

A case study on Albert a learners with visual impairment in Zambia

Penda Annie

Kwame Nkrumah University P.O.Box 80404, Kabwe –Zambia.

Abstract

This manuscript is a study of one of the learners with visual impairment. The study established the suitable measures and their effect on a learner with visual impairment who had additional disabilities of hearing impairment and mental retardation in Zambia. The work was an attempt to address the problem of writing which Albert a learners with visual impairment in Zambia was faced with for three years. Among the factors that attributed to the writing problem of this learner were visual impairment, hearing impairment and mental retardation. The measures employed in order to arrest the situation were individual teaching, giving of enough time of practicing what was being taught, patience and love towards the learner. The outcome of using these measures were that it contributed to the learner having a breakthrough of acquiring the skill of writing braille or to emboss for the first time after failing to write for three years.

Keywords: visual impairment, case study, embossing, rubella, otitis media, microphthalmos, mentally challenged

Introduction

Educationally, teachers take trouble to study children in order to teach them effectively so that they learn best. The study helps teachers to understand the nature, behavior, the interest and the area of particular difficult of learners. During the study period teachers takes into account the differences among learners and these are physical, intellectual, differences in personality, abilities, emotional, social background.

In this current study the focus was on the case study for an individual learner. Cohen and Manion (1994) ^[3] defined case study as the observation of characteristics of an individual, unit, school, a clique, a class or community.

The following factors prompted the researcher to study this individual with a fictitious name of Kalaba Albert the learner at Magwero School for the visually impaired school in Zambia. The learner was in grade one in a class of four pupils at the time of study and was the only one who was failing to write anything and He had been in school for three years. He was congenitally totally blind, unable to speak properly, restless and mentally challenge.

Literature Review

The factors taken into consideration in this review are the definition, types, causes of blindness and the related issues such otitis media, microphthalmia and mental challenges then lastly the educational implications.

Learners with visual impairment may be considered in terms of medical, legal and functional. In terms of functional Haminnen (1975) stated that, visual impairment is having limited or no vision such that special teaching method and materials are necessary in order to achieve some degree of educational success. Ashman (1990) ^[1] postulated that there are two types of learners with visual impairment the blind and the partially sighted.

The etiologies or causes of visual impairment are many. Some of them are classified under hereditary. Kirk and Gallagher (1973) ^[8] stated that these are albinism, retinitis pigmentosa

and squint. Other causes are as a result of diseases of the eye. According to William *et al.*, (1988) ^[10] these are glaucoma, cataract and maternal rubella. Kirk (1972) ^[7] confirmed that the Germany measles the mother contracts during the first three months of pregnancy result into the child having congenital defects including mental retardation, otitis media, microphthalmos and blindness. Chokley (1994) stated that, microphthalmos are extremely small and non-functional eyes. Otitis media is viewed by Heward and Orlamsky (1988) ^[10] as inflammation of the middle ear which causes conductive hearing impairment. kirk (1972) ^[7] stated that, mental retardation is incomplete development to a degree that individuals are incapable of adapting themselves to the normal environment and are grouped as slow learners and profoundly retarded. Ashman (1990) ^[1] viewed that, other causes are due to poor nutrition and drug abuse.

The education implications according to Reynell (1967) ^[9] are measures taken to handle a child with a particular disability. They are so many education implications and some of them are discussed as follows; Kirk and Gallagher (1983) ^[8] postulated that, a blind need to be provided with braille as a communication skill, brailled teaching materials as well as concrete materials in order to help them understand the abstract concepts and practical skills. Ashaman (1990) ^[1] casted his views that the child who is in the category of blindness needs special equipment and materials such as a cane, braille paper, magnifying devices, slate, stylus, perkings brailier. Gearheart *et al.*, (1988) ^[5] narrated that children with visual impairment who are partially sighted need large print, spectacles, modified education materials, learning through other senses apart from vision, they need to learn in a conducive learning environment with good lighting condition and sitting arrangements. Haminnen (1975) stated that, education services should be provided from specialized teachers such as itinerant teachers who can meet the needs of children effectively and children may learn by unifying experiences as well as learning by doing.

Case History

The discussion mainly involved the examinations from the medical doctor in terms of the child's illness and a report from the mother.

Albert at the time of study was ten years old and was born in Chadiza in the Eastern province of Zambia. According to the medical report from under five clinic card Albert's mother was attacked by maternal rubella which affected Albert's health prenatally. He was born blind, thus his onset of blindness was congenital. Rubella affected the child in such a way that he had other additional medical problems such as microphthalmos which is a condition of having extremely small and non-functioning eyes. Another condition was otitis media which is the inflammation of the middle ear which affected the transmission of the sound from the outer ear into the inner ear. Another condition was mental retardation as educable mentally restarted child.

According to a class-teacher who visited the home for Albert and had a chat with the mother to Albert narrated the issue as follows; She said that, according to the mother Albert at birth weighted 3.4 kilograms with a medium sized body of about 0.15 meters height. The mother said that *"when I was pregnant I experienced high fever which was followed by a kind of a rush and I thought it was not worth going to the hospital because the rush disappeared on its own after two days"*. After giving birth to Albert the mother did not notice anything unusual until after three months. The mother said, when I was passing my fingers across my son's face to check for his sight, his eyes were not following the fingers. The mother was highly blamed to have caused the problem by the husband and his family. It was until they visited the hospital in 1996 that was when they came to know that it was because of Rubella and not that the mother used some medicine which affected the child. Later in life the mother noticed that the child was unable to speak and hear properly and pass started coming out of his ears.

Physical Appearance and General Cleanliness

Albert was well structured apart from the defects mentioned in the case history of being blind and having small eyes and pass coming out of his ears there was no other defects. He was brown in complexion. He was medium sized boy whose weight was 25 kilograms and was 1.3 meters height. His personal hygiene was not so bad but fair. He was spoiled when he was young by his parent who over-protected him and it created over-dependence on others to the extent that he failed to keep his clothes very clean and did not seem to mind about the appearance of his clothes and at times even general body cleanliness as reported by one house parent who was directly taking care of him at school it being a boarding school for the learners with visual impairment. It was reported that, the father over-protected him more than the mother as reported by the class-teacher because the father never allowed Albert to be given any work such as manual work and these was the instructions He was giving to the teacher when he brought the child to school.

Social Economic Background

Both parents of Albert were alive at the time of study. They lived in Chadiza in Chief Mwanangala's area. He was the first born in the family of four children namely Albert, Fuzi,

Ngulube and Friday. Albert was a Zambian by nationality, a chewa by tribe and spoke chewa as a mother tongue.

The parents were not highly educated they were working as peasant farmers and lived in two roomed hut. The social economic status of Albert was fair. Over-protection made her fail to adjust in the appropriate way. For instance his behavior was that, once offended he was getting upset and could not even eat his food. The house parent had to start from the scratch to teach him on how to sweep, wash his clothes, bathing and pack his items in an orderly manner and on how to control his emotional behavior and it was fairly done. Other noticeable things as described by the teacher and the house parent were that, He was unable to speak distinctively and was found sitting alone most of the times. He was shy, moody and timid. However he had friends and a prominent one. He was able to co-operate with everyone and was not greedy, showed respect towards teachers and elders. His eating habit was good as observed by the researcher.

Intellectual Ability

Intellectually he was a slow learner educable mentally challenged child. He had minimal potential for development in three areas and these were academic subjects, social adjustment and communication skills.

The class-teacher who handled the child for three years stated that *"Albert is a slow learner, unable to write as a particular problem but had interest in his class-work, was restless and unable to concentrate and easily gave up work when tired, his position in class was always the last, needed much attention and was unable to do class work when left alone"*. At the time of the research the child exhibited all what the class teacher narrated. The researcher used classroom records to check for the academic performance of the child. It was discovered that child's position was always the last.

Client and Intervention Measure

The researcher was prompted to take a study on Albert's area of learning difficulties and this was writing. The intervention measure was done for two months. The first day Albert was given to write 6 dots of braille cell and he failed completely. He was observed to be unable to identify the 6 dots on a slate, hold the stylus correctly and was unable to insert the braille paper in between the two plates of a slate. Thus, the first measure was to teach Albert how to identify dots of a braille cell for one week and it was successfully done. Then Albert was taught how to insert the paper in between the two plates of a slate for another week it was also successfully done. Then he was taught on how to write using a slate and stylus for a period of four weeks. He was taught how to hold a stylus and how to write six dots of a braille cell. To start with he was shown to move from right to left when writing and that the braille cell has two lines the first line has dots 1,2 and 3 then the second line has dots 4, 5 and 6 the numbers for both lines run top down starting from the smallest number ending with the biggest number. This was done successfully after four weeks may be due to much attention and time which was given to the child.

Thereafter, Albert was introduced to the writing of letters of alphabet one letter at a time beginning with letter "A" as dot one, "B" dots one and two then "C" as dots one and four up to letter "J" for two weeks and the period for study elapsed. When a test was administered in class on writing the letters of

alphabet from “A to J” the child managed to write and passed the test fairly.

Generally Albert had difficulties in terms of writing and a lot of patience was exercised because at times the work was not done well. For instance at the beginning of this intervention the child never made any dots but holes and at time dots were not written in a correct order. The child was given enough time to practice whatever he was taught, it proved to be of help to him. Individual teaching was used and love was also helped him emboss.

Tools for Data Collection

The informal observation checklist was used and it assisted in identifying the characteristics of a child with visual impairment in the classroom and there was no interference with the client. Secondly, record or document analysis was used. For instance under five clinic card provided the information concerning the case history such as the sickness. Marked schedule provided the progress of the child’s intellectual ability. Thirdly, the interview schedule was used and provided the information about case history, social economic personality, behavior, intelligence, emotional, physical appearance, basic information and general impression. The information collected using these tools helped the researcher to come up with measures of helping Albert in his area of need.

Data Collection Procedure

The procedure was as follows; to start with permission was obtain from the school head-teacher to collect information with the use of interviews, observation using the checklist and record analysis from school records (using the child’s file). This authority was granted. Permission was also obtained from the parents to use the under-five clinic card it was as well granted. Purposeful sampling procedure was used which is a selection of a group or individual out of a large population according to one’s convenience. Thus, two teachers and one house parent were selected at the study school because they were directly involved with child. Then Albert was selected due to his great need to learn how to write using braille which was a great problem to him for a period of three years.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data and Discussion

Data collected was mostly qualitative therefore analysis was descriptive. However, quantitative method was just used as a supplement with the use of numbers only. To start with, this was a case study carried out on Albert. The advantage of a case study is that it focuses on a single case which can be” undertaken by a single researcher without needing a full research team” (Nisbet and Watt, 1994, as cited by Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p56) ^[4]. Secondly, according to the medical records Albert was congenitally blind with a condition of microphthalmos and this was due to rubella contracted by his mother while pregnant. The other areas which were affected due to rubella were hearing, language and mental challenge. Kirk (1972) ^[7] confirmed that the Germany measles the mother contracts during the first three months of pregnancy result into the child having congenital defects including mental retardation, otitis media, microphthalmos and blindness. Thirdly, Albert was unable to write for three years. Thus it was in order for a researcher to conduct a case study on him in order to alleviate the problem the child was facing

such as teaching a child to write braille. Kirk and Gallagher (1983) ^[8] postulated that, a blind need to be provided with braille as a communication skill such as braille in order to help them understand the abstract concepts. Then, the measures which were helpful to Albert were that of giving him enough time to practice whatever he was taught, it proved to be of help to him. Individual teaching, the patience and love from a researcher were also helpful to him. The end result was that Albert managed to emboss what he failed to do for three years and it was a break-through to him. As Yin (1994) ^[11] argued that a case study can penetrate situations which are not always susceptible to numerical analysis and address its problem.

The analysis of findings were that, may be Albert for being visual impaired and mentally challenged was a contributing factor of needing more time to understand concepts and the practical skill of writing. The hearing problem of Albert which resulted from otitis media might have contributed to him speaking softly due to being restless as a result of continuous straining resulting from the use of the residue hearing while writing. Over-protection Albert received from the parents might have led him to needing more attention, time and love from the researcher of which he was granted and probably which was not given to her by the teachers who were teaching him. The low intellectual ability of Albert which was confirmed from records of his file might have led him to being slow at grasping the practical skill of writing.

Conclusion

The aspects of this case study was of great help in trying to address the problem of writing faced by Albert for three years. The measures were implemented as a solution to the problem Albert faced.

Literature review helped the researcher to understand the problem of Albert. Case history assisted the researcher in knowing the effects of rubella on Albert from the parents especially the mother. Physical appearance confirmed the visual and hearing impairment of Albert. The social and economic background was helpful in understanding Albert’s behavior resulting from over-protection. The intellectual ability of Albert helped the researcher give him work according to his level of intelligence with love while exercising patience, attention and more time. Tools for data collection opened the mind of the researcher on how to help the client acquire the skill of writing. The information collected using the research tools helped the researcher give effective help to Albert.

Thus, a case study is very essential in education sector because generalizations are established because of probing deeply and analyzing multifarious phenomena that constitute the individual’s life circle. Studies are done in natural setting where an individual is able to express freely their characteristics and educators easily make inferences and help them accordingly. It also creates friendship between teachers and pupils which makes learning easy and understanding life in a classroom. It helps parents to co-operate with educators for the good of their children. It also help teachers develop new ways of looking at problems in a more professional way.

Suggestions

These are ways of trying to help which were not discovered previously. The suggestions concerning the child under study and the class-teacher were that, the teacher need to continue

giving the child more time of practicing to write the new work being introduced. The child still needed attention from the class-teacher for him to grasp the writing concept well. The teacher also needed to accommodate restlessness of a child resulting from hearing problem by being patient. The low intelligence level of a child required the teacher to continue preparing lesser work in line with his intellectual level as compared to other learners in class. For having problem due to the loose of vision the child needed individual teaching and modified teaching method for effective learning.

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