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The Hands with Eyes and Nose in the Palm: As Effective Communication Alternatives for Profoundly Deaf People in Zimbabwe

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Abstract:
Drawing from the experiences and testimonies of people with profound deafness, the study qualitatively explored the use of the hands with eyes and nose in the palm as communication alternatives in the field of deafness. The study was prompted by the 27 year old lady, Leah Katz-Hernandez who is deaf who got engaged in March 2015 as the 2016 outgoing President Obama's new receptionist at the White House in the United States of America (USA). Further prompts were influenced by the July 2015 paper which was presented at the USA Offices at Eastgate in Harare by Professor Thomas K. Holcomb of Ohlone College from California who is profoundly deaf. The paper emphasized on appropriate provisions as instrumental in enhancing academic performance and productiveness of people with profound hearing impairment (HI), a term used interchangeably with deaf. Point of saturation determined the sample size after no-more new data could be obtained from participants who were purposively selected on the criterion of having succeeded in their academic and professional life despite being profoundly deaf and experience in teaching people who are deaf. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were used to explore the communication experiences of people with HI while guided by the ubuntu and person first philosophy; the Symbolic Interaction Theory (SIT) and Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT). Patterns and themes emerging from the collected data were sought through the thematic analysis approach. The findings revealed that, the majority of people with profound deafness considered visual cues as central to successful communication despite the level of hearing loss because vision and touch enabled interaction. The study considered the hands with eyes nose in the palm as effective communication alternatives for people with HI since what was smelt, tasted and seen could be interpreted through hand signing. However, use of Sign Language interpreters was proposed for meaningful inclusive practices rather than skill every lecturer in deaf education. Further studies were proposed on policies mandating the use of talking hands and all other alternatives.
Keywords: hands with eyes, mouth, nose, palm, communication alternatives, deaf

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Deafness has in the past been considered a condition where victims are taken as less educable, incapable of completing secondary education or high school and less likely to go as far as university level but a paradigm shift is slowly developing against these views. However, despite a dearth of knowledge in similar studies the few available related publications seem to be reshaping the hearing world against myths on people with profound hearing impairment (HI). Such mindsets are slowly changing as evidenced by adverts and testimonies about their educability, employability and revelations of successful independent living. The shifts to inclusive practices seem to be taking a centre stage in deaf education [disability studies] and also increase their educational opportunities despite continuing controversies about the effectiveness of the practices. According to my experiences as an educationist; the educability, employability and social being-ness of people with profound HI continue to be questioned against Sign Language (SL) as their main means of communication just because the hearing world considers oralism as a pre-requisite. Hearing impairment as already alluded denotes a deficiency in auditory perception [whether congenital or acquired; mild; severe or profound]. It is important to note that any amount of hearing loss is serious enough to interfere with normal development and maintenance of speech communication skills (Rosen, 2008). The terms deaf and hearing impairment are used interchangeably in this study despite controversies and debates over their definitions.

People with HI are seen as low academic performers thus are generally considered as underachievers in their career life but this study aims to transform society at large from such a mindset. Hearing losses can be classified by degree of loss, age at onset, causes of impairment or structures affected (Orelove and Sobsey, 1991). Degree of loss may be classified according to sound frequency (Hertz or Hz/cycles) per second and intensity levels – decibels (dB) that the individual requires to hear speech or other sounds. Orelove and Sobsey (1991) divided hearing loss into mild (35 – 53 dB), moderate (55 -69 dB), severe (70-89 dB) and profound (90+dB). Each loss brings with it varied communication problems but that does not stop people with HI from showcasing their capabilities. People in the severe category may hear very loud speech but be unable to function in conversations without help and may not be able to use ordinary telephones (Moores, 1996; Hutchinson, and Kewin, 1994), thus every level of hearing loss may impact on made vocational choices. Thus, despite the degree

of hearing loss one might find a profoundly deaf child craving to be a pilot yet limitations created by the nature of the impairment disqualifies such goals. This view reflects that despite missing audition and speech, persons with HI are not barred from aspiring to take up jobs where listening and the spoken language are pre-requisites since technological advances have been designed to enhance communication. This study therefore emphasizes that people with congenital profound HI should be given opportunities to make vocational choices suiting their most preferred means of communication as evidenced by the already exemplified.

Deafness present at birth or that occurred prior to the development of speech and language is termed pre-lingual deafness. Post-lingual deafness is when deafness occurred after acquiring speech and language. According to Shield and Meier (2012), Rosen (2008) and Orelove and Sobsey, (1991) a high percentage of such people are likely to make informed decisions compared to the pre-lingually deaf people. Onset age affects language development and consequently educational achievement but with adequate support that should not stop such people from undertaking vocational choices of interest. The implication is that there should always be a link between educational achievements and job selection or preparation. Awareness of what one is not able to or able to do despite the impairment is essential in making informed choices. Though very noble this seems absent or a malpractice in the Zimbabwean context yet this has chances of blocking some capable people with profound deafness from making vocational choices meeting their talents/creativities. Some companies and job agents have tendencies of denying them opportunities at the mere realization that they are profoundly deaf. On the other hand few studies on Zimbabwe portray individuals with profound deafness in Zimbabwe who have successfully completed university studies and are living fulfilling lives despite severity of the their hearing losses through self determination (Mutswanga, 2016). The study aims to transform the hearing world so that they adhere to the needs and voices of people with profound hearing loss.

This study was thus, prompted by reading several publications one of which included news about the new occupations of the 27 year old HI lady, Leah Katz-Hernandez who relies on signing and Sign Language interpreters. The National Broadcasting Cooperation (NBC) News (2015) on March 29 described Leah's opportunity as *ground breaking news at the White House* by working as the new receptionist for the 2016 outgoing President Obama of the United States of America (USA). This is a very good example of a top–down leadership commitment to disability issues. Further influences arose from the personal contact I had with Professor Thomas K. Holcomb of Ohlone College from California who is profoundly deaf but is a very successful academic professor and author. In July 2015, Professor Thomas K. Holcomb visited the USA Offices at Eastgate in Harare, Zimbabwe and made an academic presentation to attendees. The presentation emphasized on the appropriateness of provisions, positive attitudes towards people with HI and recognition of Sign Language as instrumental in making them equal contesters as their hearing counterparts in educational performance, employment and productiveness. Professor Thomas K. Holcomb's presentation inspired the development of this study title. The occupational rise of these two examples plus many other living testimonies from successful deaf individuals in Zimbabwe instigated the development of this study with a view to show that the hands and visual cues were relevant communication alternatives which could equally enhance the dream pathways of persons with profound deafness just as audition and the spoken language for the hearing counterparts.

Debates and controversies surrounding the use of the hand with eyes, mouth and nose in the palm also raised questions on the effectiveness of these communication alternatives. However, it is important to note that hearing and vision are key senses that people use to acquire information heard; seen; smelt and tasted after it is registered, processed and interpreted by the brain. The absence of natural hearing in people with HI brings with it several negative impacts to language acquisition and use of other modalities for communication, language and information acquisition. Regarding all that, visual cues seem the main communication avenues for most persons with HI. The palm with eyes, mouth and a nose in *Figure 1.1* represents the key modalities that deaf people use to acquire knowledge, information and skills. In other words, the eyes, mouth and nose in the palm are the communication icons of most persons with HI. Most people who are congenitally and profoundly deaf talk with hands and eyes, implying the exploitation of what they eyes see, the tongue tastes and what the nose smells through hand(s) signing. The focus of the study is to urge children with congenital profound HI and their parents not to feel ashamed or out of place in the hearing society where audition and the spoken languages are regarded as pre-requisites in communication. It also aims to challenge the field of linguistics to publicly acknowledge SLs as equivalent to spoken languages. This clarity is likely to be the foundation to the recognition of SL by both the hearing world and people with HI, themselves. This is further hoped to influence parents with profoundly deaf children to give equal educational opportunities to such children.

The study's focus is to make it known to the hearing world that people who are d/Deaf are people first despite their impairment. The lived experiences are expected to set pace through creating educational and employment opportunities for people with HI as equal contesters, without putting restrictive measures to used communication modalities but with high consideration on the possessed knowledge and skills they bring. The study's thrust is to showcase that whether profound, severe or hard of hearing, people with HI are testified in these stories as *people who can* do anything when supplied with the most needed provisions in their early

childhood and continued education. According to National Broadcasting Cooperation (NBC) News (2015), the 2016 outgoing President Obama of the USA's gesture of employing a lady who is deaf as his receptionist is ground breaking news and a sign of commitment to inclusive practices. Such a gesture resembles the person first and ubuntuism which guides this study. The other focus of the study is to remind the hearing world that they equally depend on the same modalities to acquire information thus, should not despise the use of the same modalities in communication when used by people who are d/Deaf.

Hearing allows us to gather important information about the surrounding environment through listening but profound deafness variably affects communication modalities and understanding of the spoken language (Johnson, 2014); Stokoe, 2001). The eyes are an important organ of sight which is regularly used to find out how the world and its surroundings look like. People who are congenitally and profoundly deaf use visual cues and their talking hands to interpret information. In support Buchler (2010) posits that the hand trajectory alone does not disclose sufficient information thus, a multi-modal approach is recommended in deaf education. Hands or gestures serve as an alternative mode of human communication to complement and give deeper meaning to day-to-day conversations even to the hearing world. Despite the fact that the hearing world seems to continue to discriminate against people with profound HI but they remain equal beings with missing hearing just as anyone of us has his/her own impairment(s) but with differences in degrees. As noted by the (United Nations Convention Rights of People with Disabilities) UNCRPD (2006) and Arneson (1999), all human beings possess fundamental rights and freedom to use the means of communication they are comfortable with. The UNCRPD (2006) further exclusively underlines that people who are d/Deaf are entitled to recognition and support of their linguistic and cultural needs on equal basis as hearing peers.

The UNCRPD expects the state parties who have ratified and subscribed to its principles to periodically submit authentic progress reports as signs of commitment. This is a robust and noble instrument but its effectiveness seems undermined by its means of monitoring and evaluating progress in various countries. Maybe if member states get divided into clusters for ease monitoring and authentic evaluation that may reduce flawed information and cosmetic self-assessments reports. The differences between the way we see and hear readily illustrates that visible signs carry more information than audible signs (Stokoe, 2001), exemplifying a common intrusion of visible signs into sequences of normally spoken signs. People who are congenitally and profoundly deaf's communication are represented by visual cues. Deaf signers make words and sentences out of easily seen bodily movement, just as hearing speakers make words and sentences out of vocal sounds (Stokoe, 2001). In other words, visual systems and/or sounds audited are primary symbols of a language.

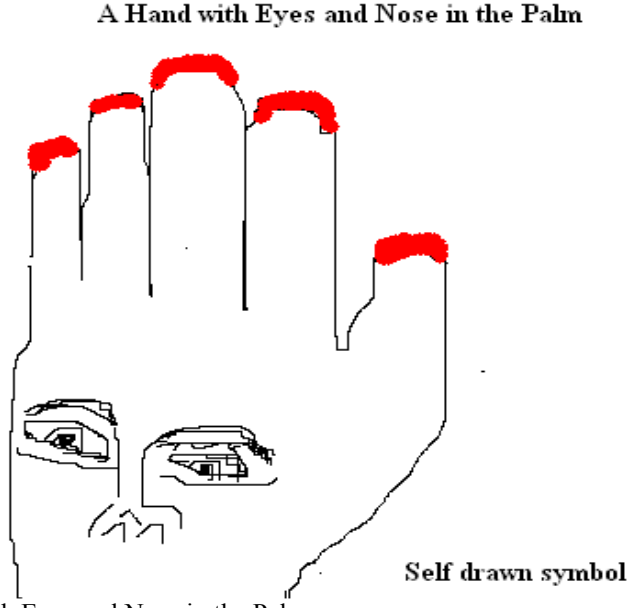

Figure 1.1 The hand with Eyes and Nose in the Palm
Source: Self Source

However, according to Stokoe (2001) vision has an advantage because it is neurologically a richer and more complex physiological system and makes use of much more of the brain's capacity than does hearing. Touch is a neglected sense in our culture, and hands are too often ignored as avenues of expression (Miles, 2003). Some deaf-blind participant excerpts' in (Miles, 2003) reported, "*Hands are my freedom from a dark silent world"* while the other echoed, *"Hands are my window to life. Through them I can truly see and hear"* and another said, *"My hand are my ears and my voice"*. Such understanding seems absent thus this study aims to inculcate it among hearing people in Zimbabwe. In support (Miles, 2003) further asserts that hands can convey

pragmatic functions, express feelings and intentions and all that exhibits conversational interaction, whether the conversation is verbal or nonverbal. In other words both verbal and nonverbal users should not see or consider either Sign Languages or spoken languages as superior over the other. This should give assurance to users that both languages carry equal worthiness as modes of communication, as attested by Leah Katz-Hernandez and Professor Thomas K. Holcomb's successful job placements.

Hands therefore serve as ways of making language accessible to a person who cannot see or hear. In support Miles (2003) and Stokoe (2001) sum it all when they propose that, Sign Language is one of the most efficient ways to make language tactually accessible. Hands are therefore reliable sense organs that can reliably access language. However, it is important to be aware that eye movements are a key part of the facial behaviour because they can invariably be involved in facial displays. Hand cues are therefore very useful in deaf education. It is because of some of the highlighted issues in this study, that people who are deaf describe themselves as *deaf pride,* that is, proud of whom they are and the way they communicate.

1.2 The Ubuntu Philosophy, Symbolic Interactionism Theory (SIT) and Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT)

The ubuntu and person first philosophy guides the study and that is further augmented by the selected principles of the Symbolic Interaction Theory (SIT) and Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT). According to Msila (2014) ubuntu is an African philosophy which magnifies group solidarity. The study selected key principles from the ubuntu and person first philosophy which the study considered as most appropriate in guiding the phenomenon understudy. Ubuntu houses human communication of all cultural groups and societies. Communication competencies are reinforced through socialisation, and community support with a view to create relationships. In other words, according to the ubuntu philosophy a person is what he/she is because it is the essence of human existence. People with HI are robbed and deprived the ability to communicate using the spoken language because of hearing loss. Ubuntu expresses the essence of significant others in each individual's life despite one's impairment or condition. The study is further guided by the selected principles of the Symbolic Interactivism (SIT) and Cognitive Dissonance Theories (CDT) to show how communication challenges caused by loss of hearing could be enhanced so that persons with HI are understood by significant others in their communities. Such recognition is likely to further enhance the person first theory where a person's condition is secondary to the being. The positive recognition is expected to transform significant others so that they feel encouraged to consider people who are d/Deaf as equal beings with freedom to demonstrate their capabilities in a language they are comfortable with, just as hearing people do with spoken languages in Zimbabwe

According to La Rossa and Reitzer (1993) SIT is a significant symbol where vocal meanings or gestures held by the user are the same as to whom the message is directed to. In other words, the theory urges the majority spoken language users to learn the language of the minority deaf who in this study use the hands with eyes and nose in palm as their communication alternatives. The emphasis is on considering their academic and professional voices in their areas of competence rather than use their impairments. Knowledge and skills one holds should be matters of concern rather than use impairments as educational and job placement obstacles (Miles, 2003); Stokoe, 2001). In support, Aboulafia (1991) describes nature of symbols as signs, for example, smoke is a symbol of the presence of fire. Symbols transform understanding and should cause a response from the other person being interacted with. Due to these reasons some principles of Symbolic Interactionism fit well into this study as enhancers.

Several studies consider ubuntu as precisely an African philosophy but Denzin and Lincoln (2008) remind researchers that some of the yardsticks used to measure the ubuntu philosophy are also considered as qualities of some western philosophies and ideology. That seems to imply that ubuntu which is being-ness or humanity is applicable across most of the societies worldwide as a *size fits all* philosophy though African ubuntu emphasizes on collectivism while the Westernized system places emphasis on individualistic. This opens doors for further debates, controversy and further studies. However, despite the arguments, ubuntu embraces some of the key principles that are in congruent with ethnography and qualitative research used in this study. In other words, ubuntu and ethnography share an ontology guiding or complementing the used qualitative approach. The focus is that the hearing world needs to accept SL as an equally superior means of communication which should not determine one's placement in society, at school and workplace but should consider the possessed skills, talents and capacity as exemplified by the professional placements of Professor Thomas K. Holcomb of Ohlone College from California and Leah Katz-Hernandez in preceding sections.

1.3 Language as a communication vehicle

A language is a vehicle of communication which embodies the attitudes, behaviour, beliefs and perceptions of a particular group of people (D/deaf Culture, n.d). Persons who are congenitally and profoundly deaf use their hands to convey and interpret information obtained through eyes, mouth and nose cues. The hands with eyes and nose in the palm therefore replace the communication modalities of sound obtained through hearing and

speaking. In other words, the alternative means of communication equally play an important role as when information is acquired through natural hearing or any other modalities. Language is not only about producing sound but it's a product of culture which includes body language and many other symbols accepted by the particular community. Each language thus uses its own accepted symbols to convey information and that authenticates why SL is not universal but that does not reduce its relevance as a natural language for people with profound HI. Additionally, gestures in day-to-day communication have a major role to complement communication processes and conveyance of meaning though despised as major communication modalities for people who are D/deaf (D/deaf Culture, n.d).

1.3.1 Hearing Parents' Communication Perspectives on Alternatives for Persons who are d/Deaf

Unfortunately, most hearing parents have limited access to SL, understanding it and even offering empirical evidence of what works or does not work with children who are d/Deaf (Johnson, 2014). The acceptance of the communication alternatives seems an issue of controversy in most communities. Hearing parents also need to be aware that children with profound hearing impairment's communication approaches are not fixed but change as their needs and preferences change. With regards to this (Johnson, 2014) proposes that parents should follow their deaf children's communication preferences and showcase their capabilities rather than join those who condemn their means of communication**.** It could be argued that, requesting a person who is congenitally and profoundly deaf to articulate when they cannot is likened to asking them to fight a battle with tied hands. However, the vision and hand philosophy according to Mutswanga and Sithole (2014) can set free people who are d/Deaf by allowing them to express themselves in ways or the language they are mostly comfortable with. Most persons with profound HI are ware-housed in their families, schools, workplaces and communities where they are forced to orally communicate and speech-read despite struggles they go through (Mutswanga, Revised SPED 309 Module Chapter in Press). In support Hintermair (2006) stresses that; coping with a hearing loss must not degenerate into battling against a defect but reinforce what is available, healthy, and strong. Such considerations are likely to promote the quality of life of most persons with congenital and profound deafness as exemplified by Leah Katz-Hernandez and Professor Thomas K. Holcomb's job placements. All this validates the risk of a contaminated quality of life for people with congenital profound hearing impairment.

1.3.2 Supporting use of Communication Alternatives for People with Profound Deafness

People with profound HI use the hand as the main avenue for communication with the support of visual cues**.** It is the hand which informs the eyes while the brain registers; processes and interprets the information**.** It is for this reason that SL is sometimes described as talking with hands as acknowledged by excerpts in Miles (2003)'s studies. Equally other cues or analytical tools that assist in giving alternative information are the noses where the hair-cells smell all odours and register them while the brain interprets them as sweet or bad smells, poisonous, danger warning for instance fires, burning food and extra. That then, cautions us not to concentrate on identifying the weaknesses of the auditory mechanisms of deaf people but the modalities they can exploit so that they access information, concepts, knowledge and extra. Antonakas, Roussos and Zafeiriou (n.d) consider SLs as grammatically rich and complex as the spoken language even though they differ in grammatical structures but they in most instances exhibit very similar properties to the spoken languages. It is important to be aware that, non-verbal behaviour predates verbal communication because soon after birth individuals rely first on non-verbal means to express themselves, for example, crying or sucking fingers as a sign of hunger.

Despite the fact that persons who are congenitally deaf are sometimes viewed as underprivileged communicators by the hearing world; Marschark (2009) states that nationally, across all post-secondary institutions, about 35% of students who are deaf graduate from two-year programmes as compared to 40% of their hearing peers; and 30% of them graduate from four-year programmes, compared to about 70% of their hearing peers. At the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, at college of Rochester Institute of Technology, the retention to graduation rate for students with HI in two-year programmes is 49% and in four-year programmes, it is 70%, (Gallaudet Research Institute, (2003). In support Kelly (2014) notes that, from each of the eight colleges at Rochester Institute of Technology during the four decades from 1968-2007 deaf students earned pass rate in the programmes of Science = 2.8%; Engineering = 1.5%; Computing/Information Technologies = 1.9%; College of Applied Science and Technology = 12.0%; Business = 6.6%; Imaging Arts & Sciences = 6.3%; Liberal Arts = 7.6%; National Technical Institute for the Deaf = 56.0%; Continuing Education = 0.5%; Printing = 1.8% and Fine Arts = 3.0%**.** In part, that supports the need for early communication interventions.

However, the results are comparatively positive but it is sad and unfortunate to note that such attainments are achieved or obtained after struggles and spending six or more years to just complete a two year programme (Kelly, 2014); Marschark, 2009). It implies that deaf education needs restructuring. Accountable authorities and institutions also need to rethink as to how communication strategies of persons who are congenitally and profoundly deaf could be improved through early interventions, a foundation which seems under-addressed in Zimbabwean systems for PWDs. The study aims to establish how principles of ubuntu and person first theory could be applied to enhance the use of the hands with eyes and nose in the palm as

communication alternatives for persons who are d/Deaf. This knowledge should further facilitate understanding of Sign Language (SL) as a natural and visual language for people who are d/Deaf. In other words, this study creates awareness amongst hearing people, educationists and any other key people to use face to face communication as the most appropriate strategy when interacting with people who are d/Deaf. That is further hoped to create the recognition of hands and eyes as major communication instruments in deaf education. The rationale is to enhance the acceptance of SL as a visual language for people who are d/Deaf. This should further reinforce the consideration of SL as an equally important language as English, Shona, Ndebele and any other spoken languages.

The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the experiences of people who are d/Deaf in using the palms with eyes and nose as communication alternatives? (2) What are the opportunities and challenges created by palms with eyes and nose as communication alternatives with individuals who are d/Deaf? (3) What mechanisms ought to be put in place to make people who are d/Deaf benefit from using the palms with eyes and nose as communication alternatives? These questions fed into the statement problem, 'To what extent are hands with eyes and nose in the palms communication alternatives for persons with hearing impairment?"

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The qualitative consultation targeted two university lecturers from each of the four selected universities in Harare in the department of education and six deaf graduates from Universities in Zimbabwe to solicit views on how they used hands with eyes and nose in the palm as communication alternatives in deaf education. The ethnography design was employed to help define how d/Deafness and cultural systems influenced some belief systems and displayed behaviours. The two principles of the ubuntu conceptual framework namely, compassionate and humanity guided this study as analytical lens. The informal testimonies revealed that with provisions in place most people with profound HI could advance in education, secure better jobs and live successful lives like any other person as already exemplified. It also revealed that a person's level of hearing loss was not a formidable barrier where one had an enabling background, exposure and had received positive attitudes which nurtured their desires or dreams. Such considerations could act as enhancers to successful livelihoods for people who are d/Deaf.

The study used the qualitative research method to elicit information from participants who were d/Deaf. Although qualitative research has a phenomenological aspect of perception, it is not the most appropriate design for this study because of a deaf cultural and belief system bias. It is because of such observations that Padilla-Diaz (2015) and Al-Busaidi (2008) argue that, although some studies proclaim that phenomenology permeates all qualitative researches that does not imply that phenomenology focus originates in all qualitative researches. This study is therefore guided by the ethnographic design. The ethnographic design is most appropriate for this study because of its focus on how d/Deafness, its beliefs and value systems influenced communication preference alternatives such as the palm and visual communication which is the focus for this study. Thus, according to Padilla-Diaz (2015) ethnography studies structures and functions of groups of people and their patterns of relationships and how they regulate their behaviours. The design was appropriate in this study because it gave a holistic picture about the group being studied by describing how cultural and social aspects of the group interrelated and influenced the members. However, care needs to be applied where ethnography is used as a design especially in the medical field because it is prone to misuse and superficial application (Padilla-Diaz, 2015).

On the other hand, globalisation is taking a centre stage world wide and thus has created global villages. As a result cross-culture cuts across all sectors including medical fields. It implies that its applicability in medical studies and any other fields should be done with great care as emphasized by Padilla-Diaz (2015) and Creswell (2013). The interrelatedness of the ethnographic design to the ubuntu philosophy guiding this study is a continuum support to the qualitative approach. In other words, there is high relatedness between the qualitative research; the ethnography design and the ubuntu philosophy thus are instrumental tools augmenting each other and that supports their use in this study.

The study population comprised of all people who are d/Deaf aged 18 and above who had passed secondary education; were successfully placed and considered SL as their natural language. These were the yardsticks used to measure participation eligibility. There being a dearth of statistics on numbers of deaf people with successful livelihoods it was difficult to determine the actual representative population. This is the reason why this study encourages Zimbabwean authorities to carry out surveys to establish the extent to which people with profound HI are being educated and placed on jobs. Such information is important in informing planners; policy makers and encouraging people who are profoundly deaf and their parents to take up educational and employment opportunities.

The above described population selection criteria had other factors to consider to select the study sample and my Doctoral studies equally assisted me to obtain the sample for this study. The appreciation of the

use of the hands with eyes and nose in the palm was used as one of the selection criteria. The key informant who was a key figure in the association for people with HI introduced me to the participants sharing the same vision and characteristics. Snow balling connected me to ten deaf participants sharing similar sentiments from which only six participants were selected after giving their participation consent while one most experienced lecturer in deaf education from each of the four universities which took part in this study was automatically considered after getting their consent to participant. The exercise revealed that generally d/Deaf people were aware of each other's communication belief systems and styles. In other words, d/Deaf people knew each other quite well despite being a too dispersed minority group. The study further selected one lecturer with experience in deaf education from each of the four universities. The ethnography design was used in this study as one of the popular anthropological methods in qualitative research work. Thus, in-depth interviews, observations and document analysis were used in this study as appropriate instruments which could help elicit information for the study.

The open-ended semi-structured interview questions were used as data collection instruments. Probes were used where possible to clarify issues. Additionally, questions were made feasible based on interactions with the participants. In other words, the in-depth interview questions were improved as interview sessions took place until point of saturation determined the sample size. The collected data was revised several times; coded and remarks were written against the corresponding sections. Emerging patterns and themes were then developed accordingly. Furthermore, revision of this data was done to cross-check for consistency, augmentation, understanding and relevance of the supporting literature review to the emerging patterns and themes.

1.5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The experiences of deaf people were analyzed and placed into patterns and themes and further interpreted, discussed and supported with related literature reviews where possible. As the collected data was interpreted the study explained the extent to which the reported lived experiences addressed the research questions.

1.5.1 Experiences of Persons who are Profoundly Deaf

The following selected excerpts highlighted the experiences of persons with congenitally profound deafness:

> *The hands, nose and eyes are very important parts of the body to us deaf people. In my view the mouth and the tongue are important for tasting, thus should also be counted as equally an important information disseminating modality* [Pee 1].

The participants with HI felt that, the tongue helps to determine the taste of things while hand signs described it. This is the reason why some participants proposed that the mouth and the tongue should be inserted in *Figure 1.1*. It was ideal to do so because people with profound HI give feedback of how something tastes through signs or talking hands.

> *My hands send messages to people I interact with. Anything that I see, smell and taste is signed. I talk with my hands. My talking hands make sense to a person who understands sign language but they do not make sense to a person who does not know sign language* [Pee 2].
>
> *I thank God for giving me hands with a voice. My hands are powerful tools which can send any messages. I am proud to communicate with my hands which are assisted by eyes, nose and the taste buds which determine how anything I eat tastes. How all things I eat taste is described by my hands and it is for this reason that I describe my hands and sight as very powerful communication tools* [Pee 3].

All the above excerpts reveal that persons with congenital and profound hearing impairment highly accept their hands with nose, mouth and eyes in the palm as essential tools in making them heard by both the hearing and deaf world. These tools are further highly valued as their communication means as expressed below:

> *The devil stole my ears thinking that I was going to be a useless individual but he made a mistake of leaving me with hands and eyes which today are helping me to interact with anyone who knows Sign Language* [Pee 4].
>
> *Am happy that am not the only deaf person who uses hands effectively for communication because I have watched my hearing parents interacting with my hearing siblings and neighbours and I have seen them using their hands to emphasize issues or make them understanding the issues they will be discussing* [Pee 5].

The preceding excerpts reveal that the majority of people with profound deafness did not lament over their hearing loss but they rather felt pride in using the hands with eyes and nose as communication alternatives. In support Drolsbaugh (1996) and D/deaf Culture (n.d) describes such people as *deaf pride*. Drolsbaugh (1996) further describes hearing loss as an invisible wall between the hearing and deaf people's world. However, some people may question what one is proud of when deafness is a condition which affects interaction and communication with the hearing world (Mutswanga, Revised SPED 309 Module Chapter in Press). The participants suggested that the pride was derived from the experienced comfort, rich and successful feedback with the visual communication tools. The excerpts also portray that most people who are d/Deaf are forced to communicate using their hearing parents' language. The findings revealed that such persons are robbed of this

pride and chances for self-identity. Mutswanga (2016) further concludes that children from the hearing families who are placed early at schools for the deaf are reported not to be ashamed of their deafness but to develop pride in being deaf due to early exposure. According to preceding excerpts parents/guardians with children who are congenitally and profoundly deaf and educationists are therefore urged to allow people who are profoundly deaf to make choices on preferred modes of interaction to reduce a '*silent life'* and empower them in gaining successful and independent lives where the deaf pride philosophy is promoted. Additionally, the hearing world is encouraged to learn SL in order to break the perceived invisible wall between the hearing and deaf worlds. In support *Pee 6* echoes:

> *I understand issues or concepts explained using hands or sign language than when am forced to speechread or articulate. Hands are involuntarily used by every person in day-to-day interactions. A person who does not use his hands or body language to emphasise what he/she communication is likely to be misunderstood* [Pee 6].

The lived experiences from this study demonstrated that the hearing parents who overlooked the use of the hands with eyes and nose in the palm as the main communication modalities or alternatives delayed and limited their d/Deaf children's access to linguistic input of both SL and the spoken language**.** Children from such families experienced language learning milestones although some later recovered after joining the d/Deaf world at schools for the deaf while those who failed to get such opportunities lagged behind in language development. Such findings demystify the wall placed between the hearing and the world of persons with profound hearing impairment. The findings enhance the hearing society to take persons who are d/Deaf as able and productive contributors to sustainable development despite the used modes of communication. On the other hand, the lecturers who participated in this study argued that in Zimbabwe there are no specific Universities for people with HI, so they have to learn under inclusive practices biased towards the hearing majority. These lecturers further complained that such systems created challenges for lecturers to employ teaching styles favourable to a minority population. Indicators therefore imply a high need to consult widely on best inclusive practices where both the majority and minority groups benefited. However, all the lecturers who took part in this study felt that the inclusive practices were too overwhelmed with expectations which they could not met because they felt that it was impracticable for all of them to be skilled in deaf education thus throughout the study use of Sign Language interpreters was proposed.

1.5.2 Opportunities and Challenges

The following excerpts reveal that people who are congenitally deaf equally gained knowledge and skills through visual communication as evidenced:

> *Use of the hand with eyes and nose in the palm has enabled me to communicate all my concerns including what I had seen; smelt; tasted; knowledge and skills gained. These tools save several purposes since I can use my hands, body language as well as facial expressions to communicate may needs or ideas at workplace* [Pee 1].
>
> *The hands with eyes and nose in the palm are my powerful means of communication with others and I am proud to communicate with them and they give me the opportunity to communicate with distanced people* [Pee 5].

The study demonstrated that hearing parents who invested in their children who were deaf by allowing them to be placed in schools for the deaf proliferated and increased the use of SL by both the hearing and people with HI (Kelly, 2014). The excerpts reflect that people who are congenitally profound deaf were satisfied by the use of the hands with eyes and nose in the palm as their means of communication. The hand and vision philosophy seems highly regarded by communities with hearing impairment even though the following challenges exuded:

> *I have challenges in communicating with the hands with eyes and nose in the palm with hearing individuals because hearing people think I am intellectually challenged despite the fact that I supervise some of them as an assistant accountant* [Pee 1].
>
> *Hearing people think that by throwing about my hands while talking I scatter objects surrounding me and it is for this reason that they feel uncomfortable with the way I communicate especially when I accidently knock down objects near me in meetings and cause messy and untidiness* [Pee 5].

According to my experiences some hearing people found such situations very annoying and ungentle. Further complains were that when such incidents occurred deaf individuals never showed remorse but continued to sign while throwing their hands about. It is because of such actions that some hearing people sometimes described deaf people as mentally challenged. In support Walker (2013) asserts that it is important to be aware that annoying habits to hearing people may not be annoying to the deaf community since they would be natural and cultural. Such a scenario seems compounded by lack of knowledge about deaf culture. Despite the highlighted challenges the findings revealed that hands are multi-modals in communication for all people and very instrumental amongst people with HI. People who are deaf also pointed out that hearing workmates bitterly complained about having to face them while interacting, a complain which was equally launched by all the lecturers who took part in this study. The findings further teach the hearing world to develop a spirit of tolerance,

consideration and patience towards people with HI and make sure they face them as assurance to understand each other. However, it could be that most people with HI over spread their hands without taking into account objects surrounding them because their focus is to be heard or put their message across to others indicating a need to educate them about it as expressed by the majority of lecturers who took part in this study. However, one of the lecturers expressed embarrassment on the way most deaf people scattered their hands during conversations and also scrolled their faces. The same lecturer complained that it made him feel uncomfortable and consider people who are deaf as people who are always angry and emotional.

People with HI further complained that at several workplace meetings where SL interpreters were not used, they felt offended by the use of terms *listen; stand up for a short energizer; observe* or *watch*; *repeat* without accompanying the verbal commands with relevant signs or use of hands to alert them of happenings at meetings, conferences or workshops. Deaf participants felt disappointed by such actions because they lost participation and some important information. Regarding that, people with HI argued that hearing workmates or organisations should take cognizance of their presence by alerting them first through hand petting on the shoulder rather than make verbal utterances without accompanying them with signs (Mutswanga, Revised SPED 309 Module Chapter, In Press). The study emphasized the need to workshop educationists and employers to enable healthy communication to transpire. Postance (2009) and Bauman (2008) suggest that a number of people with profound deafness have obtained sustainable livelihoods through using similar communication modalities as exemplified by Leah Katz-Hernandez; Professor Thomas K. Holcomb and the deaf participants who participated in this study and had successful job placements implying that, *people with profound deafness can.* However, the lecturers who participated in this study suggested that the situation needed to be revisited to reduce lecturer-student ratio to allow them to address individual needs of students according to the current global inclusive practices policies. Maybe the system needs to revise the policies first to design clear policies on how people with HI should be taught at Universities.

1.5.3 Proposed Options and Solutions

Excerpts in this section further express that people with congenital and profound HI can compete side by side their hearing counterparts:

> *I am from a family where Sign Language is the main means of communication but during my secondary education I learnt together with one classmate who was deaf who came from a hearing family where audition and the spoke language were the only communication means. To my surprise I passed well my 'O' levels while this classmate only passed carpentry and a commercial subject and to date he is a street vendor selling juicy cards and sweets while am well placed as a degreed secondary school teacher at one of the secondary schools for the deaf yet I only used sign language, finger-spelling and struggled to speech-read during my studies* [Pee 1]..

The above excerpt was equally supported by all lecturers who participated in this study but they proposed that lecturers needed to possess virtues of patience, tolerance and empathy because learners with HI took long to grasp and even took more years to complete their programmes. It is probably due to early exposure to the native language, Sign Language and the combination of parental attachment that *Pee 1* made positive achievements. The excerpts stress the importance of an appropriate and supportive environment as enriching deaf education and *Pee 5* shares the same view and expresses it as a ladder to further learning and achievements:

> *I come from a hearing family and had severe to profound mixed hearing loss. From primary school to secondary education I was placed at a school for the deaf where sign language and speech-reading were the main means of communication despite the fact that I came from a family were speech and audition were the only means used. I equally passed my 'O'Levels and am currently working as a computer assistance at one of the schools for the deaf* [Pee 5].

Johnson (2014) suggests that lack of skill in SL of the majority of hearing parents with children who are deaf is the possible reason why their children grew up to late ages with very limited linguistic access to neither SL nor the spoken language. In other words, most children who are deaf who came from hearing families had impoverished input in both the spoken language and SL but only later became proficient in SL after entering a school for the deaf. This is equally acknowledged by the following excerpt:

> *I come from a hearing family where I was forced to articulate and my parents sent me to an ordinary school where the spoken language was the only mode of interaction yet I was profoundly deaf. This forced me to rely on speech-reading which I was not proficient at. I worked hard and managed to come up with Grade 7 borderline passes which enabled placement at a secondary school for the deaf. Here I struggled to learn SL just for a short period and managed to catch up in my studies. Fortunately this exposure made me understand my capabilities thus, I passed 5 'O' Levels with Cs though it took me 6 years to achieve this. I completed a diploma in computer studies and am currently working as a computer technician and I also have a computers shop* [Pee 4].

The excerpts in preceding sections indicate that hearing parents who force their children with profound congenital HI to articulate and speech-read blocked their acoustic signals and this was also attested by Johnson

(2014) and Schachtner, in Stiemert-Strecker,Teuber, & Seckinger (2006). In support**,** Schechter, in Stiemert-Strecker *et al* (2006) stress that, empowerment processes start early for the affected families and their children with congenital HI. A multidisciplinary empowerment oriented approach was also emphasized. Furthermore, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is proposed as essential in deaf education. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) includes all forms of communication that express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas. We all make use of AAC, facial expressions/gestures, symbols or pictures, and write as communication modes so we must appreciate use of alternative communication by people who are d/Deaf. All the lecturers who participated in this study accepted all this but they argued that inclusive practices for people with HI did not make deeper considerations on lecturer skilled-ness in teaching them. They further argued that it was impracticable for all lecturers to be skilled in Sign Language thus; they proposed use of Sign language interpreters as the best solution for meaningful inclusive practices in Zimbabwean schools, colleges and universities.

1.6 LEARNT LESSONS

The hearing world is expected to gain insights from the revealed lived experiences and learn lessons from them. Furthermore, guided by the principles of compassion, justice and reciprocity; use of the hands with eyes and nose in the palm as communication alternatives should not create barriers for people who are d/Deaf since they are equally used for day-to-day errands by the hearing world. The study reminds us that the greatest disability creating barriers to educational and occupational opportunities to people who are deaf is in the minds of the hearing world and partially in d/Deaf people themselves for lack of assertiveness to claim their rights. That therefore implies that both groups need education to help them develop positive attitudes towards all the needs for PWDs in general. The findings therefore urges the hearing world to take the communication alternatives used by people who are d/Deaf out of the disability framework because it is the knowledge, skills and capabilities they possess that matter rather than deficits created by deafness. In support, Hintermair (2006) posits that coping with hearing loss should not degenerate into battling against a defect but reinforce what is available, healthy and strong. The hearing society should therefore turn away from the deficit perspective and stay conscious that *people who are d/Deaf can* as also noted by Hintermair (2006). Now that Sign Language recently gained recognition world-wide the study encourages the learning of SL by hearing individuals. The hearing world should refrain from a language classificatory problem.

The findings inform the hands with eyes and nose pedagogy and also informs both people who are d/Deaf and the hearing world that what is important is getting the message across to people it is met for. This is likely to help reshape some of the existing pedagogical structures. However, it is important to be aware that signs complement most of our day-to-day interactions in the hearing world. For example, pointing is an ubiquitous sign in everyday interactions meaning that the hearing society should refrain from ongoing controversies against SL. The excerpts in this study reflect that the majority of people with profound deafness find themselves marginalised by the hearing world because of communication barriers imposed by their conditions. Issues of negative attitude and considering d/Deaf individuals' means of communication as inferior to the spoken language seems to remain a major barrier as stressed by Quinn and Swanwick (2007) and Simser (1993), indicating the need to educate our nation so that they remove them. As emphasized by the lecturers who participated in this study, the Zimbabwean Education Systems needed to reconsider the engagement of Sign Language interpreters in schools, colleges, universities and at workplaces.

However, it is time all countries which ratified the UNCRPD (2006) shift in trajectories. The WHO and World Bank Report (2011) and Rosen (2008) note that people who are deaf share the right of humanity to work and learn but they live in societies that have not yet learned to fully protect these rights for fellowmen with disabilities despite claims as Africans to be guided by principles of ubuntu and the country's UNCRPD's membership. Insights from the study postulate that a human being with an ubuntu background should not use a person's means of communication as a barrier to accessing opportunities. Using the principles and strategies of the Symbolic Interactivism (SIT) and Cognitive Dissonance Theories (CDT) the study encourages the hearing world to allow people who are d/Deaf to use the language they are more comfortable with and to also develop positive attitudes towards the use of the hands with eyes, nose and mouth in the palm. In other words, condemnation of talking with hands and visual cues robes people with HI of their right to communicate and express themselves.

1.7 CONCLUSION

The publication of testimonies from various studies plus the exemplified successful job placement of *Leah Katz-Hernandez after successfully completing her academic and professional studies was not only ground breaking news for the White House in* United States of America (USA) under the 2016 outgoing President Obama; but remains global ground breaking news in the history of people who are d/Deaf. Additionally, the success of Professor Thomas K. Holcomb of Ohlone College from California who is profoundly deaf further ignites the

ground breaking news world-wide and confirms that *people who are D/deaf can* (Kelly, 2014). The common adage, *disability does not mean inability,* is therefore authenticated by such testimonies and stories. However, the study cautions parents and their children who are d/Deaf to be aware that successes do not just rain but one's self determination and the parents' commitment matter. Parents also need to invest in their children who are d/Deaf and allow them to use the communication alternatives they are comfortable with. On the other hand, the children should possess self determination and a spirit of working hard to make up for the communication and language challenges imposed by their deafness. The Zimbabwean inclusive practices is therefore encouraged to consider the engagement of Sign Language interpreters across its educational systems and workplaces.

1.7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings recommended that:

- There is need for the Board of linguists to go to the drawing board to consider how issues of language and communication could be improved in favour of people with profound hearing impairment.
- That the government plans vigorous advocacy and campaigns to lobby for people who are deaf's use of communication alternatives that individuals are more comfortable with and avoid imposing the hearing world's preferences.
- That various ministries develop language and communication policies where they recognise the need to consider the mode of communication preferences of people who are deaf.
- There is need for the government to come up with mandates where parents with children who are deaf timely receive communication programmes matching their children's hearing impairment conditions.
- That related institutions design communication programmes for the hearing public to skill them in ways of communicating with individuals who are deaf to pave way for their acceptance as equal beings to successful independent living.
- That the principles of ubuntu be used to guide the hearing society to see people who are deaf as independent language users in their school work and employment skills through use of Sign Language interpreters.

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