

Challenges of Family Involvement in the Education of Learners with Deaf-blindness in Selected Special Schools of Southern Province of Zambia

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Abstract

Deaf-blindness is a low incident but emerging area of disability in Zambia. Children who are deafblind depend immensely on the sort of parents and family to interact with the outside world. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the challenges of family involvement in the education of deafblind learners in selected schools of southern province. A qualitative case study was used as approach and design respectively. The main instruments in data collection were face-to-face interviews, a focus group discussion, questionnaire and documents. The study sample comprised 18 participants were sampled using the purposive sampling procedure. Data was collected from 1 SESO, 2 district education officers-special education, 2 head teachers from 2 selected schools, 8 teachers from 2 selected schools, and 6 parents for deafblind children. Data analysis engaged thematic analysis which involved organizing data through use of open, axial and selective coding of the data before presenting the emerging themes.

The study found that the challenges were; long distances between schools and home which made it difficult to have a complete multi-disciplinary team because parents lived in long far places and they were not attending the meetings when called upon. Another challenge was that most teachers were not competent in deafblind education. They lacked training in handling deafblind learners. Deafblind education was viewed as a new area in teaching. This led to the teachers exhibiting a negative attitude towards deafblind education because of lacked skills including those needed to collaborate with families and other stakeholders. In addition to that, most teachers felt that they were labelled as teachers for the deafblind and if it happened that they were absent the other teachers were not ready to teach those learners. Concerns were also raised during the study that parents found it difficult working with educators who did not appreciate their effort in supporting schools. Inability of teachers and families

to learn and use communication symbols of deafblind learners was a significant barrier to family participation. Socio-economic status of family, particularly low financial standing affected the extent to which parents got involved.

Keywords: *Deafblind Education, Family Involvement, Stakeholders, Skills Training*

Introduction

Historians and educationists globally have described deafblindness by examining its roots in the fields of blindness, deafness and multiple disabilities (Hart, 2006). Deafblindness is a unique field because it tries to meet the complex communication and programming needs of individuals with very diverse conditions. Sense International (2014) define deafblindness as a unique disability that combines sight and hearing loss, affecting a person's ability to communicate, to access all kinds of information and to get around. Although the term deafblind implies a complete absence of hearing and sight, most children who are considered deafblind have some.

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (2007) observe that definitions of deafblindness vary around the world and there is universal recognition of the deleterious effects that dual sensory impairments have on access to environmental information, as well as the acknowledgment that this unique disability requires specific teaching strategies to help and support learning (Ernsveltdt, 1996).

For Children who are deafblind, families play important role in their education Ramos (2014) observe that, family support and engagement have been identified as critical to positive child outcomes. A parent can be the most important member of the education team for deafblind learners. Parents could be the most consistent person in the life of their children who are deafblind as they know their children best. Parents hold the big picture because they have the information and experience from all areas of their children's lives, for example home, medical, school, community.

According to Epstein (2009), parents also have personal interests in the learners and want their children to be accepted and included in the society. Hence there is a need that families are involved in education provision. Having a children with deafblindness affects the whole family including siblings – the whole impact on the family affect siblings individually as well as siblings' relationships. For some siblings, having a sibling who is deafblind, can be a positive experience, but some siblings might have bitterness and resentment (Brown, Goodman, and Kupper, 2014)

There is no universal definition of what parental involvement entails but Anyikwa and Obidike (2012) define parental involvement as the parent participation and support at home and school, which impacts on the educational performance of their children. In this way, parent participation is important not only in school related activities, but help

deafblind children at home as well. Some definitions of parental involvement indicate greater participation of parents in the life of their children in schools, while others focus on increased contributions to an individual child's learning process (Cotton and Wikelund, 2001). Other ways of parental involvement include parents learning how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities (Family Support America, 2001).

As parents become better informed about their child's education, they would be expected to challenge schools more about standards and goals. Therefore, school leaders should be encouraged to actively seek parents' input. Morrison (2007) stressed that, at school the children's performance is affected by their parent involvement. Similarly, Kindiki (2009) explained that children's academic achievement and increased motivation can be observed when there is sufficient parental involvement in their children's education. Furthermore, several studies showed the connection in exploring parental involvement in educational programs and learners' academic achievement (Epstein, 2010). Although parent involvement may be correlated with similar academic outcomes, the actual levels of involvement and activities are different for parents of learners with deafblindness than their peers in general education. Parents of learners with deafblindness are less involved in general education school meetings and other activities than parents of learners in general education. At home, parents of learners with deafblindness are more likely to report providing homework support, and other follow-up works for their children than parents of learners in general education (Newman, 2005)

Generally, governments advocate for families to be involved in the education of their deafblind learners. However, Newman (2005); MOE (1996) indicate that in most cases there is a decrease in parental involvement for all learners as they age. The reasons for the decrease in parental involvement include the complexity of school systems, more complex curricula, and a decrease in outreach at the school level. In Zambia, for deafblind children, it appears that little is known about family involvement in their learning process, and the question that would arise would be, "how are families of deafblind learners participating in the education of their children in Zambia"? Parental involvement in children's education has been cited as one of the major factors contributing to learner academic achievement. This research sought to establish challenges on family involvement on the education of deafblind learners in selected special schools of southern province in Zambia. According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2005), there are several barriers to successful parent involvement and some of these include perceptions by teachers. Teachers do not always involve parents because a lot of them perceive that families were not interested when in fact families do not know how to be involved.

Simalalo (2017) indicates that, parents are expected to offer significant support to their children but sometimes they seem to be discouraged and transfer the same frustrations to their children. In most cases when this happens, then the future of learners is not certain. Parents and families were also reported to have low expectations of their children and failed to encourage and support them emotionally and financially. Ndhlovu (2005) further indicates that attitudes that some parents and teachers have towards each other could contribute to non-participation of parents in their children's education. For example, some teachers do not feel comfortable talking about issues in front of families while some parents do not trust staff. Teachers think that families are too overwhelmed to participate in their children's education and teachers often are not willing to accept families as equal partners and this makes parents to feel like they have nothing to contribute. The most prominent were negative attitudes towards the children by parents themselves and lack of skills to apply in their quest to help their children and this applies to parents with deafblind children. Nzala (2006), Williams (2005) revealed that inadequate time on the part of parents was another barrier to effective parental involvement. Some parents were too busy and hence could not find time to successfully be involved in their children's education. This was especially true for working and or single parents who felt that it was the responsibility of the school and teachers to educate their children during school time.

Parents of deafblind learners face more challenges such as lack of social supports, low socioeconomic status, lack of education (Ehlers-Flint, 2000). This statement supports the notion that deafblind impairment alone may not account for the observed challenges of parenting with other impairments (McConnell and Llewellyn, 2002). For instance, parents of children with deafblindness may experience unusual stress which can result from a history of low socioeconomic status, abuse and social isolation (Feldman and Case, 1997). Another example from Pakistan according to Iqbal, Jabeen and Maan (2014), is that in the traditional family system in rural areas of Pakistan only mothers are responsible for the care of children. These mothers face many socioeconomic problems when raising their children. The results of Iqbal's study showed that rural mothers of children with disabilities, such as deafblind face challenges that are embedded in cultural settings. On the other hand, Watkins (1995) confirmed the notion that many challenges faced by parents of children with disabilities are a by-product of culture, rather than their disability. He claimed that when parents do struggle, it is often because of social experiences rather than their disability. A study conducted by Henderson and Mapp (2002) examined factors that influenced involvement of parents from low-income groups. The study established that social factors emanating from the parents' own educational experiences and burden of additional responsibilities influenced their participation. The study suggested that when school staff engage in caring and trustful relationships with parents and recognize them as partners in the educational of children, parents' desire to be involved improves.

Deafblindness is an exceptional, low-incidence disability, and learners need a team of highly trained professionals to ensure that they receive the same access to education as every other learner. Children with deafblindness need a bridge to connect them to people, the social environment, their physical environment, and all learning, hence the family is the centre of learning. Therefore, the school and community must work in complimentary ways with different skills (Kulombe, 2019).

The study was guided by Epstein's (1995) theoretical perspectives called Epstein's types of family involvement in children's education. Epstein (1995) agrees with many scholars like Cotton, Wikelund and Bauch (1994) that parental involvement plays a key role in the academic achievement of pupils. In his perspectives, Epstein identified several ways through which parents got involved in their children's education and these included: parents volunteering at school, parents helping with their children's learning at home, joint decision making and collaborating between parents and school authorities. Epstein (1995) further argued that the following can improve school-community relations and enhance parental involvement in education; helping families to establish home environments to support children as learners, designing effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communication about school and children's progress, recruiting and organizing parents' help and support, providing information and ideas to families about how to help learners at home with homework and other curriculum related activities, involving parents in decision making, identifying and integrating resources and services from the community.

In his theoretical perspective, Epstein (2001) highlighted some potential benefits of parental involvement. He stated that parents' collaborative relationships with schools have a positive impact on academic achievement and that partnership among school, family and community can help children succeed through their time at school and after they become adults. He further stated that the benefits of parental involvement are not limited to early childhood or the elementary level; there are continuing positive effects through high school. Parents' involvement is most effective when it is comprehensive, supportive, long-lasting, and well-planned. Parental involvement has been shown to positively affect student achievement, reduce problem behaviours, and create a positive sense of self-efficacy for achieving in school-related tasks (Epstein, 1995). Each type of involvement includes many different practices of partnership. Each type presents particular challenges that must be met to involve all families and needed redefinitions of some basic principles of involvement. Furthermore each type of parental involvement is likely to lead to different results for learners, parents, teaching practices, and school climates thus, schools have choices about which practices will help achieve important goals. However, this parental involvement could be constrained by both home and school factors – that is parents' characteristics and school practices. In this study, Epstein's model can be used to establish the shared responsibilities of families,

educators, and other community members and as a tool for policy changes that lead to improved leadership and research in the area of family partnerships in schools (Price-Mitchell, 2009).

Epstein (2011) expanded her theory to show, in a concrete way, what educators can do to facilitate various types of family involvement. For example, she introduced the idea of parent–child interactive homework and discussed processes for organizing volunteers in the classroom, especially at the middle school level (Epstein, 2011). As such, Epstein’s model and typologies are fairly easy to understand and operationalize as illustrated in Patte (2011) examination of preservice teachers’ knowledge of family–school partnerships. In this study, the model will help to bring an understanding on best ways of involving families in the education of deafblind learners. The model will also highlight insights on ways to collaborate between families of deafblind learners and education stakeholders.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to ascertain the challenges of family involvement on the education of deafblind learners in selected schools of southern province in Zambia.

Methodology

Participants

The study sample comprised of eighteen participants: one Standards education officers (SESO), two Education Standards Officers (ESO) in charge of special education, parents of children with deafblindness, eight class teachers, and two head teachers from study schools. Purposive sampling techniques was employed to select the participants.

Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Zambia to carry out this study. Participants were fully briefed on the aim of the study their right to withdraw from the study All interviews and focus group discussions were audio recorded, with permission from the participants. The principle of confidentiality and respect by not sharing responses in unauthorized ways.

Three research instruments used to collect qualitative data for the study were: interview schedule, document analysis and focus group discussion guide. Interview guide was used to collect in-depth qualitative data from, SESO, two ESO Special two head teachers, five parents of learners with deafblindness and eight special education teachers. The advantage of a semi-structured interview schedule was that enabled the researcher to engage in in-depth discussion with participants through probing and clarification. A focus group discussion was one of the chosen methods used in the study to collect data. The 8 teachers were chosen for the focus group discussion. Documentary

analysis which involves a critical look at the documents viewed suitable for the study was done. The researcher sourced and read the existing documents guiding education provision in the country. The two main documents were the Zambia Education Curriculum Framework (2013) and Educating our future (1996) policy document.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data qualitatively. Recorded data were transcribed and then grouped into categories or themes that emerged using stages of coding are, open coding, axial –code and sequential coding as suggested by Creswell (2009).

The tables below present important characteristics of participants as well as the codes or identifiers generated by the study for the different participant groups. The use of codes is equally a strategy to uphold the principles of confidentiality and anonymity. The identifiers are used particularly in presenting the verbatim from participants in the results section of the article.

Table 1: Profile of Special Education Teacher

Code	Qualification	Gender	Work Experience
TR 1	Diploma	Male	1-5 years
TR 2	Diploma	Female	5-10 years
TR 3	Degree	Male	10-15 years
TR 4	Degree	Female	15-20 years
TR 5	Degree	Female	10-15 years
TR 6	Diploma	Male	20-25 years
TR 7	Degree	Female	5-10 years
TR 8	Diploma	Female	10-15 years

Table 2: Profile of head teacher

A total number of 2 Head teachers participated in the study. Their characteristics are presented in table below.

Code	Qualification	Gender
HTR A	Degree	Male
HTR B	Degree	Female

A total number of 3 Education standards officer participated in the study. Their characteristics are presented in table 3 below

Table 3: Profile of Education standard officer

Code	Qualification	Gender	Work experience
SESO-SE	Masters	Male	20-25 years
ESO-SE 1	Degree	Male	20-25 years
ESO-SE 2	Degree	Male	15-20 years

A total number of 5 parents participated in the study. Their characteristics are presented in table 4 below

Table 4: Profile of parents of Children with deafblindness

Code	Gender	Profession
P 1	Female	Farmer
P 2	Female	Marketeer
P 3	Female	Teacher
P 4	Female	Tailor
P 5	Male	Bricklayer

Results

This section presents the findings on the challenges encountered in parent involvement in the education of children with deafblindness. The presentation takes a thematic approach. The themes emerged from the data obtained from interviews and focus group discussion with the participants. **Distance Between Schools and Homes of Deafblind Children**

Participants confirmed the challenge of long distances between place of residence and the schools. Below were some views of participants on ways the distance between the schools and the homes learners came from impacted parental participation. One teacher, TR 1 stated as follows;

“It is very hard to get hold of parents because they stay far from school. It becomes difficult because when they come to pick their child, parents are in a hurry to go back to their homes. This results in less interaction.

Further another teacher (TR 4) indicated that the fact that the school was residential and children came from distant places, provided very little opportunity for parents to engage fully

“Madam as you may be aware, this school is a boarding school and learners come from all over Zambia.” Most of the parents are only seen visiting the school during closing and opening day. It becomes difficult to involve parents in the activities of the school.

The connection between residential school set up and distance was reiterated by school head teacher (HTR A) whose words were as follows;

“The challenge that we have is that parents stay in distant places and we find it difficult to ask them to participate in school activities. The only time parents are seen to be available is during PTA meetings”

Further, standard officers (ESO-SE 1) submitted that even at high level meetings beyond the school environment such as district multidisciplinary meeting, having parents of children with deafblindness participate was a challenge.

“The challenges that is there in involving parents as a district are, having meetings with multi-disciplinary team takes long to happen. Parents find it difficult to travel because special schools in our district are boarding schools. It is difficult to place Deafblind learners in mainstream so there is a problem on what type of information that can be given to parents”

Parents were equally clear on the impact of the distance between their homes and schools. A parent (P4) submitted as follows;

“The only challenge is that there is distance between the school and my home. It is very difficult to travel because of the economic challenge”

Teachers’ and Parents’ Attitudes

The matter of attitude towards learners with deafblindness emerged as one of the challenges in parental involvement. From the voices presented here, both parents and teachers had mixed attitudes. A teacher (TR 2) mentioned that;

“In most cases a negative attitude would have been seen in teachers not only in me but with others as well. This is because teaching a child who is deafblind gives you a tag or label as ‘deafblind teacher”

In a contrary view to that of TR2, TR 3 mentioned that the attitude was positive.

“I think as a teacher I am positive about involving parents in the school activities, and how I wish I had all that is required like skills to help families of deafblind learners.”

From the point of view of parents (P1) blamed teachers attitude and stated that teachers were not helpful.

“I feel there is a gap between the school and the parents. What I know is that the school should be interested in giving guidelines on the child’s education. I try to provide skills to my child from home, but teachers have a negative attitude towards that. They are not willing to assist in my efforts. All I am told is that my child needs to learn skills. I feel the school has less time to attend to our needs concerning our learners because we as parents have little idea on the education of this child”.

Another parent (P5) stated the following;

“For me I feel teachers are overwhelmed with the condition of my daughter so in most cases they run out of ideas on how to assist the child. There is only one teacher who I have seen to be so interested in assisting my child.”

One teacher (TR 6) was clear that parents displayed less interest in the education of the learners when all they focused on was picking the children for holidays with seeking information on ways to help the child learn at home. said that;

“Parents are also not willing to get much involved. I say so because sometimes when schools close, parents would not come to get the girl but instead ask other sibling to come, whose interests is only to pick their sister. Sometimes even the report form is not collected because they would be in a hurry to travel back especially if it’s the siblings who have come to pick her up”.

Teachers’ Low Confidence in Skills of Deafblindness Education

One emerging challenge in parent involvement was that teachers lacked skills to engage parents as partners in education of children with deafblindness. Teachers and parents attested to this challenge. In presenting views on this matter (TR 4) had this to say.

“You know madam, the first time I came across this child, I was like dreaming because it was my first time. The question was, ‘how will

I communicate with this child? 'First I experienced communication challenges'.

In agreeing to inadequacy of skills the teachers in terms for deafblind children (TR 2) lamented that;

"As for me Madam, I must say that, I can't teach the DB [deafblind] learners. That is the challenge enough. Further, I do not have much knowledge to give the parents. Basically, we are both learning".

A school administrator (HTR A) talked about the institution having teachers trained in special education but without skills in deafblind education

"Our school has a lot of trained teachers in special education, but the only challenge was that these teachers were not equipped to handle deafblind learners".

HTR B emphasized that teachers without skills cannot engage or make effort to work with parents.

"Some of the challenges in parental involvement are that lack of trained teachers in deafblind education who can help involve parents of deafblind learners. If the teacher doesn't have much knowledge to handle the deafblind learners, it will be difficult to find activities that may engage parents".

Parents were equally expectant and looking forward to teachers, as professional to offer support and create an environment where they the school and parents share skill. In the verbatim below a parents (P2) made the following submission.

"I have not come across any teacher specifically trained for deafblind learners and hence the school offers little knowledge to parents on how to assist the child with education".

Further another parent (P5) echoed the sentiments of P2 when they mentioned the following;

"Teachers seemed not to know what specific work to give deafblind child and in most cases it was trial and error".

Parents' Socio-Economic Status

The socio economic status of parents was identified by participants as having an influence on the level participation in education. Teachers (TR 8) mentioned the following;

“Most of our learners come from poor families and this hinders families to engage themselves in the education of their child. This is because parents do not have finances to travel to school in the middle of the term for any activities”.

Similarly TR 2 said that;

“It’s a challenge to involve families for a deafblind learner because what I have seen is that, this child comes from a poor family. You can tell when the child comes, few clothes, no groceries and sometimes no books. This hinders the families to travel to the school of the girl and participate in the activities that require parents be involved”.

From the parents’ point, there are competing needs in their lives hence failing to meet the needs or get involved in programmes of the child with deafblindness fully. P1 made this submission;

“It is very difficult for me to visit the school for my child as often as I would be required because I have other challenges that I need to attend to which would require money. I find myself fall short in that area. Money issues are a problem madam”.

In agreeing to P1’s views P3 state that the she was interested in her child’s school programmes but lacked stable income to enable her support the child.

“Much as I would like to fully involve myself in the education of my child, I fail to manage because I do not have enough financial capacity. It is difficult to travel now and then to my child’s school because I have no stable income”.

Then HTR A said that most families rarely come to the school to during the term because they have financial challenges.

‘Others their economic status is very and unable to come and get involved in the education of their children’.

Parents' Time Constraints

The study found that some parents were extremely busy with activities to generate income to support the whole family. There was not enough to participate in the deafblind child's school activities. TR 1 made the following observation.

"My observation has been that, families have limited time to attend to their child's school activities. Parents would be busy to concentrate on their economic situation"

Equally TR 2 made similar observations as communicated in this voice;

"The parents has no time to visit the school for the girl. They have no capacity to come to our school".

Another parent, P5 seemed overwhelmed by work and gets home to find the child already asleep

"For me, I am usually at work and unable to find time to attend to my son. In the evening my child would be sleeping when I reach home".

For P2 said that not being in formal employment entails long hours of business hence not having time for the child's school activities;

"I am not in formal employment and doing business. This becomes very difficult to provide time to my child".

In the same vein P4 said that she has to made decision whether to attend to the child's education welfare or work to earn an income, the latter was the choice

"It is my sincere desire that I may provide time for my child, But I find it very difficult because I would rather go and pursue money for the family. This takes most of my time".

Communication Barriers

Deafblindness entail challenges with hearing and sight. This call for special skills in communication involving multisensory strategies. Some parents reported a lack of skills to communicate with their children as a reason they fail to get involved in the education. A parent P4 mentioned that among the challenges in deafblindness was failure by parents and the children to communicate.

"Understanding the language of my son is also difficult for me to understand. It's difficult to communicate with him".

Additionally, ESO SE 2 said that;

“There is also language barrier which hinder communication between parents and the teachers. This is because when learners are given holiday assignment, it will be very difficult for parents to help because the work maybe in braille and the parent has no idea of reading braille”.

Another parent P3 the training offered by the school particularly communication was not adequate;

“The school fails to provide activities apart from the P.T.A. meetings. There is a problem with language barrier between me and my daughter. The school tries to train me but it is not enough that I can manage to communicate with my child. There is a challenge especially when schools close, the child is back at home, she would want to use the communication skills learnt from school and in the end I fail to help with the holiday work given. There is a distance between the school for child and the home.

Discussion

Arising from the study, families find limitations hindering them from getting fully involved. Distance between the school and the homes was identified as hindrance to parent participation. This was observed when the schools were failing to engage parents in different school programs because most of them were coming from distant places. The challenge of long distance was also linked to the difficulty to have a complete multi-disciplinary team because parents were not attending meeting when called upon. Lack of participation in multi-disciplinary meetings due to distance entailed parents were not close to school activities and missed an opportunity volunteering. Bauer and Shea (2003) mention that family-school partnerships help families become informed and skillful at understanding their children and supporting learning at home.

Another challenge was that both teachers and parents had negative attitude towards teaching learners with deafblindness. Apparently some teachers were labelled as teachers for the deafblind and if it happened that they were absent the other teachers were not ready to teach those learners. The negative labels led to negative attitude towards the learners they handled. On the other hand, parents blamed teachers for not offering support to the efforts of some parents, but rather discouraged them. Teachers equally indicated that parents were not willing get involved in school programmes to a point that some parents never visited the school to pick their children for holidays or collect performance report cards. The findings are similar to Center for Comprehensive School

Reform and Improvement (2005), Simalalo (2017) who found that parents and teachers had a predisposition to blame each other when collaboration between the school and home was not positive. Further, the findings were consistent with Ndhlovu (2005) who found that teachers think that families are too overwhelmed to participate in their children's education and teachers often are not willing to accept families as equal partners. This makes parents feel like they have nothing to contribute.

Teachers' low confidence in skills for learners with deafblindness was found to influence the level of parent participation. Some teachers lack training in handling deafblind learners. Educators reported that they were under-prepared to deal with learners presenting with multiple disabilities such as deaf-blindness. Suffice to say that these teachers were trained in special education, the area of deafblindness was not included in their college training. To most teachers, it was seen to be a new area of teaching. This finding is contrary to the recommendations by National Consortium on Deafblindness (2007) and Newman (2005) that in order to ensure delivery of good education to deafblind children, at least one member of this team (a deafblind specialist) should have an in-depth knowledge and expertise in deafblindness. In this study teachers had limited knowledge and skills on communication, teaching and learning strategies to share with. Further, this finding echoed the one by Wolford (2016), Maguvhe (2014) and Charles (2014) who reported that there were gaps in training, and recommended establishment of effective training for educators of deaf-blind learners and to also form unit standards with achievable outcomes for teaching learners with deaf-blindness such as communication, parent-child relationships, cognition, motor and perceptual development. Teachers can only provide skills and guidance to parents if they have the said skills. It is clear from the findings that teachers lack skills in deafblind education. This partly explains the lack of parent engagement.

Communication barriers among parents, teachers and children was identified as a reason parents were not able to fully participate in the education of their children. This was mentioned by parents and administrators. In as much as parents can demonstrate involvement at home by reading with their children or helping them with their homework, the study showed that parents had challenges with communication. One participant said *"There is also language barrier which hinder communication between parents and the teachers. This is because when learners are given holiday assignment, it will be very difficult for parents to help because the work maybe in braille and the parent has no idea of reading braille"*. This affirms the observation by Riggio (2009) who noted that communication with the student who is deafblind as a primary need. A teacher who has this set of abilities is competent enough to work with deafblind learners. Communication with deaf blind learners is complex. Teachers, parents and siblings must be able to assess, interpret, and respond to the pre-symbolic forms that a learner who is deafblind may communicate to increase their communication development, skills, and interaction (Newman, 2005).

Socio-economic status of parents was identified as factor influences family participation in education of deafblind children. Having a deafblind child as well as low income negatively impacted parenting and the level of involvement in education. The cost of educating the siblings and that for the deafblind child much was too high for parents. Parents could not afford education for their deafblind children on their own without support from the church, non-governmental organizations and the government. The findings are similar to those by Horvatin (2011) and Ehlers-Flint (2000). who stated that working parents, those struggling to earn a living or those with one or more jobs, do not have time to get involved in activities that promote strong relationships among parents and schools.

Parents had challenges to set aside time to get involved in activities concerning their children's' education. Some parents had less time to visit their deafblind child because they were busy with work. Further parents did not feel the need of visiting the school of their children because it was the responsibility of the school to take care of their deafblind children. lack of time was reported by Williams (2005) who mentioned that parents reported lack of time especially for working and or single parents. Schools, therefore, need to address issues of parental involvement with much importance and make plans to convince parents to find time to get involved with school regardless of their busy schedules

Parents need to be encouraged by the school and engage them often in the education of their deafblind children. The school could provide training services that can assist parents to be involved with their children. These services could be important to children with deaf-blindness and their families and maybe designed to address the child's developmental and learning needs.

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