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# Implications of Hearing Impairment on Psychosocial Adjustment of Secondary School Students with Hearing Loss

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**Isaiah Olugbenga Ojo, Ph.D.**

*Department of Special Education*

*University of Ibadan, Ibadan*

*E-mail: isaiahgbenga@yahoo.com*

*Tel: 08060223923*

## **Abstract**

*This paper examined the fact that no matter how mild, moderate or severe the hearing loss of an individual, it has a way of affecting his/her psychosocial adjustment. Emphasis is therefore, placed on the meaning, causes, symptoms of hearing impairment, characteristics of students with hearing impairment, concept of psychosocial adjustment and the implications of hearing impairment on the psychosocial adjustment of students with hearing impairment. It is therefore; recommended that there should be early intervention programmes for children with hearing impairment, in order to help them adjust to school or society at large.*

## **Introduction**

The sense of hearing is very crucial to man's existence. This is because; a lot of activities are carried out in our environment through the sense hearing. These activities include, listening to music, lectures and alarm of environmental dangers. One could rightly say that our ears afford us a lot of opportunities in our environment. Individuals with hearing impairment are missing greater parts of these opportunities as a result of their loss of hearing. Ademokoya (2005) posited that a normally hearing individual hardly appreciates the inestimable opportunity his hearing affords him in his daily interactions and transactions; he scarcely imagines how miserable life could be to him, if he should lose his sense of hearing for a day. According to him, a congenitally deaf individual can hardly estimate the worth of joy he has lost because of his hearing deprivation. He hardly knows that there are unceasing sound in his environment at all times.

According to Ademokoya (2005), to lose one's hearing is to lose contact with the hearing world. Furthermore, students with hearing impairment are affected in virtually all aspects of school life, ranging from psychological to social. That is, it has devastating effect on them. They find it difficult to have good sense of self, relate with others and

listen to lectures, especially where interpreters are not available. These, therefore point to the fact that the implications of their loss of hearing on them are very great. Hence, efforts should be made by all and sundry to assist them. This will enable them adjust to their environment in order to compete favourably with their counterparts with normal hearing.

### **The Concept of Hearing Impairment**

Hearing impairment is a generic term that is used to describe all forms of hearing loss, such as, deafness and hard-of-hearing. Schneider (2002) defines hearing impairment as impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

In addition, World Health Organization (2005), reported that hearing impairment is a broad term used to describe the loss of hearing in one or both ears. According to WHO (2005), hearing impairment refers to complete or partial loss of the ability to hear from one or both ears. It was also observed by WHO, (2005) that there are two types of hearing impairment defined according to where the problem occurs-conductive hearing impairment, which is a problem in the outer or middle ear. This type of hearing loss is often medically or surgically treatable. While the other one is sensorineural hearing loss. It is usually due to a problem with the inner ear, and occasionally with the hearing nerve going from there to the brain. This type of hearing problem is usually permanent and requires rehabilitation, such as with a hearing aid. The common causes of sensorineural hearing impairment are excessive noise and ageing (WHO, 2005).

World Health Organisation (2005) reported that hearing sensitivity is indicated by the quietest sound that an animal can detect, called the hearing thresholds. In the case of humans and some animals, this threshold can be accurately measured by a behavioural audiogram. A record is made of the quiet sound that consistently prompts a response from the listener. The test is carried out for sounds of different frequencies. There are also electro physiological tests that can be performed without requiring a behavioural response.

Normal hearing thresholds within any given species are not the same for all frequencies. If different frequencies of sound are played at the same amplitude, some will be perceived as loud, and others quiet or even completely inaudible. Generally, if the gain or amplitude is increased, a sound is more likely to be perceived. Ordinarily, when animals use sound to communicate, hearing in that type of animal is most sensitive for the frequencies produced by calls, or in the case of humans speech. All levels of the auditory system contribute to this sensitivity towards certain frequencies; from the outer ear's physical characteristics to the nerves and tracts that convey the nerve impulses of the auditory portion of the brain.

A hearing loss exists when an animal has diminished sensitivity to the sounds normally heard by its species. In humans, the term hearing impairment is usually reserved for

people who have relative insensitivity to sound in the speech frequencies. The severity of a hearing loss is categorized according to the volume that must be made above the usual level before the listener can detect it. In profound deafness, even the loudest sounds that can be produced by an audiometer (an instrument used to measure hearing) may not be detected. (WHO, 2005)

### **Causes of Hearing Impairment**

Hallahan and Kauffman(1991) posited that most common way to classify hearing loss is on the basis of the location of the problem within the hearing mechanism, hence, we have losses at the outer, middle or inner ear. In addition, Alade (2005) found out that the causes of hearing impairment can be classified into three sections namely: Causes occurring before birth, Causes occurring during birth and causes occurring after birth. She opined that the causes of hearing impairment can be classified into outer, middle and inner ear. According to her, the following are the causes of hearing impairment:-

#### **Impairment of the Outer Ear**

Impairment of the outer ear, either pathological or resulting from accident or infections, can lead to conductive hearing loss. According to her, the following are the common impairments of the outer ear:

- Atresia – condition in which the external auditory canal does not form in some children.
- Presence of foreign objects in the external ear.
- External otitis: This refers to a situation whereby the external auditory canal is infected.
- Pathological growth like tumor in the ear.
- Accumulation of cerumen or ear wax which can block the external auditory canal.
- The eardrum can become perforated as a result of clearing or scratching that canal, a blow to the head or excessive pressure in the middle ear.

#### **Impairments of Middle Ear**

Impairments in the middle ear are generally more serious than those of the external or outer ear. Otitis Media, an infection of the middle ear space and Non-suppurative Otitis Media, and disruption of the functioning of the eustachian tube are the common causes of middle ear impairment.

#### **Impairment of the Inner Ear**

Most causes of inner ear impairments are meningitis, a disease of the inner membrane covering the brain, maternal rubella and hereditary factors. The following are other

causes of inner ear impairments: Premature birth, Viral infections, such as mumps and measles, Prenatal infections of mother, such as, congenital syphilis, Rh factor – that is, blood incompatibility between the mother and child, unforeseen and unwanted side-effect of some antibiotics, blows to the head and excessive noise levels.

WHO (2008) found out that hearing impairment can be inherited, for instance, if one of both parents or a relative is born deaf, there is a high risk that a child will be born deaf. More so, WHO (2008) identified the following causes of hearing impairment:

- Premature birth
- Condition during birth in which a baby lacks enough oxygen to breathe
- Rubella, syphilis or certain infections in a woman during pregnancy
- The use of ototoxic drugs – a group of 130 drugs (such as the antibiotic gentamicin) that can cause damage to the inner ear, if incorrectly given during pregnancy.
- Jaundice, which can damage the hearing nerve in a newborn baby.
- Head injury or injury to the ear can cause hearing impairment.
- Wax or foreign bodies blocking the ear canal can cause hearing loss at any age.
- Excessive noise, including working with noisy machinery, exposure to loud noises, such as gunfire or explosions, can damage the inner ear and weaken hearing ability.

WHO (2008) stated that as people age, accumulated exposure to noise and other factors may lead to hearing impairment or deafness.

### **Characteristics of students with Hearing Impairment**

The characteristics of students with hearing impairment show the problems that are associated with their impairment. Scholars have identified some characteristics of students with hearing impairment

**Language and speech Development:** Adediran (2000) posited that the students with hearing impairment are noted for their poor speech and language development as what is processed and stored as vocabulary in the process of speech and language development is based on what is heard. In view of the above, the absence of auditory feedback is one of the factors that are responsible for poor speech among students with hearing impairment.

**Social and Personal Adjustments:** Hearing impairment has negative effect on social and personal adjustment of the affected individual. This negative effect is closely connected with communication problems which contribute to social and behaviour difficulties. Furthermore, there is a consistent adjustment problem among deaf children than their hearing counterparts. A child often finds it difficult to make friends, because he feels that nobody wants to relate with him, as a result of his impairment (Adediran, 2000).

It is therefore, very important to make the school and home environment very conducive for the individuals with hearing impairment, in order to alleviate their adjustment problems

**Academic Achievement:** Academic difficulties are by-products of hearing impairment. Deaf children and to some extent, hard-of-hearing children have academic difficulties. Sometimes, academic achievement is closely related to intelligence and intelligence testing of the deaf has created problems from time immemorial, because of language problem. Deaf children have been seen as being low in intelligence. This is not surprising, considering the poor language development and lack of auditory exposure to their environment, resulting from the handicap of deafness. Other areas affected by hearing impairment include motor ability, peripheral vision, social maturity, visual perception and personality development. Academic retardation is one of the implications of hearing impairment (Adediran, 2000).

### **Concept of Psychosocial Adjustment**

Richard (2004) posited that adjustment refers to the interaction of an individual with his environment. He stressed that the adjusted individual interacts in a harmonious way with the world in which he or she lives. According to him, adjustment could be within the family, work setting, school and larger society. The term social adjustment is often used to refer generally to harmony in the interpersonal realm. In the use of the term adjustment, attention is often focused on the mode of interaction. Alternatively, the emphasis may be on conditions within the individual. In other words, the term may be defined in terms of the extent to which the individual's needs are satisfied, usually with the implication that maximal or optimal need satisfaction depends on a satisfactory relationship with environment, since meeting needs usually entails interaction with our physical environment or surroundings.

Elegbeleye, (2001) opined that psychological factors are identifiable as those that explain the nature of interaction that exists between the individuals and the environment. She stressed that, human environment in this respect includes, the individual's parents and the kind of child-rearing pattern and the eventual normative observance that underline aspiration, need for achievement; choice between good and bad; interpersonal relationship and group belongingness.

Hemilin (1999) opined that it is very important that professionals, such as teachers, school counsellors, special educators and psychologists should be aware of the psychological issues like personal, social, behavioural or family problems relating to the adolescents with hearing impairment's adjustment, in order to assist them cope with such problems. According to him, those working with the adolescents with hearing impairment should be aware of and understand the issues they are facing in their daily lives, in and out of the school settings.

Zeizaika and Harris (1998) identified several issues as the most common psychosocial adjustment issues that face the adolescents with hearing impairment. These

issues are: peer influence, decision making, self esteem, social relation, aggressive behaviours, communication, interactions with hearing people, career decisions, sexual abuse, suicide, withdrawal and gender issue.

Furthermore, Polat (2003) observed that language barrier may be a source of psychological problem to the adolescents with hearing impairment, especially those in mainstream school setting, since they prefer to use their official language, which is sign language. This may lead to breakdown of communication with their hearing counterparts. According to him, problems in communication ability are basic for understanding of a child's behaviour, emotional and social development, especially if the child has hearing impairment.

### **Psychosocial Implications of Hearing Impairment on Student with Hearing Loss**

Loss of hearing is a common health problem affecting millions of people. Therefore, defining the extent of loss of hearing and its possible effects on human behaviour involves many factors (Willey, 2000). According to him, the extent of hearing impairment is not the only factor determining the degree of impairment of language and other behaviour in the child. If hearing loss is present at birth, or occurs before language develops, the child's normal pattern of acquiring language is altered and behaviour is profoundly affected.

Furthermore, Lemse (1992) opined that severe or total deafness which does not develop until after language has been learned, though tragic, is not such a handicap as deafness at birth which prevents the normal development of language. According to him, severe hearing loss after the acquisition of language may produce severe emotional disturbances in the child struggling to adjust to a drastically altered world of silent lip movements. Also, serious acquired hearing loss will produce deterioration in speech sounds because the child can no longer perceive his sound production by listening. Scholars have discovered the effect of the environment, intelligence and other physical handicaps on the students with hearing impairment. For example, Wiley (2000) said that other factors that influence the amount of impairment related to hearing loss include environment, intelligence, and other physical impairments. According to him, interaction between intelligence and hearing loss has not been adequately defined, but it is generally agreed that slow learning or retarded child may be more impaired by a given degree of hearing loss on the other hand, the bright responsive child, in a supportive environment, may be able to compensate for part of his hearing loss.

### **Implications of Hearing Impairment on Personality**

The sense of hearing is very vital to the existence of man. Hence, loss of this essential organ may have a devastating effect on those concern. Hearing impairment is a serious handicapping condition that tends to isolate the child from normal living. He or she is cut off from many of the experiences and opportunities for learning that ordinary children enjoy and has to make constant and considerable efforts to achieve things that come



relatively to normal hearing children (Akinpelu, 1998). She stressed that hearing impairment often brings with it communication problems which in turn can contribute to social and behavioural difficulties. In addition, deaf children have adjustment problems than their hearing counterparts. In other words, they exhibit characteristics of rigidity, egocentricity, absence of inner control and impulsivity.

In addition, hearing impairment affect several aspects of the lives of those with the disability. Olubela, Alade and Adediran (2003) observed that hearing impairment, though an inconspicuous sensory disability, do affect the victim overtly. They opined that hearing impairment like any other disabilities, do hinder the normal capability expected of the victims in terms of age, sex and societal adjustment. Also, they added that, hearing impairment, no matter the age of onset, do affect the victim's psychosocial disposition, communication ability, adjustment capabilities and educational achievement.

Andrea (2007) observed that hearing impairment has its social, academic and psychological effects on the students with hearing impairment. These effects can be reduced if they can accept their disabilities by adjusting to their social, psychological and academic environment. According to him, it is important to counsel students with hearing impairment to accept their disability in order to adjust to the negative attitudes held by some communication partners. In addition, he identified the following psychosocial effects of hearing impairment: the person withdraws from his or her surroundings, conversations become shorter, less frequent, less spontaneous and less personal; the person becomes less attentive and/or avoids social gatherings and noisy surroundings, reduced social contact and less social or physical activity, loss of intimacy, problems at work and sexual problems.

The social environment of the adolescents with hearing impairment includes the school setting, where they have to interact with their peers (other students with hearing impairment and their hearing counterparts). Also, they have to interact with their siblings at home as well as their parents and teachers. In a situation whereby the students are not socially and psychologically adjusted, maladjustment sets in.

Osiki & Nwazuoke (1998) observed that the students with hearing impairment may be self blaming, blaming others and or God for their predicament, they are often psychologically traumatized when the thought of their physical malfunction get to pathological level. They stressed the fact that except with the advantageous use of some hearing aid, and where the cost is not prohibitive, students with hearing impairment are highly susceptible to adjustment problems.

Jones (2004) observed that individuals with hearing impairment, due to their poor interactive nature, strongly have problem with intimate relationship with others. He opined that in order to reduce the effects of hearing loss on the individuals with hearing impairment, their needs must be met by the social environment in terms of information and support from others. Apart from that, he observed that there is delay in social maturity, slow communication skills with their hearing counterparts among the adolescents with hearing impairment. He equally found out high rate of depression and anxiety disorders, particularly social phobias in deaf and hard-of-hearing adolescents.

## Psychological Implications of Hearing Impairment

Wiley (2000) discovered that by itself, a hearing loss lowers the quality of life, and for most adolescents and adults with hearing impairment, hearing loss has psychological, physical and social consequences. In some cases, however, hearing impairment may have more severe effects. According to him, for the adolescents with hearing impairment, trying to keep up in conversations and overcoming the anxiety of being in social settings may be so stressful that it may result in psychological disorders. The psychological effects of hearing loss vary from person to person, but according to Wiley (2000) a hearing loss may worsen a variety of disorders such as:

- Panic disorder-recurrent, unexpected panic attacks; can be situation induced.
- Social phobia-persistent fear of social or performance situations in which embarrassment may occur.
- Obsessive compulsive disorder and/or personality-recurrent behaviours severe enough to be time-consuming or caused marked distress or significant impairment.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder-development of characteristic symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor.
- Anxiety in different forms-due to medical illness, psychological effects or general anxiety that does not meet criteria for any specific anxiety.

In the same vein, American Speech-Language Association (2007) identified the following psychological consequences of hearing impairment: shame, guilt and anger, embarrassment, lack of concentration, sadness or depression, worry and frustration, anxiety and suspiciousness, insecurity and self-criticism and low self confidence.

Consequently, according to American Speech-Language Association (2007), the adolescents with hearing impairment need the help of professionals, such as special educators, counselling psychologists, rehabilitation counsellors, teachers as well as, parents, in order to alleviate the psychological effects of hearing impairment. This will enhance their psychological adjustment. In addition, the Association concluded that hearing impairment can make an individual irritable and less tolerant towards other people. Not only that, some may even become paranoid.

## Conclusion

Hearing impairment, as observed in this paper has a lot of implications on the psychological and social development of students with hearing loss in secondary schools. It is therefore, very important that adequate intervention programmes should be put in place by all those who are concerned with their rehabilitation in order to reduce the effects on them. This will enable them adjust to their environment psychologically and socially.

## Recommendations

The following are recommended for the benefit of parents, teachers, professionals and students with hearing impairment:-

1. There should be early intervention programmes for students with hearing loss, so that its implications on them could be reduced before they get to secondary schools.
2. Support staff, such as, interpreters should be employed in our secondary schools that are having students with hearing impairment, in order to help them during class work and other activities outside the classroom.
3. School psychologists and rehabilitation counsellors should be employed in our secondary schools with hearing impairment in order to help them resolve their areas of difficulties in the school environment.
4. Recreational activities should be put in place for students with hearing impairment. This will boost their psychosocial adjustment in the school.
5. Parents and professionals should collaborate in the education of students with hearing impairment.

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