

3. UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF ZIMBABWE'S SIGN LANGUAGE: VIEWPOINTS ON THE DEAF, THEIR LANGUAGE, AND ITS ADVANCEMENT

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Abstract

This article explores how the underdevelopment of Zimbabwean Sign Language (ZSL) has significantly hindered its growth into a fully developed and recognized language within the socio-cultural landscape of Zimbabwe. The investigation is grounded in the pressing issue of the scarcity of ZSL in postsecondary and higher education, which limits opportunities for Deaf individuals to gain access to advanced learning and professional development. Moreover, the absence of foreign sign languages, such as American, British, and French sign languages, in the educational curriculum further exacerbates the marginalization of ZSL. This exclusion not only restricts the linguistic resources available to the Deaf community but also diminishes their ability to engage with the broader world of sign language users. As a result, ZSL remains underutilized, preventing the Deaf community from realizing its full potential in various spheres of life, including education, employment, and social participation. To gather comprehensive data for this study, a qualitative research approach was employed. This included the use of document analysis to review existing literature and policies regarding ZSL, focus group discussions (FGDs) with a subset of Deaf vendors at Harare's bustling Market Square and Copa Cabana bus termini, and semi-structured interviews with executive directors of organizations dedicated to supporting the Deaf community. Through these methods, the study aims to shed light on the challenges faced by ZSL and the implications for the Deaf community in Zimbabwe. This study highlights the impact of the absence of foreign sign language instruction and standardized sign language on the Deaf community's engagement with national development issues. The study reveals that non-standard sign language continues to be prevalent in Zimbabwe, which limits the ability of Deaf individuals to effectively communicate with the media and contribute to the country's socio-economic development. Despite Zimbabwe's Constitution recognizing 16 official languages, including Zimbabwean Sign Language (ZSL), Deaf individuals still encounter significant prejudice. Moreover, the current educational system promotes inclusive education that often requires signers to adopt spoken

languages, leading to discrimination against those who rely on sign language. Many schools do not admit Deaf students, which hinders their ability to participate in the nation's future development. Additionally, the lack of international sign language training creates challenges for Deaf individuals seeking employment abroad and limits their ability to transfer income back home. The article concludes that these developmental restrictions surrounding ZSL significantly impede the Deaf population from realizing its full potential.

Keywords: deaf, sign language, marginalisation, socio-economic and political developments, sustainable development

Introduction and background

This research investigates the controversies and debates surrounding the role of language in socio-economic development, with a particular emphasis on sign language in Zimbabwe. It critically examines the perspectives of the deaf community regarding their inclusion and exclusion in national development processes. The analysis is situated within the framework of Critical Applied Linguistics, a field that emphasizes the intersection of language with social justice issues. According to Tollefson (2006), Critical Linguistics is concerned with the study of language in its social, political, and historical contexts, prioritizing issues of inequality, linguistic discrimination, and language rights. By exploring these dimensions, this research aims to illuminate the complexities of language use and its implications for the socio-economic empowerment of marginalized communities, particularly the Deaf, in Zimbabwe.

Sign language in Zimbabwe refers to the language used by the Deaf community, as recognized in the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act of 2013. This language is acknowledged in various policy documents, including the 1987 Education Act. According to Mutswanga and Sithole (2012), sign language is classified as a visual-gestural language, serving as the primary mode of communication for individuals who are Deaf. It employs manual signs and diverse body movements to convey meaning effectively. Furthermore, the Deaf Zimbabwe Trust (2013) emphasizes that sign language is not merely a collection of gestures; rather, it constitutes a fully developed language with its own structure, rules, and grammar. This recognition underscores the importance of sign language as a legitimate means of communication and highlights the need for its inclusion in educational and social frameworks.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 430 million or over five percent of the world's population have a hearing disability. WHO estimates that by 2050 over 700 million people, that is, one in every ten people, will have disabling hearing loss. While Deaf Zimbabwe Trust (2015) estimates 214

912 Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in Zimbabwe. Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) continue to face significant obstacles to equal participation in economic development initiatives and most are excluded from mainstream financial services, and this in turn continues to drive the cyclical relationship between disability and poverty. Deaf Statistics shows that over 90% of deaf children are not in school and remain language-less, even in adulthood, and are poverty stricken.

This research examines the potential impact of the underdevelopment of sign language in Zimbabwe, particularly its absence in higher and tertiary educational institutions, as well as the lack of foreign sign language instruction. These issues raise significant concerns regarding access to education and information for individuals who are Deaf. The limited availability of sign language resources has historically impeded many Deaf individuals from realizing their full potential and participating effectively in the socio-economic development of the nation. This study aims to highlight the critical need for the integration of sign language into educational curricula and the overall recognition of its importance in fostering inclusivity and empowerment within the broader societal context. This has profound impact to innovation and economic success and national unity. Against this backdrop, this paper argues that all languages and cultures, regardless of their numerical size or status can contribute to the process of socio-economic development. Drawing on other examples from other nations, the researchers outlined the positive role which language can play in national development. The study also established the absence of Foreign Sign Language teaching in Zimbabwe, enabling them to work outside the country and contribute to the country's development through remittances sent back home. It is hoped that the arguments presented here will contribute to the successful development of Sign language in different domains in Zimbabwe and it must be prioritised in all public institutions and service centres. Access to information in regard to economic, political and social issues is only possible when people are competent in the language used. If the linguistic rights of the Deaf are taken into consideration they will be part and parcel of different discourses, the world/nation can also tap on their brilliant ideas, it will also boost their survival due to access to information through their own language.

The mantra by the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, His Excellence Comrade E.D Mnangagwa, that "Zimbabwe is open for business" cannot be accomplished if the issue of sign language is relegated to the periphery. Language is a resource that mitigates the impacts of poverty. Access to information with regard to economic issues is only possible when people are competent in the language used. If the linguistic rights of Deaf individuals are acknowledged, they will be able to engage meaningfully in various discourses. This inclusion would not only allow the nation to benefit from their valuable insights but also enhance their ability to thrive by providing easier access to information in their own

language. Such recognition fosters a more inclusive society and promotes the overall empowerment of the Deaf community. The true measure of a country's development lies in how able it is to cater for its most vulnerable and marginalised people and deaf people fall under this category (Hlatywayo and Matende, 2019).

Financial independence or self-sufficiency is very important for every individual whether able-bodied or not as it gives one greater control over their life, greater peace of mind, one is able to assist and empower others and one becomes a dependable role model in society. Section 83 of the Zimbabwean Constitution shows that the state has an obligation to ensure that PWDs realize their full mental and physical capabilities. Section 83 (a) states that, 'The State must take appropriate measures, within the limits of the resources available to it, to ensure that persons with disabilities realise their full mental and physical potential, including measures to enable them to become self-reliant.' One can only attain financial independence through being employed by others or being self-employed.

Employment prospects are very hard for PWDs in Zimbabwe and nearly impossible for the Deaf. According to a study by the National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH), only two percent of PWDs are employed in the formal sector in Zimbabwe. Some of the barriers that hinder the Deaf from getting employed formally include negative attitudes from hearing counterparts, negative attitudes by employers, poor education among deaf people, scarcity of job opportunities, lack of supporting laws and communication challenges (Hlatywayo, Hlatywayo & Mtezo, 2014). These hindrances are a result of societal preconceptions borne by the language barrier between the deaf and the hearing. In contrast, section 6 of the Constitution recognises Sign language as an official language in Zimbabwe. The state has failed to promote and advance the use of sign language in the country and has neglected to create the conditions necessary for its development, which is contrary to Section 6(4) of the Constitution (Mutswanga, 2014).

Arnold and Seekins (2002) and Blanck et al. (2000) emphasize that self-employment should be more widely adopted as a strategy to assist individuals with disabilities in transitioning from unemployment, underemployment, and reliance on welfare to gainful employment and self-sufficiency. In Zimbabwe, some deaf individuals often resort to self-employment for financial survival, predominantly engaging in vending activities within townships and central business districts (Masawi, Mtisi, & Kufakurinani, 2023). Many of these entrepreneurs sell essential goods such as vegetables, fruits, snacks, and airtime. Despite facing significant challenges, deaf individuals in Zimbabwe demonstrate remarkable resourcefulness and are emerging as a notable group of entrepreneurs (Matende & Mugari, 2017). However, it raises an important question: Are they receiving the same level of support as their hearing

counterparts to grow their businesses and achieve full financial self-sufficiency?

Local, regional and international research (Viriri & Makurumidze, 2014; Namatovu et al., 2012; Kitching, 2014) has shown that the deaf community face similar entrepreneurial barriers across the globe which include lack of human and financial capital, limited access to entrepreneurial training and skills development and lack of appropriate and sensitive business support such as unhelpful attitudes of business advisers. All of these barriers stem from the language gap that exists and isolates the Deaf.

Mufwene (2001), believes that the survival of any language depends on its strength to provide socio-economic survival to its users, but this is not the case for sign language users in Zimbabwe. The hypothesis is that if deaf individuals are empowered with an effective medium of communication, they will be able to interact more meaningfully with others in the global community, leading to an improvement in their overall quality of life.

With the right support, deaf persons can become entrepreneurs of note. Examples include Mark Burke, Jon Cetrano, and Sam Costner, the three deaf founders and owners of Streetcar 82 Brewery in Hyattsville, Maryland (Sidlow, 2018). All of the staff are deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL). In addition to providing job opportunities for the deaf community, the owners collaborate with Gallaudet University to mentor younger students who want to build their own businesses. Yvonne Cobb, who has been dubbed "the deaf Nigella," is the founder of Yumma Foods, a catering service for corporate and private events in Gloucestershire, UK (Withey, 2022). She is also a BBC anchor presenter for BBC SeeHear. Deaf friends and fitness instructors David Edgington and Dean Chester founded The Deaf Gym, a United Kingdom based fitness center that focuses on services tailored to the deaf and hard of hearing. Ebony Gooden is a deaf Black activist, filmmaker and artist. Zhuo is a Tibetan Yarn spinner who runs an alternative sort of business. Ahmed Khalifa is a marketing consultant in Edinburgh, Scotland. He is the founder and director of Khalifa Media, where he offers his skills as a WordPress CEO consultant to help customers build their websites. Braam Jordaan is a South African entrepreneur, filmmaker, animator and activist. Sign language, being a minority language, worldwide, Zimbabwe included warrants promotion through research and the developmental trajectory of its users is premised on its recognition, awareness, acceptability and compatibility with different aspects of humanity, inclusive of the right to communication. The potential that can be utilised for development lies untapped in the Deaf community due to constraints of language.

Statement of the problem

Sign language is an essential means of communication for the Deaf community in Zimbabwe, enabling

their participation in national development activities. However, the underdevelopment of sign language in the country poses significant barriers to this participation. Access to development opportunities for Deaf individuals is compromised by the inadequacies in the language's structure and recognition (Chimhundu cited in Nkomo, 2008; Vambe, 2006). Despite official acknowledgment of sign language, it remains marginalized in various spheres of life, limiting the Deaf community's engagement in socio-economic activities. Research has shown that Deaf individuals face substantial challenges in accessing health and legal information due to communication barriers, a shortage of qualified interpreters, stigma, and negative attitudes from professionals in these areas (Matende and Mugari, 2017; Matende, 2018). This study aims to explore the perceptions of Deaf individuals regarding the extent of sign language development and its impact on their participation in national development activities. It seeks to answer two critical research questions, What factors related to sign language impact the participation of Deaf individuals in Zimbabwe's national development activities? And What practical measures can be suggested to ensure the inclusion of Deaf individuals in the country's development initiatives? Addressing these questions is vital for promoting the development of sign language and enhancing the socio-economic inclusion of the Deaf community in Zimbabwe.

Research objectives

- (a) To establish factors related to SL that impact on the participation of deaf persons in Zimbabwe's national development activities.
- (b) Suggest practical measures to ensure the inclusion of Deaf individuals in the country's development initiatives.

Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature and utilised qualitative document analysis of existing literature on the deaf and their language. In respecting the adage 'nothing for us without us' data was also collected from deaf vendors situated around the main commuter bus termini of Copa-Cabana and Market Square where deaf people are much concentrated. The researchers collected data from deaf vendors through the assistance of a qualified interpreter. Data from focus group discussions was translated from sign language to English using the direct translation method. More so, a content analysis approach was applied to analyse the data. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before the study was done. The researchers were assured of anonymity to protect identities. The study also utilized semi-structured interviews with three executive directors from notable organizations for the deaf in Zimbabwe namely, Deaf Zimbabwe Trust, Deaf Women Included and Sunrise Sign Language Academy. The primary aim of these interviews was to elicit their perspectives on the inclusion and

exclusion of the Deaf community in socio-political and economic development.

The researchers employed purposive sampling to select participants for the study, a method that entails determining the specific information needed and identifying individuals who can provide relevant insights based on their knowledge and experience (Bernard, 2002). Through focus group discussions, they gathered the perspectives of Deaf individuals regarding the development and use of sign language across various domains in Zimbabwe. Leaderman (1990) suggests that focus groups facilitate a synergistic interaction, yielding insights that surpass the sum of individual contributions. The data were presented and analyzed using a thematic approach, which involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. This approach allowed the researchers to organize the findings into coherent themes that reflect the participants' experiences and views, providing a rich and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to sign language in the country. By focusing on recurring themes, the researchers could draw meaningful conclusions and recommendations that address the specific issues faced by the Deaf community. The thematic approach is particularly effective in qualitative research as it enables researchers to capture the complexity of participants' experiences and to highlight significant patterns that emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

To analyse the collected data, the researchers deployed Critical Disability Theory (CDT). CDT offers a robust framework for understanding the social, cultural, and political dimensions of Deaf identity and language rights. Rooted in the broader field of disability studies, CDT challenges the traditional medical model of disability, which often pathologizes Deaf individuals as deficient or in need of remediation (Linton, 1998; Oliver, 1996). Instead, CDT positions Deaf individuals as members of a linguistic minority with unique cultural and linguistic contributions (Ladd, 2003; Padden & Humphries, 2005). This perspective is particularly significant in advocating for the recognition and advancement of Zimbabwe Sign Language (ZSL) as a legitimate and autonomous language, thereby promoting the linguistic rights of Deaf individuals in Zimbabwe (Ndhlovu & Makoni, 2022). By emphasizing the importance of inclusive practices and the need to dismantle systemic barriers that marginalize Deaf communities, CDT supports efforts to create equitable access to education, healthcare, and social services (Goodley, 2017). This approach not only empowers Deaf individuals to fully participate in society but also affirms their cultural and linguistic identity (Kusters, De Meulder, & O'Brien, 2017). In the context of Zimbabwe, where Deaf individuals often face significant exclusion and discrimination, CDT provides a critical lens for addressing these inequities and advocating for policies that recognize ZSL as an

essential component of the nation's linguistic diversity (Chimedza & Peters, 2003).

Discussion

Perceptions of the Deaf

The following section is a presentation, analysis and discussion of data that was gathered through focus group discussions and documentary analysis. The major themes forming the talking points are centred on lack of standardisation of sign language in Zimbabwe, absence of a language policy that promotes prulilingualism in Zimbabwe, exclusion in media and classrooms and lack of foreign sign language teaching and learning in Zimbabwe which have been cited as the major challenges that hinders the Deaf to participate in social-economic and political development of the nation.

Lack of standardisation

Focus group discussions with the deaf revealed that SL is not well standardised. The result is that people from different areas fail to understand each other. One of the interviewed deaf executive director notes:

'that sign language must be properly standardised and popularised to avoid communication challenges between sign language interpreters and the Deaf whenever the sign language interpreters are hired to offer interpretation services'.

Deaf vendors during focus group discussions revealed that the majority of people who are deaf do not use "standard signs" enshrined in sign language dictionaries. The researchers noted that, there is loose connection between the standard forms and the actual language usage and this will cause communication problems between sign language interpreters and the people who are deaf in different domains in Zimbabwe. According to Mugari and Matende (2022), the compatibility challenges that the Deaf meet when they interact with their speaking counterparts exacerbated their communication plight and as long as their language is not developed, their concerns and contributions will not be heard.

The underdevelopment of sign language or delay in developing a proper standardised sign language by the government and different key stakeholders which can be used in different domains, is contrary to what the Constitution says. It is clearly stated within the Constitution Chapter 1 Section 6 (4) that:

"The state must promote, advance the use of sign language and create conditions necessary

for the development of the language".

Mugari and Matende (2022) opine that, sign language being a minority language worldwide, inclusive of Zimbabwe warrants promotion. In fact, section 6 of the Constitution determines the language rights of citizens who are deaf which must be honoured. It "embraces language as a basic human right and multilingualism as a national resource which then allows people who are deaf to use sign language in public life (Honberger, 2002: 30). Responses from the interviewed executive directors of deaf organizations revealed that all the different varieties of sign language in Zimbabwe must be harmonized to facilitate better communication among the Deaf and the use of sign language in various domains in Zimbabwe. However, Mugari and Matende (forthcoming) evaluate the practicalities and consequences of sign language standardisation through harmonisation. A cursory analysis of the historical aspects of the origins of different systems of sign language tells a different story that does not support harmonisation. As varieties of sign language from Masvingo, Mutare, Bulawayo, and Harare among others are attributed to different European countries and the American systems, where they are treated as autonomous language in the countries of origin; harmonising such languages would be enslaving and distorting this historical sketch.

Absence of a language policy that promotes plurilingualism in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean overt language policies do not promote learning of multiple local languages. Overt language policies are explicit and formalized. They are often documented in official regulations, laws or institutional guidelines. Shrifman (1996) cited in Shohamy (2009) expanded the notion of language policy by differentiated between overt and covert policies: overt policies refer to explicit, formalized, de jure, while covert policies refer to language policies that are implicit, informal, indirect, unstated, de facto, grassroots and latent. He further claims that covert aspects of language policies are usually ignored. They have a monolingual orientation where each ethnolinguistic group learns its own language. This hinders participation of the deaf in various sectors to contribute to the development of Zimbabwe's economy. They find themselves left out because nobody wants to employ them because of the hindrances on communication. Section 6 (4) of the Constitution Amendment (No 20) Act state that,

The State must promote and advance the use of all languages used in Zimbabwe, including sign language, and must create conditions for the development of those languages.

One of the executive directors of an organisation for the Deaf response was:

'We have financial institutions like Zimbabwe Women's Microfinance Bank which is a credit organisation formed via government to provide funding for disadvantaged groups who cannot get funding from mainstream financial institutions. However, these microfinance banks do not have particular strategies to reach the Deaf even though the deaf are among their target population which they are specifically established to serve'.

The above response clearly shows that the Deaf are excluded in national funding programmes.

Furthermore, the mainstream banking sector with the exception of a few banks does not have a communication strategy for the deaf. In as much as most of their advertising is via visual material they do not help the Deaf due to lack of education and the differences between Sign language and English, majority of the deaf do not fully understand the banking products and would require further clarification. Hence, they cannot get the much needed information as most banks in Zimbabwe do not have staff that can adequately communicate via sign language.

Another major challenge deterring deaf people from developing entrepreneurial skills is lack of motivation and mentorship from astute business people. This is a result of the communication barrier. Most distinguished business people and motivational speakers cannot communicate using sign language. Most business seminars, workshops and conferences even at national level do not provide sign language interpretation. The deaf have to organise their own seminars which might not be as beneficial as there are not many deaf business people of note in Zimbabwe.

The deaf population is also excluded from participating in business competitions like Junior Achievement Zimbabwe, CFA Institute Research challenge and Capital Markets Quiz which are great platforms to get financial training and business grooming. While there has been some effort towards including the Deaf financially, it is way too little and it falls short of what needs to be done. Deaf Zimbabwe Trust has partnered with Empower Bank for agency banking to provide loans for youth with disabilities. This is commendable, though the deaf community in the rural areas and even some urban areas where the Trust and the bank are not represented are left out. CABS partnered with Signs of Hope Trust, an organization that seeks to raise awareness on disability issues and conducted financial literacy training for the deaf (Mutingwende, 2023).

Exclusion in the media

Data from focus group discussions revealed that deaf people in Zimbabwe are left behind in political participation and economic development because they are excluded in the media. The deaf are

excluded in several areas where they could have contributed to the country's development. While there is an interpreter on News on Zimbabwe Broadcast Television most of them do not follow much because of lack of standardised signs. One of the Interviewed deaf executive director notes that,

'Free and unhindered political participation sits at the core of democratic societies'.

The human rights perspective affirms that every citizen regardless of sex, intellectual capacity, race or disability has a right, if they so wish, to take part in politics either as member of a political party or in the exercise of the right to vote or to stand for election and hold public office when so elected subject to the provision of reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities.

Another interviewed executive director of an organisation for the Deaf revealed that:

'in the absence of information on what political parties are offering to the public in their manifestos, the ability of one to exercise the right to vote will be unduly respected'.

Therefore, the guaranteed political rights under section 67 subsection 1-4 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe will not be fully realised by people with disabilities. The provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of people with Disabilities henceforth (UNCRPD) are more enlightening as to how people with disabilities ought to receive information that is of public interest. For instance Article 21 of the UNCRPD which deals with freedom of expression and opinion and access to information provides that:

States parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others, and through all forms of communication of their choice, as defined in article 2 of the present convention, including by:

- (a) Providing information intended for the general public to persons with in accessible formats and technologies appropriate to different kinds of disabilities in a timely manner and without additional cost.*
- (b) Accepting and facilitating the use of sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and all other accessible means, modes and formats of communication of their choice by persons with disabilities in official interactions.*
- (c) Urging private entities that provide services to the general public, including through the internet, to provide information and services in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities.*

(d) Encouraging mass media, including providers of information through the internet, to make their services accessible to persons with disabilities.

These provisions make reference to accessible formats and technologies appropriate to all kinds of disabilities as the most effective way of communicating public information to people with disabilities. Therefore, for deaf people the use of sign language and sign language interpreters during one on one engagements or mass arrangements would be appropriate. In situations where information has to be published via television broadcasting services then the provision of sign language interpreters or the use of captions becomes relevant. With respect to people who are hard of hearing, the use of voice amplifiers, sign language and sign language interpreters may also be used as a suitable form of communication of public information to this group of citizens.

Focus group discussions with deaf vendors revealed that access to information for people with disabilities has been a huge perennial problem which has hindered the majority of people with disabilities from fully participating in direct politics in Zimbabwe. Generally in Zimbabwe, media houses like ZBC, Star F.M and ZiFM amongst other public service broadcasters in the country does not put captions on their programmes and they have no provision for sign language interpreters for political awareness and economic programmes which consequently thwart the participation of the deaf. Kazuwa (2016) notes that, the main impediment to the implementation of the 2013 constitution in relation to the enhancement of sign language in Zimbabwe and its use is coming from the few unrevised strategies that the State has put in place so far. The strategies are not revised in the sense that though strategies have been developed to ensure the use of sign language on ZBC-TV still a lot needs to be done on sign language itself before it can be used in any public sphere, in this case in the news media, particularly on the programs broadcasted via ZBC-TV.

One of the interviewed director of an organisation for the Deaf said that:

'In Zimbabwe, we have the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises, which has several programmes to support SMEs. However most of their programmes are conducted via road and radio shows which are all audio platforms. Moreover, they do not have sign language interpreters in their various offices across the country. The highest office in the country where funding assistance should be accessed by all Zimbabweans has no specific programme to reach the disadvantaged group of deaf people'.

This glaring exclusion of the deaf from accessing national assistance to grow their enterprises amounts to a form of discrimination on the grounds of disability. It is contrary to section 2 (2) of the Constitution

which states that the State, its institutions and agencies of government are further mandated to assist persons with physical and mental disabilities to achieve their full potential and to minimize disadvantages suffered by them. Furthermore, section 22 (3) (a) mandates the State, all government institutions and agencies at every level to develop programmes for the welfare of persons with physical or mental disabilities especially work programmes consistent with their capabilities and acceptable to them or their representatives.

Exclusion in inclusive classes

Document analysis also revealed that sign language has received significant attention in academic literature. However, focus group discussions with deaf people and interviews with the directors of organisations for the deaf revealed a different situation. For instance, focus group discussions with deaf people revealed that, the Deaf are excluded in programmes such as the Tauramwana programme (Katiza, 2016). The medium of instruction used in schools like Emerald Hill is spoken English language. Deaf students learn together with hearing students and the medium of instruction used is spoken language whilst the Deaf are not allowed to use sign language. The use of spoken language as the medium of instruction when teaching deaf students is not a suitable approach and also the Tauramwana programme is not in any way upholding the terms of the language policies. Practice in the education system is violating the rights of the deaf to use a language of their choice as provided in section 6 (a) of the Constitution which states that:

"The state and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must ensure that all officially recognised languages are treated equitably"

This implies that sign language should serve the people the same way languages like Shona and English serve their speakers.

According to Mugari and Matende (2022), out of all the state universities sign language is not used as a medium of instruction in the learning and teaching process of deaf students. The practice of teaching the deaf at universities through the use of overhead projectors, providing electronic notes and encouraging deaf students to lip-read is a manifestation of a complex exclusionist system, unaccommodating policies, unclear implementation strategies and abuse of linguistic rights as enshrined in Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights Charter. This confirms Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahans (1996, p.422) argument that "internationally recognised language rights are universally violated when it comes to signed language minorities". The use of English as a medium of instruction shows that sign language is not prioritised in the education domain. Crawhill (1995) asserts that the

Deaf are illiterate and only the partially deaf are able to lip read and write in English. This means that those who are profoundly deaf cannot communicate and express themselves in any other way through the means of sign language or a sign language interpreter. In the same vein, Miller (2001) notes that, because of varying education levels of linguistic diversity in deaf populations, spoken English, note writing and the efforts of well-meaning family members or basic signs used by teachers do not satisfy a signing deaf individual requirement.

Exclusion in learning institutions

Participation of the Deaf in the country's development is compromised by educational levels of the Deaf. The Deaf have not been catered for in most institutions. University of Zimbabwe has only had 2 deaf students in the faculty of education (Matende, 2015). Sibanda (2015) also points out that the deaf are unemployed and underemployed due to lack of education and training. Evidence that there is no training in sign language teaching and learning at tertiary levels is revealed by Sibanda (2015), who points out that of the ten schools of the deaf in Bulawayo, no one is trained to teach the language.

Sibanda (2015) concludes that the inclusion of the deaf children in the schools would remain a pipe dream as long as teachers are not proficient in SL. There is need for attitude changes by the general populace if the education system has to embrace sign language as both medium of instruction and a language subject across universities; addressing the spirit of inclusive education and the recommendations of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (1996). According to Mugari and Matende (2022), universities worldwide are regarded as centres of excellence and drivers of policies in matters of problematisation, formulation, implementation, assessment and evaluation. However, universities are not walking the talk as sign language is not prioritised in higher and tertiary institutions.

Lack of Foreign Sign Language teaching and learning in Zimbabwe

Document analysis revealed that the Secretary's circular of 2002 advocates the teaching of foreign languages, but data gathered through interviews revealed that no teaching of foreign Sign Language is being done in Zimbabwe. This is despite the fact that there are more than three hundred Sign languages around the world (Johnston and Shembri, 2006). This lack of foreign Sign Language teaching in Zimbabwe limits the ability of the Deaf to migrate and work outside Zimbabwe. If they could work outside the country, they could contribute to the country's economy through remittances, as other Zimbabweans do. According to Tambama (2014), migration has the potential to deliver many positive benefits for development and poverty reduction through remittances send back home. They are an

important source of external funding in developing countries. Because of limitations of language, the Deaf are excluded from participating in the country's development and the welfares of their families.

Conclusion

The research findings shows that the Deaf in Zimbabwe are left behind in socio-economic and political participation and their potential remains locked due to lack of access to information. This is because sign language has been marginalised in both its structure and usage in different domains. The discussion highlighted what is portrayed by the media in the deaf community to be refuting the sustainable development goals SDGs on inequalities towards the inclusion of the deaf in socio-economic and political developments. Lack of standardisation of sign language, absence of a language policy that promotes prulingualism in Zimbabwe, exclusion in classes and higher institutions of learning and lack of foreign sign language teaching and learning in Zimbabwe have been cited as the major challenges that hinders the Deaf to participate in social-economic and political developments of the nation. There is also lack of policy implementation on promoting students who are deaf and available resources are inadequate and less appropriate to enable successful teaching and learning in schools that accommodate students who are deaf.

The study therefore, concludes that the potential that can be utilised for development lies untapped in the Deaf community due to constraints of language. The researchers recommend the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe to consider the involvement of Applied Linguists in Deaf education and users of sign language as educators of the Deaf. Intensive language support and intervention services for deaf children and their hearing families is an obvious void in the educational process for the Deaf children in Zimbabwe. The researchers also recommend the government and media houses in Zimbabwe to accommodate the deaf community and adopt policies that include the marginalised minority groups in socio-economic and political developments.

Some of the initiatives which can be employed to ensure maximum inclusion of deaf people in financial matters to guarantee their self-reliance include; introduction of a national project targeting the Deaf under the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises. Ministry must engage organisations for the Deaf so that their members can get funding, and ministry officials get training in sign language. The ministry can partner with PWDs and deaf organisations by training organisation representatives across all districts on funding opportunities who will then become the main contact point for the deaf people in areas where the Ministry has communication barriers with the Deaf.

A deliberate effort by the government to have financial inclusion policies for PWDs specifically for the Deaf must be implemented. Establishment of a working group comprising stakeholders dealing with PWDs, financial service providers, Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises and the deaf community. The Deaf should be involved in coming up with policies that affect them.

Establishment of affirmative action programmes in favour of the Deaf. Section 56 (6) of the Constitution provides for affirmative action that is legislative or other measures to protect or advance people or classes of people who have been disadvantaged by unfair discrimination. The Deaf is a class of people who have been disadvantaged by unfair discrimination.

Training and capacity building of staff of financial service providers. Service providers should have PWDs officers who are well trained in areas of concern including sign language and Deaf culture. PWDs officers should have relevant knowledge to adequately serve and offer PWDs particularly the deaf, an inclusive and seamless banking experience.

The use of assistive technology for financial services must be promoted in the deaf community. In developed countries like the United Kingdom and United States of America banks offer versions of their websites and product brochures in sign language videos. They also offer their banking services through a live video link where one communicates with the adviser with sign language (Inclusion London, 2016). Zimbabwean financial service providers can consider adopting assistive technology to serve their deaf customers.

The provision of financial literacy training, including digital financial literacy programs by more financial institutions, inclusion of sign language interpretation at national events and high level business fora. Catch them young - include the deaf in business competitions right from primary level so that they grow up understanding and appreciating business culture.

In summation, it is insufficient to have a constitution that recognizes the Deaf as a marginalised group and Sign language as an official language. The absence of the implementation of programmes that promote and advance the use of Sign language renders useless, the constitutional right that all officially recognised languages be treated equally. Thus, the State, private players and organisations for the Deaf should advocate for a society with equal access to information and opportunities to all. The State must uphold its duty to create conditions for the development and advancement of Sign language. When Deaf persons are empowered with a medium of communication that allows them to interact with the rest of the world, only then can there be an end to their isolation and break the cycle of poverty. Thereby, leading to their self-sufficiency and greatly improving their quality of life.

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