READING FOR ALL: A CASE OF THE WHOLE SCHOOL READING IDENTIFICATION MODEL IN THE HARARE METROPOLITAN PROVINCE IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This study on whole school identification was carried out in the Harare Metropolitan Province in Zimbabwe between 2008 and 2012 it acknowledges that reading for all is the cornerstone of all learning and without it children cannot progress in all the other subjects. Education for all children is not an adequate condition for all children including those with learning disabilities (LDs) since it may not always guarantee their success in learning. A school needs to ensure that all children with LDs including those without learn to read. However reading for all children is a daunting task as evidence shows that by seventh grade there are still non-readers in the Zimbabwean primary schools. This part of the study focuses on those few schools which were using the whole school reading identification models for reading to identify lessons which can be used by other schools. This was a qualitative research using a case study design. Using semi structured interviews and document analysis, data was collected from 6 primary school teachers from 4 primary schools selected from a pool of 27 primary schools. Data was verified by informants from the Head Office of the Ministry of Education and the Schools Psychological Services and Special Needs Education Department (SPS&SNE). The study found three types of permutations that the schools with a whole school reading identification model were using. By identifying the schools' best practices recommendations were made which schools can follow to improve children's reading competencies.

Keywords: Whole school reading identification model, reading, children with learning disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

A school needs to ensure that all children including those with Learning Disabilities (LDs) learn to read. However reading for all children is a daunting task because evidence shows that by seventh grade there are still some non-readers in the Zimbabwean primary schools. Strang (1978:61) says that reading is the foundation for all 'learning and personal enjoyment'. Roberts (1973), Carrol, (1978) agree that reading is a skilled behaviour performed in order to get information; a linguistic process which reflects the language being read and a focus on the critical units of the language. The issue of learning disabilities arises when students fail to read and write or calculate. Cosford (1990) defines a learning disability as a failure to achieve in school despite having a normal to above average intelligence, motor and sensory abilities and emotional adjustment. Such a child may progress satisfactorily in mathematics and be weak in reading or vice versa.

This study depicts attempts some primary schools are making to ensure that all children learn to read through whole school reading assessment programmes. It focuses on those schools in the Harare Metropolitan province in Zimbabwe which were using the whole school reading assessment models so as to identify lessons which can be used by other schools.

Statement of the problem

Omari (1977) says the problem often encountered in African countries is lack of appropriate screening and assessment tests depicting local environment and cultural realities. Addressing the problems of children with LDs at the school level by first identifying them properly and then providing appropriate teaching programmes will equip them with adequate learning skills which will prepare them for examinations and the world of work.

Assessment is the base for all interventions and if it is inappropriate it is reflected in the inadequacies of the reading tests and the teaching failure to produce the desired results. This is in line with the Nziramasanga Commission of inquiry into Education and Training (1999) which places identification of disabilities as the basis for intervention. What then is actually taking place in schools and what lessons can be drawn from the current whole school reading assessment programmes?

Significance of the study

The findings of this research are a vital base for the development of pertinent literature on identifying children and developing reading interventions for all children. Teachers need information to enable them to make decisions; therefore the findings from this study fill up this gap as it acknowledges what schools have been doing thus empowering them. It also provides a basis for further research in assessing reading in an African context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These questions were used in the study;
* What whole school reading assessment models do teachers use to identify children with learning disabilities in reading and why do they use them?
* How effective are they and what challenges have schools encountered when using them in their schools?
* What are the suggestions for improving whole school reading assessment models?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Conceptual framework

Assessment comprises the referral, screening and the determination of the learning disability (Gearheart, 1986). Placement, individual educational programme (IEP) planning and intervention follow after the identification. In this conceptual framework assessment is either continuous or formative in each intervention or summative at the end. Lin and Gronlund (1995) see assessment as a process by which information is collected for a specific purpose. Salvia and Ysseldyke (1991) say it is a process which should guide decision-making about a child by identifying a profile of strengths and needs. It should take into consideration the cognitive components of learning difficulties as well as the learning environment. Dockrell and McShane (1995) give three steps to be followed, which are; identifying the existence of a problem, evaluating the nature of that problem and making a diagnosis. In this brief literature review the following are discussed: the current assessment components and strategies; their effectiveness; challenges encountered and solutions.

Effective Assessment Components and Strategies in identification models

Educational assessment of children with disabilities is defined by McLoughlin and Lewis (1986:3) as the "systematic process of gathering educationally relevant information to make legal and instructional decisions about the provision of special services". McLoughlin and Lewis (ibid) show that educational assessment; testing and diagnosis are related but are not synonymous. Swanson (1991) agrees as he says although one traditionally thinks of assessment in terms of test administration, scoring and interpretation it is important to understand how the concept of assessment is separate from testing practice. Swanson (1991) and Dockrell & McShane (1995) refuse to give a precise definition of assessment but instead see it as discerning individual characteristics that are important for establishing individual intervention programs. Assessments can be formative or summative. The formative, which is continuous, informs the intervention process and summative is carried out to ascertain the position of an individual after teaching.

Various assessment models for identifying children are made up of steps, stages or other types of activities to enable the process of identification. Assessment, identification and planning educational intervention are typical of most of the whole school reading assessment models.

This is the focus of this study to find out how schools identify and place all children who fail to read in the intervention programmes. The Nziramasanga Commission of inquiry into Education and Training (1999) places identification of disabilities as the basis for intervention. Identifying the existence of a problem is not always straight forward for classroom teachers especially if the classrooms are overcrowded. This is due to the need to make a judgment in comparison to children's peers who may be too many. Adamson (1979:26) suggests 'essential indices of suspicion which suggest initial referral are problems in perception, conceptualisation, language, memory, impulse control, feeling, task, coordination and isolated academic area'. This is not supported by McKinney (1987) in Mpofu (1999) who says that identifying children with LDs should include categorising them into three behavioural sub types: perceptual motor, language and behavioural. This ensures that the teacher is then able to handle children with similar problems together in line with each child's IEP.

The strategy of screening is a process in which test scores or teacher ratings are used to identify children who need further evaluation and possible recommendation for remedial intervention (Gearheart, 1986; Dockrell and McShane, 1995). The following strategies are used; checklists of warning signs, checklists or ratings forms that identify suspected students, classroom observations, school records, especially the results of group testing and report cards. Although screening may point out the children who may need further special education assistance (Dockrell and McShane 1995) warn that sometimes they may not indicate the presence of a learning disability or any other disability (Gearheart, 1986). It is the assessment that ensues soon after the screening which identifies if a child has a learning disability in specific areas in reading.

The tests commonly used for identification are intelligence tests which determine the child's intelligence quotient; scholastic, perceptual, neurological and language tests (Cosford, 1990). A confirmation of a normal to above average IQ does not confirm the existence of an LD, a significant discrepancy between potential to learn and actual level of functioning is required

(Lewis and McLoughlin, (1986); Sattler, 1992). Sattler (1992) says the Wide range Achievement Test (WRAT) is one such test which can be used by psychologists and teachers to provide a quick indication of a child's approximate academic level as it provides scores in reading, spelling and arithmetic. The scores can be indicated in terms of grade equivalent, a standard score or percentile. In some districts the same standardised achievement tests that are used with the ordinary school population are also used to identify the students.

Norm referenced tests provide information about where an individual lies on a particular ability. Thus a child is placed on a continuum where they are compared to their peers in terms of the product of their learning. These tests do not tell much on the child's strengths and needs nor do they reveal the processes involved in a child to arrive at their attainment level. Holistic assessment which is continuous and ecologically based and takes into consideration the children's backgrounds consists of documenting expressions of learning from multiple authentic learning situations; analysis of writing; miscue analysis of reading material. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are central to this model. Teachers and parents are involved in recording children's behaviours. A running record is the most powerful assessment tool which is carefully analysed to make inferences about the child's growth in the use of learning strategies (Montebruno 1994). Portfolio assessment is another strategy employed in the holistic model as it is a record of the child's work (Gillis, 1993). Holistic models are inclusive and consultative, granting the student an active and meaningful role in assessing and interpreting their learning all the time.

In Zimbabwe a discrepancy procedure for pupil identification and placement purposes is used (Mpofu 1999, Tambara 2001 and Kaputa and Ndoro 2001). Although Mpofu (1999) points out that teacher ratings are also used this is not possible in large areas like the capital city where they are many children in a classroom. Abosi (2007) points out that a similar situation prevails in Botswana in which children with LDs are not adequately catered for by classroom teachers.

Challenges Encountered and Suggestions for Improvement

Teachers' identification of LDs is quite significant during the intervention period but what are questionable are their abilities to identify children with LDs for placement in classroom or clinical remedial programmes. How valid and reliable are their informal methods in identifying children with LD?

Teacher expertise determines the type of tests which are crafted for assessment. Formal tests are expensive and are produced in the western world and yet Zimbabwe has experts in psychometrics. There is need for home brewed instruments to be used in reading assessment. This literature review has shown that first there is inadequate literature on the reading assessment situation in Zimbabwe. Secondly we need to identify the best assessment strategies which are currently in use.

METHODOLOGY
Research design

A qualitative design was used in the form of a case study of the Harare Metropolitan province which included the town of Chitungwiza focusing on what assessment models were being used and how teachers were carrying them out in the selected schools. The selection of a case study enabled the full understanding of whole school reading assessment models.

Population and sampling

Purposive sampling was used in the design (Oliver 2006). Schofield (2006) describes it as a method whereby whoever is available and willing takes part in the study. This is both expedient and less costly. The purposive sampling was used to select the schools and the teachers. Six teachers were the main participants of the study as focus was on their assessment activities as they selected and taught primary school children in the different schools in Harare and Chitungwiza.

Research Instruments

Semi structured interviews and document analysis of the 6 teachers in 4 schools were used to collect the data in the main study. Triangulation was achieved through soliciting information from, Education Officers, Educational Psychologists, Remedial Tutors and School Heads. These verified the data collected from the teachers. Document analysis completed the triangulation through analysis of records, tests and reports. This enabled the identification of the actual tests and strategies being used in the whole school reading assessment model.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed using global analysis (Flick, 2009) and Rudestam and Newton's (2001) 7 steps to thematic data analysis. Issues of confidentiality and anonymity were assured in the interviews carried out with the participants. To gain access into the different sites consent was sought from the responsible authority and the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture's Secretary through letters and meetings. Every effort possible was made not to harm any individual or institution as all ethical considerations were adhered to.

RESULTS

The results are given below.
Four schools have embarked on whole school class teacher identification using grade teacher made and standardized tests, and teacher observations and error analysis. Districts 5, 6 and 7 have schools which have embarked on this programme. Table 1 shows the interviewed six teachers and their schools.

Table 1:   Schools Embarking on Whole School Programmes

District	Schools	Teachers	Type
5	1	1	Reading programme
6	2	3	Reading & Math
7	1	2	Reading & Math

Interview Data (2012) n=6
All the six class teachers in these schools had long experiences in teaching remedial classes with one having 45 years of service.

What reading assessment models do teachers use to identify children with learning disabilities and why do they use them?

Whole School Identification

Table 2 shows the whole school reading identification model and the steps that were followed in selecting the children.

Table 2: Theme of the Model and the Identified Steps which were followed.

Type	Model	Steps followed
Whole school	Whole school identification	• Whole school testing involving grades 2 to 7 with formal tests and school tests twice a year • Test all newcomers for placement • Identification Committee compares reading age (RA), spelling age (SA), and school tests performance to identify children with LDs • Intervention occurs in class, pullout group and remedial classes

*RA = Reading age
*SA = Spelling age

Permutations of the Whole school reading identification model

Despite having the above steps in their programmes schools had different ways in which they selected which I called permutations. The different permutations from the four schools are presented below

School 1
Teachers with special education qualifications and experience teach the remedial classes created for the students with LDs who will have been identified from the school exercise. The teachers mentioned that they use the following tests for identification of children:
- *Schonell*
- *Holborn*
- *Graded word reading list*

The teachers pointed out that their emphasis was on literacy as indicated by the statement below.

> *Thrust on literacy. By end of 7 years [child must] read and understand/ function meaningfully in country.*

They said that this will prepare students for the high school because as they said;
> *Children struggle when they get to high school if they cannot read.*

School 2
In school 2 teachers have developed their own material to proceed with the teaching. Those with remedial departments have bought commercially made materials to help with the diagnosis. Diagnosis is part of the process of identifying children as it confirms if the choice made was correct. Teachers said that they viewed the process of identifying learning disabilities and using diagnostic tests in the teaching as one continuous processes involving the whole school. The teachers' statements can be summarised as:
- *School has whole school approach*
- *A wholistic approach of the total child*

- *Caters to children's needs- this is individual teaching in a group situation*

Identifying children is not an exact science. It is possible that during identification the child might be placed in the remedial programme although they may not warrant it. Further diagnoses during teaching fulfil two objectives; to confirm that the child has been correctly placed; and to identify the level of difficulties the child has so as to ascertain the beginning point for teaching.

The teachers have improvised material for use where possible in the whole school identification. Improvisation has occurred at the two levels first during the testing to identify the children. Here teacher structured questions have been used.

> *Groups are working; observe, examine, [this] plays a big role in selecting children. Use progress checks every two weeks; use 6 weekly tests, send to parents*

Teachers mentioned that their school has test or subject committees responsible for the assessments.

> *The academic department is responsible for identification.*

A positive situation which is occurring in schools is the development of subject committees which set up banks of tests. This may indicate that the staff development sessions at schools and those conducted by SPS and SNE are bearing fruits.

In the instances where English is being tested some children resort to the mother tongue. The teachers' behaviour of reading to the children during testing is an indication that a lot of these children are non readers. Despite teachers doing this the children will have difficulties in understanding what will have been read to them. It is important that in the initial grades the activity of reading for the children should be discouraged.

School 3

A single school in district 5 was also carrying their whole school reading programme in tandem with the prescribed SPS and SNE model. Their plans to start reading programmes show the need to include oral reading in the identification of children with learning disabilities. Upon asking the teacher why they had detailed reading age for the whole school they pointed out that it was a requirement of the high schools the children wished to join that they should obtain a certain reading age if they are to be admitted. Most of these English reading tests have not been adjusted over the years to incorporate any local content. Newer versions may be targeting modern innovations in education.

Some schools especially in the low density areas like school 4 which are mainly private have made reading a priority in their identification of LDs remedial classes for reading and purchasing local supplementary readers with relevant reading ages. A teacher in district 6 says:

> *Each class has supplementary books with their Reading ages.*

School 4

School 4 is a private and has a department mainly for the identification of dyslexia in children which they have identified as a major cause of reading problems in their community. The teacher in charge at the department said that they use these assessment instruments to identify children in the whole school:

- *Dyslexia screening test*
- *Wide Reading Assessment Test (WRAT)*

- *Waddington test (Australia)*
- *Holbon numeracy test*

However, they needed expertise in interpreting the results where the school did not have such expertise it engaged the services of private educational psychologists to do the identification and evaluation. These tests are different from the ones being used by other schools following the clinical identification. Their effectiveness was measured by performance of the children especially in terms of improvements in their reading and spelling ages. The heads responses indicated that their emphasis was on reading. This is a critical area which has been identified by the Ministry Primary and Secondary Education for improvement by all schools.

How effective are these models

A major strength of this method is its ability to place the child's needs in a holistic setting. The child is viewed in relationship with other children in a naturalistic manner which provides the teacher with an opportunity to correctly ascertain the child's reading competencies. In such instances the parents support encouraged the children to remain in the programmes they are placed.

Programmes which involved class teachers in identifying by asking them to provide further information in the form of class work, class test results and other anecdotal reports produced better results. Their remedial department was linked to the classes and this showed that the identification was a continuous process from the classroom to the clinical identification and back to the classroom setting. This is line with inclusive principles which place the classroom environment as the best place for all children.

Classroom remediation has always been the ambit of the teacher for obvious reasons. First the teacher is the one who ensures that the child gets adequate teaching and performs well. The teacher is the first one to observe children who are struggling with their learning. Secondly the teacher is the face of the school; meeting parents, guardians and other members of the community. Their failures and successes in teaching children are highlighted in the community compared to any other member who is outside the classroom. The ability of the class teacher to quickly identify children's learning difficulties and then remedy them is the most crucial in a child's learning experience. Many adults never forget the teachers who helped them to learn to read when they were struggling.

What challenges have schools encountered when using them in their models?

The main weakness of the whole school programme is on its reliance on the old tests whose norms are not compliant to the African society despite globalisation. The inclusion of the teachers' input helped to correctly identify the children's reading problems.

The identification of children with LDs being carried out in school is sometimes ad hoc and with no definite direction. Teachers use any method at their hands and the most common being the child's performance in the oral lesson. Error analysis in children's written work is used and at times does not clearly show the pattern of children's work. Despite schools using weekly test, fortnightly and monthly tests these are seldom used because teachers view them as not helpful in a learning situation. This is not correct because in those schools where they are used they produce a rich source of information on the child's overall performance in the different concepts.

In some schools the patterns of failures in reading scores and in the test are used to identify children who may need help. One shortcoming of this is that it sometimes tends to group together all children with varying learning problems who may not have LDs. This is not correct as children with learning disabilities are not homogenous. Three distinct groups emerge in a classroom situation. Those who are above average and may experience failure once in a while, those who are average and those who are performing below the average, comprising non readers, non numerates and those with poor handwriting. With such a plethora of children with needs the teacher is at pains to identify the ones who need to be remedied.

What are the suggestions for improving whole school reading models?

The use of reading ages computed from old and foreign tests on mostly African children rendered the whole exercise ineffective. Teacher input should be used to augment the process. Schools should also use local materials when carrying out their reading programmes. Whole school screening should provide class teachers with information which they should use to plan for the children. Children who continue to fail may be referred to the clinical remedial programme for an accurate identification of their problems.

DISCUSSION

These whole school reading identification model provide all children including those with LDs early identification which translates into early intervention. However the tests which are used in some schools are both foreign and old. Such tests would be like those mentioned by Cosford (1990). This is where SPS and SNE and University Special Needs Departments can provide expertise in the development of appropriate tests for screening, identifying and diagnosing children's learning disabilities.

The whole school reading identification models in private schools focused on reading especially dyslexia and used outside support for further assessment. Some educationists like Clay (1992) support this assertion that the most suitable way to ascertain the progress of a child is by determining their ability to read. Reading competence is therefore the ideal aspect to look for in a class. Classrooms where children read for meaning provide the right education. The schools which had whole school screening models believed that reading remediation was the only way of helping children. However schools seem to rely on old tests to screen children.

Team work was seen in those schools which were running successfully programmes. Teachers worked as a team to administer, mark and score the tests. Especially in the private schools where selection was done by the whole school. Human and material resources enabled schools to develop their programmes effectively. This similar to Sattler's (1992) suggestion when using the WRAT.

The area of reading is crucial to any students' learning. Failure to read has been identified as an important aspect in reading at any level. Although schools were embarking on various school based reading programmes they did not use continuous assessment strategies like the ones suggested by Montebruno (1994) and Gillis (1993). Continuous assessment strategies need further pursuit.

CONCLUSION

Whole school identification or screening was not a common phenomenon but was observed in a few schools. It mainly took the guise of whole school reading programmes. This is a noble strategy and needs support from all concerned. The whole school reading model helped all children in the school. It is during this process teachers get an opportunity to identify children's reading levels or ages and non-readers. The teachers' class observations of the children were a vital source of their on and off task behaviours within the classroom.

Tests enabled the schools to ascertain the presence of a learning disability which was a good starting point. Tests being used were old.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research made the following recommendations in line with the findings.
- Schools should set up identification committees to lead in the whole school assessment programme. This should include classroom teachers, remedial teachers, heads and the district remedial tutors.
- Teacher input should be a component of the identification which should focus on all children; namely with LDs, global learning difficulties and the gifted, talented and creative.
- Both continuous assessment and appropriate tests must be used to identify children with reading difficulties. These must be reviewed and appropriately adjusted if there are to produce any meaningful results.
- Collaborate with universities to carry out reading research on reading models appropriate for the local context.

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