

## EASING THE FRUSTRATION OF THE DEAF GRADUATES WHO COMMUNICATE THROUGH SIGN LANGUAGE

Ssekamwa J.C.<sup>1</sup>

1- Faculty of Education, St. Lawrence University, jcssekamwa@gmail.com

---

### ABSTRACT

The principle which underpins this paper is section XXIV of the 1995 Uganda Constitution which emphasizes government commitment to the promotion and development of the Sign Language for the Deaf.

The historical survey design has been used. The Deaf young people in Uganda, who attend schools for the deaf, get the impression that on graduation, they will meet many non-deaf people in society. But they soon get disappointed. The proposal in this paper is that universities should conduct short courses in the Sign Language for workers in the evenings and on weekends and also make the Sign Language part of all their programs. This way, a critical mass of non – deaf people will learn the Sign Language with whom deaf people will communicate through the Sign Language especially when they go to public places seeking services of one kind or another.

**Key Words:** Sign Language, Hearing Impairment, non-deaf people, people with disabilities (PWDs).

### INTRODUCTION

I beg the reader to start by reading what happened to me when I went one morning to a school to supervise a student teacher on school practice on Monday 13.8.2022.

I entered into the classroom with my student teacher at 8.30 a.m. We found the students settling down to attend the lesson.

Soon after we had entered the classroom, the Head teacher entered the

classroom with a well-dressed young man of about twenty one years of age. The Head teacher told us that he had brought us a visitor and requested us to find out what he wanted to tell us. At that juncture the Head teacher got out of the classroom and left the visitor with us.

Smiling friendly, the spritely dressed young man bent his head forward a little to us and then began to play with his fingers. He then bent his head a little forward as if he was asking us whether we had understood his message. My student teacher, the 85 students and myself showed him that we had not got his message.

The young man repeated the gymnastics with his fingers and also tried to find out whether we had got his message.

At this juncture, the youthful boys and girls broke out in laughters showing that the Head teacher had brought us a comedian to entertain us so early in the morning. My student teacher waved the young students to keep quiet which they did.

Then the young man picked up a piece of chalk and wrote on the black board the following words:

“I am coming from our school for the deaf. We are fundraising to repair our library. Please, we seek your help.”

Then we realized that our spritely dressed visitor was deaf.

We all clapped with excitement. My student teacher called upon the Class Monitor to start collecting some money from his colleagues. Within fifteen minutes, the boys and girls had contributed 45,000/=. Then the Class Monitor handed the money to our deaf visitor. He bowed to us gratefully and left the classroom smiling friendly all the way. Then my student teacher told the students to settle down which they did and he started his lesson.

I had to supervise four student teachers that day in that school of over 1800 students.

Before I left that school at 5.30 p.m. I visited the Head teacher in his splendid office. He informed me that he had introduced the deaf young man to the students in all their class rooms. By the time that young man left the school at around 3.20 p.m. he had raised 8 million Shillings.

## **METHODS**

The study was conducted using only qualitative and descriptive methods. Both historical and contextual perspectives were considered.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Historical perspective**

Efforts to teach people with hearing impairment in Uganda, go as far back as 1958. Dr. Peter Ronald an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) surgeon at Mulago Hospital launched a society with some other prominent Ugandans to help people with hearing impairment. The society was named the "Uganda Society for the Deaf."

In 1959, Sir Edward Muteesa II was elected President of that society and Dr. Peter Ronald its chairperson. The recommendation of that society stressed the teaching of the Sign Language to the deaf. But in this recommendation, there was no provision for teaching the non-deaf people the Sign Language.

(Makerere University Education Journal Vol.1,1998). Since 1958, several developments have been outlined as below regarding the people with hearing impairment.

### **Contextual perspective**

#### **Political concern regarding teaching the Sign Language to the deaf.**

Principle XXIV(C) of the 1995 Uganda Constitution, emphasizes government commitment to the promotion and development of the Sign Language for the Deaf. In the above statement however, there is no commitment to teach a critical mass of non-deaf people the Sign Language so that the deaf people would find many such people in the society with whom they would interact through the Sign Language. These deaf persons after graduating from their schools for the deaf will not live

on an island by themselves and communicate among themselves through the Sign Language.

### **Developments regarding teaching the Sign Language to the deaf since 1992**

A number of units for teaching the hearing impaired children have been set up in the different parts of Uganda.

According to UNISE Bulletin Vol.1,1992, Uganda had three schools for the deaf namely, Ngora school for the Deaf in Kumi, Teso, Mengo School for the Deaf, Kampala and Uganda School for the Deaf at Ntinda in Kampala.

Then there are several sub-units namely,

- Ikwere unit in Soroti.
- Masindi unit
- Mbarara unit
- Muguluka unit in Jinja
- Mokit unit in Tororo
- Nakanyonyi unit in Mukono and
- Pallisa unit in Pallisa.

UNISE was poised to tackle the problem of producing teachers for the hearing impaired students. It started to provide Sign Language lessons to non-deaf people who want to teach the Sign Language to the deaf students and also to those non-deaf people who aimed at being hired in Radio and TV stations. These latter efforts were in the right direction. But they could provide just a drop of water in the ocean. They are not intentionally directed to providing masses of non-deaf people in the society, where at random, a deaf graduate can get a non-deaf person who knows the Sign Language and assist him/her if he/she needs a service or help of any kind.

### **Public concern for the absence of a critical mass of non-deaf people in the general public places to assist persons with hearing impairment.**

In 2008 the Executive Director of the Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) estimated that there were 2,000,000 deaf people in Uganda out of the general population of 31,000,000 at that time. Oluoch (2010)

citing the Uganda National Bureau of Statistics recognized that the figures of deaf persons ranged between 0.5% and 2.7%. Both the above persons lamented the absence of a critical mass of non-deaf people in the general Uganda society who can readily communicate through the Sign Language with the increasing people who are deaf.

**The present concern by the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) regarding the dilemma for the hearing impairment persons.**

In the Daily Monitor of 29.6.2022, the Director of the Uganda Human Rights Commission demanded of the government to hire Sign Language interpreters in all Ministries and Departments of government in order to fulfill the 2016 United Nations recommendations for the rights of people with disabilities (PWDS).

Ms. M. Wangadya said that during the 10th Parliament, legislators passed a law that two people must be employed by Parliament and by government departments to provide Sign Language services at all times for the deaf people. But Parliament and the government departments have not implemented it. (Daily Monitor 29.6.2022).

**Some of the places where the hearing impairment people go seeking to be served or to be helped out of any puzzling situation.**

- Courts of Law
- Hospitals
- Banks
- Churches
- Mosques
- Police
- Army
- Government Departments
- Taxi parks
- Bus parks
- Boda Boda stages
- Markets
- Shops
- Arcades
- Primary schools, secondary schools, Universities and other

Tertiary institutions.

- Training workshops
- Restaurants
- Hotels
- Games fields
- Village community seminars and centres for developments.
- Homes with deaf children.
- Radio and TV studios.

The researcher visited many of the above places. None had an employee who is not deaf who could handle a deaf person if one turned up for assistance. Some of the heads of the above places said that they are visited by such deaf people who know the Sign Language, but most times, they get away with disappointment. Indeed the heads of the above places expressed interest to employ one or two of their employees who are non-deaf but who know the Sign Language.

### **Strategies of a university to teach the Sign Language to a critical mass of non-deaf people**

1. Short courses lasting 3 months.
2. Diploma in Sign Language.
3. Combination of the Sign Language in programs such as Law, ICT, Education, B.Sc., B.A. Business, Medicine, nursing, Engineering, Fine Art, Animal husbandry and vocational courses such as cosmetology, Building, Carpentry and Catering.

### **Mode of attendance**

- a. Day. 8.00 a.m – 4.00 p.m. Monday – Friday
- b. Evening 4.00 p.m – 7.00 p.m. Monday – Friday
- c. Weekend 8.00 a.m – 4.00 p.m., Saturday – Sunday

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Strategy for starting the Sign Language

Let a University start by teaching the Sign Language through short courses. These short courses should be attended by employees from the above establishments.

N.B: The short courses would also be attended by interested employers, by people who look forward for employment, by parents of children who are deaf, by people who are self-employed and by people who take the Sign Language as a hobby.

Then, let the Sign Language be part of the courses in every university program. This will help to produce every graduate with the knowledge of the Sign Language. There may be people who want to study the Sign Language as a standalone diploma program. These will be time tabled, similarly, there may be people who want to learn the Sign Language as a standalone degree program. Bugema University has already included the Sign Language in its programs, this is a welcome step.

#### **Qualification for attending the above short courses**

- a. A pass at O Level
- b. An equivalent to a pass at O Level.

By teaching the Sign Language through the above strategies, the education system of Uganda shall produce a critical mass of non-deaf people who will be easily available to communicate with the hearing impairment people who have graduated from the schools for the deaf.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The deaf young people in Uganda attend their schools for the deaf where they learn the Sign Language for communication. They hope that after graduating from those schools, they will find many non-deaf people in the society with whom they will communicate through the Sign Language. Their frustration will be resolved if the above proposal is taken by the universities in Uganda because a critical mass of people with the knowledge of the Sign Language will be randomly available in the Uganda society.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. Makerere University Education Journal, Vol.1,1998, Kampala Makerere University Printery.
2. Daily Monitor Newspaper Kampala 29.6.2022

3. NTV Saturday Kampala, 6.8.2022 7.00 P.M.
4. The 1995 Uganda Constitution. Government Printer Entebbe
5. UNISE Bulletin Vol. 1.,1992, Kampala Kyambogo University.