

# Deaf education in Ghana

Daniel Fobi, Joyce Fobi and Obed Appau share their professional reflections on deaf education in Ghana

Ghana was colonized by the British in 1844 and formal education was introduced in that same year. However, the inclusion of individuals with disabilities was not catered for. Because of the colonization, many missionaries were sent to Ghana with multiple objectives. In 1957 a deaf missionary named Andrew Foster, a graduate of Gallaudet University, visited Ghana to preach and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ to deaf people. He also aimed at introducing basic numeracy and literacy skills to deaf people through sign communication (Adu-Bediako, 1982; Oppong, 1998; Osae-Owusu, 1982). Through his research, Andrew discovered that the majority of deaf individuals in Ghana were illiterate because there was no formal education for them. He was able to identify some deaf individuals from the streets and communities in Accra and started a class with them at his private residence at Osu. He sought consent from parents of deaf individuals and enrolled them in his private school. Andrew also held classes with his students in some homes of parents of deaf children, but often, he had classes with his students in a basic school building during weekends, that is, Saturdays and Sundays. During that time, early identification of deaf individuals was informally done by parents. He started using American Sign Language (ASL) to teach, though deaf individuals in Ghana had their means of communicating which was not formal by then. The blend of ASL and the local signs developed into Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL). GSL is what is used to educate deaf people who use sign communication in schools. Along with GSL, Ghana also has deaf communities such as Adamrobe in the Eastern Region and Nanabin in the Central Region who have their unique means of sign communication, called Adamrobe Sign language (ASL) and Nanabin Sign language (NSL) (Nyst, 2011, Oppong and Fobi, 2019).

Due to an increase in enrolment, the school was relocated, in 1959 to Mampong Akwapim in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The curriculum for instruction in the school was mainly numeracy, literacy, and traditional vocational education in the form of basket and doormat weaving, sewing for girls and tailoring for boys. The teachers of the schools were using both speech and sign as modes of communication in teaching. Deaf individuals who enrolled at Andrew's school started sharing their school experience with their peers and families who were both deaf and hearing. Through the education of deaf people and the awareness created among the Ghanaian communities, more deaf children were enrolled in the school. Irrespective of all these developments, many Ghanaians thought it was a waste of time and money to educate deaf individuals due to cultural beliefs among some ethnic groups.

To foster the education of deaf individuals, the government enacted the Education Act of 1961 and Article 32(8) of the 1992 constitution of Ghana, which

emphasised Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) for all persons of school age. However, these policies did not consider the inclusion of deaf people in educational institutions. Currently in Ghana, there are 17 schools for the deaf: two integrated and fifteen special schools across the country providing educational services at basic and secondary levels for deaf children (Oppong and Fobi, 2019). Six tertiary institutions provide training for teachers who are posted as special educators to support deaf children at the various special schools in the country.

At the pre-school and basic education levels, before deaf children are admitted into both public and private schools for the deaf, assessment reports which include the child's audiogram, the placement form from the Ghana Education Service (GES), and general medical reports from a certified medical practitioner are required. Admissions are normally done at the beginning of the new academic year, often in September. Before admission, parents and the child ought to visit the school every week to be taken through counseling and sign language lessons. These lessons continue for parents after enrolment for some time so parents can communicate with their deaf children. The classes are open to other family members such as caregivers, siblings, and individuals among the general public who are interested in learning sign language. Children without any signing knowledge and skills, who are enrolled in schools, are often pulled out and taken through sign language lessons until they attain some level of proficiency.

The schools for the deaf have slightly different signs because no standardised sign language policies govern the language of the deaf in Ghana. They also display some slightly different cultural norms, depending on the region in which the school is situated. There is continued debate about the standardisation of GSL across the country.

All the schools for the deaf follow the standardised and general curriculum of the GES. However, the structure of school years in deaf schools differs from that of regular schools. Regular schools run a 2-6-3-3-4 (2 years pre-school, 6 years primary, 3 years junior high, 3 years senior high, and 4 years tertiary) system of education (Amoako 2019; Oppong and Fobi 2019); schools for the deaf practice 2-6-4-4-4 (2 years pre-school, 6 years primary, 4 years junior high, 4 years senior high, and 4 years tertiary) (Fobi and Oppong 2018; Oppong and Fobi 2019). The schools for the deaf have additional years added at the junior and senior high levels to help them complete the syllabus, since it requires more instructional hours than usual to communicate the curriculum through sign language, illustrations, demonstrations, dramatization, and field trips.

Contents of the curriculum are sometimes adapted by the teachers to make learning easier for the children. All deaf children do the same standardised tests as their hearing

counterparts. This means that both deaf and hearing children follow the same lessons and examinations as per the GES learning curriculum, but during both internal and external examinations, deaf children are given extra time of about 30 minutes since they often need help interpreting instructions and some questions. The external examination is usually marked by the chief examiners because they are specially trained on children with special needs, including deaf children, and understand their grammar as well as their style of writing.

Basic school education was the highest formal educational level for deaf children since the introduction of formal education for the deaf. These children could not attend regular secondary schools as a result of the communication barrier and limited educational interpreters at the time (Osae-Owusu, 1982). Since there was no secondary school for deaf students, the Secondary/Technical school for the deaf was established in 1975 at Mampong-Akwapim, in the Eastern Region of Ghana, to train deaf students in elective courses like General Arts, Home Economics, Visual Arts, and Technical work (Metalwork, Building and Construction, and Woodwork), and core subjects like mathematics, English, social studies and integrated science. Students were made to choose the elective courses of their choice in addition to the course subjects.

Before 2000 Ghanaian deaf students who had the qualifications to pursue tertiary education in the country could not do so due to a lack of professionals and support services for them at the tertiary level. They had their tertiary education overseas—specifically at Gallaudet University in the United States.

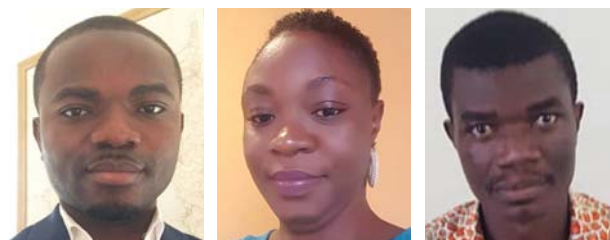
The University of Education, Winneba (UEW) is the first public institution in the country that offered provision for qualified deaf students to benefit from tertiary education in 2006. The UEW has since been admitting qualified deaf students to study for four-year bachelor's degree programs in various departments. The university trains competent professional teachers for all levels of education. The university also practices inclusion and offers a variety of programs for all categories of learners. At the moment, the majority of tertiary institutions in Ghana practice the inclusion of deaf students.

Deaf students at the tertiary level are provided with support services in the forms of sign language interpreting, resource teaching, tutoring, and note-taking at various lectures as well as social gatherings. Despite all the support services provided for deaf students in some schools, the majority of parents are not well resourced to send their deaf children to school. In addition to this, most schools' environments are not accessible in terms of physical and material resources to support deaf students.

In line with the Inclusive Education Policy of Ghana, all schools practice inclusion, in principle. Examples of inclusive schools are: University Practice Inclusive School Winneba, Central Region, Diamond Kids Academy in Nsawam in the Eastern Region, and Odupong Kpehe in Kasoa all of which admit some deaf children to receive an

education with their hearing peers in the same classrooms. But some of the schools lack or have inadequate sign language interpreters to interpret for deaf children during their lessons. This has been a challenging situation for deaf children to learn with their hearing colleagues. There are resource teachers who collaborate with the classroom teachers to modify the curriculum to suit the level of deaf children and also provide academic support in the classes for deaf children.

Another challenging issue with deaf education in Ghana is that the majority of professional teachers posted to the schools for the deaf do not know deaf education and sign language. They apply the general knowledge of teaching and learning of regular students to teach deaf students, and this has made it difficult for deaf children, especially those at kindergarten and lower primary, to grasp the basic concepts in lessons. ■



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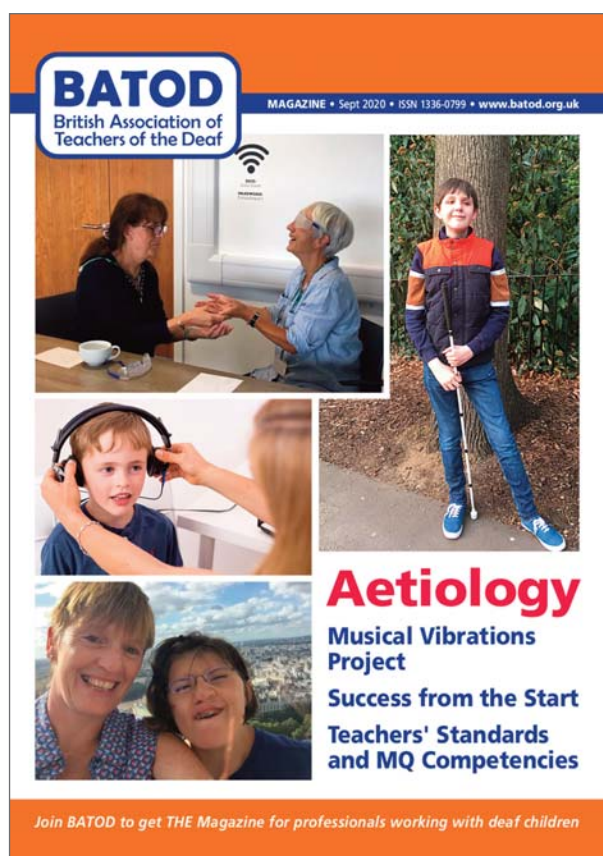
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