

**SIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION METHOD AN  
IDENTITY IN DEAF COMMUNITY AND CULTURE FOR  
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

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DOI: \_\_\_\_\_

**Abstract**

**T**he paper looked at sign language as a manual system of communication commonly used by persons with hearing impairment. It is expressed through manual system using hand gestures and movement, body language and facial expressions instead of spoken words when the spoken words become impossible, not desirable or becomes difficult at stuttering. Sign Language is not universal as people who are deaf in different countries use different sign languages. It has it's own distinct parts of hand shape, palm orientation, movement and location to create signs. Communications is the imparting or exchanging of information and knowledge by speaking, writing or the use of other medium like sign language and finger spelling. The paper went further to tease out deaf community as a group of people with similar medical problem which is hearing impairment or hearing loss or deafness, but also include their family members and sign language interpreters and view hearing impairment as a difference in human expression rather than a disability or disease. The paper again see deaf culture as a way of life, a set of social beliefs, behaviours, arts, traditions, history, value and shared institution of community that is influenced by deafness and which use sign language as their identity and main means of communication. The paper is concluded with the recommendations that the hearing world should encourage inclusivity with the deaf world. Treat them like fellow



**4th to 7th March 2024**

**Science and Humanities: Bringing the Divide for Human Development**

human beings in socio-economic development.

**Keywords:** Sign language, communication, finger spelling, deaf community, deaf culture, hearing impairment.

## **Introduction**

Language is not the creation of one person or of one period, but it is an institution on which generations upon generations have used. Language as it is, is seen as the opportunity to have and use complex system of arbitrary symbols to communicate ideas, feelings and emotions to somebody else either through verbal or non-verbal. The non-verbal or no speech is the use of sign language, writing, gestures, facial expressions and body movement. Language is a serious part of human being's life for connections in both material and human resources development. Man is the only one that has the ability to use speech to share ideas, thoughts, feelings with others to build or tear down the society. It is any formal system of gestures, signs, sound and symbols believed and used as a means of communication or expressing oneself. It is unique to human species as a way to express ideas, cultures, values, mores history, ethics and customs. Language is one (Learning Journals, 2011) to the most basic ingredients of people's identity.

## **The Concept: Sign Language**

The act of communicating with parts of the body came before formal language was acquired. Children at the infancy stage without full language acquisition resort to sign language through pointing, gestures and grabbing to communicate and express their needs. Thus, children use all manners of signs to communicate before the use of speech. Sign language is a visual language that communicate through hand, facial expression and body movement. Sign Language is a way (rising



Kashmic.com) to communicate with somebody with the use of hand gestures and symbols for words and letters of the alphabets often used by persons with hearing impairments. It can be crudely expressed as ordinary grimaces, shrugs, pointing, nodding strengthened with facial expressions and sometimes words are spelt using the fingers. Sign Language is a manual communication system commonly used by both hearing and the non-hearing people. It is not universal as people with hearing impairment from different countries use different sign languages. The gestures or symbolise in sign language are organized in a distinct linguistic way as a language that is interrelated and intertwined and present for appropriate use (w.w.w.washington.edu >what sign language is) it has rules that guide word orders for its grammar, (Syntax) with sentences, meaning of words, phrases and sentences (phonology). More importantly, the use of signs in context areas like hospital, prayer houses, courtrooms (morphology) to get appropriate understanding.

Sign Language is creative as it is learned by the user, but not acquired by the user like in speech and language development. Sign language is not only good for the brain to develop but a good way to improve communication skills. People have come a long way and have use it in most forms especially the speed to take place becomes impossible not desirable or becomes difficult at stuttering. It has been observed that one sign is created from the combination of handshapes, palm movement and location to convey express meanings instead of spoken word. It is abridge that connects people with normal hearing to the world of persons with hearing impairment or speech impairment. It allows people to understand the world around themselves through visual descriptions and as a result contribute to social interaction for sustainable development in the society. Sign language is based on concepts of languages not written, but made up of (26) hand different



shapes or symbols that are represented by fingers in different shapes. Words and phrases expressed through a combination of finger shapes and finger spelling. Is a language that is frequently use as the mainstream of communication between people. It is natural and developed over the years by those who use it in most basic ways like banging table top in a crowd to quieting noisy situation, nodding the head to agree to an idea, placing index finger against the lips to quiet somebody, move the arm before you to pave way for movement. Gond enough, countries that share or have the same spoken language do not necessarily or obviously have the same sign language. Many countries use English as a major language but have varieties of language of signs American Sign Language (ASL), British sign language (BSL), Australia sign language (AUSL), Indian Sign Language (ISL).

### **Parameters of Sign Language**

The way the signs behave within the spaces matters a lot. No difference is shown for the different grammatical forms of the same word and usually the noun, adjective and adverb will be signed exactly alike like Love, Loving and Lovingly. A sign can be made slowly or with speed, it can be static or have motion. Ranganath and Kong (2008) it can be made gently or with force. All of these are necessary as they add to the beauty and meaning of the message. Speed of the sign is also important as it influences it. Thus, the more force one applies on the signs, with stronger facial expressions, the stronger the meaning is attached to it.

Direction of the sign (Riekehof, 1985) is critical in sign language as different signs made in different directions give different meaning.

**Hand shapes:** It means the hand configuration which is used in the beginning of any word production till that word is ended. This convey a



large amount of information about each sign. It can be remained in the same position or changed to another.

**Hand Position:** The hand position in signing and finger spelling is normally placed in front of the chest in a comfortable location not hidden but clearly shown.

### **Sign Language as an Identity**

Persons with hearing impairment recognize and identify with sign language as their means of daily communication with themselves, family members incubus and the community. Sign language is their first language like (mother tongue). They were not able to acquire speech and language (Winzer, 1990) from childhood because of deafness. Hearing parents of deaf children use sign language to communicate their needs to them through simple signs from the beginning. The early use of signs, Learning Journal (2011) stimulate the mind and reduces the frustration that follows deafness with it communication difficulties. Sign language, Sander (2006) support spoken language like waving to someone or beckoning, waving away, or pointing to an object. These gestures or body movements are true and natural in everyday life. Sign language builds on body language and acts as tool to communicate and interact with people as it creates open door of communication between the normal hearing and deaf people.

It reduces frustration in those who are not easily able to express themselves verbally resorts to the use of sign language. They feel free and express themselves (Lawrence and Marie, 2022) as their needs and interest are responded to tantrum which are stressful for both the child and parents are reduced.

Sign Language as an identity improves child parent communication relationship as they use communication easily for whatever they want to



say. It helps them remember words and see the words in action as they rely now more on vision than using the ears to hear. They use of sign language in Deaf community is an opening for persons with hearing impairment to freely interact with others (Learning Journal, 2011). This introduces persons with normal hearing to a new language that becomes a link between two different parties to meet and make friendship as they learn from each other. This broadens awareness of different people.

Sign Language, ([www.sign solutions.uk.cm](http://www.signsolutions.uk.com) 7 sign language) is a unifying force within the community as it encouraged shared identity to connect with each other, build social network for acceptance, preserves and celebrate Deaf culture, provides unique form of artistic expression, showcase their gift, talents and creativity in visual poetry, storytelling, theoretical performances and to convey emotions and messages to contribute to cultural development.

It promotes Deaf community and cultural pride that raises awareness about Deaf culture among both Deaf people and normal hearing people. As an identity, Riekehof (1985) in Deaf Community, has its grammar, syntax morphemes, Phonology, pragmatics and cultural tones. The community becomes more accessible and acceptable of Deaf of culture. This creates more awareness to break both the psycho-social and physical barriers to encourage and facilitate inclusivity that value and respect Deaf culture and it's contributions to sustainable human development with no discrimination.

### **The Concept Hearing of Impairment**

It is a generic term (Winzer, 1990) that means a hearing problem that could be mild, moderate, severe or profound. This includes deafness or hard of hearing. A hard of hearing person is one who generally is not totally deaf but partially deaf and can process speech sound through the



ear with or without the use of hearing aid for sound amplification. A Deaf person is someone who cannot process speech sound (linguistic information) through ordinary hearing even with the use of sound amplifier (hearing aid).

### **The Concept of Deaf Community**

The deaf community is a term used to refer to a group of people with similar medical conditions, which is hearing loss or deafness. This also include the following; family members, associates and sign language interpreters. In like manner, ([www.handtalk.me](http://www.handtalk.me)>[blog](http://blog.deaf.co)>[deaf.co](http://deaf.co)) affirmed that the community shares the same experiences, communicate in the same way using sign language and lip reading as the primary source of communication. It is observed that there are many deaf communities spread out in the world as there are many persons with deafness and each community has its own way of livelihood. Despite this, they have almost the same characteristics of communication, principles, values, cultures, identity, advocacy history, beliefs and heritage. The community supports and promotes social interactions, have associations for their wellbeing mine by their elected executives.

Deafness is embraced, identified and identity is celebrated in ability and not disability as deafness is seen as a difference in human experience rather than a disability or disease. Deaf people in a community ([nationaldeafcenter.org](http://nationaldeafcenter.org).>[resources](#)) have the pride that they are deaf and have a minority language and group and misunderstood by those who do not know sign language. However, deaf community and culture promote the human rights, pass their language and way of life to future generations. Being involved in deaf community and culture significantly promote self-esteem and give support, easy social interaction and shelter from the frustrations of the hearing world.



## Conclusion

Be it in education, sociology, anthropology, theatre, medicine, law and even in the military or day to day affairs, the functions of sign language communication go beyond those with deafness as is useful to those with speech disorders and neurological impairment to sustain and empower members of deaf community and culture. Obviously, the full level of the identity of sign language communication is yet to be established.

**Recommendations:** The paper is concluded with the following recommendations.

1. People should appreciate and support the use of sign language as a life-wire and powerful instrument of communication and celebrate people with deafness and the richness of deaf community.
2. Policy makers and implementers should encourage the use of sign language for human wellbeing for sustainable development.
3. Sign Language should be encouraged to thrive in professional and context areas to promote persons with hearing impairment to contribute their unique and valuable thoughts and perspectives to sustainable human development.

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