

Status and Challenges of the Deaf in One City in the Philippines: Towards the Development of Support Systems and Socio-Economic Opportunities

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Abstract – The case study described the status and challenges faced by the Deaf in Butuan City, Philippines. The study utilized the qualitative technique wherein the data were analyzed using the Van Kaam Method. The status was described according to Atkin's three roles of education and previous experience, network and support systems, and Deaf identity and communication access. The challenges faced by the Deaf were categorized into employability and entrepreneurship. Findings revealed that the educational support system for the Deaf was still weak with the lack of tertiary programs accommodating them. The network and support systems of the Deaf, with particular emphasis on the Deaf's family and the community, was also weak regarding communication and cooperation. There is less awareness as to the Deaf culture and capability. They are still perceived as people with disability and not with capability. The study also revealed that employability level of the Deaf graduates is low. Access to entrepreneurship is very limited, and one major factor is the lack of capitalization. Based on the findings of the study, initiatives are proposed to strengthen the support systems of the Deaf and widen their access to employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Keywords - Deaf, Employability, Entrepreneurship, Support Systems, Socio-Economic Opportunities

INTRODUCTION

One of the largest people groups of differently abled individuals with their set of cultures is the Deaf community. Over the years and around the world, there has been progress in the socio-economic opportunities available to the Deaf in various fields of employment and entrepreneurship [1]-[3]. According to the National Deaf Business Institute, there are around 800-1,000 Deaf entrepreneurs worldwide [1].

The Deaf people are sometimes called people with "hidden disability." The reason is that there are no attendant and visible marks on their appearance such as wheelchairs, white canes, and black eyeglasses to identify their particular needs. The only time that they are recognized as Deaf is when they begin to talk using sign language [4]. Further, the Filipino Deaf has their own cultural identity with their visual language which is the sign language [5]-[6].

In the Philippines, there is already a Magna Carta for Persons with Disability (PWDs) [7] and Executive Order No. 417 [8] which direct the implementation of

the economic independence program for PWDs. It mandated the creation of promotional programs to develop the positive image of PWDs, which includes the Deaf sector. So far, there has been government and private institutions' efforts to help improve the socio-economic status of the Deaf. Success stories have proved that the Filipino Deaf "can" and possess the skills which are recognized globally especially in this era of ASEAN integration.

However, looking at the bigger picture of the Deaf population in the Philippines, the opportunities remain to be limited for them. For more than ten years of the researcher's volunteer work with the Deaf community in the different parts of the country, it has been observed that the issues of equal access to economic opportunities such as employment have been prevalent among the Filipino Deaf nationwide. Further, a pioneering socioeconomic survey in one urban city in the Philippines revealed that only 32% of PWDs with jobs are from the Deaf sector and only 16% are inclined towards some business [9].

The Deaf Gain concept [2] considers the Deaf as a value-adding asset and not a liability in the society. The Deaf have an enormous potential of being valuable contributors to the economy but the challenges that they are facing limit them in realizing the bright future ahead of them. Therefore, this study was conducted to draw a picture of the status and explore the challenges of the Deaf. Their stories provided input in proposing initiatives that would enable them to live economically independent and productive.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on the three roles of Atkins [1] namely, a) education and previous experience, b) networks and support systems and c) Deaf identity and communication access.

The role of education and previous experience emphasized the need for knowledge and skills in the particular business area that the Deaf entrepreneur is engaged. Educational level of the owner played a critical role in their success as formal education provided the principles and training on how to run the business. Their previous work experience at a company providing similar products enabled them to acquire the specific skills that they need to succeed in their venture. They also saw the need for education and previous experience to build their credentials and the legitimacy of their organization.

The role of network and support systems contributed significantly to the Deaf entrepreneurs in different areas such as entry to markets, access to financial capital, and sharing of resources and psychological support. The value of having a social network and support systems such as family and friends who sustained them in their journey is very crucial. Another common theme that made them successful in their career is having a mentor, whether Deaf or hearing. However, one of the main issues was their access to formal and informal networking with mainstreamed groups outside the Deaf community.

The role of Deaf identity and communication access discussed the impact of their status as Deaf entrepreneurs belonging to a communication-based community with their language and culture. Some identified themselves as entrepreneurs first rather than as Deaf and see themselves as no different from the hearing entrepreneurs. The role of Deaf identity relates with communication access. The advance in technology such as the Internet, social media such as Facebook and text messaging (SMS) enabled the Deaf

to communicate within the Deaf community and outside with the hearing people without the assistance of interpreters. Video chats allowed face-to-face interactions within the Deaf community through the use of sign language. Some of the participants also discussed the video relay services where they can use an interpreter via webcam to interpret their calls.

These three roles in entrepreneurship that Atkins derived served as the basis of the researcher to describe the status of the Deaf and explore the challenges that they faced in finding a job and venturing into entrepreneurship.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general purpose of the study was to describe the status and challenges of the Deaf in Butuan City. Specifically, the study intended to describe the status of the Deaf in terms of a) education and previous experience, b) network and support systems, and c) Deaf identity and communication access. It also explored the challenges of the Deaf in terms of a) employability and b) entrepreneurship. Finally, the study proposed initiatives for the development of support systems and socio-economic opportunities for the Deaf.

METHODS

The study utilized the qualitative method particularly case study.

Subject of the Study

The study utilized purposive sampling. The participants were Deaf ages 24 and above who met one of the following criteria: a) engaged in business for at least one year, b) employed at least one year, c) college and vocational courses graduates but currently unemployed. The participants were a combination of three entrepreneurs, three employed, and four unemployed.

Ethical Consideration

Permission of the participants was obtained before the conduct of the study. The researcher explained the purpose, procedures, and the possible users of information using Filipino Sign Language. The participants were then given the time to read the interview consent form and to ask questions that they may have. Upon agreement, the participants signed the interview consent form and a copy was given to them.

The participation in the study is voluntary, and the decision of the participants would not affect their

current or future relations with the researchers. Even if they have agreed to participate, they were given the freedom to withdraw at any time, and they could skip any questions that the researcher asked.

Since the study dealt with Deaf whose networks are closely related, pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identity and general description were used for their background, company, and any information. A transcription of the individual interview was given to the participants, and they were allowed to change the descriptors that might reveal their identity.

Research Instrument

The case study was semi-structured, and it utilized a researcher-made interview guide which was tailored according to the status of the Deaf. The interview guide questions were reviewed and validated by four content experts.

Data Collection Procedure

The data gathering process began with environmental scanning by connecting with the government agencies to identify the key people working with the Deaf who became the bridges to the wider Deaf community including the hearing key people from religious institutions.

The researchers discussed the purpose of the study to these key people one by one and obtained an overview of the Deaf situation in the city concerning support systems, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities. They are also the source of referrals of Deaf participants in the case study.

The participants are a combination of Deaf who have unique stories in business as entrepreneurs, employed, and College graduates who are presently unemployed. To build rapport with the Deaf, the researcher joined the gatherings during Deaf Awareness events. Those Deaf who were not present in these gatherings were visited in their residence or place of work.

The purpose of the study and invitation to participate in the interview was initially explained through personal discussions with the Deaf or online messaging such as Facebook and SMS/text. The SPED teacher and the agencies focal person also assisted in connecting with the Deaf who did not respond online.

Appointments for interview were then made with the Deaf participants according to the agreed date,

time, and location. The interview consent form was given to the Deaf for reading and was explained by one of the researchers using Filipino Sign Language (FSL). In the case of the unschooled Deaf, the form was explained to the relative.

After the participants had signed the consent form, the interview was conducted using FSL and was recorded by taking notes. Due to the sensitivity of issues among the Deaf within the Deaf community, recording devices such as videos or voice recorder through voiced interpreting were not employed.

As the first layer of validation, the researcher signed back their stories to confirm the researcher's interpretation. The written notes were also shown to the Deaf for clarification. For those Deaf participants who have businesses, an actual observation was done in the course of their work to gain a better understanding of their experiences. In the case of the unschooled Deaf, the participant's relative was interviewed, and the relative also interpreted to the Deaf participant using home signs.

The interviews were then transcribed in English and were validated by the participants. Validation was done either of the two ways. One is through personal discussion, and the participants wrote any corrections on the transcript. Another is through online by sending the transcript through a private message where the participants also responded and gave the necessary corrections. The data gathered were corroborated by secondary data such as the plaque of awards, documents such as school and training records, photos, information from their support systems and through personal observations.

Data Analysis

Case descriptions of each Deaf participant were presented which told the stories of their background concerning their social support systems and experiences in accessing employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. The study also used the Van Kaam method of analysis. The validated transcripts were analyzed, and significant statements were listed and grouped. The researcher looked for recurring ideas, determined the similarities and differences, probed into the gaps, and eliminated irrelevant ideas. The refined data were then analyzed further and categorized into themes and patterns.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ester, 41

Ester was born deaf to hearing parents as the youngest child of five. Early on she developed a sense of responsibility to provide for herself. After classes, she sold peanuts to her classmates and teachers to earn allowance. She finished 2nd-year secondary school and got married at the age of 20.

Starting as a young couple, Ester and her deaf husband earned their living in different ways. Their first attempt was to raise pigs. Due to the neighbors' complaints of the foul smell and the unprofitable return on their investment, they decided to stop raising pigs and pursued the food business where she cooked meals which her husband sold to offices.

Eventually, Ester was introduced by a hearing friend to the direct selling business which she found as a better option. With her natural ability in networking and people relations, and through the use of social media such as Facebook, Ester easily established her client base and continuously develops them.

She intentionally targets customers in groups, such as salons, grocery stores, or offices. She has a structured plan for her schedules, in logistics, collection, and remittances. She has been in the direct selling business for 20 years now. Despite being Deaf, she was awarded as the top seller of the known direct selling companies in the country. Later on, they were able to raise enough capital to start their mini grocery store and phone loading business.

Jelo, 24

Jelo was born to an abusive father and eventually his parents separated. Jelo's grandmother sent him to elementary school, but when they could no longer afford the school expenses, he decided to stop studying and set his mind on working to support his family.

Through observations and practical experience, he acquired the skills as an 'all-around' employee in the parlor. He can do haircuts, hair re-bonding, manicures, pedicures, facial treatments, and massage. Young as he is, he has been working for ten years now. Eventually, he started his own salon business.

Honed with his previous experiences, he became quickly familiar with managing the business and established connections with regular customers and suppliers. He communicates with the hearing mainly through writing, showing pictures and gestural sign language. He also uses his voice, and he knows how to lip-read.

Jelo wanted to go abroad to earn more for his family. He processed his documents and got his passport, but when he went to POEA, they said he could not work abroad because he is Deaf. However, he is still considering the possibilities of working abroad, although for now, his focus is in his business.

Marinda, 49

Marinda is single and she never learned sign language as she was one of the Deaf adults who did not have access to formal education during their time. When the SPED school for the Deaf opened in the city, Marinda felt she was too old to start at the elementary level. At present, she can write her name and numbers, and sign using gestural and home signs.

By helping her elder brother sell vegetables in the market, Marinda gained the knowledge, experience, skills, and connections she needed in putting up her own business. Presently, she has her stall in the city and also goes to the nearby cities to market her vegetables. Marinda negotiates with customers and suppliers through gestures and the use of a calculator. She also maintains goodwill and offers discounts to her friends and regular customers. According to her niece-in-law, she has regular Deaf clients, mostly the young adults. She has been a vegetable vendor for more than 20 years.

Leo, 40

Leo is currently employed as a janitor in a church that has a ministry to the Deaf. Because of his excellent performance, he was given a promotion and was placed in charge of the Maintenance Department. He has a hearing assistant under his training. He felt satisfied and blessed that he can provide for his family through his job.

He is considering raising pigs as a livelihood when he reaches retirement and expressed that he would still continue to help the Deaf members, especially those who cannot afford to buy their lunch after the church service. His wife is also Deaf, and they have two sons, the eldest was born Deaf and the second is hearing. He has a brother who is hard-of-hearing. His wife has three Deaf siblings, and his mother-in-law is also Deaf.

Gideon, 25

Gideon is the third child among the four siblings. He was born Deaf, and his grandmother is also Deaf. His parents and siblings know a little sign language, but his eldest sister is skilled in signing. Gideon is married to

his Deaf wife.

Gideon is currently employed in the meat shop as a butcher, where his sister also works as an office clerk. The store is owned by his Deaf friend's aunt and managed by his friend's mother. He learned the work from his co-workers. His manager, who also has a Deaf daughter, knows sign language and communication lines have been open between them. His primary challenge is communicating with customers when his co-workers are not around. In these situations, the guard would relay the customers' requests to him by lip-reading. Gideon also does other kinds of work such as doing the inventory, recording, cleaning the store, and checking the CCTV.

James, 31

James is the third child in the family and the only Deaf. After graduation, he was jobless for a while until his friend invited him to help out in his home re-bond service with a fee. Showing natural ability in hairstyling, his friend trained him and asked him to apply for a job in his salon. Through the relay interpreting of another Deaf friend, he was hired in the salon. He learned more of haircutting through YouTube videos. His plan is to build his own barbershop.

Karen, 37

After college, Karen worked as Admin Staff in a retailer company in another city for six years. She liked her job, but the feeling of being left out by her officemates led her to resign after six years. The manager did not have direct interactions with her, and the workload was given to her by her workmates.

She moved to another place to look for a job but found no opportunities at the time. She stayed with a friend for three years and was supported by her mother and sister, after which she went back home and worked for three months in a government agency as an encoder and verifier together with other Deaf. After their contract had ended, she was again unemployed.

Bea, 24

Bea's family owns and runs a grocery store. She helps in the grocery store as a cashier, taking turns with her mother while she is looking for a job. She is the eldest, and she has a younger brother who is now in secondary school.

As a graduate of a computer course, Karen worked in a government agency as an encoder and verifier for three months. Following this, she tried to apply and give out resumes. She applied to 12 companies but

were refused by all of them. She went looking for jobs together with her Deaf friends, who also did the relay interpreting for them. She also brought up the difficulties of the Deaf in English grammar.

Even if they already have a family business, Bea prefers to be employed and independent. She wanted to work as a clerk or an office assistant. Her primary motivation is to support her younger brother and her parents who are already growing old.

Erika, 26

Erika is an adopted child and never knew her biological parents. Her adoptive father is a dentist, and her adoptive mother is a retired government employee.

As the same plight of the Deaf graduates, she applied to different companies, but to no avail. She said that there should be equality, and the government programs should be inclusive of the Deaf and not just focused on the hearing.

She also withdrew from the Deaf community in the city and stepped down as an officer of the association because she felt she was not respected and her efforts in helping the Deaf were not recognized. Despite being hurt by the conflicts in the Deaf community, she continues to love the Deaf and desires to help them in the future.

Jewel, 30

Jewel grew up with supportive parents especially in her studies. Her father works abroad and she has one younger sister who is now a registered nurse. Her mother, sister, niece, and cousin communicate with her through sign language.

It is Jewel's passion to pass the licensure exam for teachers. She has taken the licensure exam for three times thus far but failed. She would study on her own and struggle with the concepts. She had no interpreter to explain the deep words. She said that the teachers were so busy and she was told to study on her own.

Although teaching can be a challenging job, she considers it normal and enjoys teaching. She is currently serving as a volunteer teacher aide in a SPED school in the city. She is not earning income yet and is supported by her parents. She said that she cannot be hired as a regular teacher because she has not passed the licensure exam yet. When asked whether she liked business, she said no, as she wants to focus on her professional growth as a licensed teacher.

Table 1. Themes

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1.0 Education and Previous Experience

1.1 Provision of Skills Training by the Government

Schelzig [10] indicated that one of the reasons that only slightly 10% percent of DOLE registered PWDs are wage employed is that their educational attainment does not qualify them for employment. The factor is similar to Mina's [11] findings that PWDs belonged to low-income households and recommended that the government offer scholarships to school-aged PWDs and alternative learning sessions to those who are already beyond school age but were not able to finish

high school which is usually the minimum requirement for employment.

The study revealed that there was one private college in the city which accepted Deaf students in partnership with the government program of 2-year housekeeping course. However, it closed down just after the first batch of Deaf students graduated. Currently, there are ongoing discussions with the other private schools in the city in accommodating Deaf students and the availability of sign language interpreters.

Erika: No college offered signed classes/interpreter for the Deaf. The SPED teacher and the priest discussed in helping the Deaf enroll in college. The priest had a former university classmate who owned a private college in the city, and she agreed to accept Deaf students.

The two entrepreneurs availed of the skills training under the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in the SPED high school.

Jelo: Although I already knew haircut, I attended the training to get a certificate so I can process my papers to work abroad. I attended four trainings namely haircut, make-up, manicure, and dressmaking.

1.2 Learning by Observing and Doing

Most of the participants said they learned how to do what they are doing now through observation and trying it on their own. They observed it either with family members or friends who are in a similar business or line of work.

Marinda: She learned to sell vegetables from her brother who had the same business. She used to help him in the business and learned through observations and actions. Later on, she was able to go to other markets for business. When they saw that she could manage the business well, she started on her own.

A study [12] also confirmed that Filipino employers preferred hiring PWDs with previous work experience and suggested that the government look into promoting educational and training opportunities that will prepare them for future jobs that will commensurate them according to their qualifications.

1.3 Lack of Academic Institutions for the Deaf

RA 7277 [13] provides that there should be a complete, adequate and integrated education for the Deaf. However, the study revealed that there is a lack of academic institutions catering to the Deaf in the city. It was only in 1999 that the SPED school opened. One

of the participants never attended school, and two of them went to a different city and lived with Deaf friends which meant being away from the family. Another one relocated together to another city with her mother and sister to avail of the education which had interpreters for the Deaf. This challenge has always been the situation of the Deaf who live in the rural areas such as in the Visayas and Mindanao areas where there are limited schools for the Deaf. Their recourse is to go to nearby cities where are their schools whose teachers are either Deaf or hearing interpreters who can communicate well in sign language.

Although there is a SPED school already for the elementary and high school level where some of the younger participants attended, the next challenge that they faced is the tertiary education.

Gideon: There are 13 of us Deaf who graduated in 2011, but the school closed after we graduated. The Deaf who were in high school were excited but were sad to know that it already closed.

Like other Deaf, James experienced the struggles of mainstream education and transferred from one school to another. After high school, there was no suitable college he could enroll in, so he stayed at home and sometimes accompanied his Deaf friends, who were skilled in haircutting. This experience is where he gained his expertise to his current job as a haircutter.

Further, the Magna Carta [7] states that PWDs are entitled to educational assistance in pursuing all levels of education, in both public and private schools, given that they meet the minimum requirements. The provision includes scholarships, grants, subsidies, financial assistance, and other incentives such as books, learning materials, and uniform allowance. Although there are already laws and mandates, the implementation is not evident.

One participant told of her goal to be a licensed professional teacher, but she failed in the licensure exam three times. She did not have interpreters and never went to a formal review school.

Jewel: Some of the words are deep, and I did not understand their meanings. I was slow, and although I was able to answer all questions, I had many mistakes. My overall average rating in my recent exam was 58%. I had no interpreter because the teachers-interpreters are always busy.

1.4 Struggles in Mainstream Education

The majority of the participants shared about their struggles in mainstream education, so they transferred

from one school to another. They had difficulty in understanding the lessons which resulted in lower grades.

Erika: There was no interpreter so we usually escaped from the class. We got bored, and we were always absent because we did not understand what the teacher was speaking and writing.

A study [14] revealed that the school program implemented for the Deaf is a significant factor in the postsecondary outcomes of high school students and their transition to adult life. Further, to efficiently provide the children with special needs the access to formal education, training programs are regularly conducted to the SPED teachers and administrators for their enhancement and upskilling [15]. However, it was noted that even if there were teachers-interpreters, the lessons were not faithfully signed or explained in a way that develops comprehension.

James: After I had graduated from high school in our city, I went to a university in another city and took the HRM course. We were 16 Deaf, and we hired an interpreter. We could not understand the lessons. We studied hard for the exams, but when the questions were given by the teacher, it is not entirely explained by the interpreter. The signs were cut short, so we did not fully understand the test questions. As a result, we got low scores. Some Deaf passed, but some of us just gave up. I went back to my hometown where I stayed home for two years until I enrolled in a college where we had interpreters.

2.0 Network and Support Systems

2.1. Community of Business-Minded People

Researchers noted that the networks of friends and even hearing business people helped the Deaf entrepreneurs in putting up and maintaining their own businesses [1]-[2].

Ester: I have a Deaf best friend who owns his own parlor in another city, and his business had been successful in many years. We always talk about the future and ideas on how to run the business. We focus on what we do and do not waste time gossiping like other Deaf young adults would do. I also have Deaf friends in another city who are working as masseurs and cooks. My hearing friend, who owns a restaurant and massage shop, introduced me to her network in salons, so they became my friends and my customers.

2.2. Socialization with Other Deaf and Hearing

When asked about what makes them happy in their work or OJT experience, most of them pointed out that they enjoyed having fun with their co-workers.

Gideon: I enjoyed my work especially when my workmates and I tease each other, but it is not bullying. I teach them basic sign language, and I also know how to lip read, so that's good.

Bea: I like computer work, I am not bored. I like being busy and I focus well on my job. We also talk about funny things with my co-workers.

However, missing out on networking opportunities can also be a source of the feeling of isolation. These frustrations include missing out on networking opportunities and engaging in casual conversations and jokes with their hearing non-signing colleagues [16].

Karen: If it is a holiday, my workmates would go swimming, but they would not invite me, or call me. When my manager's son had a birthday party, they went, but I was not invited. They never invited me, so I was just patient. I thought maybe they did not like me because I am Deaf. Sometimes, there is company travel to Hong Kong. My hearing workmates would go, but I am not invited.

2.3. Family Relationship Limited by Communication Barriers

The basic unit social support system is supposed to be the family. However, the majority of the participants' family members do not know sign language. The situation is similar to the findings that more than 70% of the hearing parents do not use sign language with their children. The communication barrier can result in lowered self-esteem, delays in learning and feelings of isolation as they could not express their thoughts and feelings to their family who matters most to them.

The primary mode of communication is gestural and writing which can be through writing or text messages. Often, the male members sign gestural, and the female members such as mothers, grandmothers, and sisters are more likely to learn a few sign language.

Jelo: When I was around 3-6 years old, my father would abuse me whenever he was drunk. He wanted me to speak, but I am Deaf so I cannot speak.

Karen: Every [school] vacation, I would go home, but I did not have good communication with my family, which is why I was lonely. I easily got angry and quarrelled with my sisters and brother because I

wanted them to communicate with me through sign language but they were too busy to learn my language.

On the other hand, there were participants whose family members know how to communicate in sign language, and it created a healthier environment for them.

Gideon: I am the third child. I have two older sisters and one younger brother. I am the only Deaf among my siblings, but my grandmother is also Deaf. My parents and siblings know a little sign language, and my eldest sister is skilled and fast in signing. My wife's family, however, all of them, know how to communicate through sign language.

2.4. Sibling Rivalry

There was also a case when one of the siblings is the one limiting the opportunities for the Deaf.

Leo: I wanted to proceed to high school, but my older brother told my mother not to send me to school because I am deaf. I studied in secondary school, but my mother told me not to finish it. I asked why and she explained that my older brother told him I am an intelligent Deaf.

Other Deaf would feel left out compared to their hearing siblings.

Ester: My parents did not love me. Maybe they hated me because I am Deaf. They are only focused on my hearing siblings, so I have to support myself. My brothers do not know sign language, and they easily got angry with me. It is only my sister who knows sign language and whom I can communicate with but now she's dead so what can I do?

2.5 Conflicts and Gossips within the Deaf Community

The majority of the Deaf had experiences wherein they were not respected in their own community. For those who had withdrawn, they have found another connection with Deaf from another city.

Ester: Some Deaf misinterpreted me that I was corrupt and I stole the money of the association. I served for three years and I never got any salary nor did I ask money from the government. They made false stories about me, and I was very hurt, so I resigned as officer of the association. I had many ideas, and when I make suggestions, they would talk about me and viewed me as boastful. I avoided them and be with other Deaf instead from another city who are more mature.

3.0 Deaf Identity and Communication Access

3.1. Being Deaf as a Source of Inspiration

Some participants never allowed deafness to be a barrier in excelling in their work like Ester who awarded as Top Seller by different direct selling companies. Erika also got an award when she graduated from College.

Erika: When we (the Deaf) graduated, the people held their tears as they were so inspired when I gave my graduation speech. I got an Academic Excellence Award.

3.2. Use of Tools and Technology in Facilitating Communication

The Deaf participants used tools and technology to overcome the communication barriers in their work. Ester communicates with the hearing people through gestures, brochures, writing on paper or her arm, and putting sticker labels in her products such as the name of the customer and the price. Amazing how hearing people can also communicate with her through gestures, writing in the air, and voicing so she can lip-read. She wrote the addresses of her residence and frequent destinations in a paper and showed it to the tricycle or jeepney driver. Ester also installed a doorbell connected to a lightbulb which goes on and off to signal them when they are inside. They always put a paper in the store window to facilitate communication and also get used in lip read or gestural signs. She also used social media such as Facebook in marketing her products.

Marinda, a vegetable vendor, negotiates with customers and suppliers through the use of calculator, gestures and writing the figures on her lower arm. James, a barber, shared of his initiative to make his work environment 'Deaf-friendly.

James: I often watched Youtube videos on my laptop on how to cut different hairstyles. I memorized the methods, and I tried doing it on my clients. The customers were okay with it, they liked my work, and they kept coming back. What I did was to look for pictures of hairstyles in the internet using my laptop, put a name on them, then printed and photocopied them. I posted them in the barbershop. My sister knows that I was responsible for making copies of those. When clients sit down, I show them the pictures, and they point out their choice. Before, I was anxious, but I was relieved when I had the pictures. Other clients would give me tips, and I thanked them. I serve them well, and

they become my regular customers. Some of them are surprised that I am Deaf.

3.3. Educating the Employers and Co-Workers in Sign Language

The Deaf workers taught their co-workers basic sign language to facilitate easy communication with each other.

Erika: My boss in on-the-job (OJT) knows a few alphabets in sign language. The Deaf students contributed money to pay for the photocopies of the sign language notes that the hearing can study. We teach them basic sign language, and we also use paper to write as another way of communicating.

Leo: I give instructions to my assistant, and I teach him basic sign language so we can communicate to each other.

3.4. Communication Support in Work Environment

It is evident that those Deaf who have communication support from their managers and colleagues are more likely to succeed with high retention rate in their jobs.

James: My boss does not know sign language, but he knows how to describe different hairstyles through actions which I easily understood, such as signing "O" which means bald or signing the hair to the side. When a client, who is not yet aware that I am Deaf, comes in, my boss talks to him and signs to me his preferred (choice) hairstyle. My boss is always in the barbershop and supports me in communicating with the clients.

Karen, on the other hand, shared her challenges in her previous job.

Karen: It is hard to communicate especially during seminars. I needed to hire an interpreter, but the company did not allow an interpreter due to confidentiality reasons. I was worried because I did not understand what was being discussed. I wanted to ask my workmates through writing, but they were not committed to helping me. They were all too busy to learn sign language, so we just communicated through writing.

3.5. Filipino Sign Language as the Preferred Language of the Deaf Community

It was also observed that the Filipino Sign Language is preferred by the Deaf as it is more comprehensible.

Gideon: Some teachers do not sign well. When the teachers sign in ASL, the Deaf do not understand, so

we have to explain to the younger Deaf in simple sign language.

Erika: FSL is better, it is simple, and the Deaf can easily understand it.

3.6. Need for Hearing and Deaf Relay Interpreters

It is a common theme that there is a lack of hearing interpreters. As an intervention, it is also the Deaf who does the relay interpreting for the other Deaf.

Jewel: (Re: licensure exam) I had no interpreter because the teachers-interpreters are always busy. When I ask for help, she told me I should study on my own.

Bea: I went with the other Deaf (for the job application), the teachers- interpreters are always busy. Our Deaf friend would relay the message to us.

4.0 Employability of the Deaf

4.1 Time Lapsed Before Finding a Job

Three factors determine the employability of the graduate [17]. These factors are a) time lapsed before finding a job, b) salary and c) suitability of job to qualifications. Finding a job within three months from graduation is considered very employable. However, the study revealed that it took a long time for the Deaf graduates to get a regular job which ranges from one to five years. Around two-thirds of the Deaf college graduates do not have a job as of the present. The case is similar to the findings of a training center where 54% of the 88 Deaf participants were unemployed [18]. All of them attributed the difficulties of finding a job to their identity as Deaf.

Erika graduated three years ago together with the twelve (12) other Deaf but has not found a job up until now. Although there is an existing Public Employment Service Office (PESO) in the city, still the Deaf applicants had difficulties in finding a job.

Republic Act 10524 [19] expanded the work allocated for PWDs such that government agencies, offices or corporations shall reserve 1% of the positions in this sector. Some Deaf have been hired as encoder and verifier in DSWD for three months. After the contract, they had to find another job again. Bea was a graduate of a computer course and was one of the few Deaf who worked with DWSO.

Karen is also a graduate of Computer Course. She used to work as an Admin Staff for a retail company in another city for six years, but she resigned due to

communication issues. Karen is jobless for more than four years now.

4.2. Salary

One of the common issues related to the Deaf is their employment retention. One of the determinants in retaining employees is the salary.

Karen: My hearing workmates had higher salaries than I did. I looked at the payroll with the names and amounts. There are many deaf in different companies who observed that the hearing have higher pay. Also, my hearing workmates had salary increases, but I did not have an increase. It was not fair.

Leo, on the other hand, was very satisfied with his salary and benefits. He is currently working in a church and heads the Maintenance Department. He also enjoyed other incentives such as joining the staff vacations or retreats.

4.3 Suitability of Job to Qualification

Both Gideon and James are graduates of a two-year course in housekeeping. They could have been hired in a hotel or pension houses doing jobs related to their finished course. However, because of limited opportunities, Gideon is currently working as a butcher and James as a haircutter.

Moreover, another employed Deaf, Leo, has a lot of potentials. Despite being Deaf, Leo ranked second in the mainstreamed elementary class and serves currently as a leader in their religious community. Given the right opportunities and education, he could have landed a job where his knowledge and skills can still be honed. However, because he did not finish high school, he currently works as a janitor in the church and accepts repair jobs of bicycle parts on the side.

Martz & Xu [20] confirmed that education plays a significant role in the employment of people with disability such that employment of PWDs with a college education is nearly comparable with their non-PWD counterparts.

5.0 Access to Entrepreneurial Opportunities

5.1 Passion Coupled with Strategic Thinking in Doing Business

A lot of people brand entrepreneurs as aggressive risk-takers, but the reality is they are people who are passionate about an idea and carefully plan out the details [21]. They make the cost-benefit analysis and arrive at decisions based on calculated risks. An

entrepreneur must be able to know his/her motivation in starting the business.

The characteristics are true in the case of Ester who shared that her primary motivation in entrepreneurship is her love for business. Even in her elementary years, she had been into different income-generating activities. Later on, she and her husband also ventured into piggery as well as preparing meals to be sold to offices until she found her niche in direct selling business. She got an award as the top seller of the known direct selling companies. When asked about how she managed to keep track of her customer records and remittances to suppliers, Ester smiled and said "I have no trouble memorizing the names and their accounts. I love business, so it is so simple." Out of their savings from their different ventures, they were able to put up a mini grocery store in their house.

Marinda never went to school, so she does not use sign language and instead uses home signs. Her sister explained that what she can only write are her name and some alphabets, but you could never fool her when it comes to numbers. She is so smart with money matters and in dealing with her suppliers and customers. Selling vegetables is the only kind of work where Marinda had experience, and she does it with all her passion and joy.

5.2. Sources of Capitalization

Executive Order No. 417 [8] provides that the Cooperative Development Authority (CDA) should develop and implement programs which promote coop organizing and development among PWDs. The People's Credit and Finance Corporation (PCFC) shall also direct its affiliated microfinance institutions to open programs for PWD entrepreneurs and promote the development of microfinance schemes designed for PWD micro-enterprises. However, all of the three entrepreneurs funded their business from their savings.

Another source of capitalization used by Marinda is from the private lending individuals. Although they have higher interest rates of 20% compared to the prevailing interest rates of cooperatives of 2-5%, they are still being sought after as they offer fast and accessible services with no paperwork requirements.

Some of the Deaf participants have the desire to put up their business; the hindering factor is the lack of capitalization. Some relied on their family members to provide the capital.

The case of another Deaf is different where the family has already run a business, so the investment is already provided. However, she preferred to be

employed as an office staff rather than take care of the business. She is one of the unemployed.

5.3. Establishing the Market Base

Before building the enterprise, the entrepreneur must be able to identify their target customers who would be willing to buy their product or service [22].

The common factor between Marinda and Jelo is that they have an established market by working previously as employees of that kind of business. When they have started their own business, they already have an established market. The result is akin to the study of Atkins [1] where previous work experience in a similar industry established the market for the entrepreneurs.

Marinda was working before with her brother as his assistant in selling vegetables where she got to know the suppliers and the marketplaces where she can sell her products. Later on, she became independent and ran her own business. Marinda has already repeat customers, some of whom are Deaf young adults. Marinda also offers discounts to her loyal customers.

Jelo was the former employee of the salon which he runs now. Thus he has already clients in the area. The majority of his customers are hearing people.

While Ester and Jelo are often in their shop/stalls, Ester, on the other hand, is very mobile and walks along the streets of the school and governments for three long hours. With her natural ability in networking and people relations, and through the use of social media such as Facebook, Ester easily established her client base and continuously develops them. She intentionally targets customers in groups, such as salons, grocery stores, or offices. She has a structured plan in her schedules in logistics, collection, and remittances.

Her husband does the deliveries in the morning, and she would stay in the grocery store. Then they take turns in the afternoon when she goes out for collections and delivery of products, and her husband would take care of the store. She does the collection from the salon group on a daily basis, so the payments are not heavy on them, while the offices group are done on a monthly basis. She also extends grace to her customers, especially in the salon group if they could not pay at the moment.

5.4. Supporting the Family as a Driving Force

Jelo is the breadwinner in the family. What motivated him to start his own business is the need to support his family. When the salon where he worked closed, he took the opportunity to take over and run the

business on his own by leasing the space. Jelo's parents are separated, and he has a nephew who was born out of wedlock whom he is taking care of. Jelo dreams of buying their own house someday.

Ester's motivation, second to her passion in business, is to provide for her family. She had several experiences when her husband was hospitalized and required a considerable amount of money. She works hard to support his son's education and their daily needs.

Their reasons also reflect the recent survey results of National Economic Development Authority showing that majority of the Filipinos want a "comfortable and simple life" instead of an extravagant one by 2040. According to the survey, Filipinos defined comfortable life as having a medium-sized home, enough earnings to support everyday needs, owning at least one car, being able to provide college education for the children, plus being able to go on local trips for vacation once in a while [23].

5.5 Sacrifices Made for the Business

The success of the entrepreneurs did not come without cost. Ester wanted to have five children, but because of too much stress and hard work, she had two miscarriages. The first one was a 6-month old boy and the second was three months old which she lost just two months before the interview.

Jelo sacrificed his education to work to support his family. Later on, his experience paved the way for him to start his own business.

5.6. Blessed to Be a Blessing to the Deaf Community

Ester has a big heart for the Deaf community. She was the former leader of the Deaf Association in the city and has done many advocacies for the Deaf with the government, schools, and employers. She does relay interpreting for the Deaf who are applying for work, and she communicates with the employers and negotiates for their salaries. When she feels that the Deaf are not being given justice, she advises them to resign and helps them find another employer.

Her greatest goal is to have a business for the Deaf with different stalls for internet café, eatery with vending machines for water, coffee and chocolate drinks, direct selling products, grocery and loading stores, photocopy and printing. The employees will be both hearing and Deaf, and she can help in managing the business because she has experienced all of them. They will install visual mechanisms to orient both the

hearing and Deaf people, and she will train the Deaf who are willing to be trained.

Jelo also extends help to his Deaf friends by training them in developing the same skills. Jelo explained every step of the process as he is training a Deaf friend, who is applying for work in his business.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The College programs in the City are not yet ready in accommodating the Deaf considering the limited availability of skilled hearing interpreters and lack of awareness of the hearing academic community about the Deaf culture and sign language.

The majority of the Deaf's family members do not use sign language thus limiting the openness of communication between the household members and the Deaf. As a result, the Deaf often felt isolated inside their homes. Also, being an ethnic minority, those Deaf who got better jobs or have their own business often face the issue of crab mentality or jealousy from the other Deaf. The conflicts had weakened their unity and limited the opportunities to share knowledge and resources among them.

Due to lack of Deaf culture awareness, people still perceive the Deaf with lesser capability. Communication access to the hearing community is also very limited as only a few are skilled in Filipino sign language which is the heart language of the Filipino Deaf.

It is also noted that employers prefer to hire the hearing workforce compared to the Deaf. Hence, business owners do not see the value of the Deaf as workers in the companies yet. Their primary concerns are on communication access which may cost them time and financial resources in training their Deaf and hearing employees. With that communication barrier and the limited vocabulary of the Deaf such as in grammar construction, they also cast doubt in the capability of the Deaf in performing the work.

The lack of access to capitalization has limited the opportunities of the Deaf to start their own business. Often, they relied on their family members as sources of capital but did not push through yet. Moreover, those participants of the study who were entrepreneurs financed their businesses by their savings and from private lending individuals with higher interest rates.

Based on the findings and conclusions, it is recommended that the Deaf community should actively participate in the advocacy programs such as those held during the Deaf Awareness Week. The Deaf

Association may also conduct a leadership training for its core leaders that will empower them in developing initiatives for the Deaf Community. They may also maintain an updated database of the Deaf which can be the basis for organizing a regular gathering of the Deaf according to their work status and developing the necessary interventions. Regarding finances, the Deaf Association may also implement membership dues and encourage regular savings which they can deposit in a cooperative until such time that they can organize themselves into a self-sustaining and income-generating cooperative. Also, the Deaf Association may develop programs or project proposals for presentation to the local government unit for financial assistance.

The family members are strongly encouraged to participate in the Deaf Culture Orientation and sign language training conducted by the SPED Schools and other Deaf advocacy programs. The orientation will give them a deeper understanding of what the Deaf are going through, and with open communication lines, they can better serve them as their primary support systems.

It is recommended that the government agencies update their database on the socio-economic profile of the Deaf and increase the campaign on registration for PWD IDs with proper orientation on the rights and benefits of PWDs. They can also link with other government agencies on education in designing programs that would facilitate educational, skills training, employment and entrepreneurial capabilities of the Deaf. Moreover, they may consider establishing a group or organization which functions as an employment agency with primary focus on Deaf employment. The training for the Deaf may include career counselling for proper placement, basic training in job application such as preparing their resumes, conducting mock interviews and providing interpreters for interviews. Regarding entrepreneurial opportunities, government agencies may also provide spaces in their respective offices where the Deaf can display and market their products.

The Local Government Unit should allocate funding for the Deaf Association which may include provisions for scholarships, assistance in interpreter fees, support to start up a small business, and other programs of the association. It may also strengthen its Public Employment Service Office (PESO) by having a Deaf work with them who can better communicate with the Deaf applicants.

The employers may provide job internship opportunities for the Deaf. The employers may also give access to a Deaf Awareness Seminar in their respective offices which deal with Deaf culture and their potential, basic sign language training, and tax benefits for employers in hiring the Deaf.

Colleges offering undergraduate or graduate courses in Special Education (SPED) are encouraged to have the specialization to the Deaf sector and become intentional in producing graduates who are skilled in sign language interpreting and well-versed in Deaf Culture. They are a primary source of advocates and interpreters who can help produce competent Deaf graduates. It is also recommended that the placement of the Deaf in their on-the-job training (OJT) be more strategic and give more opportunities for the Deaf to practice their skills, so their stint becomes a firm foundation for their transition. The experience also increases the likelihood of the Deaf to be absorbed in his/ her company of OJT. Thus, there should also be a collaborative effort on the part of the academe and the future employers as to the placement of the Deaf either to the employment or entrepreneurship route.

The sign language interpreters coming from academic and religious institutions may organize themselves for upskilling and for matching to the needs of the Deaf. There is an existing Philippine National Association of Sign Language Interpreters who gather and discuss issues surrounding sign language interpreting and Deaf culture and may consider putting up the same organization in every region. They may also set the tariff rates for sign language interpreters to give justice and fair compensation for the services of the interpreters.

Further studies can be made on the status and challenges of the Deaf in other cities or regions and the effectiveness of implementation of the government and private institutions' initiatives. Researchers may also deal more with the Deaf Gain Concept and Deaf Space.

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