

Perceptions of ‘Hearing’ People on Sign Language Learning in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: *Using in-depth interviews, observations and document analysis, the study explores perceptions of randomly selected hearing people from streets of Harare urban on the use of sign languages (SL) as a mode of communication and teaching people with hearing impairment (HI) in Zimbabwe. Data was analysed using the themes identification methods. SLs are languages which use manual communication to convey meaning. In Zimbabwe, use of SL did not have a legal status until March 2013. The current acceptance of SL as one of the 16th languages in the 2013 constitution gave birth to this study with a view to exploit findings into best practices on SL issues. The study revealed that hearing people considered SL as gestures and / or talking hands. They did not take it as a language. They took it as signs shared amongst people with HI and suggested that it is pointless to learn it unless one wants to work with deaf people. Behaviours of people with HI were described as contributing to negative attitudes towards learning SL. Observed challenges included lack of skilled SL instructors, negative attitudes and many others. Using the participatory framework, the study aims to place Zimbabwe amongst global competitors in deaf education.*

Keywords: *perceptions, Sign language, Zimbabwe, hearing impairment, hearing people*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many sign languages (SLs) wherever deaf communities exist. Thus, as long as we have people with hearing impairment (HI) we will have SL. In this paper the words HI includes all people with hearing loss such as the deaf and hard of hearing. SL is therefore there to stay as a language for people with HI. Such languages are found all over the world and are known to be natural languages of people who are deaf and hard of hearing in a particular country or region, such as American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL), French Sign Language (FSL) and Zimbabwe Sign Language (ZSL) just to mention a few but this study's focus is on views of hearing people on the learning of Zimbabwean Sign Language (ZSL).

2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

There are many various communication forms that have been used with children with HI during the past years and are still used today but SL has remained their natural language despite its non recognition as a language by many people. Thus, debates about the learnability of SLs have always reigned and they still reign today. The study feels it is time solutions are sought globally so that people who use SLs find their place or identity in society. We all use signs and gestures unconsciously at one point or in our daily interactions but we are the same people who despise SL. In Zimbabwe the use of SL in day to day communication and learning did not have a legal status until March 2013 when the Constitution officially declared it a natural language for people with HI. This is a great stride for deaf education in Zimbabwe. The recent ratification of the UNCRPD by Zimbabwe on 23 September 2013 and current acceptance of SL as one of the 16th languages are great commitments to disability. Zimbabwe is applauded for such strides. People with HI and Disabled People Organisations (DPOs) went through thick and thin to attain the current status. As observed by researchers, like any other country Zimbabwe misses it on implementation. The Zimbabwean 2013 constitution is not clear about its next move after recognising SL as a native language for people with HI. Thus, most educationists are asking, ‘So what?’ ‘When shall its teaching and learning start? How? By who? Where?’ These recent

commitments to disability drove us to investigate held perceptions with a view to find best practices on SL learning in Zimbabwe. Experiences of the researcher augmented by in-depth related literature helped to shape this study. The study was also driven by the variations in teaching people with HI in Zimbabwean schools.

Prior to this, in Zimbabwe the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture has volume one to two dictionaries plus other volumes developed by King George VI School and Centre in conjunction with the two main deaf associations, the National Council of the Deaf which include Zimbabwe National Association of the Deaf (ZIMNAD) and Association of the Deaf (ASSOD). While this is another reckoned commitment but its purposes are compromised by limited availability of the SL dictionaries at schools and within the public. Despite all this, SL has not received its status as a language as is ongoing with Shona, Ndebele and other languages. A lot of controversy still surrounds this phenomenon as some institutions are forcing people with HI to articulate and use SL in their private life while others claim to use total communication and / or SL. In one workshop one educationist called out; *we do not even know what mode of communication to use with people with HI. We are confused. So our students with HI are more confused than us because we detect to them instead of consulting them.* The *nothing for us without us* philosophy of people with disabilities then applies. The people with HI prefer to use their natural language, which is SL.

Supported by Chimedza and Sithole (2000) the study aims to minimise and remove barriers to SL learning and teaching. Other studies such as case studies findings on South Africa, Kenya, Ghana and Namibia reveal the existence of stigma associated with SL in many African societies. They also reveal lack of recognition of SLs as an official language in most African countries (Akach, 2010).

While Gallaudet University in United States of America is a living experience of using the SL mode to produce graduates who are HI as a reality to deaf education, little is happening in under developed countries such as Zimbabwe. This century has seen a sharp increase in attention paid to deaf education but the use of SL as a medium of instruction has continued to receive negation in most African countries (Akach, 2010 and Strong, 1988). It is against this background that this paper intends to direct and edify the controversies through tapping the perceptions of hearing people on SLs learning.

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A lot of debates and perspectives are ongoing about learning SL and using it as a communication tool. The question that this study seeks to answer is: What are the perceptions of selected hearing people on the use of sign languages in learning?

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In a bid to find out what hearing people think about the learning of SL in Zimbabwe the study addressed the following questions

- To what can SL be learnt like any other language?
- How do hearing people perceive SL learning?
- What challenges are likely to be experienced in the learning of SL in Zimbabwe?
- How best can SL be learnt in Zimbabwe?
- What are your recommendations to SL learning in line with educational global trends and competitiveness?

5. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This section presents the review of related literature to the study. It explains how the held perspectives on learning of SL could be guided by the participatory approach.

6. PARTICIPATORY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The participatory framework guided this study. According to Mhlanga (2002) the approach relies heavily on participation by communities. It is designed to enable local people to be involved not only as sources of information but as partners. It is the best framework for learning and understanding people with HI and the hearing people's opinion, behaviour and attitude with regards to learning SL. Through such framework, hearing people in Zimbabwe may gain greater access and understanding into the world of people with HI. To avoid participation for the sake of it, there is need to develop appropriate participation procedures in line to SL learning. It means that in order to acquire basic SL skills and understand people with HI, hearing people in Zimbabwe should participate into day to day activities of people with HI. The notion of participation is expected to help clear misconceptions and encourage SL learning in Zimbabwe just as Shona and Ndebele, just to mention a few. Such participation shall make both hearing people and people with HI understand the cultural values of SL and drive them to want to learn more about SL.

7. WHAT IS SIGN LANGUAGE?

Zimbabwean Sign Language (ZSL) is manual communication where hand plus arm shapes, positions and movements are used to form signs in the language (Chimedza, Sithole and Rinashe, 2007). It is a visual language with grammatical structures different from the structures of spoken languages. Instead of speech sounds signs are used as conventional systems of signals. It meets the requirements of language as defined by Bloom and Lahey (1978) as a code whereby ideas about the world are represented through a conventional system. For recorded centuries SL has served the communication needs of people who are HI but its acceptance as a language by the public is a mammoth task. Almost every country has its own SL. Although SLs are not universal languages there are universal features in SLs, which help make it possible for users of different SLs understand one another far more quickly than users of unrelated spoken languages can.

8. CHARACTERISTICS OF SL

Spoken languages are perceived through hearing. SLs are perceived through seeing. Spoken languages are produced orally while SLs are produced manually. Visually based languages such as SLs have distinctive characteristics. SLs contain large vocabulary of signs that are used to express a broad range of ideas (Kolod, 2004). The basic lexical units of SLs are signs. Signs are articulated with specific movements and configurations of the hands at different locations or positions to the body. The space in front sides of the signer are called signing space and it plays an important grammatical role in SL. This contrasts with spoken languages where the use of space does not serve a grammatical purpose. Signing space can be used to localise objects and persons so that they can be referred to during a conversation or story. Manual signs may be used to display linguistic information such as; the face, head and upper body. Facial signals and movements of the head and upper body are called non-manual signals and they add meaning to signs. These can be used to modify the meaning of signs.

Spoken words are formed from vowel and consonant sounds so are the signs in any SL but the parts of signs are not sounds. For example, ASL has 18-19 handshapes, 24 movements, and 12 locations. Each sign in SL is composed of a specific and unique combination of a handshape, movement, location or orientation (Kolod, 2004). Changing any one of these aspects of a sign changes the meaning of the sign. Locations are positions on the face, body, or area in front of the signer. Manual body and facial gestures take the place of spoken word in SLs. SL is more than a language of the hands. Its grammar incorporates the entire body. In addition to the manual elements, the signer's face, head and eye gaze play key linguistic roles (Kolod, 2004). Movements of the signer's eyes, face, and head can act as adverbs, adjectives and various other grammatical signals. These movements can tell whether it is a sentence, question or a command.

SLs have handshapes and locations that are used in other SLs but are not used in others just as there are sounds used in other spoken languages but not used in others. Different types of variation that exist for spoken languages also exist for SLs. In spoken languages different intonations of the person's voice determine whether it's a question or statement but this

grammatical information is not always conveyed by the use of specific words. Likewise, SLs grammatical information is not always conveyed by the use of specific signs but by certain non-manual behaviors such as, raised eye brows, slightly widened eyes, raised shoulders and a tilt of the head or body. For Wh-word questions one is expected to use a different non-manual signal for each question.

People with HI use telegraphic speech and their SL may read, ‘.Me saw car red go’ they explain details of the situation without ‘the, is, are etc;’ because their major aim is to convey the message. SLs may also be expressed in written format. Written SL may read, ‘TODAY STORM, SCHOOL CANCEL’ In this sentence, the words “TODAY STORM” are accompanied by a brow raise, a slight head raise and tilt, a shift of eye gaze, and an eye blink. It means there is a storm today and school is cancelled. It can be concluded that emotional facial expressions co-occur with SL and spoken English. Linguistic facial expressions are an essential part of SL. Everyone uses emotional facial expressions, but signers regularly use enhanced linguistic facial expressions. The facial expressions used in SL are unlike general emotional expressions in that they are required for meaningful communication. However, people who are HI express emotion much in the same way as hearing people but hearing people usually mistake them to mean bully and emotionally charged. This knowledge is essential to the sign language user especially hearing people who are learning SL. Iconicity is another very important character where the sign imitates the shape of the item or object such as tea-pot, pot and so on

9. BENEFITS OF LEARNING SL

There is much more to learning SL than just memorising it. SL has its own grammar, culture, history, terminology and other important aspects as already alluded. This is particularly true, given the fact that a solid foundation in a first language leads to better performance in the second language (Akach, 2010). Teaching SL as the first language for children with HI also has additional benefits. Proficiency in SL automatically allows membership acceptance in the Deaf community. This membership is vital for children with HI because it promotes a healthy view of who they are, increases self-esteem and confidence (NIDCD, 2011; Finnegan, 1992). SL learning helps hearing people get a glimpse of people with HI’s world. It enables them to share joys, witness their creativity and talents. People with HI within a deaf community share a SL and culture which underpin their identity (NIDCD, 2011; Akach, 2010; Coplon and Wax, 2000).

10. SIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING CHALLENGES

Deaf people have faced numerous challenges (NIDCD, 2011). Hearing people have very hard times imagining what it is like to be HI. Thus, people too dependent on hearing according to Bouvet (1990) see deafness as a strange inconceivable world. Hearing people think that people with HI live in a very empty world where many doors are shut to them (Bouvet, 1990). Also lack of SL classes for parents and caregivers severely restricts communication. Zimbabwe has principles, policies and legislation on disabilities but these are just signposts to implementation. It is a worse situation therefore to formulate and implement SL teaching and learning procedures. Thus researchers encourage specialists to take an active leading role. In practice, implementation is fraught with hesitation, uncertainties, fear of societal stigma, fear of accountability and ignorance (Akach, 2010). Besides this, there is a chronic lack of consistency in policy when it comes to addressing SL issues in Africa.

Learning a new language comes with its own challenges. A language that does not provide auditory feedback to people who rely heavily on audition is usually found challenging (Berke, 2010). Most hearing people experience SL learning difficulties because they switch to spoken language in between conversations. People mistakenly believe SL is easy to learn because some signs are simple and familiar. However learning a new language as an adult is a challenge in most cases. SLs demand a different way of thinking from spoken language. SL grammatical variations pose particular challenges to both hearing people and new learners with HI. Besides volumes of dictionaries there are no SL books to reinforce SL learning or new signing skills (Berke, 2010). This complexity is understood by the fact that there is still no consensus on how to record SLs in written form due to vast number of symbols required. So what is the conclusion to this matter is the duty of you and me to come up with possible ways of presenting it.

Carroll, (2012), NIDCD (2011) and Berke (2010) discovered that learning SL can be quite challenging but the ultimate experience and the benefit derived may far offset the challenges. The most mistakes that people make are that they confuse the rules of the SL with those of English grammar. Having set their brain on English grammar rules they think in English and try to translate English into SL as a result SL is found very difficult. Although SLs are not spoken languages they have their own complex grammar as already explained. SL follows its own rules of grammatical, sentence structure and punctuation it also includes its own idioms and jargon and hearing people find it hard to master this. Another major challenge of SLs is that there is no a corresponding sign for every English word. Thus HI maybe a hindrance to interactions with hearing people but it suffers more from the hearing public's closed minds than their closed ears.

11. BEST PRACTICES

SL mastery requires extensive exposure and practice. Thus the participatory framework is encouraged because it immensely exposes and gives adequate practice to a learner. It is therefore the best framework which can guide this study. SL therefore needs to be approached with respect and understanding that mastery will occur overtime (Berke, 2010; Galvan, 1999). SL learning by hearing people may help in developing positive attitude change towards people with HI. Special SL learning would need to be paid to hearing parents of Deaf children and other professionals. Attitude change is the key issue to public SL learning. Learning SL changes one's negative perceptions about it and about people with HI too. SL exposes hearing people to deaf culture. This may make them grow up in one culture and learn the language value and practices of a different culture and become enculturated into that culture. It is important to note that there are levels of SL that are shared with and taught to hearing people but there are intimate levels of communication that people with HI share and use only among themselves (Coplton and Wax, 2000) and are considered too precious to be shared with outsiders. These are secrets of people who belong to the Deaf Culture. SL interpreters are necessary where people with HI and the hearing interact. Interpreters are trained professional who act as a cultural and linguistic bridge between people with HI and the hearing world. Their job is to convey messages to all participants clearly, accurately with original intent and tone. They are strictly bound by Code of ethics that guarantee confidentiality and impartiality. Our systems and sectors lack the use of SL interpreters. As educationists we should not look upon the government to do it alone. It is time our SL specialists convene meetings to arrange strategies of meeting SL training challenges in our country.

12. METHODOLOGY

The study employed the qualitative approach based on the phenomenology design to collect data on what the hearing world think about learning and teaching SL. Phenomenology is an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon from which philosophical conclusions can be drawn. It is the best for this study because participants are studied in their context. The design draws conclusions from participants' stories in relation to the phenomenon understudy. There being a dearth of knowledge on perspectives held by people on SL learning and teaching in Zimbabwe it is noble to carry out this study. The qualitative approach is a social science most preferred method of inquiry. It was imperative to engage the qualitative phenomenology approach design to learn views of the hearing on learning SL. The aim of the phenomenological paradigm is to give people a better understanding of SL as a communication mode for people with HI and greater insight into their life situations in relation to views on SL learning by hearing people. The fact that the researcher had basic SL skills assisted in creating rapport between them and the participants with HI. The study aimed to identify experiences of hearing people in learning SL

13. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population included hearing people from the urban streets of Harare who were interested in deaf education and/or SL learning. Random sampling was used to select participants. Participants' interest in the study were sought to ensure that only interested people in the area of study were recruited. Contacts and interactions with people with HI were used as a selection criterion. Anyone meeting the criteria automatically became a study participant. Twenty hearing participants, that is ten males and ten females were selected for this study.

14. INSTRUMENTATION

The paper uses the most common qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, observations and document analysis to obtain views held by hearing people on SL learning in Zimbabwe. The paper adopted a triangulated approach. Triangulation involved seeking accounts from three or more perspectives. Semi-structured guiding questions were used to elicit views of hearing people on SL learning. Shortcomings were verified through checking consistence with observations and analysed documents. Observations gave cues and understanding to obtained data and observed behaviours. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were valuable assessment tools that allowed participants to share their experiences. Such evidence was supported by capturing actual responses. Use of direct quotes helped in presenting accurate depictions of the phenomenon under study. Documents are a data source in qualitative research (Bowen, 2009). The nature and form are described before they are analysed and may be used as support materials or facts. Interpretations are done.

15. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section describes the findings. It also explains and discusses how the findings answer the research questions and arising assumptions from both literature and collected data. Themes that developed from the study included SL training needs, curriculum need, positive attitude change towards SL learning and best practices. These themes were discussed under research questions.

16. TO WHAT EXTENT CAN SL BE LEARNT LIKE ANY OTHER LANGUAGE?

Learning means one gets to know something through experiences and/or instructions. The study findings have generally shown that SL learning and communication with people who are deaf and hard of hearing is surrounded by a lot of controversy and debates. SL was accorded many definitions. Some defined it as a language for the deaf and/or talking hands. Others associated SL with mental challenges and/or called them people without a language and even called them mutes. Despite such definitions the majority of the hearing participants considered SL learnable by both people with HI and the hearing public while the minority had mixed sentiments about it. In view of this, hearing participants reported; SL is teachable and learnable by anyone interested. Three of them said; we are hearing but have completed a 5 day basic SL short course. We encourage all people to learn SL. Anyone can learn it though challenging. One of these three participants echoed; It is learnable but it leaves your hands and arms aching and make you very tired at the end of day. The findings reflect concepts held by hearing people on what SL is. To help clear misconceptions hearing people must participate in the deaf world. It also stresses that though SL is learnable it is strenuous to learn (Berke, 2011; Pomoni, 2009; Kolod, 2004). Responses from the hearing minority reported; SL cannot be learnt by hearing people because it is a language with a lot of variations and jargon. It is a language for people who are HI and it cannot be taught to hearing people because it is too abstract. Lack of qualified hearing SL instructors makes us think in between the lines that SL cannot be learnt by all but few with an in born skill.

As observed by the researchers although majority of hearing participants saw SL as a learnable language their tones expressed unknown fears and imagined insurmountable difficulties to learn and communicate with people with HI as evidenced by one hearing participant who says; I look curiously at people when communicating in SL, infact I envy SL speakers. I wish I could sign too although from mere observations, I take it to be a very difficult to learn and understand. One of the participants reported; I do not think I will ever be able to learn SL because my hands are not as flexible as of people with HI. The study hopes not to leave its readers the same, but to inculcate in each one a spirit of wanting to learn SL. Similarly Berke (2010) agrees that SL is difficulty to learn although some hearing people speculate that it can be learnt easily. One therefore needs to put a lot of effort to learn SL.

The study revealed both understanding and ignorance of some of the hearing people on what SL is and its learn ability. Some suggested that it was too technical with too much details to observe and too many variations in hand positioning and facial expression. Here are some of the expressed sentiments; Speaking in sign language makes one look like a mentally confused person; I do not want to learn SL because of the way people who are deaf scroll their faces; I cannot learn SL because the varied combinations of hand shape positions confuse me. It means caution needs to

be exercised when teaching SL to hearing people. One needs to explain every action, demonstrate and ask speaking hearing learners to practice it. Another commented; I do not want my child to learn together with the deaf else it retards his communication speech. HI is neither transferable from one person to the other nor is it contagious. People therefore need education on deafness.

17. HOW DO HEARING PEOPLE PERCEIVE SL LEARNING?

There are several types of variation in all human languages. It has often been thought that they are not real languages. Most of the hearing participants in the study had had encounters with people with HI while one had never come across a person with HI as already alluded. The researchers were surprised by this respondent whose reasons for this was that he always travelled by own transport thus meeting such people was rare on his routes. Further interviews with him revealed; It is a language for the deaf and has nothing to do with hearing people. I never get a chance to attempt communication with them since I have never had contacts with them. All I know through tales is that they exist and they are bully. This can be treated as an issue of negative attitudes towards people with HI. Some hearing people perceived SL as gestures while others took it to be signs for the deaf world without a relationship to spoken languages. Other participants had these perceptions; we find people with HI to be very intelligent because they are born without a language without an idea of environmental or language sounds but they find their way in life. People with HI have signs for every word and action. This puzzles us. What a good memory they have. One articulated; I take it to be miraculous at times. Given a chance I want to learn SL. Here hearing people acknowledged cognitive equality with people with HI.

Most hearing participants echoed; we are ready to learn SL but the problem is lack of SL language training centres, SL books and qualified SL teachers. The study shows that hearing people have mixed sentiments. For example the minority of them hold negative definitions of what SL is. They at the same time suggest that SL is learnable and that they would want to learn it if given a chance. Here the participatory approach could help cultivate positive relationships between the hearing and people with HI. Thus this is likely to bring them together and enhance SL learning.

18. WHAT CHALLENGES ARE LIKELY TO BE EXPERIENCED IN THE LEARNING OF SL IN ZIMBABWE?

Many hearing people question whether SL is a bona fide language. Bloom and Lahey's endorse its being a language. Thus the ZSL fits the conception of being a language. As observed by the researcher SL is marginalised by the dominant indigenous languages already referred by Akach (2010) as double linguistic imperialism. Literature concludes that in Africa, the situation of SL is marginalised by Western languages by the preference for other African indigenous languages to SL. Prior to this the fluency of SL is deprived. Hearing participants in this study suggested that the fierce looks displayed by people with HI scared them. One reported; People with HI always look fierce and emotionally charged when communicating, especially among themselves. The other participant reported them as looking fierce, bully and unfriendly as they communicate. However Kolod (2004) comforts readers by asserting that everyone uses emotional facial expressions, but people who use SL use a different kind of facial expressions as an essential part of the language. Indicating that we must learn to tolerate their facial expression and grab chance to learn their different meanings. One hearing participant who had completed the basic SL short course complained as follows; I have difficulties in distinguishing words with hand positions that look similar such 'easy' and 'cheap'. This makes me not enjoy learning SL. In agreement Berke (2011) asserts that one reason some hearing people resist learning is because they think they need to become efluent in it. It means SL instructors should make sure that they demonstrate the differences and expose learners to a lot of practices without rushing them. However, Koold (2004) notes that SL poses particular challenges to people whose primary language are spoken languages.

The researcher observed that hearing people use signs daily to add meaning to speech. Signs strengthen their daily talk but they look down on SL as a Language. It is a natural language for people with HI. One participant reported; ... but it is a disadvantaged language in the dark where there is no light and speakers cannot see the signs. This challenge is overcome by using touch and feeling. Another participant echoed; Lack of practice, makes me easily forgot taught skills. It

means that SL training centres should frequent workshop the trained signers. Centres may enhance SL learning by supplying them with SL materials such as CDs, DVDs, dictionaries and books. This may encourage SL learners to practice on their own and even teach others. The more hearing people learn SL the minimal are negative attitudes towards it and even towards people with HI themselves. In view of this, one participant suggested; every school should teach Deaf Education, deaf culture and hold SL evening training sessions for workers and daylight sessions for the unemployed. Another reported; I suggest establishment of SL caffers where a person can pay one dollar to go through a 30 minutes basic SL topic session with an instructor. This will make many people attain basic skills in SL in an affording step by step manner. This study highlights SL training as the key means to enhancing SL learning by hearing people.

One participant said, People with HI are suspicious of hearing people. They take long to accept hearing people. This has great effects on SL learning. May be education in interacting with others can resolve this. The finding suggests that people with HI have their share of contributions to prevailing negative attitudes towards SL learning by the hearing population. Here indicators are that despite many complains about SL and the hearing population Disability Studies educationists should educate people with HI on how to relate to others.

19. HOW BEST CAN SL BE LEARNT IN ZIMBABWE?

Many suggestions were raised and the study captured some of them as follows; the state needs to develop a sign language policy from which all sectors should draw the expectations and guidelines; SL should be given similar status given to Shona, English and Ndebele and should be; SL should be taught from primary to secondary level; Its attainment should be recognised just as English; and that SL dictionaries should be disseminated into all schools and communities. Such action may give SL the universal means of communication highlighted by Pomon (22009). One participant suggested, *Engage people who are deaf to teach SL. People with HI know both English and SL. Universities should admit both the deaf and the hard of hearing.* Another narrated; *Now that SL has a language status, lets not wait upon the government to disseminate the information or even teach it but chain teaching should be encouraged in our communities .*One of the participants who had gone through basic SL training suggested;

Institutions with SL specialists should not be spectators but take a leading role to carry out SL trainings in schools and rural communities. They should also educate policy makers and encourage government supported training programmes. Evening SL classes should be created for the employed and school holiday classes for school children. When people with HI hold public functions we should support in great numbers.

It means the public should participate in issues of people with HI in a meaningful manner. It further expresses it as the duty of everyone to see to it that SL is taught to all people. One participant echoed, *We need a lot of SL materials like books, CDs, DVDs. The materials should be disseminated both to the rural and urban communities. We also greatly need SL interpreters.* The researchers acknowledged that with such measures in place Zimbabwe can achieve global competitiveness in deaf education.

One elderly echoed; *Young people should be taught SL in their schools to allow chain teaching.* Meaning that taught school children will in turn teach their siblings at home who will further teach their parents or guardians. This breakthrough is likely to help clear misconceptions about learning SL. The best way to master SL is by interacting with other SL users (Berke, 2011). SL can be the universal means of communication that has the ability to bring together hearing and non hearing individuals (Pomoni, 2009). Another participant suggested; *SL policies need to be enacted to mandate SL teaching and learning.* Indicators are that there is need for a national SL policy from which various sectors and institutions can draw their own. Policy will then enforce SL learning and at the same time suggest how it should be learnt or taught.

20. CONCLUSIONS

From the above findings, it can be concluded that:

- SL learning and communication with people who are deaf and hard of hearing is surrounded by a lot of controversy and debates.

- The hearing participants considered SL learnable by both people with HI and the hearing public though it is strenuous to learn.
- SL is difficult to learn although some hearing people speculate that it can be learnt easily.
- SL is too technical with too much details to observe and too many variations in hand positioning and facial expression.
- Some hearing people perceived SL as gestures while others took it to be signs for the deaf world without a relationship to spoken languages, hence showing negative attitudes.
- Many hearing people question whether SL is a bona fide language.
- SL is marginalised by the dominant indigenous languages in preference of other indigenous languages
- The fierce looks displayed by people with HI scared the hearing people.
- SL poses particular challenges to people whose primary language are spoken languages.
- The more hearing people learn SL the minimal are negative attitudes towards it and even towards people with HI themselves.
- People with HI have their share of contributions to prevailing negative attitudes towards SL learning by the hearing population.

21. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above conclusions, it is recommended that:

- A national SL policy with detailed implementation strategies be developed.
- Institutions to draw clear and detailed SL policies from the national policy.
- There is need for SL interpreters in every sector.
- Parents with children with HI should go through special SL training programmes.
- SL practicing centers and cafes be created to allow SL learning and practicing continuity.
- SL materials like books, CDs extra be developed and disseminated to all people .
- Most of the SL teachers should come from the d/Deaf community itself.
- SL should be used as the method of communication in the classes for the deaf and hard of hearing and in inclusive education.
- SL instructors should make sure that they demonstrate the differences and expose learners to a lot of practices without rushing them.
- SL should be taught in schools, colleges and universities.
- Day and evening SL training should be carried out.

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