




## Teachers implementing Zimbabwean sign language regulatory frameworks for deaf learners in special schools

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**Abstract**—Effective implementation of sign language-based instruction is crucial for providing quality education to Deaf learners at special schools. Teachers experienced challenges to effectively implement sign language policies for the Deaf learners in Zimbabwean special schools. However, this study explores how teachers implement sign language regulatory frameworks for deaf learners in special schools. Drawing on qualitative data from teachers, headmasters, school inspectors, and psychologists. The findings revealed critical gaps in the in-service training and professional development opportunities available to teachers serving deaf students. Despite teachers reporting difficulties with sign language fluency and inadequate understanding of deaf culture and pedagogy, the study found a disconnect between teachers' expressed needs and the perspectives of district-level officials, who often did not perceive additional training as necessary. This study further highlights the heavy reliance on support from external donor organizations and NGOs to provide teachers with limited sign language workshops and resources. This overreliance on precarious external funding sources compromises the sustainability and scalability of professional development initiatives. The study's implications call for a comprehensive, government-led strategy to ensure all teachers in deaf schools receive robust, long-term training in sign language, Deaf education methodologies, and deaf cultural competence. Strengthening the capacity of the teaching workforce is essential for upholding the rights of deaf learners to receive instruction in their primary language and achieving meaningful implementation of sign language policies. This study contributes vital empirical evidence to inform policy reforms and teacher training programmes to support using Zimbabwean Sign Language as a medium of instruction for deaf learners.

**Keywords:** Sign language policies, Deaf, Mother tongue, Special schools, Policy implementation, Total communication

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### I. INTRODUCTION

ENSURING access to quality education for deaf learners is a critical aspect of upholding the rights of learners who are deaf. Across the African continent, numerous countries have undertaken legislative and policy reforms to recognise sign language as the primary medium of instruction for deaf learners. Zimbabwe is among these nations, having enacted the Zimbabwean constitution Act in 2013 to formally establish sign language as an official language and mandate its use in educational, health, and other public domains. However, the effective implementation of sign language-based instruction in Zimbabwean special schools for deaf learners remains an area of concern. Research suggests that teachers often lack the necessary fluency in sign language, knowledge of deaf culture and pedagogy, and access to appropriate teaching and learning resources to deliver quality education to deaf learners (Musengi, 2019). These deficiencies in teacher capacity can undermine the realisation of sign language policies and perpetuate the marginalisation of deaf learners within the education system. This study explores how teachers in Zimbabwean special schools for deaf learners are equipped to implement the country's sign language regulatory frameworks. Specifically, it investigates the availability and effectiveness of in-service training and professional development opportunities for enhancing teachers' sign language proficiency, deaf cultural competence, and specialised pedagogical skills. The study also

explores the perspectives of school administrators, policy implementers, and teachers themselves regarding the challenges and support needs in realising sign language-based instruction.

Understanding the factors that enable or impede teachers' ability to implement sign language policies effectively is crucial for informing policy reforms and teacher training programmes to uphold the educational rights of deaf learners in Zimbabwe. This research contributes vital empirical evidence to the limited scholarship on inclusive education for deaf learners in Southern Africa, with broader implications for advancing sign language-based instruction across the continent.

#### Teachers' level of preparation/ skills for teaching deaf learners

Wakumelo (2009) observes that Sign Language gives deaf learners normal academic development and, therefore, teachers who are assigned to teach deaf learners need not only to be trained in Special Education but also in Sign Language to enable them to teach deaf learners using Sign Language as a medium of instruction. Nelson (2015) asserts that the school, educational settings, in-services training, administrative support, and availability of support services contribute significantly to the competencies teachers need in teaching deaf learners.

Deng (2017) observes that those who develop the curriculum are generally separate from those who use it. Developers are responsible for developing a sound curriculum and materials. Policy implementers are responsible for realising the aims of the curriculum by transforming it into educative experiences in the classroom. Nelson (2015) states that in-

service training courses should be considered. Teachers should be given opportunities to access diverse expertise in the deaf world. Their language and training should focus on hands-on experience to enable teachers to acquire the competencies to teach deaf learners. A study by Nkolola-Wakumelo and Manyando (2013) revealed that teachers try to overcome these challenges by learning from the learners, consulting more experienced teachers of deaf learners, and creating new signs for new words for teachers and learners. Specialist teachers for deaf learners should have training in Sign Language and similar proficiencies and competencies. They should also be holders of certificates, diplomas, or degrees in sign language to be competent in using ZSL.

#### **Teachers' competencies and deaf need to teach deaf learners using Sign Language as a medium of instruction**

Adebayo and Ngwenya (2015) assert that there has been evidence to suggest that teachers who attended teacher training programmes in sign languages and became qualified are more successful in using Sign Language than their counterparts who did not attend teacher training programmes in Sign Language. Teacher training programmes in sign languages aim to provide preservice teachers with the professional knowledge, skills, and disposition needed to assist deaf learners (Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013). In Zimbabwe, some policies support the use of Zimbabwean Sign Language (ZSL) as a medium of instruction as well as a taught subject, such as the 2006 Amended Education Act, which states that before the 4th Grade, Sign Language should be used when teaching deaf learners (Government of Zimbabwe, 2002). Curriculum policy which states that Sign Language is one of the academic subjects to be taught, the Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act No. 15 (2019), Section 62:1a also states that every school shall endeavour to teach every officially recognised language and Section 62:1c, which states that the state should ensure that the mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction at early childhood education. Despite all these provisions, Sign Language is neither a curriculum subject nor formally taught in Zimbabwean schools, including in schools for deaf learners, yet deaf learners are expected to learn the same material and perform the same as their hearing counterparts (Matende, Sibanda, Chandavengerwa & Sadiki, 2021). Chupina (2006) sees the need to introduce sign language as an academic subject in schools and teacher training institutions. Chupina (2006) argues that such a move would enhance teachers' and learners' Sign Language literacy skills. This will align with the Zimbabwean Amended Education Act and the 2001 Education Act. Stein (2013) feels that increased use of Sign Language as the sole medium of instruction in the formative stage of deaf learners has the potential to improve academic performance among Deaf learners. According to Sambu, Otube, and Bunyasi (2018), in an assessment of the academic performance of deaf learners in five selected special primary schools for deaf learners, as a subject, Kenya Sign Language was the best-performed subject compared to other subjects. The study found a tremendous improvement in mathematics and science performance attributed to using Kenya Sign Language in classes to explain concepts. The study targeted a population of 369 participants: 5 head teachers, 111 teachers, and 253 learners. A sample comprised 112 participants, including five head teachers, fifty-seven teachers, and fifty learners. Sambu et al. (2018) in Kenya also revealed that the higher the number of years a teacher has used Kenya Sign Language as a medium of instruction, the higher the likelihood they would come across a varying academic performance of Deaf learners.

Sign Language is recognised as an official language, and only a few learning institutions offer it as a subject. There are no official facilities to teach professionals like teachers and lawyers, although nurses, doctors, and police officers know how to communicate in sign language. Training colleges must develop programmes that train the teachers to deal with deaf learners and use their mother tongue as a medium of instruction, which in this case is Sign Language. Zimbabwe has only one college, the United College of Education, where teachers specialise in practical communication, while most colleges concentrate on Special

Needs Education. It is, therefore, essential to determine how well the teachers are equipped to implement Sign Language policies in the school curriculum.

According to Pakata (2015), the Kenya Ministry of Education, Kenya Sign Language was adopted in 2004 as a medium of instruction for deaf learners after various modes were tested out but failed to fulfill the communication needs of the learners. The absence of a national policy document on deaf education in Ghana, according to Amaoko (2019), means that no legal principles guide the recruitment of teachers into schools for deaf learners. Thus, teachers who are not skilled in Ghanaian Sign Language or have no training in special or deaf education, are posted in deaf schools. Such staff postings affect the quality of teaching. According to UNESCO (1994), problems that lead to poor quality education persist because of a shortage of qualified and properly trained teachers. UNESCO (2004) postulates that teaching styles and high quality of education depend on the quality of the available human resources, which can be found in teachers. The teacher factor is vital for academic achievement for deaf learners. Even though Ghana has a National Disability Act Policy document formulated in the year 2000 that acknowledges the lack of adequate facilities for Sign Language programmes, little has been done to ensure that the teaching of Sign Language in teacher training colleges is implemented.

## **II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

This study explored how teachers implement the Zimbabwean Sign Language Regulatory Frameworks in Special schools for deaf learners in Zimbabwe.

## **III. METHODS**

### **Research approach**

This study employed a qualitative case study research design to explore the competencies required by teachers to effectively implement sign language regulatory frameworks in Zimbabwean special schools for deaf learners. Some scholars have argued that human learning was best researched using qualitative data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Rather than using a single source, this qualitative research strived to use multiple sources of evidence, so it was a multiple case study. The researcher obtained data from teachers, School Heads, and school psychologists through in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, and non-participant observation.

### **Research paradigm**

This study employed an interpretive research paradigm. A research paradigm is a belief about how data about a phenomenon should be gathered, analysed, and used. According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), interpretivism contends that reality can be fully understood only through the subjective interpretation of and intervention. Researchers in the paradigm seek to understand rather than explain; hence, the researcher used the interpretive paradigm to understand how the teachers were equipped to teach deaf learners. The researcher preferred interpretivism because it allowed close interaction with participants. Therefore, the researcher managed to interact with the teachers and administrators of learners who were deaf to the extent that the teachers were equipped in the profession to teach deaf learners. The study employed interpretivism because social phenomena cannot be studied like physical objects, measured, or predicted (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

### **Data collection instruments**

This research used multiple methods, such as in-depth observation and semi-structured interviews, to collect data in a multiple case study. The researcher selected various cases to illustrate one issue or concern (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The researcher used a multiple case study design to explore how teachers implement the Zimbabwean Sign Language Regulatory Frameworks in Special schools for the deaf in Zimbabwe.

### **In-depth interviews**

In in-depth interviews, the aim is to obtain a more detailed and rich

understanding of the topic of interest (Morgan, Eliot, Lowe, & Gorman, 2016). In-depth interviews usually complement participant observation. In this study, the researcher sought to understand how teachers implement the Zimbabwean Sign Language Regulatory Frameworks in Special schools for deaf learners in Zimbabwe. The in-depth interviews involved direct one-on-one engagement with individual participants. According to Morgan et al. (2016), in in-depth interviews, the participant's experience, behaviours, feelings, and/or attitudes may be probed deeply to identify the underlying concepts the researcher analyses to generate a theory surrounding the research topic. The researcher allowed the participants to communicate freely and provide detailed descriptions of how they implemented the Zimbabwean Sign Language Regulatory Frameworks in Special schools for deaf learners in Zimbabwe.

#### **Semi-structured interviews**

A semi-structured interview is exploratory (Ruslin et al., 2022). Semi-structured interview. The authors further explain that the semi-structured interview is generally based on a guide and typically focuses on the main topic, providing a general pattern. This study aimed to explore how teachers were implementing the Zimbabwean Sign Language Regulatory Frameworks in Special schools for deaf learners in Zimbabwe.

In addition, Ruslin et al. (2022) argue that the semi-structured interview enables a researcher to go deep for discovery, in this study discovering how Sign Language regulatory frameworks were being implemented in Zimbabwean special schools for deaf students. Semi-structured interviews corroborated data gathered from teachers and through non-participant observations in this study.

#### **Non-participant observation in special schools for the deaf**

The observations were used as data collection instruments. According to Anum (2017), observation is one of the critical methods for obtaining comprehensive data in qualitative research, especially when a composite of both oral and visual data becomes vital to the research. Using the observation strategy, researchers can obtain first-hand information about a phenomenon. The possibility of distorting facts and records is reduced to the barest minimum (Anum, 2017). Non-participant observation provided the researcher with the chance to learn things that people were not willing to discuss in an interview and to triangulate data collected through interviews at the four special schools for deaf learners in Masvingo Province, Midlands Province, Bulawayo Province, and Harare Province. This was done by observing the lessons taught by Grade One to Grade Three specialist teachers of deaf learners. According to Anum (2017), in this approach, the researcher does not live as a member of the subjects of the study. Anum (2017) notes that in non-participant observation, the researcher watches the subjects of his or her study with their knowledge of his/ her status as a researcher but without taking an active part in the situation under study. The researcher carried out the role of a visitor, with the only right being to observe their behaviours and environment without participating in their activities. The observation aimed to develop sets of notes that described the phenomenon as much as possible. The observation was tied to the research questions, which acted as a guide. Data emerged during the process. The observation was structured observation, as the research questions guided it:

#### **Research design**

This study employed a multiple case study design. It aims to compare cases and identify common patterns, relationships, or similarities (Yin, 2018). In this design, cases may be similar or diverse, but the researcher looked for patterns or relationships across cases (Yin, 2018). Multiple cases permit cross-case analysis, and the sites or locations of a phenomenon are explored differently. This study examined the phenomenon in four provinces, making it a multiple-case study. In this study, the researcher could understand this phenomenon through the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences and search for the cruxes of those experiences. In this study, the researcher explored how teachers were equipped to implement Sign Language

policies for deaf learners in Zimbabwean special schools.

#### **Research site**

This empirical study sought to explore how teachers implement the Zimbabwean Sign Language Regulatory Frameworks in Special schools for the deaf in Zimbabwe only in formally registered special schools with relatively large populations of deaf learners whose ages range from early childhood to teenagers. These schools were established before independence in 1980 in four provinces: Harare, Masvingo, Midlands, and Bulawayo. The selected special schools for deaf learners did not include the many country-wide resource units for deaf learners and early childhood development centers for the deaf learners, such as Nzeve in Mutare, that were established post-independence and are, therefore, relatively new and may, therefore, have shorter Sign Language traditions. Seventeen teachers were selected from grade 1 to grade 3 since the regulatory framework focused on lower grades. The 17 teachers were selected from 4 special schools for deaf learners, and four school heads were selected from the four special schools for deaf learners, 4 district school inspectors, and four school psychologists. The researcher chose Grades One to Grade Three teachers because the Amended Education Act of 2006, Section 62, requires that learners in those classes should be taught using their mother tongue. In addition, many researchers, including Ngobeni, Maimane, and Rankhumise (2020), Stemela-Zali, Kathard, and Sefotho (2022), and Alzahrani (2022), argue that the most sensitive period for language learning is when children are young.

#### **Procedures**

Ethical clearance (number 2020/1) was obtained from research by the Great Zimbabwe University Ethics Committee. Permission was granted from the special schools for deaf learners in four provinces: Bulawayo, Masvingo, Midlands, and Harare. Permissions were obtained from the Head Office of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Zimbabwe and the Permanent Secretary of Education. Permission was granted, whereby the provincial and district offices provided their stamps for approval. Before data collection, participants read and signed the informed consent and were informed about their rights to participate in the study. They were informed about the privacy and anonymity of their identities and were guaranteed. The collected data would be used for research purposes only. Lesson observations were then conducted in the various classes. Observations were followed by interviews. The interview sessions were audio-recorded after the participants signed the informed consent forms, which sought permission to audio-record the interview sessions. Three participants were unwilling to be audio-recorded, so answers for unrecorded interviews were written on the guided question form. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed to allow for network thematic analysis. Participants were allowed to communicate freely and to provide detailed descriptions of their views on implementing sign language regulatory frameworks in Zimbabwean special schools for deaf learners.

#### **Data analysis**

This study used deductive thematic analysis to analyse data (Pearse, 2019). Analysis was driven by the researchers' analytic interest in implementing Sign Language policies in special schools for deaf learners. According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), the semantic level of data analysis consists of identifying themes within the explicit or surface meanings of the data. The observation data were analysed using cross-case analysis to compare what had been observed in the language of instruction used in various classes. The researcher used Atlas.ti, which provided the ability to make chains of multiple codes and link quotations, which was vital for third-stage coding. Atlas.ti allowed co-occurring codes to be retrieved and visualised through network and mapping tools. Data from teachers were coded Tr A1 to Tr D18, with 'Tr' representing 'teacher', the letter of the alphabet representing the school, and the numeral representing specific individual teachers.

Similarly, School Heads were coded HA, HB, HC, and HD, while the District School Inspectors were coded as DSIA, DSIB, DSIC, and DSID,

and data from school psychologists were coded as PsyA, PsyB, PsyC, and PsyD.

#### Trustworthiness

According to Amankwa (2016), it is pertinent to address how the researcher will establish that the research findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable. Trustworthiness is about establishing these four concepts. Transferability was also obtained through a detailed description of the data and context, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Quotations from the interview transcripts were used to illustrate the results and ensure the reader can access part of the original data to justify the interpretation of sub-themes. According to Kyngäs, Kääriäinen, and Elo (2020), the researcher provided an audit trail highlighting every step of data analysis that was made to provide the rationale for decisions made. Each transcript was given to each interviewee concerned to crosscheck its accuracy, test the researcher's interpretation's conformability, and invite the participants' reflection, feedback, comments, and corrections. This helped to establish that the research's findings accurately portrayed the participants' responses (Polit & Beck, 2014). Dependability involved participants evaluating the findings and the interpretation, and the study's recommendations to ensure they were all supported by the data received from the study's informants. In this study, the participants were allowed to evaluate the findings, their interpretation, and recommendations.

## IV. RESULTS

### Implementing sign language regulatory frameworks for deaf learners in Zimbabwean special schools

#### Sign Language Proficiencies

The results showed that teachers needed sign language proficiencies and competencies to effectively implement sign language regulatory frameworks in Zimbabwean special schools for deaf learners. Teachers of deaf learners need to be qualified and competent, as this will enable them to be proficient in Sign Language. These competencies include signing ability, language teaching strategies, and curriculum management skills. The following excerpts show the teaching competencies that teachers need to be equipped with to teach deaf learners:

*"I need competencies in signing, especially when signing new curriculum words because they are not in the dictionary. The government should teach us how to sign to teach the new curriculum to the learners"* (Tr A1).

*"I need to further my studies in Sign Language"* (Tr A4).

*"I need to have competence in Sign Language, competencies like teaching strategies on how to teach certain topics and deliver lessons"* (Tr D4).

*"I need to be proficient in Sign Language and ICT literate, so, I need training in those areas"* (Tr A3).

The policy implementers believed that if the government had capacitated them to upgrade their knowledge and skills in sign language, they would be able to implement the policy effectively. The participants also pointed out that they needed competencies in teaching certain subjects since they were using textbooks that were not adapted for deaf learners, so they needed workshops on how to customise the content to fit the level of deaf learners.

*"I need to have competence in sign language, competencies like teaching strategies on how I can teach certain topics in sign language and deliver lessons since we are using textbooks for normal students. As a teacher, I need to customise their content so that they will understand. I cannot teach these children like normal children. I need competencies in understanding every topic and how I will adjust the topics to fit their level"* (Tr D9).

*"The school should hold workshops to enhance those who might have been deployed without the correct qualifications. The learners should be engaged with their counterparts so that they also learn the language from them"* (Tr A1).

*"If teachers are not competent in Sign Language, there will be no learning that will occur since the teachers will not be knowledgeable in sign language"* (PsyC).

In Zimbabwe, teachers were introduced to the new curriculum in 2015. The new curriculum moved from a predominantly theoretical curriculum to a hands-on curriculum through the policy Curriculum Framework for Primary and Secondary Education (2015-2022) (CFPSE). According to the MoPSE, all the relevant preparations were done, and schools could implement the new curriculum starting in January 2017. All the teachers were trained in implementing the CFSPE (2015-2022), which the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education introduced. The specialist teachers believed that the Ministry should have held workshops for in-service specialist teachers on implementing the new language-in-education policy, just like it took teachers to workshops to learn how to implement the new curriculum. Without the above competencies, the teachers concluded that implementing the policy effectively would be difficult. School Heads also postulated that teachers needed competencies in Sign Language for them to implement the policy, as illustrated by the following quotes effectively:

*"Teachers need to be fluent in sign language so that they will be able to communicate with the kids and to deliver lessons effectively. They need to be trained in Sign language"* (HB).

*"They are not confident because they are not fluent in Sign Language"* (HC).

#### Sign Language teaching skills

The results suggested that specialist teachers for deaf learners had limited language skills. Thus, they presented a problem for teachers who had to teach sign language skills to learners. Teachers can only be prepared to teach language skills to deaf learners if they are confident in using their language, in this case, the ZSL. Teachers were confident in teaching using Sign Language. The following extracts show these:

*"We need sign language skills because they are not our language. We need to be experts in the language to implement the policy effectively. If the government can even provide us with in-service training, whereby our skills in sign language are upgraded, maybe we can be in a better position to implement these policies"* (D6).

*"The other factor that makes a teacher confident is the knowledge in Sign Language. If you do not know Sign Language, you cannot be confident because you cannot teach something you do not know. If you know Sign Language, you know what you are teaching. If you know sign language, you can ask a child a question, and if you find that the child is confused, you can change the questioning technique so the child can understand"* (Tr B8).

*"I am not very confident, as I told you before. I am not proficient in sign language. Sign language must be used frequently, but if you take a long time without it, you will forget all the signs"* (Tr C14).

*"I feel good because learners show that they have understood, and their written work is good, and they participate in the lessons"* (Tr C16).

*"I need a solid training in Sign Language, but even if you are trained, you can only be confident when you are very proficient in Sign Language"* (Tr C13).

Lack of confidence in a language can significantly hinder effective communication skills. Teachers' confidence in ZSL can positively influence language skills, which will help the teachers impart language skills to learners.

While participants C13 and C14 concurred that they were not confident in Sign Language, participant C16 had a different opinion.

Like the sentiments above, most of the teachers pointed out that they were not confident in using Sign Language as a medium of instruction. From the observations, all the teachers did not have confidence because nearly all of them used total communication in teaching deaf learners. The Ministry was not capacitating teachers to use Sign language as a medium of instruction but were getting the experience from other deaf teachers or learners. The better the teacher is at a particular skill, in this scenario, confidence in ZSL, the more likely they will feel confident in performing the given task, for example, in imparting language skills to learners.

School Heads had their views on their teachers' confidence in using Sign Language as a medium of instruction. The following quotations show the views of the School Headmasters:

*"They are very confident in using Sign Language, and besides staff*

development, they have their sessions as a staff" (HD).

"Few teachers are confident since most are not yet confident because they cannot sign fluently" (HB).

"They are not confident because they are not fluent in Sign Language" (HC).

There were various views on the confidence of teachers. One school head pointed out that teachers were confident in using sign language as a medium of instruction. Others revealed that they were not confident because they lacked fluency in sign language. If the teachers were not fluent in Sign Language, it would be difficult for them to implement the policy. Teachers who did not receive training in Sign Language struggle to equip deaf learners with necessary learning skills. However, some of the school administrators pointed out that their teachers were confident in using Sign Language, as shown by this excerpt:

"They are very confident, and I say so because most are qualified. They have the necessary qualifications in Sign Language" (HM).

The above excerpt contradicted teachers' confidence in using Sign Language. Most teachers pointed out that they were not confident using Sign Language, as it was not their language. This implies that teachers of deaf learners need to be in-serviced in Sign Language to teach deaf learners effectively.

Because of the lack of sign language skills, specialist teachers of deaf learners preferred to use speech or total communication instead of Sign Language to teach deaf learners. The following extracts were the views of the school administrators on why teachers were not willing to use ZSL as a medium of instruction:

"Kusaziva (not knowing)" (HD).

"Most teachers are not fluent in Sign Language, so they may prefer to use speech" (HB).

Participants HD and HB concurred that most teachers preferred speech or total communication because of a lack of fluency in Sign Language.

"Those who were not using Sign Language were not qualified enough to use it, so those who used it knew its benefits. We should be biased towards the learner but not the teacher. Sign Language benefits the learner, which is why we should use it" (HA).

"Teachers are not fluent in Sign Language. Therefore, it is obvious that they will use a language that will make them comfortable. Teachers are used to talking, so they will be more comfortable using speech than sign language" (HC).

All the administrators concurred that teachers were comfortable using speech, regardless of whether the students benefited because they were not fluent in Sign Language.

#### Attitudes towards Sign Language

The results demonstrated that the participants' attitudes toward Sign Language could be discerned through how the policy implementers doubt the authenticity of Sign language as a language in its right. Policy implementers ask this question: Are sign languages real languages? Sign language is placed low in the hierarchy of languages, and they also feel it has no value for children. These ideas were expressed in the following extracts:

"Sign language is broken English, for example, "Start how" instead of saying "How do you start?" Some ungrammatical words exist, such as "Go how" (Tr D7).

"Total communication is more beneficial and better for them and me as a teacher. I communicate better with them when I use total communication" (Tr A3).

"Sign Language is a social language. It is only used for communication. You cannot write in Sign Language. The policy is deviating from how academics are run. I have never seen a book written in Sign Language. When I sign, even when I am teaching, the child must write, and what I sign is different from what the child writes. So, I think there is a contradiction between academics and Sign "Language. I believe that Sign Language is a language just for social communication" (Tr B12).

"I prefer total communication because they do not have a community like this (Community for the deaf). So as a specialist teacher, I know that I must train my kids so that they get into the community of the hearing. It will be easy

for them to communicate with the hearing" (Tr C15).

"As a teacher, it is a policy. There is nothing I can do. I should teach according to the policy's wants because it is a policy. If it were not a policy, I would use other means of communication, not Sign Language, but I will use total communication" (Tr B12).

The above verbatim sentiments reveal that policy implementers do not value Sign Language like other indigenous languages such as Shona, Ndebele, or Venda. They feel that Sign Language is inferior to other languages. They feel that Sign Language is inferior to spoken languages as they feel that a deaf child cannot function in the hearing community without spoken languages. Policy implementers are still in the autistic model, feeling that manual languages are inferior to spoken ones.

One school inspector confirmed that advocacy was being done to convince parents and implementing officers that Sign Language is important and should be taught like other indigenous languages. The following extract confirms the sentiment:

"Advocacy is needed first to convince officials, parents, and teachers that sign language is important and can be assessed. However, for it to be assessed, it should be taught. We should have textbooks in the form of signatures and syllabuses to guide us in teaching. That is my take" (DSIB).

While the above sentiment from the DSI shows a positive attitude towards implementing the policy, the fact that specialist teachers of deaf learners do not have relevant qualifications related to Sign Language shows the government's attitude towards Sign Language. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education wants ZSL to be a medium of instruction for deaf learners, according to Section 62.5 of the LiEP, which states that ZSL shall be the priority medium of instruction for deaf learners. Nevertheless, MoPSE is not doing anything to ensure that policy implementers are qualified to implement the policy. While the teachers' reactions concerning their qualifications and positive attitude towards the policy. They also reflect the Ministry's attitude towards language-in-education policy. Below are the teachers' sentiments:

"No qualifications concerning Sign language" (Tr B13, Tr A2, Tr A3, Tr A4).

"No qualifications related to Sign Language, but Sign Language is my language" (Tr C16), (post-lingual deaf teacher).

"I only did Special Needs Education and did not have any qualification related to Sign Language" (Tr A1).

"I want to know how to sign some of the words. Also, I want to be able to sign some of these words for them to understand. Maybe I will make some mistakes, and they will have problems capturing what I am saying because the teacher, myself, should be well versed in the signing of the work I will be teaching. I am not well versed with the work so it will be difficulty for the child to grasp what I will be teaching because it is now that I am learning, and the child is learning too" (Tr D9).

According to the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Section 62:5 (2013), Sign Language is a priority medium of instruction for deaf learners. However, the main concern is that those supposed to implement the policy are not even proficient in the language they should use. The policy implementers are using outdated Sign Language dictionaries and do not have the syllabuses to guide them on how to teach the subjects. The following extracts evidence this:

"I might not be proficient in giving the correct sign language for learners to understand. For teachers who are not deaf, we are also learning, so it is a combination of two learners. We have the learner, the child, and the learner, the teacher. The dictionaries we have do not have all the information. Some signs might not be in the dictionaries" (Tr A3).

"Like I have said before, the dictionaries that we use do not have all the words since some of the words are not there, so it is not easy to sign, and sometimes you may sign the word as it is in the dictionary, but the learners may not know the words" (Tr A2).

"It is because first, it is not my language, it is not my mother tongue, and the other thing is my lack of resources. We do not even have a sign language syllabus" (Tr D6).

"If the teachers could sign proficiently, it would help very much, but the problem is that sign language is not our first language. So, it is difficult for us to be proficient when signing with them" (Tr C14).

The above verbatim reports from policy implementers reveal the Ministry's attitude towards the policy. To show a positive attitude towards the policy, the MoPSE should play a central role in all stages of the policy implementation, such as financing the policy, providing in-service training for teachers, or providing the required resources. All the attributes above are lacking, as evidenced by the participants' claims, which reflect their attitude toward the policy.

*"The problem is inadequate finance. If the financial problem could be addressed, maybe it could have been prudent for us to hold in-service training once every term instead of once a year. Finances are not adequate. There is no budget for this. You plan for the workshops, but the finances are not available to run the workshops, so we end up not doing the workshops because of financial challenges"* (PsyC).

Besides having the policy, the government has yet to fund it, and the teachers have yet to be capacitated in the policy's language. Sign Language has yet to have books written in Sign Language, despite the government's policies supporting using Sign Language as a medium of instruction. Deaf learners use the same textbooks that hearing learners use. The books do not have visual materials. This attribute shows the attitude of the Ministry's towards Sign Language.

*"They give us textbooks the same as those found in the mainstream. Last time, they gave us Heritage and Social Studies, which are not written in sign language. I can imagine sign language textbooks (Hakuna Zvakadaro and nothing like that). Even their dictionary is not yet there because those things require a lot of money, and many people should be involved"* (HB).

*"Although the schools have resources such as textbooks, the textbooks are meant for the hearing learners and are not written in Sign Language"* (DSIB).

*"The disadvantage of this policy is that they do not have their textbooks or the relevant materials to teach those who are deaf. Because the resources are limited, they must source their materials"* (B11).

*"We should have textbooks in Sign Language to guide us on what we are teaching"* (DSIB).

While the Ministry is providing textbooks for other languages such as Shona, Ndebele, Venda, and other languages, deaf learners are still waiting for textbooks that are adopted to meet their needs. This reflects the government's and the MoPSE's attitude towards implementing the policy and deaf learners. The government and the MoPSE are not treating all the subjects equally, even though the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Section 6:3a (2013) states that the state shall ensure that all languages are treated equitably.

The Ministry has a policy on mother tongue instruction. It is even stated in Section 62:5 of the language-in-education policy that Sign Language shall be the medium of instruction for those with hearing impairment. The Ministry has prepared books in different indigenous languages, such as Shona and Ndebele, but has yet to prepare books adapted to meet the needs of the deaf people. The lack of materials prepared in ZSL shows the government's attitude towards Sign Language. The researcher feels that the Ministry should research and find out what should be done in other countries like Japan and India. For example, textbooks about Japanese-hearing people are translated into sign language in Japan. The above responses spelled out that the MoPSE did not provide schools with any material resources related to Sign Language, or any bilingual material to support the mother tongue instruction policy. This lack of commitment by the Ministry reflects their attitude toward resources that enable effective teaching and learning of sign language.

**In-service training**

The results indicated that after the initial phase of teachers' training, most teachers underwent professional development in diploma and degree training in Special Needs Education and Sign Language, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Professional development of specialist teachers of deaf learners

Dip. in SPED	B. SC. In SPED	B.Ed. in SPED	B.Ed. in Sign language	Certificate in Sign language	M.Ed in SPED	M.Ed in ECD
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D <sup>7</sup> , D <sup>8</sup> , D <sup>9</sup> , C16, C15, B10, B <sup>12</sup>	B <sup>12</sup> , B11, A <sup>5</sup> , A <sup>4</sup>	C15, A3, A2, C14	D <sup>8</sup> ,	C <sup>17</sup> , D <sup>6</sup>	A <sup>1</sup>	D <sup>6</sup> ,
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- B. SC in SPED. Special Needs Education
- B.Ed. Bachelor of Education
- M.Ed: Master of Education.
- M.Ed. in ECD: Master of Education in Early Childhood Development
- Dip. In SPED: Diploma in Special Needs Education

Although specialist teachers had degrees and diploma qualifications in Special Needs Education, the results revealed that policy implementation still required the highest levels of competencies in Sign Language. Few teachers have undergone formal training in teaching deaf learners. Teachers could be competent in Sign Language through capacity development or workshops from the Ministry. The following extracts show the views of the teachers on the frequency of in-service training in Sign language:

*"We rarely get workshops from the district and the ministry"* (Tr A1).

*"We had one workshop after a very long period from the district. Yes, sometimes, but concerning Sign Language, we have yet to receive the workshops from the Ministry"*. (Tr A2).

*"Once in a while, you can be called for a workshop in Harare. The problem is that you are not allowed to train others after training. I think we are called there when they want to acquire donor funds. You attend the workshop for a week so that you will train others. Two years will pass, and you will forget about the workshop and what you learned"* (Tr D6).

*"The district organises no workshops or the Ministry"* (Tr C16).

The teachers said they needed signing skills to implement the policy successfully. Teachers can only learn signing skills by being trained in sign language by the Ministry. The above excerpts show that the district education offices and the Ministry were organising no workshops. Suppose teachers are not proficient in Sign Language and the Ministry is not retraining them. In that case, this implies implementation failure of the 2006 Amended Education Act on using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, in this case, Sign Language for deaf learners.

Participants said that although it was the responsibility of the Ministry to capacitate teachers and to fund the in-service training for teachers, the schools were taking the responsibility of funding for the training of teachers, as evidenced by the following excerpts:

*"The school usually funds the workshops with the help of Non-Governmental Organisations"* (Tr A1).

*"Most of the workshops are sponsored by the school"* (Tr A3).

This meant that the schools were funding for the in-service of teachers. The Ministry of Education was not funding the in-service of teachers. If the schools did not fund the in-service of teachers, no training would occur, and there would be no penalties stipulated in the policy for not implementing it.

*"We are teaching the district officers, not them teaching us. We have police officers from police stations who come here for Sign Language lessons. We have lessons with United College from those who specialises in Special Needs"* (HD).

*"The teachers who are deaf provide the in-service training in Sign Language. It is in three stages: Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3. Level 1 is on the basics, such as the months of the year, relationships, and so on. Thus, one of our staff members who is doing a Masters is the one who comes with the syllabus. He is a lecturer at GZU and is a member of the ZIMSEC Board, and he, being deaf learners, can offer the lessons"* (HD).

*"In in-service training, we do it here at the schools because the district does not have qualified personnel to train us"* (HB).

*"Long in the past, we used to have in-service training, but currently, there is nothing like that. We now only organise staff development workshops at the school level. Teachers can come during the holiday for in-service training to get detailed orientation, but for the government to say they give us in-service training, no. They used to do that long ago, whereby teachers would go to Bulawayo for in-service training. The government should initiate free retraining programmes, especially for specialist teachers"* (HA).

On the aspect of frequency of in-service training of teachers, the District Schools Inspectors and the psychologists had this to say:



*"It has been frequented now but looking at the number we have in the province, it may not seem frequent. Under guidance and counselling, several partners and every term are supporting us. We are training teachers, but you know that the special needs learner welfare issues and psychological issues, you may not get to a point where you say we have exhausted that. We have frequent workshops in different aspects"* (PsyA).

According to the above participant, workshops on different aspects, not on sign language, are being held with the help of different donor communities but not with the help of the Ministry.

*"Teachers are knowledgeable about Sign Language, so they are only trained on how best to impart knowledge to the learners and the teaching methods to treat their pupils"* (PsyB).

This response contradicts the responses from many teachers, who pointed out that they were not fluent in Sign Language and needed in-service training in Sign Language. The administrator might not have been aware of what was on the ground because of a lack of follow-up on implementing policies.

*"Workshops are only done when there is a need"* (PsyD).

According to teachers and school administrators, teachers always need in-service training because of challenges such as lack of fluency in the language and skills on how to implement the policy. The above participant does not see the need for the workshops, which implies that the participant should go into the field to identify the training needs of the policy implementers.

*"Us to staff develop them. As an administrator, I am also incapacitated. That is where the gap is now, meaning that, at all levels, we should have teachers conversant in sign language, but we do not have them. In your district, do you have people who speak sign language? So, as a nation, we have been sidelining that area. You see where the gap is. We only have the department of learners' welfare. We also have a remedial tutor, but the tutor might not be conversant with Sign Language"* (DSIB).

According to the above participant, it is difficult for them to have workshops or training for teachers because the administrators are not fluent in Sign Language. They also need in-service training or workshops in Sign Language. Although other policy implementers pointed out that workshops were only done when the training needs arose, on the ground, teachers and School Heads pointed out that they required a lot of workshops in Sign Language and how to implement the policy.

*"School D always organises our workshops in ZSL, and we do not know anything about Sign Language"* (DSID).

The above participant postulated that he/she did not know anything about the in-service teachers, implying that there were no in-service workshops for teachers on sign language. Suppose teachers said that they were not fluent in Sign Language. In contrast, the administrators said there was no need for workshops because teachers knew about Sign Language or how the policy was being implemented. In that case, it remains unlikely that the policy would be implemented.

The following extract shows that if teachers are offered in-service training, then they will be confident in using Sign Language:

*"I am very confident. We have a lot of workshops in Sign Language, and we have deaf adults who also teach us Sign Language. We have a deaf adult here who is a qualified teacher who helps us a lot; so, I am very confident"* (Tr B1).

*"They are very confident in using Sign Language. Besides staff development, teachers themselves as teachers of the deaf have their sessions as a staff"* (HD).

*"I am very confident because I know sign language. I went to college and learned about it, and I know what I am doing. The other thing that makes a teacher confident is the knowledge of Sign Language. If you do not know Sign Language, you cannot be confident because you cannot teach something you do not know, but if you know Sign Language, you are confident, you know what you are doing, you know what you are teaching"* (Tr B4).

The above participants acknowledged that if teachers are knowledgeable about Sign Language, this would motivate them to use Sign Language in the teaching and learning process of deaf learners. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education can develop confidence in teachers through capacity development.

While some participants postulated that the schools funded all the workshops, others said the Ministry funded the workshops. The sentiments were contradictory because the participants said the Ministry was organising no workshops. At the same time, they said the Ministry was funding the workshops. Some of the participants pointed out that:

*"The workshops are funded by the donor community like Leonard Cheshire, UNICEF, UNESCO, and other donor communities. These workshops from the Ministry are being funded by UNESCO and UNICEF"* (Tr B10).

*"The government funds the workshops"* (Tr B13).

Teachers from the same school had different views on who was funding the workshops.

*"When we used to have workshops, the school would fund them"* (C14).

The government had no budget for this policy; it was just a policy on paper. Despite the government approving the policy, it was not doing anything regarding it, no workshops or resource procurement.

*"No clear budget to implement the policy because of financial problems and materials. Sometimes you plan workshops, but you will not be able to do it because of financial problems"* (PsyC).

Administrators pointed out that the Ministry did not help organise workshops.

*"Through BEAM, in terms of policy, they are not"* (HC).

*"The Ministry never supported us regarding staff development"* (DSIC).

Another administrator pointed out that the government only supported the policy by authorising workshops in schools.

*"Very supportive. When we plan for our workshops, they authorise it"* (HD).

*"No workshops from the district. They do not have qualified personnel to train the teachers"* (HB).

*"From the Ministry, no workshops"* (HB).

Another participant pointed out that the government helped sensitise the parents about deafness. Zimbabwe was falling short of ensuring these students had adequate and equitable opportunities for educational success. Further, the state was at risk of failing to meet the intent of the Education for All Act. It was clear that special education teachers for deaf learners needed high-quality on-the-job support and training to help them better meet the needs of their deaf learners. However, in Zimbabwe, funding specifically dedicated to supporting and training for teaching special needs students was limited. This influences the learning of the deaf learners. The administrators were the ones only providing the workshops for the teachers.

*"The school provides in-service workshops for teachers"* (HD).

*"In-service training is done here at the schools because the district does not have qualified personnel to train us"* (HB).

This implies that the policy did not have an adequate budget for these workshops, as shown in the above extract.

The participants said that no support was coming from the government to enable them to use sign language. The government had left all the responsibilities of in-service training workshops for teachers to schools without giving them any financial help. The government held workshops for teachers on the new curriculum it had introduced in schools. It funded the workshops, but the government was yet to fund or organise workshops for teachers in line with the language-in-education policy. There are also hearing learners at special schools because of the reverse inclusive education, so the textbooks may mainly help hearing learners. These findings show that the government is sitting back and expecting things to happen. There is no allocation of financial resources from the government to capacitate teachers.

The participants had various views on the involvement of the government's school psychological services in the continuous professional development of teachers for deaf learners. These views are illustrated in the Network View generated by Atlas.ti, as shown in Figure 1 below:

*Figure 1 Support from the school psychologists*

#### **Support from school and external agents**

All the participants testified that there was no commitment on the

part of the government to ensure the availability of workshops to capacitate policy implementers. The schools had to shoulder all the responsibilities of sourcing donations, sourcing resources, and financing the workshops to capacitate teachers about sign language.

*"We are very supportive. We do in-service training for teachers and source CDS with sign language so that teachers learn from them. We also do peer teaching in Sign Language. We have other teachers who are proficient in Sign Language from whom other teachers can learn"* (HB).

*"The school usually funds the workshops with the help of Non-Governmental Organisations"* (A1).

*"The school funds the workshops done at the school and Non-Governmental Organisations"* (A2).

*"We do the workshops here at school, so no funding is required"* (HB).

*"These workshops from the Ministry are being funded by UNESCO and UNICEF"* (Tr D6).

*"We have our donors, Leonard Cheshire, CHRISTIAN Blend Commission"* (Tr C17).

From this theme, it is evident that the Ministry was not funding this policy. Results of the study revealed that most of the support for workshops and resource materials is from schools and non-governmental organisations. The government has yet to provide support for this policy.

## V. DISCUSSIONS

The findings revealed that teachers were ill-equipped to implement the ZSL policies. Nelson (2015) asserts that the school, educational settings, in-service, training, administrative support, and availability of support services contribute significantly to the competencies teachers need in teaching and learning deaf learners. It also emerged from the current study that teachers needed certain competencies, especially related to Sign Language, to implement Sign Language regulatory frameworks effectively. Teachers were, therefore, not adequately qualified and competent to be proficient in Sign Language. The competencies that teachers lacked included signing ability, language teaching strategies, and curriculum management skills. Likewise, Mulonda's (2013) study revealed that the major challenges that teachers and pupils faced were a lack of knowledge of Sign Language, limited vocabulary of Sign Language, and limited learning and teaching materials in sign language. Nelson (2015) observes that in-service training courses should be considered. Teachers should be provided with opportunities to access diverse expertise in the deaf world and their language, and training should focus on hands-on experience to enable teachers to acquire the competencies needed to teach deaf learners. Another study by Nkolola-Wakumelo and Manyando (2013) revealed that teachers try to overcome these challenges by learning from the learners, consulting the more experienced teachers of the deaf learners, and creating new signs for words that are new to both the teachers and the pupils.

This study found that the government did not capacitate teachers to upgrade their sign language skills so that they would be able to implement the policy. It was revealed, from the study, that policy implementers needed competencies in teaching certain subjects since they were using textbooks that were not adapted for deaf learners. Therefore, they needed workshops on modifying the content to fit the level of deaf learners. In addition to the training of teachers, it would also be necessary to upgrade the competence levels of those teachers who are already in practice, in this case, specialist teachers of deaf learners on the training offered to teachers in Sign language, Mulondo (2013) noted that most of the teachers in his study felt that they did not receive adequate training in Sign Language.

As a result, they did not have the Sign Language skills. Results of the study revealed that specialist teachers of deaf learners were not prepared to teach deaf language skills because they had limited sign language skills. The results also demonstrated that Zimbabwean specialist teachers for deaf learners had limited language skills, which presented a problem for teachers who had to teach deaf learners

language skills.

One of the challenges teachers faced was that they were not prepared to teach deaf learners language skills because they were not confident in using the language of instruction, in this case ZSL, because of lack of adequate training. Sign Language proficiency among teachers of deaf learners forms the basis for effective learning by deaf children (Sibanda, 2015). Akoth (2021) argues that Sign Language plays a pivotal role in affecting all activities in the classroom for Deaf learners. Without Sign Language, Deaf learners will face challenges in the classroom because of the communication barrier.

In this study, most of the specialist teachers for deaf learners professed that they were not confident using Sign Language, as it was not their language. It was revealed, from the study, that because of a lack of Sign Language skills, specialist teachers of deaf learners were not confident in using Sign Language as a medium of instruction. According to Glaser and Van Pletzen (2012), sign language proficiency means the knowledge to interpret and produce meaningful signs appropriate to the linguistic context. Specialist teachers for deaf learners can be knowledgeable about meaningful signs in ZSL through capacity development. As a result of a lack of knowledge of these meaningful signs, specialist teachers for the deaf learners preferred using spoken language to sign in teaching deaf learners. However, the researcher observed that a teacher with a degree in Sign Language used Sign Language in all the classroom activities. In concurrence with the research study's findings, Adebayo and Ngwenya (2015) asserted that there has been evidence to suggest that teachers who attend teacher training programmes in Sign Language and become qualified teachers are more successful in using Sign Language than their counterparts who did not attend teacher training programmes in Sign Language. Teacher training programmes in sign languages aim to provide preservice teachers with the professional knowledge, knowledge, skills, and disposition needed to assist deaf learners (Luckner & Ayantoye, 2013). Wakumelo (2009) also observes that sign language gives Deaf students normal academic development as teachers who are assigned to teach Deaf students need not only to be trained in Special Needs Education but also in Sign Language, to enable them to teach deaf learners using Sign Language as a medium of instruction. The findings reflected that instead of being capacitated by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to use Sign Language as a medium of instruction, they were getting the experience from other deaf teachers or deaf learners. Mpuang, Mukhopadhyay, and Malatsi (2015) noted that most teachers of deaf learners often lack the skills necessary to teach deaf learners.

Chifinda (2017) postulated that there is an acute problem of lack of enough knowledge in Sign Language among teachers, and pupils solely depend on it as a medium of classroom instruction. Likewise, Khumalo (2014) notes that teachers' lack of competencies in using Sign Language as a medium of instruction is a major deterrent in implementing Sign Language regulatory frameworks due to lack of training and negative attitude towards Sign Language.

The attitude of policy implementers towards sign language was seen in how they doubted the authenticity of sign language as a language on its right. Policy implementers asked this question: Are sign languages real languages? Sign language was placed low in the hierarchy of languages, and they also felt that Sign Language had no value for deaf learners, as they lived in the hearing world. Policy implementers did not value sign language as much as they valued other indigenous languages such as Shona, Ndebele, and Venda. They felt that Sign Language was inferior to other languages. They felt that Sign Language was inferior to spoken languages, for they felt that a deaf learner could not function in the hearing community without spoken languages. Policy implementers were still in the autistic model, where they language felt that manual languages were inferior to spoken ones. Musengi (2019) notes that belief in the supremacy of spoken language over manual language results in discrimination, referred to as audism. Akoth (2021) asserts that teachers are instrumental in successfully implementing Sign Language in schools for deaf learners. Akoth (2021) also notes that teachers' abilities and



attitudes can limit learners' academic performance. Musengi (2019) asserts that deaf people can use sign language for communication and, therefore, have a right to use this language in education. "Let the deaf be deaf," declared Munoz-Baell and Ruiz (2000) to underscore that deaf learners should be taught using appropriate Sign Language and resources. This implies that deaf learners should also be given the right to their language. Some district school inspectors confirmed that advocacy was being done to convince parents and implementing officers to understand that Sign Language is a language like any other language and should be taught like other indigenous languages.

The fact that specialist teachers of deaf learners did not have relevant qualifications related to Sign Language revealed the government's attitude towards Sign Language. The teachers' reactions concerning their qualifications portray the Ministry's attitude towards the language-in-education policy. Sign language is a priority medium of instruction for deaf learners. The amended Act states that Sign Language is the priority medium of instruction for deaf learners. However, the main concern is that those supposed to implement the policy are not even proficient in the language they should use. The policy implementers were using outdated Sign Language dictionaries and did not have the syllabuses to guide them on how to teach the subjects. Sign Language was yet to have books adapted to meet the needs of deaf learners, even though the government has policies that support the use of Sign Language as a medium of instruction. Deaf learners were using the same textbooks that the hearing learners were using. The books did not have visual materials. This attribute reflected the attitude of the Ministry towards Sign Language. The Ministry had prepared books in different indigenous languages, such as Shona or Ndebele, but had yet to prepare books in Sign Language. This lack of commitment by the Ministry reflected its attitude towards Sign Language.

The Sign Language-based challenges the teachers gave further indicate the lack of training in Sign Language offered to teachers. Similarly, the claim that Sign Language is shallow indicates how teachers trained to teach deaf learners are unfamiliar with their learners' language capabilities and shows the common misconception about sign languages. It also shows how inadequately trained or incompetent they are in the language they are supposed to use as a medium of instruction. However, as Parkin (2010) notes, learning to educate and communicate with Deaf learners are not skills that can be imparted through 2-day or 1-week workshops. Parkin (2010) also notes that in this field, methodology and communication take years to learn and master. According to Parkin (2010), the lack of training available to teachers compromises the quality of teaching that deaf learners receive, firstly because many teachers are unable or have limited ability to communicate with their learners. Secondly, because they lack an understanding and appreciation of deaf education and deaf culture and community, they are not empowered to connect with their learners and provide meaningful teaching. School Heads noted that teachers always needed in-service training because of challenges such as lack of fluency in the language and workshops on how to implement the policy. Mulonda (2013) reveals that most specialist teachers did not receive adequate training in Sign Language.

According to Mugarura, Ssempala, and Nachuha (2022), in-service training is crucial in a teacher's life and the learners' general performance. Furthermore, learners' achievement is linked to numerous factors, but quality teachers are among the most critical components of student success. After the initial phase of teacher training, most teachers underwent a lot of professional development by obtaining diplomas in Special Needs Education and bachelor's degrees in Special Needs Education. Although specialist teachers had those high qualifications in Special Needs Education, the study's results still revealed that policy implementation required the highest levels of competencies in sign language. Currently, few teachers have undergone formal training in dealing with deaf learners. Teachers could be competent in Sign Language through capacity development or workshops from the

Ministry. This professional development enables teachers to improve their education through seminars, workshops, and classes.

On the contrary, the district officers felt teachers would only attend workshops if needed. Some district officers argued that specialist teachers of deaf learners were knowledgeable about Sign Language or how the policy was being implemented. If teachers said that they were not fluent in Sign Language while the district officers said there was no need for workshops, then it remains unlikely that the policy would be implemented.

Some School Heads argued that the government was not taking appropriate measures to help the schools. They further argued that the government could not help the special schools for deaf learners because they had never visited the special schools for deaf learners to identify the needs of the schools. Some policy implementers, such as Leonard Cheshire, UNICEF, UNESCO, and other donors, confirmed that the donor community funded the workshops. Mpuang, et al. (2015) note that most special schools are run by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). These NGOs offered different training programmes. This implies that if the donors were not there, no workshops would be held, and the available resources would decrease over time, which would be a big challenge to the School Heads, teachers, and learners since deaf learners could not learn effectively without this resource.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The findings underscore the critical gaps in equipping teachers with the necessary skills and resources to effectively implement Zimbabwe's sign language regulatory frameworks in special schools for deaf learners. Despite the legal recognition of ZSL and its mandate as the primary medium of instruction, the persistent lack of comprehensive in-service training and professional development opportunities has hindered teachers' ability to deliver quality, sign-based education to deaf learners. The heavy reliance on external donor support for the limited workshops and available resources compromises the sustainability and scalability of interventions to strengthen teacher capacity. Addressing these systemic challenges requires a concerted, government-led strategy to ensure all teachers serving deaf students receive robust, long-term training in sign language, deaf pedagogy, and cultural competence. Investing in the teaching workforce is essential for upholding the rights of deaf learners and realising the promise of inclusive and equitable education in Zimbabwe.

## VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should provide capacity development opportunities to sign language policy implementers from the national, provincial, district, and school levels and teachers in the classroom on how sign language regulatory frameworks can be implemented. Continuous professional development through seminars and other in-service training workshops is crucial for teachers and other policy implementers to be able to use sign language as a medium of instruction when teaching deaf learners. It also enables the MoPSE officers to be knowledgeable about monitoring the implementation of the sign language policy to avoid policy ambiguity and conflict. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is also recommended to encourage international collaboration and cross-country learning on effective strategies for sign language-based teacher training and deaf education. Establish platforms for teachers in deaf schools to share best practices, lesson plans, and teaching resources with one another. It should develop clear, measurable standards and indicators to assess teachers' sign language fluency and competence in deaf-centered instructional practices. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education is recommended to develop a comprehensive, government-led teacher training programme. They should also establish mandatory, long-term in-service training for all teachers in deaf schools, covering sign language fluency, deaf culture and history, and specialised teaching

methodologies. Ongoing mentorship and coaching support to help teachers continuously develop their sign language proficiency and deaf pedagogy should be provided

### VIII. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this study.

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