Examining Language and Access for Deaf in Central Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper is based on an ethnographic study stemming from a partnership between the Diocese of Central Tanzania and a non-denominational church in Laurel, MD. This partnership focuses on forming an alliance to provide better and more equitable access for deaf and hard of hearing Tanzanians in the Dodoma Region. This study examined the impact of introducing Tanzania Sign Language (TSL) to deaf and hard of hearing residents in five villages in Dodoma, Tanzania. The goal of this partnership and this research is to examine how bringing exposure to deaf culture and TSL to communities where they have not had such exposure can impact entire villages. With access to communication as well as social frameworks that accept deaf and hard of hearing individuals as whole and capable, deaf Tanzanians can have opportunities to be productive and valued members of their communities.

Key Words: Deaf, Tanzania, Tanzanian Sign Language, disability, ability, culture, access

1. Introduction

Without access to communication, being deaf can be very isolating in an hearing-centric world. However, with access to communication, being deaf can mean having full access to that world and those around them. Around the world, there is much debate on what this "access" looks like and how it should be attained. This ranges from oral and auditory access through assistive technology such as the cochlear implant, or visual access through sign language, or both. However, for many deaf and hard of hearing people, none of these options have be made available to them. In some of the world's poorest regions, many people are unaware of what it means to be a deaf person with access to communication, functioning as contributing members of society. Dodoma, Tanzania is one such place, though that is changing. This study examines the impact of a program to teach Tanzania Sign Language (TSL) to residents in the Dodoma region, which, in turn, raises deaf awareness. The study shows the strides that have been made, as well as the daily struggles of the deaf children and adults and their hearing family and neighbors.

Approximately five percent of the world's population are deaf (World Health Organization, 2015). In regions where access to medical care is limited, this percentage is higher. This is the case in the Dodoma Region of Tanzania. Dodoma is the capital city of Tanzania. It is located in the Dodoma region in the center of the country and is also the poorest area in Tanzania. As a result, there is a severe shortage of health care (Dodoma Tanzania Health Development, n.d.). Dodoma is also the largest region in Tanzania, spanning 41,311 square kilometers (15,950 square miles) (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010) and has a population of 2,083,588 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2013).

With a large population and limited access to quality healthcare, there are many residents of the region who have disabilities due to illness, poor nutrition, and lack of treatment for illnesses such as ear infections. Therefore, many deaf people live in the villages in and around Central Tanzania, in the Dodoma region. Formal census information on the number of deaf residents is not available for Tanzania, but based on the lack of accessible healthcare (Dodoma Tanzania Health Development, n.d.), it can be assumed that the number is higher than five percent of the population.

Worldwide, there are generally two paradigms for understanding what it means to be deaf. There is a pathological perspective, which focuses on deafness as a physical disability, and the cultural perspective, which focuses on the Deaf person as belonging to a culture with its own language and cultural norms (Ladd, 2003). The deficit-based model typically focuses on how to give the deaf person more access to hearing. The goal is to make their hearing ability as close to normal hearing as possible. This deficit-based model typically supports oralism, the use of spoken language, as the preferred mode of communication and the target language for the deaf person. The second paradigm is a cultural model. The focus is on building the Deaf person's sense of pride in identifying as Deaf and through full access to communication through the use of American Sign Language (ASL) as the valued language of power (Reagan, 2002). Deafness, from a cultural perspective, means that for many, they need visual sign language in order to communicate, but other than that, their minds and bodies function the same as any other non-deaf person. In countries such as the United States, where laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act ensures that deaf people have access to education, public events and information, deaf enjoy many of the same rights and experiences as their hearing peers. In other countries, such as Tanzania, these rights are not automatic and many deaf do not experience the freedom and ability to access the world around them.

This ethnographic study looked at the lives and opportunities for deaf people living within the Dodoma Region of Tanzania. Ethnographic methods can unpack how aspects of the environment constrain or facilitate what parents want for their children, revealing richness of immigrant families' experiences (Weisner, 1997). There are 531 villages within the Dodoma Region. The deaf residents of these villages are often left with no access to formal language. Their families and community members have not been exposed to the existence of Tanzania Sign Language (TSL) or the reality that their deaf family members or neighbors are capable of making meaningful contributions to society. There are two schools for the deaf in the Dodoma Region and, according to an unpublished survey taken in 2010 by a pastor from the Dioceses of Central Tanzania, Reverend Isaac Mteme, only two percent of deaf children living in the Dodoma Region attend school. The general perception of people who are deaf in Tanzania is negative. They are often shunned and treated as lower-class citizens. This aligns with the work of Steinberg et.al (1997) and Vodounou (2008) that found that deaf and persons with disabilities can be highly stigmatized within Latino and African communities. These studies suggested that persons with disabilities are considered a burden on the community and a sign that the person or family has been cursed. This leaves many deaf residents of the villages in the Dodoma region living life in silent isolation and oppression.

The authors of this study, as well as all those involved in the partnership through which this study is based, view deaf and hard of hearing people not as disabled, but as members a deaf cultural system who rely on visual communication. In order to help spread awareness of deaf as capable and not as disabled and increase access and resources for the deaf in the Dodoma Region, The Diocese of Central Tanzania and a church in Laurel, MD, Bethany Community Church, developed a partnership to help foster and provide language and education. This partnership has been ongoing for nine years. The partnership includes providing sponsorship for students to attend school, subsidizing TSL interpreters, and employing deaf Tanzanians to go into the remote villages for eight weeks at a time to provide TSL training to the deaf and their caretakers. This article focused on the TSL training portion of that work. It examined the impact of TSL training on the perceptions of deaf and on the communication between deaf and hearing and deaf with deaf participants in the villages who have completed training. The study answered the question: What are the experiences of deaf Tanzanians and their hearing peers living in remote villages in the Dodoma Region of Tanzania after receiving four to eight weeks of TSL training?

This study is important because it reveals the impact a small service can have on a person and a community. There are many communities worldwide and within Tanzania that have yet to see services available for their deaf residents, and where deaf and hard of hearing residents are left in silent isolation throughout their lives. This study sheds light on how to move forward to improve access and opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing people who are without these basic human necessities.

2. Methods

This study used elements of a grounded theory qualitative approach because it allowed us to gain insight into the experiences of the individuals in this study. We sought to gain insight into the experiences of deaf and hearing residents of five villages in the Dodoma Region of Tanzania. We examined how these individuals navigate, adopt, and reject various aspects of culture from their country, their village, and Deaf culture through focus group interviews. The research question was best answered using qualitative research methods because qualitative methods allow the researcher to listen to the unique stories of each individual (Creswell, 2007). It is a study of a population that historically not been heard as research on deaf in remote areas is scant. Data were collected using focus group interviews and observation.

Data were collected and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Specifically, this study used constructivist grounded theory as described by Charmaz and Balgrave (2012). Constructivist grounded theory is based on the belief that theories need to be constructed as opposed to discovered (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Constructivist grounded theory follows the steps of grounded theory in data collection, analysis, coding, memo writing, and generation of theory, but recognizes the situation in which the theory is being constructed including the position of the researcher as well as the research situation (Silverman, 2016, p. 305). Because there is little to no research examining the experiences of deaf and hearing residents of remote villages, or, in this case, villages in Dodoma, TZ after taking a TSL training course, theories have yet to be built and this method will create "useful tools for learning" (Charmaz & Balgrave, 2012, p. 349). The goal was to determine how these individuals construct their understanding of what it means to be deaf and what it means to be an ally to the deaf in their community.

2.1. Participants. Deaf and hearing residents from five villages participated in focus groups. Each focus group was conducted at the local parish within their own village. Participants ranged in age from young children to senior citizens and were both deaf and hearing residents. Participants were recruited by local parish priests living within that village. They were invited based on two criteria, one being their being deaf or the caretaker of deaf, and the second criteria was their participation in the TSL training that was provided in their village. Not all of the focus group participants met the second criteria. Some missed the training because they did not live in the village at the time. One deaf participant missed most of the training because his parents would not allow him to attend. However, they expressed desire to participate in the study to make their stories known and their voices heard. This shows the need for more research and opportunities to learn about these communities. Table 1 breaks down the number of attendees at each of the five focus groups.

Table 1: Focus Group Participants

Villages	Total number of attendees	Total number of deaf attendees	Total number of deaf children
Bihawana	17	6	2
Homobolo Bwawani	15	6	none
Homobolo Makulu	18	11	2
Mpunguzi	18	6	2
Mvumi Mission	20	20	none

2.2. Data Collection. Focus group sessions lasted anywhere from 30-90 minutes depending on the number of participants. Communication was a bit slower due to the use of language translators between TSL and Swahili, and their tribal language, Kigogo, English, and American Sign Language. A professional Tanzanian interpreter was used for the TSL, English, and Swahili translations and our Tanzanian program manager, who is local to Dodoma, translated Kigogo into either English or Swahili. It is almost impossible for information to not be lost in so much translation, but we repeated statements to help ensure that we captured the comments from the participants.

Each participant was asked to describe various experiences being deaf or being a caretaker, usually a family member, or neighbor to someone who is deaf. The participants were encouraged by the local parish priests, also in attendance at the focus groups, to be open and honest about their daily life experiences. It was explained that it is not typical for them to reveal their honest struggles with outsiders, so the urging and trust of the priests went a long way to help build trust among the focus group participants. This allowed us, the researchers, to learn raw stories of daily life successes and struggles of the deaf living within each village. We were also able to observe deaf and hearing residents and their hearing neighbors and caretakers in their natural settings within the village. These observations were a powerful way to see how their natural interactions happened, or not, through what is known as "home sign" and gestures. We also saw deaf who could not sign, write their name in the dirt in order to introduce themselves to us. Unfortunately, some of the deaf and hard of hearing participants did not have language skills to communicate with us. Our participation with them relied heavily on their deaf and hearing allies and our observations.

2.3. Data Analysis. During the data collection part of the research, we kept memos to document any reflections and notes about the interviews and potential themes and unique information. These memos also served as part of the data, particularly where they noted observations about the interview, such as who was present, the general comfort and tone of the interview, how the group interacted between deaf and hearing and deaf and deaf, and other relevant observations. All of the interviews were transcribed. Data were analyzed using open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) which is consistent with grounded theory. This helped to find many potential themes through open coding. Substantive themes were created after reviewing and analyzing the data collected from the interviews and observations. Data were entered into matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Maxwell, 2012b), sorted by themes and compared within and across interviews. Data were analyzed for potential themes in and across focus group participant experiences taking TSL training and how that shaped how they interact with and understand what it means to be deaf in their village. Themes that were common across interviews were noted and presented in order to generate new theories on how TSL training raises awareness of deaf abilities and increases communication among deaf with their families and the larger community.

3. Results

The results of this study reveal the impact of the exposer of communities to TSL and so much more. They paint a picture of the current successes, daily struggles, and needs of deaf and hearing members of the villages as they seek to better provide access and opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing residents. These results can be broken into six themes. These themes are outlined and explained below.

3.1. Communication. As stated earlier in the article, most of the deaf people living in the Dodoma Region never attend school. As a result, many also do not have the opportunity to learn formal language. We met several deaf who wanted to share their stories with us, but were unable to share in depth due to their language. For example, two men work in the farming fields were trying to tell us more about their jobs, but it was difficult to understand due to the language barriers. Often, their peers who had formal language training in school helped facilitate the communication. However, we noticed that when those two men were not talking to us, they were using their signs to talk to one another.

This was not the only situation in which we saw home signs (or signs made up by individuals or small groups, such as families, to communicate with one another). We saw this happen between children and their caretakers or children with neighbors as well. While this was helpful to involve the deaf individual, they were not as able to communicate with those outside of their circle. We examined the data to see if the TSL training did anything to bridge that gap. In some cases, it helped the deaf communicate with those around them, but actually grew the home signs, or the made-up gestures and signs used between family and community members. This is because the need and desire to communicate was above what they learned in the TSL training course, so they invented signs to communicate better. This shows the need for increased TSL training and more tiered courses for students to advance.

After taking TSL classes, the communication has increased among the deaf and hearing and deaf and deaf within the participating villages. Knowing some basic TSL is certainly a reason for the increase. However, the changed paradigm of the perception of being deaf from being unable to communicate to being able to communicate has been the powerful force that has continued to grow within the communities. This realization was not just that they didn't know sign and now they did.

Rather, it was that many participants did not know that sign language even existed or that deaf people could produce words in their own language. They had been perceived as a deaf and dumb. In addition, some deaf individuals noticed that they were able to interact with and sit beside their hearing friends after taking the TSL classes. The ability to interact removed the awkward barriers that had long existed among them.

One lady in the village of Homobolo Bwawani, Sarah, became deaf as a result of physical abuse. Her partner beat her on her head and she lost her hearing. He ended up leaving her as a result of her being deaf. Then, she found that in the community, she was being rejected because of her deafness. However, taking TSL class, it helped her in regaining her “voice” and recognition as part of the community. Yet, she took the class in 2010 and was asking for a continuation and expansion of TSL classes in her village.

All of the participating villages requested for longer classes and a place where they could get together to interact using TSL as well as learn some health, empowerment, or any type of vocational workshop in TSL for everyone in their village. This was particularly true in Mvumi Mission where there were many deaf young adults who attended and participated in our study, all of them without reliable, gainful employment, most of them without any way to earn money at all.

Participants also shared experiences communicating before the TSL training. They shared that prior to TSL classes, the village had to rely on face-to-face interaction focusing on lipreading, speaking slow, and pointing. After the TSL class, they were able to recognize the difference between gestures and signs, such as the different signs for “husband” and “father”. They shared that before the TSL class was being offered, they simply say hello to their community and they were discouraged from using sign language as it was not considered as a language. After the TSL class, they were finally able to communicate better more and are now being encouraged to use sign and gestures. As a result, they are better able to get their message across and finally experience having some kind of voice.

3.2. Perception of Deaf. As discussed in the introduction, the perception of what it means to be deaf varies within and across people. This perception is often influenced by outside factors including the larger society and what resources are available to the deaf person. In Tanzania, we observed and were informed that the general perception of being deaf is very negative. We certainly met individuals who strongly view deaf as equal and valued members of society, but overall, there is a negative stigma associated with being deaf. Families are often in denial that they have a deaf family member. According to one local deaf school headmaster, many families do not add their deaf child to the school enrollment because they do not want their child associated with a special education school. Meanwhile, as we saw in our study, these children are just sitting, silent, at home, missing out on language, communication, social, and academic development opportunities. These same children grow up to be adults that are dependent on others for survival.

Worse than being ignored or looked down upon, some deaf become easy targets for abuse, both physical and sexual. They often do not have the language skills to report this abuse and it is not certain that anyone would believe them even if they did, simply because they are deaf and, therefore, considered to have less credibility. This section unpacks some of these issues by highlighting the impact bringing TSL training to the village had on the community including opening the door for deaf people to communicate and changing the terms used to refer to deaf people.

3.3. Training impact. The study showed that, for some, there was a shift in the perception of people who are deaf. Many of the participating villages are far from town and not easily accessible without access to a car, which many people do not have. Therefore, many residents in the village have not have much experience outside of their village. When no one in the village is aware of the language opportunities and needs of deaf people, they maintain the perception that deaf are not able to be productive members of society. The training was intended to bring language to teach TSL, but the implications exceeded just learning language, which will be discussed in this section.

Sylvia, in Bihawana, was a graduate of attended Kigwe School for the Deaf. She was thrilled to learn that TSL class was being offered in her village as it improved her communication with her family and neighbors and the village realized her ability to represent herself as an individual. She was able to communicate her wants and needs as well as things she dislikes. After having the TSL class being offered, she noticed an improvement in the hearing residents of her village attempting to approach her and to communicate even if on a basic level.

In another village, Mpunguzo, focus group participants found TSL training beneficial as they have at least 18 deaf individuals in the villages, though they did comment that the classes were too brief. A catechist, who also served as an "interpreter" between TSL and Swahili for the deaf in his village, found that offering TSL training helped develop the relationship between deaf and hearing people in the village. As a result the parish priest was adamant that they would like to have an expanded TSL training session as well as and educational opportunities for the deaf in his village and surrounding villages. He even went so far as to offer us free land to build a permanent classroom to hold vocational training classes and TSL classes in their village. As the leader of the community, the parish priest has a lot of influence on the residents in the community. In this case, his support of the deaf residents in and around his village may help to influence families of deaf who remain reluctant to bring their deaf family member out into society to learn sign language and attend school or training. Partnering with village leaders provides us access into the villages and trust among the people. This relationship is not always a given, however. Some villages have been reluctant to allow the training and the trainers into their village. It is a work in progress.

In some cases, the impact of the training affected family relationships. In Homobolo Bwawani, a mother of a deaf teenage daughter took the TSL training alongside her daughter. The mother realized that after the TSL class, their relationship has improved significantly because of their ability to communicate. Her daughter was recruited to become one of TSL teachers for the project. She stated that they continued to expand they language that they had learned through using more home signs.

On the contrary, some deaf did not, and still do not, have the support of their families to learn TSL and get an education. One deaf young man from Mvumi Mission, Abdul, wanted to attend the TSL training offered in his village in 2009. He was only able to attend parts of a few sessions, however, because his parents forbade him from attending. They made Abdul stay home and work in the field so that he would not be able to make the classes on time. However, the TSL training motivated him to continue learning TSL. He was fortunate because, unlike any other village that we visited, there seems to be a strong, growing deaf community within this village. Because of this, he was able to reach out to other deaf people within the village, especially those who went to school for the deaf, to teach him TSL. Abdul was able to communicate for himself during our focus group.

3.4. "Deaf and dumb". One of the participants in a focus group in Hombolo used the terms "deaf and dumb" to categorize those deaf individuals who cannot speak and hear. Our professional interpreter, Salim, asked us for permission to step out of his role as the interpreter and address the participants directly. We granted him this permission. He emphasized to those gathered, in their own language, that being deaf has nothing to do with their intelligence. He shared that the words "deaf and dumb" are considered inhumane and then explained that it is illegal to refer use the term in Tanzania. He warned that any individual who chose to use those term could be punished to the full extent of the law in Tanzania.

This was interesting to us and to our research. We realized that, even our presence conducting this study was having an impact on the perceptions of being deaf within the villages. It was a positive sign that while we saw cases of abuse and neglect of deaf and hard of hearing people, the country was moving in the right direction to raise awareness of deaf rights and abilities.

3.5. Impact of our visit. As researchers, we wanted to come in as observers and have open dialogue with the participants. However, our being there did have an impact on some of the participants, regardless of our intent. Many of the participants were so eager to learn, so eager to understand how to better communicate and have access for deaf and hard of hearing. The first author of this article is hearing and fluent in ASL. The second author is from a fourth generation Deaf family and a native user of ASL. Participants observed keenly the researchers had conversations with one another, or as the hearing researcher interpreted in ASL for the Deaf researcher.

In Mvumi Mission Village, there was a deaf and blind participant that was brought to our session by his deaf peers. We learned that Alfi, who appears to be in his 40s, was able to sign as he had attended one of the local schools for the deaf as a child. His story was very heart wrenching, but necessary to share to learn of the barriers many deaf still face and to realize what steps are needed to overcome these barriers.

About one year ago, Adill, who was not blind, was finishing his job loading trucks. He was attacked and mugged by a couple of young men who knew that he just got paid. When they learned that he is deaf, they gouged his eyes out. Adill was, thankfully, rescued and taken to get medical care. He is now fully blind and unable to work in his job. He is living with family and fully dependent for daily living. It was obvious through his communication that he is well educated and very intelligent, but is now left in isolation most of the time.

A deaf peer who brought him to the meeting would occasionally place his hands on top of Adill's and make Adill's hands copy the sign of the speaker. This was their invented way of interpreting for him. So, for example, when we were going around the room introducing everyone, Ame, the deaf friend, put his hands on top of Adill and moved Adill's hands to sign, "What is your name?" in TSL. Adill's face showed understanding of the question and then, on his own, he responded that his name was Adill.

There is currently an efficient way of communicating with and interpreting for deaf-blind signers. It is called tactile interpreting. One of the researchers asked Ame to move, sat beside Adill, and began signing with one of Adill's hands placed on one of her hands. The whole room watched in silence and amazement as they watched Adill and the researcher have a conversation. The end of the conversation was met by a room full of cheers from the other participants. As mentioned before the intent of the researchers was not to influence the community in any way, but just our presence there, being able to offer simple ideas made an impact on the lives of some of the participants, particularly Ame and Adill, who shared that they were going to practice using tactile signing.

3.5.1. Change of heart. One mother of a deaf son, about 7 years old, was informed about one year before our research trip about the school for deaf children in the city. However, she shared that she was not ready to allow her child to attend school. During our focus group, she sent a message to us that she was now ready for her son to attend the school and wanted information on getting him enrolled. This was a big step for her, as she wrestled in the place between what she had believed about deafness as a curse on her family and her desire, as a mother, to help make sure that her son would have opportunities.

3.6. Gainful Employment. Language and perception of deafness impacted the ability of the deaf and hard of hearing participants to find gainful employment. We found this to be true in the city and in the surrounding villages. Some of the deaf participants had learned a trade either in vocational training courses at school or from kind neighbors who mentored them. Some deaf people had demonstrated their abilities in various trade like carpentry and tailoring, however, they simply were not allowed to work in the mainstream workforce due to the employer's ability to communicate with deaf them. The employer simply shut them out.

Many parents and caretakers expressed concerned about the inability of the deaf to be self reliant. Some of the village leaders were also concerned about this and offered to host vocational training programs within their village where deaf from villages all around could come to learn a trade. The deaf participants shared dreams they had to work and make money to support themselves and, in many cases, their children. Anna reported that she is currently working in a field feeding chickens. She shared that sometimes, her employer refuses to pay here. Sarah shared that she is working to clean houses, but her dream is to be a cook. She wants to have a small stand where she can cook and sell her food. Training and communication were not the only issues the deaf reported that they were facing. They also did not have their own tools or equipment such as a tool belt and tools, or a sewing machine, or a small stove. Without the equipment, they could not find work on their own, but without working, they could not afford to buy the equipment. It presented as a hopeless situation without some form of intervention. In Homobolo Bwawani, they had someone from city coming in to train a deaf guy in the village. This was discontinued because the deaf individual did not have the tools to continue the work. This support the importance of having tools in order to do training before finding a job. One of the hearing participants advocated for the deaf in his village, Bihawana, by sharing that he would like to see the deaf obtain vocational training, tools, and opportunities to work for themselves and take care of their children instead of depending on others.

Mvumi Mission had 25 deaf attendees. Adam, a gentleman in the group, who we observed as a natural leader by his disposition, presented an idea of how to make his farming work more efficient and profitable for both himself and other deaf who could work alongside him. He presented to us a well thought out business plan that included the installation of a irrigation pump. Amos spends his days walking back and forth from the water source to the tomato plant, watering the plants with water he collected in his buckets. He does this work all day, everyday in order to water each of the plants. He noted that the profit made from selling the tomatoes was low compared to the cost of selling cabbages. He proposed switching to planting cabbages instead. He then presented that an irrigation system would mean that more plants could be planted and time could be saved not having to carry water in buckets back and forth all day, everyday. He shared that he attempted to obtain a small loan offered for villagers with solid business ideas. However, he was shut out because he is deaf and the board could not be bothered to try to communicate with him. So, he is stuck to continue watering the tomatoes day after day.

4. Conclusion

The findings in this study have implications both for the ongoing work through our partnership in Tanzania, but more importantly, it has implications for deaf and hard of hearing people living in low to middle income countries around the world, particularly in remote areas with limited access to awareness of sign language or deaf abilities. This study was first step in understanding the daily lives of deaf people living in Dodoma, Tanzania. The results of this study show that many of their struggles for access and opportunities are related to their lack of access to the world around them and from the perception of what it means to be deaf. Providing TSL training went beyond teaching language to spread awareness of what it means to be deaf and helped change perceptions of people who are deaf from incapable and dependent, to capable with the potential for independence.

However, it is still clear that this is just a small part of the extensive work that needs to be done. All of the participants, both deaf and hearing, expressed that they felt the training was not enough. They wanted more opportunities to learn and become proficient in TSL. Our study confirmed that many deaf are still living a life that is dependent on hearing family and neighbors to provide for them. In order to help minimize this, more and deeper TSL training needs to be offered. We are working on recruiting more, local, deaf trainers to provide this training on a regular basis. We are also working on establishing deaf centers where deaf can come together to meet with other deaf in their village to build community and language.

Simply providing TSL training does not solve the lack of access and opportunity for the deaf people living in the Dodoma Region. They need access to education and they need vocational training as well. However, they showed that providing what little training we have has made a big impact on the lives of the deaf and hearing participants. Because of it, families are able to communicate through some TSL and gesturing, some parents are hopeful and seeking options to enroll their child in one of the two schools for the deaf, where they may have been hesitant before. This study confirmed that we are moving in the right direction. Our hope is that this study and our work will help raise awareness and opportunities for deaf living in remote areas to become active participants in their communities.

The larger implications from this study can parallel the work of other scholars that have found that the perception of what it means to be deaf or have a disability is often negative and, therefore, deaf are seen as a burden instead of an asset to society (Steinberg et.al, 1997; Vodounou, 2008). This is a very small, very specific study, but it points to the need for more intervention to spread awareness of deaf and hard of hearing people as capable members of society. It shows that even small scale programs can make a big impact on empowerment to deaf and hard of hearing people in low to middle income nations, particularly in remote areas. It also points to the extreme need to attend to deaf education on a global level. While nations, such as Tanzania, have devoted much time and attention to ensuring that all children attend school, there has been little focus to providing accessible education for deaf and hard of hearing children. With access to communication and framework of being deaf not as a disability, but simply a need for a visual language, the lives of not only the deaf and hard of hearing people can be improved, but that can have a positive impact the whole communities as well, particularly in communities where resources are scarce and caretaking is a heavy burden on the families.

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