

Sign Language Policies, Practices and Challenges in Zimbabwe's Universities

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Abstract

This study examines the teaching and learning of Sign Language in Zimbabwe with special reference to the national language policy, current practice and challenges pertaining to its implementation. The focus is on establishing the medium of instruction that is being used to teach deaf students and the challenges in interactions that are faced by both students and lecturers. The data was collected from a sample of five universities. The findings converge on lack of spelt out implementation strategies by universities in promoting Sign Language use and Sign Language instruction in educational institutions in line with the expectations of statutes espoused in the national constitution. The universities are yet to roll out Sign Language pedagogy and promotion through access to education and respect of the basic linguistic rights that are enjoyed by many of the citizenry in the country. The selected universities are a representation of both public and private institutions which would be expected to lead by example in championing constitutionalism and promotion of local and marginalized languages. The findings also noted the need for attitude changes by the general populace if the education system has to embrace Sign Language as both a medium of instruction and a language subject across universities, addressing the spirit of inclusive education. This study conscientizes policy makers at both micro and macro levels to walk the talk and work out strategies for the development of Sign Language.

Key words: *Sign Language, language policy, deaf, medium of instruction, mother tongue.*

Introduction

This study examines Zimbabwe's language policy position, practice and challenges pertaining the teaching and learning of Sign Language, or the teaching and learning of the deaf through Sign Language in university education. The focus is on establishing the medium of instruction that is being used to teach students who are deaf and the challenges in interaction that are faced by both students and lecturers. The study investigates the Zimbabwean language policy framework and evaluates the current Language in Education Policy in a view to surmise the extent to which the

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language provisions relating to the teaching and learning of Sign Language users in university education are being implemented.

According to Johnston (1989), through education technology or social practices, people who are deaf continue to experience discrimination and many attitudinal barriers that prevent them from achieving their full potential. Inclusive education (deaf and hearing learning together) has to be upheld or promoted but in a way that both sides benefit. The unfortunate case of inclusive education has often meant the child who is deaf does not have much access to the information taught as most of it will be delivered orally, at a fast pace which only benefit the hearing students. This confirms Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahans (1996:422) argument that, “internationally recognized language rights are universally violated when it comes to signed language minorities.”

Universities worldwide are regarded as centers of excellence and drivers of policies in matters of problematisation, formulation, implementation, assessment and evaluation. Pursuant to this, it becomes worthwhile to investigate how a policy covering language recognition, use and vitality is implemented by the pacesetters of society, who amid all leading community organizations, may be assumed to understand the needs better than anybody else. The fundamental question would therefore be: are universities walking the talk through teaching Sign Language and teaching the deaf in Sign Language? Umalusi Report on South African Sign Language (2018:11) found that expertise in relation to teacher qualifications [for the deaf] is lacking and this is a worldwide challenge. Hearing teachers, most of whom are not fluent Sign Language users, continue to dominate the educational process. Further, Umalusi Report on South African Sign Language (2018:29) cites Morgan, Glaser and Magongwa (2016) maintain that a proficient teacher who is deaf is a role model to learners who are deaf. It is imperative for people who are deaf to receive education in their own language; this affirms their rights as enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe of 2013.

With the intention of understanding the policy and practice regarding the teaching and learning of students who are deaf in university education, this research also intends to answer the following questions, which may also have some overlaps: Which language is used as a medium of instruction to teach the students who are deaf? How effective is it? To what extent are universities implementing language policy provisions? To what extent are universities promoting Sign Language? What are the communication

and integration challenges people who are deaf face and why? Why and how can Sign Language development improve the deaf's access to education opportunities?

Zimbabwe Language Situation

Zimbabwe has for long operated shorn of an elaborate framework governing the multilingual community as buttressed by Ndlovu (2011:1) who notes that 'Zimbabwe does not have an explicitly written down national language policy document'. The country's current language policy is pronounced in the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment Number 20) Act 2013, and previously was inferred from the 1987 Education Act as Amended in 2006, Secretary's Circular Number 1 and 2 of 2002, and the Directors' Circular Number 26 of 2007 among other similar documents. This concurs with Kadenge and Mugari's (2015) observations that, the Zimbabwean sociolinguistic situation has for long been dogged by lack of a holistic and well-articulated language policy. In many instances, the language policy is typically concluded from the obtaining practices that somehow regulate language use in various spheres of life (Kadenge and Nkomo, 2011a; 2011b).

Inferring a national language policy from primary and secondary school level documents and other domain specific documents may endorse the absence of a documented national language policy, but it does not translate to the absence of policy. Quite often, in line with Bamgbose (1991, 2000, and 2003) and, Kadenge and Nkomo's (2011b) observations, language policies are covert and can only be inferred from observed practices. This facilitates an understanding for this study that, although the policy could have been silent or quite loosely put 'non-vocal' on Sign Language, these were just consequences of practice that lacked initiation and provocation. Furtherance to this, the general social standing of Sign Language in Zimbabwe seem to be tainted by Zimbabwe indigenous traditional culture which largely views disability negatively and in which able-bodied people experience shame if there is a person who is handicapped in their family. This study advocates for the realization that Sign Language is as proper a language as any other and those who use it should be afforded unhindered opportunities even to study it and learn through it.

Methodology

This research is qualitative, seeking to respond to life experiences and the implications that they foist and influence on the socio-

economic wellbeing of the society. Owing to the diversity of our research objectives, data was triangulated through documentary analysis of selected policies and interviews directed at university administration and heads of the departments responsible for language promotion and development. The research used the descriptive approach to analyze the data. According to Elliot and Timulak (2005), descriptive research attempts to describe, explain and interpret conditions of the present. The approach is most suitable for examination of phenomena that is occurring at a specific place and time. The choice of this approach was motivated by the nature of the data required to achieve the objectives of the study. The approach was used to describe the medium used in teaching students who are deaf. Chivero (2012) argues that description, interpretation and explanation complement each other because description presupposes interpretation and interpretation presupposes explanation. Thus data presentation, interpretation and analysis were therefore carried out simultaneously.

Consent was sought from the universities' authorities upon divulgence of research objectives, and methodology for ethical considerations. The identity of institutions is also not divulged on specific issues arguably to protect their brands and unfair suppositions and stereotypes. Where people who are deaf were interviewed, the researchers asked for consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were emphasized and the interviewees were assured that their responses were for mentioned research purposes only.

Data on policy issues was collected through analysis of documents that focus or relate to language use in education. Ndlovu (2011, 256) defines documentary analysis as:

a relatively unobstructed form of research, which does not necessarily require the researcher to approach respondents directly. Rather the researcher can trace the respondent's steps, actions, agendas and ideologies through the documents they left behind.

The research analyses the following documents: the 1987 Education Act as amended in 2006, the Secretary's Circular No.1, 2, 3 of 2002, Directors' Circular number 26 of 2007 and the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No.20) Act 2013. Analysis of these policy documents is significant and enlightens the researcher on language

policies and their implementation in regard to the teaching and learning of Deaf students in different levels of education.

Data on language practice and challenges was gotten through questionnaires administered to purposively selected lecturers from Arts and Humanities faculties targeting a minimum of five lecturers per university. The sampling targeting Arts and Humanities was purposive as it based on the probable availability of Sign Language in humanities programs, particularly those focusing on language and education. This explains the choice of five universities namely University of Zimbabwe, Women's University in Africa, Midlands State University, Great Zimbabwe University and Lupane State University. Interviews were carried out over the telephone following a purposive sampling procedure targeting individuals and offices that are understood to be knowledgeable in university policy. The telephone interviews proved time and cost effective considering the distance emanating from the countrywide distribution of research informants and the usual bureaucratic nature of the state universities.

Theoretical Framework

Tollefson's (2006) Critical Theory in Language Policy (henceforth CLP) is the main theoretical framework used to analyze data in this research. According to Tollefson (2002), the term critical in CLP refers to the field of critical linguistics. It entails social activism: linguists are seen as responsible not only for understanding how dominant social groups use language for establishing and maintaining social hierarchies, but also for investigating ways to alter those hierarchies (Tollefson, 2002). For this reason this study adopts CLP in order to offer solutions to the challenges faced by deaf children in educational institutions. Within the field of Critical Linguistics research and practice are inextricably interwoven through this important social and political role for linguists and their work. CLP becomes a relevant tool of analysis for this research. This is so, because this research deals with issues of policy interpretation, linguistic rights and the plight of the deaf child in educational institutions. Moreover, as a research approach, CLP seeks to develop more democratic policies that reduce inequality and promote the maintenance of minority languages (Tollefson, 2006). This defining characteristic of CLP allowed the researchers to analyze the extent to which linguistic human rights of the deaf are guaranteed in the education domain in Zimbabwe. Hence, the study adopts CLP because it sees language policy as a mechanism serving and

maintaining the interests of dominant groups and it seeks to “to unmask the ideologies behind language policies” (Lin, 2015). The theory acknowledges that language policies often create and sustain various forms of social inequality, with policy makers promoting the interest of dominant social groups (Tollefson, 2006)

The National Language Policy

The Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No 20) Act, Section (6)1 stipulates that “there are 16 officially recognized languages, Sign Language included.” This is a positive shift considering that the previous constitution did not officially recognize the language. The logical conjecture would occasion optimism that such a policy would eventually set in motion the promotion of the language into use in domains like education, law and access to health. However, not many details are given regarding implementation as with previous policies. Gotosa, Rwodzi and Mhlanga (2013), note that there is need for a practically oriented policy. Moreover, Shohamy (2006) insightfully observes that the mere act of declaring certain languages as official does not carry with it much meaning in terms of actual practice in all domains.

Furthermore, the phrase ‘officially recognized’ raises more questions than answers because it is not transparent in terms of roles that are granted these officially recognized languages. Kadenge and Mugari (2015) argue that there is lack of clearly spelt out domains of use of the officially recognized languages and they suggest that such domains of use be clearly laid out since the society is polyglossic. Of course the constitution is by standards a lean document, but it should have at the least recommended that there be some bill that would then give details on how these languages should be managed against the complexity of a multilingual society.

Section (6)4 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe states that “[t]he 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.” It is noteworthy and estimable that the obligatory and binding terms like ‘must’ are used in this clause. However, to facilitate the implementation trajectory of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No. 20) Act provision on language, the conditions which are necessary for the development of mentioned languages should be clearly stated in an annexure for avoidance of doubt. Generally, overt policy positions, particularly on Sign Language attests to government support and alacrity to develop linguistic minorities.

The development and recognition accorded to Sign Language would also need to cascade down to current trends in language education theories which promote mother tongue education. According to Gora (2013), all Zimbabwean pupils should be allowed to utilise their mother tongue where possible. This is in congruent with the Zimbabwe Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999) recommendations that linguistic rights must be enjoyed with all citizens and community language must be promoted irrespective of the number of speakers of a particular language (Muchenje, Goronga & Bondai, 2013). The above mentioned clause only defines the right to equality and non-discrimination. It is through the tenets of Critical Theory in Language Policy that we interrogate these mismatches and root for the marginalized. The clause is silent about the rights of children to learn in their mother tongue. If the law provides this right clearly and not in a covert manner, then the use of Sign Language as a medium of instruction in university education would be logically expected. Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010) argue that should someone fail to be granted the right to use his/her language in education, it is outright violation of the substance of that right.

Section (81) (f) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment Number 20) Act specifies the right to education but, this right is not provided in the child's mother tongue. According to Dube and Ncube (2013:250), 'education and language are like Siamese twins'. This is in agreement with Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh and Wolff (2006) who observes that language does not mean everything in education, but it cannot be relegated to the background because without language everything is insignificant in education. Moreover, in a bid to promote the child's right to equal treatment before the law, right to education, right to health facilities among others, it will be ideal if people learn Sign Language so that the presence of the Deaf will be recognized and in return grant them right to education despite their hearing and speaking impairments.

Language-in-Education Policy and Sign Language

In this section, the Education Act, the Secretary's Circulars and the 2013 Constitution are analyzed. Although these instruments were created for the lower levels of education, they are the closest we can get to policy and therefore, they give a clear picture of the dearth of attention that Sign Language has gotten.

The Education Act of 1987

After Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the first document to be crafted in order to guide language practices in education was the Education Act of 1987. The act identified Shona, Ndebele and English as subjects to be taught while Sign Language was to be given the priority as medium of instruction for the deaf and Hard of Hearing (The Education Act as Amended in 2006, Part II Section 4). Thus Sign Language is recognized in this document not as a subject but as a medium of instruction for the deaf. English, Shona and Ndebele are given a higher status even for the deaf. The language that the deaf should use in official domains is not stated and is therefore presumed to be English. The pronouncement demonstrates "how policy texts construct and sustain power relations, an ideological standpoint is of particular interest in CLP research, as are also the values that are articulated in policy texts" (Taylor, 2004:6). Thus, from the standpoint of CLP scholars should develop their ability to critically "read" language policies that is to understand the social and political implications of particular policies adopted in specific historical context (Matende, 2018).

Bamgbose (1991) encapsulates the implications of the clause in the 1987 Education Act on Sign Language when he observes that, declaration without implementation, avoidance, arbitrariness, vagueness and fluctuations are the major problems or characteristics of language policies in Africa. The clause in this case circumvents declaring that Sign Language must be taught as a subject and there are no guidelines of how the language should be taught, even when it should be taught. Bamgbose (1991, 2000) regards language policies in Africa as mere pronouncements, given the absence of the provision for implementation. Contrary to the view by Muchenje, Goronga and Bondai (2013:502) that educators and policy makers must make sustained efforts to address student's linguistic diversity, the Education Act seems to marginalize Sign Language which is the mother tongue of the deaf and hard of hearing students.

Ministry of Education of Education Policy and Circulars

The Secretary's Circular Number 3 of 2002 curriculum has the necessary arsenal to implement the national goals of;

2.8 promoting the practice of inclusive education through flexible accommodation of special needs among learners, and

2.9 providing special needs which include the acquisition of survival and appropriate acquisition skills like:-Sign Language, Mobility, Self-care, Braille-literacy, and Social skills for learners with special needs. The education system expects pupils to develop skills and competencies in language and communication.

Sign Language is acknowledged in this document and there is recognition of the need to promote *inclusive education* through consideration of *special needs* of pupils. The need for acquisition of Sign Language and social skills and competencies for signers as people with special needs is also recognized. However, the Secretary's Circular Number 3 of 2002, Section 3.1.1, just like the Education Act, does not state clear procedures to be followed within the inclusive system of education. According to Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar (2010: 34), for most deaf children, Sign Language is the only language that they can express themselves fully. It is impossible for them to express themselves in any spoken language except when writing. Most children who speak may also find it difficult to use Sign Language. The stipulation of the Secretary's Circular Number 3 of 2002 curriculum does not clarify the language to be used in a mixed class with both hearing and deaf students. Moreover, the stipulation does not clarify on qualifications and competencies of teachers responsible for teaching deaf students.

In the same circular, Sign Language has not been included in Appendix C: Time Allocation. The exclusion of Sign Language makes it invisible and hence not recognized. According to Ndlovu (2013) and Bamgbose (1991), time allocated to a subject relates to the importance attached to the subject. Sign Language is therefore marginalized since nothing is given to the language on time allocation.

The Secretary's Circular Number 1 of 2002 and the Directors' Circular number 26 of 2007 is totally silent about the use of Sign Language as a medium of instruction and sole means of communication for the deaf where writing is not involved. These policy documents undermine the right of deaf students by excluding their language in regard to its use as a medium of instruction.

Language Policies in Universities

The language policies of the universities investigated are mostly similar. They all state that English is the language of official

communication and all lectures have to be conducted in the official language. However, exceptions are granted when the subject being taught is another language, for which lectures may be taught in that language. For example, when the subject is Shona, the Shona language may be used during lesson delivery and assessment.

Even though this may be policy, only one university has adopted such an approach to teach indigenous language subjects in the indigenous languages except. Lessons are conducted in English even if there are deaf students in the lecture. Since some of the universities have begun teaching Sign Language, or they have plans to, there has not been evidence that Sign Language would be used to teach deaf students since most students taking Sign Language are hearing students. There should be elaborate plans coupled with a robust support network to teach Sign Language to native speakers in order to spur development of the language and associated resources.

Language Practice

The data that was collected reveal that since 2007, only three Deaf students managed to be enrolled with University of Zimbabwe. One of them graduated in 2007 after acquiring a Bachelor of Arts Honours in English degree and the other two students acquired a Graduate Diploma in Education in 2014. The students enrolled and studied together with their speaking counterparts in keeping with the practice of inclusive education. More so, at Women's University in Africa less than ten students who are partially deaf are enrolled.

At the University of Zimbabwe and Women's University in Africa, Sign Language is neither taught as a subject nor used as a medium of instruction to teach the deaf. Responses from interviews revealed that the University's Disability Resource Centres (DRC) have no facilities to cater for hearing impaired persons, though they cater for the visually impaired students and those with other disabilities. Instead, English is used as a medium of instruction by lecturers. The lecturers teaching deaf students use overhead projectors, electronic notes via e-mail, writing notes on the board and lastly lectures are conducted using spoken language. Students were also asked to lip-read as lecturers teach. The students also indicated that they were not given equal opportunities with their hearing counterparts. The lecturer's explanation of notes and PowerPoint presentations only benefited the hearing students. Deaf students who have left the university also indicated that their participation in class and tutorials was limited since they could not speak.

The following section presents and discusses some of the challenges bedeviling the education of the deaf which include shortage of resources, communication barriers, attitudes and insensitive learning environments.

Challenges

Insensitive Learning Environment

The interviews we conducted revealed that an unstructured and unsupportive environment impedes the teaching and learning environment of deaf students in university education. The learners described the learning environment as riddled with distractions. For instance, the amount of light in the learning venues makes it impossible for them to lip-read the lecturer as it is the only expected way to follow proceedings and to compound their predicament, the lecturers at times walk around the classroom while talking, denying the deaf the much needed visual contact necessary for lip reading. Furthermore, the lecturers would also write on the board while talking, which vitiated the information transfer only possible by face to face through lip reading. Oyewumi (2008) asserts that the deaf and hard of hearing students tend to be visual learners and this is difficult in an environment where much essential information is delivered exclusively by word of mouth. From the standpoint of CLP, concepts of power and dominance are embedded in language use.

Lip reading also has the challenge that it demands maximum effort and concentration. According to Doyle and Dye (2002), only 30-40% of all words can actually be seen on the lips, 60%-70% is rather like guesswork. Moreover, some groups of consonants have the same lip-pattern for example /m/, /p/ and /b/ are bilabial consonants. Thus it is difficult to distinguish between the words because phonetic differences require the gift of hearing to tease apart different consonants. Therefore, insisting that deaf students should exclusively lip read would be expecting too much from them. Interviews with deaf students reveal that the university environment is not supportive of deaf education as required by constitutional provisions.

Communication Barriers

The lecturers use English as a medium of instruction to teach deaf students, which is a challenge since the deaf students are not able to articulate their views through the spoken language. There are no experts in Sign Language to teach lecturers responsible for teaching deaf students in university education. Special education mainly deals

with the visually impaired and, in some cases, the hard of hearing. Deaf Zimbabwe Trust (2013) argues that being trained in special education does not empower one to teach children who are deaf as the curriculum does not focus on Sign Language but all manners of disability, thus Sign Language should be included in university education curriculum. Deaf students require special services which must be offered by qualified and skilled teachers in order to respond to their unique needs (Beveridge, 1999).

Deaf students also noted that being taught by someone who is not proficient in Sign Language is tantamount to self-teaching. In the end, they resort to reading to get information. There is no student-teacher bidirectional communication and thus student participation is thwarted. Deaf students interviewed suggested that there is need for university institutions and teacher training colleges to introduce special education in Sign Language for all teachers. We also propose that all the lecturers responsible for teaching deaf students should undertake in-service Sign Language courses.

Interviews with the lecturers also revealed that they have difficulties in communicating with the deaf students since they are not proficient in Sign Language and they do not have interpreters during lessons. The lecturers also indicated that they have difficult experience in teaching deaf students due to unavailability of teaching material which cater for the special needs of the deaf. The lecturers use power point presentations, handouts and at times encourage the students to lip-read the lectures. Doyle and Dye (2002) observe that most teachers have little or no exposure to educating learners with hearing impairments and may feel ill-prepared to meet the needs of a deaf student. The interview with the lecturers responsible for teaching deaf students revealed that lack of resources and competent teachers in Sign Language, which shows lack of will power and commitment by the government and the respective universities to promote Sign Language as a medium of instruction to teach deaf students. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) argues that instructing learners in an unfamiliar language has been called 'submersion' because it is just the same as submerging learners under water without any instruction on how they should swim. The teachers responsible for teaching deaf students suggested that the government should come up with a board responsible for the development and promotion of Sign Language.

As a special minority language worldwide, Sign Language in Zimbabwe has not been spared from the dearth of notable development in the education system, a quality which it shares with a host of other minority languages. According to Musengi, Ndofirepi and Shumba (2012), the educational outcomes of children who are deaf are a long-term global challenge. Literature is replete with researchers recording how most high school leavers who are deaf barely manage to achieve a 4th grade reading level (Brueggermann 2004, Wauters, van Bon & Tellings, 2006) and how their Mathematics attainment are lower than their counterparts (hearing peers) (Gregory, 1998, Wood, Wood, Griffiths & Howarth, 1996). Kiyaga and Moore's (2009) report that in general teachers of the deaf in sub-Saharan Africa are mostly not deaf, lack appropriate skills and cannot sign and do not view Sign Language as a language. Nziramasanga (1999) found that in Zimbabwe, even some specialist teachers for the deaf had to be taught Sign Language by the pupils before they could teach them.

Lack of Resources

The materials used to teach deaf students are inadequate because they would require explanations and demonstrations in order to understand the written notes, which the teacher cannot ensure as they lack the key resource, Sign Language skills. Interviewed deaf students clearly stated that, there is lack of adequate human and material resources to cater for the special needs of the deaf and to promote deaf education. The lecturers responsible for teaching deaf students suggested the need for enough overhead projectors, internet, televisions, bulletin boards, computers and other assistive devices which will make university education sensitive to the special needs of the deaf and make the learning process flexible for both teachers and deaf students. Such inadequacies have long been foreseen by Serpell (2007) who notes that inclusive education of children with disabilities is being hindered by lack of resources needed to meet the individual's needs of such children.

At the University of Zimbabwe there is a center meant to accommodate students with disability (DRC) but it only caters for the needs of the physically (body) handicapped, the blind and the partially sighted. There are no Sign Language Resources which include particularly the personnel to interpret and translate to and from the language. All these practices are some of the ideologies behind language policies which CLP argues should be unmasked to promote the maintenance of minority languages (Lin, 2015). The lack

of relevant equipment and adequate resources calls for the participation of different stakeholders in advancing the needs and rights of the deaf. Availability of resources and teachers contribute much to the development of deaf education in university education. Kadenge and Mugari (2015) note that there is need to proactively embark on an all-encompassing approach to planning that involves all stakeholders that would consummate in the implementation of a policy that promotes the minority. Echoing the same sentiments, Johnston quoted in Musengi and Chireshe (2012) notes that while it is possible for teachers to implement inclusive education with little in terms of material resources, an increase in material resources is a major contributing factor towards inclusive education.

The teachers of deaf students who were interviewed also revealed that the unavailability of resources also shows that there is lack of funding and lack of genuine political will by the government since there was no commitment to provide the necessary resources for the successful teaching of deaf students in university education, including Sign Language as a medium of instruction.

Attitudes

The interviews with the deaf students, lecturers and university administrators show that negative attitudes toward the deaf is one of the major challenges faced by deaf students at universities in Zimbabwe. The deaf students reported that some of the lecturers were insensitive to their needs. They forced them to lip-read, they are not accommodative for consultation (most likely because of no or deficient Sign Language skills) and preferred communicating with hearing students to deaf students. Such discrimination has also been noted by Deaf Zimbabwe Trust (2013) which observed that teachers fail to accept children with hearing impairments. Moreover, Deaf Zimbabwe Trust (2013) notes that teachers give preferential treatment to children who do not have impairment at the expense of the children with a hearing impairment. These negative attitudes clearly explain why deaf students are likely to be frustrated in class. All these may have been occasioned by linguistic challenges meaning that all other challenges are simply symptoms of inability to use Sign Language.

The interviews with deaf students revealed that negative attitude also comes from the university administrators. The students noted that they encountered many challenges to get admission at one of the universities in Zimbabwe. The students had to wait for eight months

for admission but to no avail up-until they looked for official intervention from the then Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education. However, one of the university administrators revealed that lack of lecturers who are proficient in Sign Language and Sign Language interpreters makes it difficult to admit the deaf. This is a manifestation of a complex exclusionist system, unaccommodating policies and abuse of linguistic rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights charter.

Conclusion

The research findings show that the major impediment in the successful implementation of the 1987, 2002 and 2013 policy developments is lack of implementation strategies by the government and its stakeholders. The 1987 Education Act as amended in 2006 that mentions Sign Language as a medium of instruction is silent about the training of teachers who will teach deaf students and the providence of equipment necessary to teaching deaf students. Furthermore, the Secretary's Circular Number 3 of 2002 recognizes the need to promote the practice of inclusive education. Moreover, the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment Number 20) Act stipulates that there are 16 officially recognized languages in Zimbabwe, Sign Language included. The conclusion that can be drawn regarding policy is that there is lack of implementation procedures to make the policy proclamations practical. With the attention that Sign Language got on paper over a long time, it shudders to note the staggered development of the language, if at all it is noticeable.

The findings here show that Sign Language is not used as a medium of instruction in the learning and teaching process of deaf students. Moreover, lecturers teaching deaf students are not competent in Sign Language. 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 the Universal Declaration of Linguistic rights charter. The conclusion that can be made is that teaching of deaf students is inadequate at all universities in Zimbabwe.

The research also discovered many challenges facing deaf students in university education. These challenges include lack of human and material resources, communication barriers, attitude and insensitive learning environment. The conclusion that can be made is that at the

moment there are no adequate resources, facilities and a conducive environment that can enable successful teaching and learning.

We recommend similar confirmatory studies to be carried out at teacher training colleges, polytechnics and other institutions of higher learning considering a larger sample. Apart from that, further research can be carried out on the teaching and learning processes of Sign Language in primary and secondary education, highlighting the major challenges which hinder deaf students to proceed to higher and tertiary institutions. Such studies would inform policy makers and educational planners on how to best proceed without quashing the rights of the deaf.

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