Understanding Ghanaian sign language(s): history, linguistics, and ideology

Hadjah, T.M.

2.

THE HISTORY OF GSL AND ITS COMMUNITY

This chapter examines the historical interplay between the evolution of GSL, the development of deaf schools, and the dynamic activism within the Ghanaian deaf community. In delving into the history of GSL, the chapter looks at the contributions of Rev. Andrew Foster in establishing the Ghana Mission School for the Deaf (GMSD) and introducing ASL signs. While recognising Foster's impact, the study extends beyond his era to explore the lesser-known evolution of GSL. Unveiling the interconnected threads of GSL's emergence, its roots within the Ghanaian deaf community, and its transformative journey with deaf education.

While scholars have extensively documented the introduction of ASL and English-based signs by Rev. Foster (Kiyaga & Moores, 2003; Nyst, 2010; Runnels, 2020), the post-1965 era, marked by Foster's departure from Ghana, reveals a less-explored and conflicting landscape in the country's deaf education. Notably, Runnels (2020) and Amoako (2019) shed light on sign language and deaf education in Ghana, emphasising the government's efforts to establish nationwide deaf primary schools, emulating Foster's model. Other researchers, such as Edward and Akanlig-Pare (2022:31), have also emphasised the government's continuation of Foster's model after his departure. However, divergent perspectives, as suggested by Nyst (2007), Oppong (2006), and Oppong and Fobi (2019), hint at a potential shift towards oralism in Ghana's deaf education history, an important aspect that has not been focused on much in current narratives.

Runnels (2020) in his Ph.D. thesis, credits some Ghanaians who assisted Foster's mission, including Dr. Seth Ocloo, Florence S. Oteng, Richard Anang, James Anang, Emmanuel Sono-Omari, Musa Nartey, Elizabeth Ocloo, Samuel Agorgli Kwaku Fiaxe, Ludwig Ahmere Bafo, Pastor Thomas Marfo, Pastor Henry Dashinor Cobblah, and Pastor D.A. Konotey-Ahulu. Acknowledging the scarcity of information on their contributions, Runnels encourages further exploration to recognise other significant Ghanaian contributors. Identifying gaps in the understanding of the role of deaf Ghanaians in the evolution of GSL, this chapter poses the following research questions (within the historical context between 1957 – 2007):

1. How did GSL emerge in Ghana and what role did deaf education and deaf activism play in this emergence?
    a. How have deaf schools in Ghana contributed to the development and promotion of GSL?

b. In what ways have deaf activists influenced the evolution of the national sign language, and what factors steered its emergence and maturation?

By addressing these questions, this chapter aspires to present a holistic view of the history and progression of deaf education and sign language in Ghana.

In the following sections, I will provide an overview of Rev. Foster's socio-historical background, as gathered from existing literature. This will contextualise his role in introducing ASL to Ghana (Section 2.1). Additionally, Section 2.2 will offer insights from the literature into the historical origins of deaf education and GSL as a background for this chapter. Moving forward to Section 2.3, I will outline the research methodology employed in this study. In Section 2.4, the research findings will be delineated, with Subsection 2.4.1 presenting findings from the secondary data and Subsection 2.4.2 offering primary data findings. The chapter will then progress to discussions in Section 2.5, where I will address the research questions posed earlier and conclude with Section 2.6, summarising the key insights and findings.

2.1 Andrew Foster: Socio-historical Background

Runnels (2020) in his Ph.D. thesis, extensively explores the life and contributions of Rev. Andrew Foster in Ghana from 1957 to 1965, using archived histories, observation notes, secondary sources, and interviews conducted across the United States, Nigeria, and Ghana between 2015 and 2020. Unlike many, Runnels (2020) reveals Rev. Andrew Foster's background and demonstrates him as a significant figure in the realm of deaf education, particularly in Africa. Born on June 27, 1925, into an African-American family in Alabama, Foster's early life was shaped by racial segregation in the United States (Runnels, 2020; Stow, 2010). At age eleven he became deaf, a condition he shared with his brother. Despite being deaf, he maintained some ability in speech (Anson-Yevu, 1977:2; David, 1972:62). Foster attended the Alabama School for the Negro Deaf and Blind, an institution that was distinctly separate from its counterpart for white children due to the prevailing racial divides (Stow, 2010). Notably, this school had Black ASL, a unique dialect of American Sign Language, reflecting that era's wider cultural and racial distinctions (McCaskill et al., 2011). It was in that school, Foster was first introduced to sign language. However, it is important to note that during Foster's educational era, the term ASL or Black ASL which reflects social or geographical distinctions, was not in common usage. Instead, a more generic label was applied to the sign language employed in deaf education (Power, 2022).

Upon graduation, Foster, like many African Americans of his generation, moved to the northern industrial cities, a phenomenon documented as the Second

Great Migration in the history of the US. This vast exodus saw over five million African Americans journeying northwards in pursuit of better opportunities (Agboola, 2014). Foster continued his academic pursuits in the North. He earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in education and a degree in Missionary education studies (Oteng, 1988: vi; Stow, 2010). During Foster's educational tenure, segregation persisted in deaf schools, including Gallaudet University[16] (Stow 2010:3; Carroll and Mather 1997:45ff).

Runnels (2020) noted that Foster's vision extended beyond the shores of the United States. Engaging in numerous international missionary efforts, broadening his global perspective before setting foot in Ghana to establish his first deaf school in Africa (Runnels, 2020). At the World Congress for the Deaf in Germany in 1959, Foster met Berta Zuther[17]. The two, bound by shared convictions and aspirations, were wed on January 29, 1961 (Ilabor, 2010: 102). Rev. Foster established the Christian Mission for Deaf Africans (currently, Christian Mission for the Deaf (CMD)) in 1956 before moving to Africa to start his missionary work. As a non-profit organization, CMD mainly served as a backbone for fundraising prior and during Foster's time in Ghana. Foster met his demise on December 3, 1987, as he journeyed to Kenya (Runnels, 2020; Stow, 2010; Lang & Meath-Lang, 1995). His wife, Berta, continued managing CMD[18] as its director until her retirement.[19] Before Foster's demise he traversed more than 13 African nations, directly or indirectly initiating the foundation of 31 deaf schools. Furthermore, in certain nations (e.g., Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), he laid the groundwork for training programs tailored for deaf educators (Fikes, 2018).

From this overview on Rev. Foster, it is evident that he had exposure to Black English[20], Standard American English, hearing gestures, ASL, Black ASL, and other sign languages such as German Sign Language. Given this linguistic exposure, it is reasonable to infer that Foster was an educated leader and an adept multilingual communicator. Notably, during his time in Ghana, he picked up some AdaSL (Kusters 2015: 161). Existing literature, exemplified by works such as Runnels (2020) and Ilabor (2010), indicates that Rev. Andrew Foster introduced ASL signs to the deaf community in Ghana. Yet, contemplating his diverse

---

[16] Established in the US in 1864, Gallaudet is the first advanced tertiary education targeted at deaf people.

[17] According to Ilabor (2010:100), she become deaf at the age of 4. We can also speculate that Berta had speech when we consider Ilabor's statement, "It was an exciting experience for Zuther to talk with deaf people from English-speaking countries, using her little English knowledge" (2010 :100).

[18] CMD continues working in other African countries (but not in Ghana).

[19] Berta passed away in 2018.

[20] A variety of American English used by the Black community in US (McCaskill et al., 2011).

linguistic repertoire, I might argue that Foster's arrival not only brought the introduction of ASL signs but also initiated a versatile system of signing comparable to his experiences and deaf education in the United States.

2.2 Genesis of Deaf Education and GSL community

Formal deaf education in Ghana began in 1957. In that pivotal year, Rev. Andrew Foster embarked on a mission to Ghana, propelled by a vision of evangelising the deaf population in Africa through education. The establishment of the first deaf school in Ghana, named the Ghana Mission School for the Deaf (GMSD), was founded on September 10, 1957 (Runnels, 2020; Okyere & Addo, 1999; Ilabor 2010). Rev. Foster's arrival in Ghana on June 10, 1957, coincided with Ghana's independence from British rule. The Ghanaian government, initially indifferent to deaf education, provided Foster administrative backing and later, by 1959, significant financial support (Fiaxe 1964 as cited in Okyere & Addo, 1999:152; Grischow, 2011; Ilabor, 2010).

Rev. Foster commenced the school in a rented classroom in Osu, Accra, scheduling classes after mainstream school hours (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 148; Ilabor, 2010). The initiative was as much about deaf education as it was about fostering a new generation of educators: Foster aimed to train teachers, with vocabulary acquisition being a focal point (Ilabor, 2010; Runnels, 2020; Stow, 2010). The involvement of teachers, both deaf and hearing, underscores Foster's broad approach. However, in the literature, some discrepancies exist regarding the exact count and identities of these initial teachers: Oteng (1988: vii) noted that Foster engaged three deaf Ghanaians as pupil teachers in his initial school without providing their names, while Ilabor (2010: 32&40) noted two teachers: one Deaf (.i.e., Seth Ocloo) and the other hearing (i.e., Henry D. Cobblah). However, images used by Ilabor (2010: 32 & 34) seem to contradict him as it suggests that there was indeed a third staff who was a female (probably Florence Oteng), as also indicated through illustration by Oteng (1997: 33; 1988: vi). Addo and Okyere (1999), who interviewed Foster in 1987, noted two females who worked with Foster. According to them (Addo & Okyere 1999: 149), Foster recalled some of his initial teachers to be in the name of Ms. Florence Oteng, Ms. Grace Tetteh and Mr. George Okae Tetteh. It is therefore possible that the discrepancies could be because of the different timeframe.

High demand led to the school's relocation from Osu, Accra to Mampong-Akwapim[21] in January 1959. Despite the move, classes and church services for deaf adults persisted in Osu, Accra (Okyere & Addo, 1999:149). Reasons for the choice of Mampong remain speculative, but several sources hint at societal stigmas,

[21] The distance from Osu, Accra to Mampong is approximately 45 kilometers.

accommodation and health issues in Accra, and the necessity for farmland (Okyere & Addo, 1999:149; Avoke, 2001: 31; Foster, 1960a:149; 1957; Kwaffo, 1988:3; Ilabor 2010). As detailed in Chapter 1, Subsection 1.4.1, the school's location in Mampong-Akwapim presented a unique opportunity to create a boarding facility. This, in turn, facilitated the formation of the first national deaf community in the country, marking the birthplace of GSL (i.e., ENGLISH, BROKEN & LOCAL). In 1962 the government formally took over the school (GMSD), with Foster continuing as its headmaster (Ilabor 2010; Okyere & Addo, 1999). This was part of a broader move by the government towards supporting 'special schools' (Ametepee & Anastasiou, 2015). From the deaf education initiative 1957, Ghana established several deaf schools across all ten regions. Figure 3 provides a detailed map of Ghana, demarcating its ten formal administrative regions[22] and illustrating the locations and years in which the deaf schools were established. The dates presented in this figure are based on the comprehensive research by Amoako's work (2019:6)[23].

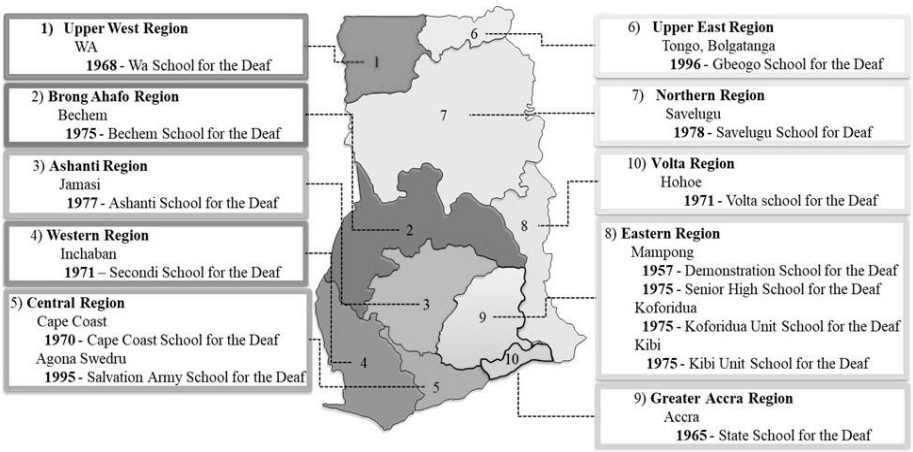

Figure 3: Map showcasing the establishment of deaf schools across Ghana.

[22] On 27 December 2018, 6 new regions were created through a legislative instrument. They are Savannah, North, North East, Oti, Ahafo, Western and Bono East Regions. See figure 1 for a current regional division in Ghana. Figure 7 here presents the map of Ghana when Deaf schools were established in all the 10 regions.

[23] There are discrepancies with some of the years of establishment of the school. According to Runnels (2020:224), the State School was established in 1966, the Becham School in 1969, and the Demonstration School in 1967, while Gadagbui (1998) noted 1968 for the Demonstration School. However, Amoako (2019:6) indicated without any details that 1964 marks the renaming of the school while 1967 marks a relocation of the school.

In summary, this section has laid the groundwork by outlining the initiation of deaf education, with particular attention to the contributions of key figures. Building on this, the subsequent section 2.3, will delve into the research methodology, offering details about the study's consultants in Section 2.3.1, presenting an overview of the data set in Section 2.3.2, and explaining the data analysis in Section 2.3.3. This method is designed to reveal the evolution of GSL, connecting the past stories from 1957 to the growth of deaf education and activism, culminating in the introduction of GSL in tertiary education.

2.3 Methodology

This chapter employed a broad research design, drawing on secondary and primary data to explore deaf history and sign language in Ghana. The secondary data encompassed published and unpublished documents. These materials included newsletters, archived records, and reports from Andrew Foster and his NGO, the Christian Mission for the Deaf. In contrast, the primary data was gathered through interviews, observations and personal communication with individuals associated with the contemporary and historical deaf community in Ghana.

2.3.1 Consultants

In fostering collaboration for this study, I reached out to deaf colleagues in Ghana, sharing the research goals and seeking guidance on how to reach out to key stakeholders deeply engaged in the development of sign language and deaf education. From such engagement, several names emerged as recommendations, forming the basis for a potential consultant list guided by specific criteria related to their relevant characteristics and experiences. While facing challenges in reaching all initially identified individuals during fieldwork, I adapted by strategically engaging with those accessible. Their assistance proved invaluable as we worked together to identify additional potential consultants, aiming to incorporate a diverse range of personal experiences and insights into the historical evolution of sign language within the context of deaf education in Ghana.

Through the approach used, the study sought to access members of the Ghanaian community who possessed relevant and useful information pertaining to the investigation. This approach helped ensure that consultant selection was not based solely on convenience but rather on the potential richness of the data each consultant could offer. It is important to note that one consultant was serendipitously encountered during the research. While visiting Mampong for an interview with a deaf friend (Marco Nyarko), the research purpose was shared, and this friend mentioned an older man living in Mampong who had worked as a driver at the “Old

School"[24]. This encounter led to booking an appointment with the older man, who shared insights into his experiences working with Foster and the deaf school.

The available literature was a guide in selecting potential consultants whose experiences could help fill gaps in the existing knowledge and address research questions effectively. In addition to deaf individuals, hearing consultants were considered as they reportedly also played a significant role in developing deaf education and sign language in Ghana. The target number for both deaf and hearing consultants was 10, with an equal distribution. All consultants involved in the study were elderly Ghanaians, all retired individuals. Eight consultants [25] were purposively sampled for the interviews, comprising four deaf individuals and four hearing consultants. Their ages ranged from 62 to 83 years, reflecting a wealth of historical knowledge and personal experiences.

Table 2 below presents the demographic background of each consultant, providing key information about their affiliation with deaf history and education. Meanwhile, Figure 4 displays images of the various consultants with their corresponding code names (ID).

Table 2: Consultants demographic information.

ID	Name	Year of birth	Education level	Past association with the deaf community
D1	Mr. Samuel Adjei	1944	[No formal education]	• Former vice president of GNAD • Christian preacher
D2	Mr. Godwin Amenumey	1954	Senior High School Education	• Former president of GNAD • Former student of the Old School[26],

[24] This term was mentioned by some of the consultants in my study. It was also explained to be commonly used in the past to refer to Andrew Foster's school after his official departure from Ghana.

[25] Two weeks after the data collection, my office in Ghana was burgled, and the thieves took away all my data recordings, including a valuable book by Andrew Foster. As a result, I had to redo all my interviews again. Fortunately, the cordial relationships I had established with consultants facilitated easy access for the second round of interviews. This time, the environment was more welcoming and friendly, and participants appeared more relaxed and comfortable. Despite the setback, I was able to gather rich information and obtain new documents. However, due to time constraints, I interviewed 8 consultants in the second round instead of the initial 10, and two consultants were unfortunately eliminated from the study. While recalling details from previous interviews, it seems all the important information was recaptured from the 8 participants.

[26] It is important to note that Foster's school, generally known as Ghana Mission School for the Deaf is popularly known among the elderly members of the deaf

				• Leader for Church of Christ deaf ministry • Former executive member for the Ghana Society for the Deaf • Former member of the Commission on Sign Language of the WFD Scientific Section • GSL teacher
D3	Mr. Jonnathan Amuah	1959	Diploma in Building and construction	• Former vice president of GNAD • Former student of the Old School • Deaf arts & sports promoter • GSL teacher and advocator
D4	Mr. Alexander D. Okyere[27]	1938	Master's degree in special education	• Former vice president of GNAD • Former teacher & vice head at Old School • Former researcher & GSL teacher • Former vice president of the Ghana Federation of the Disabled
H1	Ms. Mary Addo	[Withheld by consultant]		• Former teacher at the State School for the Deaf and the Old School • Interpreter (e.g., news telecast for the Missing Link Programme) • Former researcher & GSL teacher
H2	Mr. E. K. Kwaffo	1941	Bachelor's degree in special education	• Former teacher at the Old school and Cape Coast School for the Deaf • Former headteacher for Sekondi School for the Deaf
H3	Mr.	1942	Bachelor's	• Former oralist and teacher

community as the "Old School" to make specific reference to what Foster started. The term "Old School" was also used by Rev. Foster when he left Ghana (Foster 1987).

[27] Sadly, Mr. Okyere passed away on 7th September 2022.

	Ebenezer Asamoah		degree in special education	at the Special Teachers' Training College • Former headteacher for the Ashanti School for the Deaf • Former GNAD director
H4	Mr. George Diaba	1938	[No formal education]	• Former driver at the Old School

D1 D2 D3 D4

H1 H2 H3 H4

Figure 4: Consultants for this chapter

Photography by the author. Taken and printed with permission

2.3.2 Data sets

Given the scarcity of available literature on the history of sign language in Ghana, I conducted extensive searches for any existing documents, including pictures and write-ups, that could shed light on the development of the national sign language. I began by reaching out to my network of hearing and deaf contacts within the deaf community and education. Through phone calls and messaging, I followed up on all leads and recommendations provided by members of the deaf community who were considered custodians of relevant information. These individuals were crucial primary sources of information for the study.

Additionally, I visited GNAD (which is briefly introduced in section 1.2.1.) with a formal letter seeking access to any available documents. While GNAD was supportive, the information in their office was limited. However, through informal sources, I learned of an abandoned room and shelves that were said to contain archive information related to sign language and Andrew Foster. Unfortunately, my request to access these spaces was denied during this study, and I had to rely on other primary sources of information.

The interviews were designed for free conversation with some guided topics, allowing consultants to discuss their experiences and share their perspectives freely. This approach aimed to capture rich and detailed narratives, even if some information discussed was sensitive or emotive. The interviews were conducted from October to December 2020, with consultants being informed about me, the deaf assistant, and the purpose of the research before the interviews began. To ensure consultants' comfort and privacy, I promised anonymity for any sensitive information shared during the interviews. With the exception of two consultants, I met all other consultants at their homes, so they were in a natural environment for a dialogue. I met one consultant at my home upon his request and the other at the head office of GNAD. While I appreciate all consultants, I am immensely thankful for Mr. Jonnathan Amuah's decision to travel over 7 hours (300 km) to visit and spend two days with me for the interview and research discussion. This visit proved to be incredibly valuable, as it was through him that I became aware of the existence of a low variety of GSL as a distinct variety.

Apart from conducting interviews, majority of the consultants also generously provided me with a variety of relevant materials from their personal collections. With some material also from the deaf community, the following is a summary of the secondary data I gathered during my research: 5 books, 1 government report, 2 newsletters, 5 GNAD pamphlets, 6 lecture/seminar papers and 11 letters. For a detailed list of the titles of all the secondary data, please see Appendix A. These valuable documents significantly enriched my understanding of the history of sign language and deaf education in Ghana.

Ethical considerations were of utmost importance in this research. Consultants provided informed consent before the interviews, indicating their willingness to participate and their understanding of the research's purpose. The consent documents were provided in English, and I also summarised the content in a language that consultants could easily comprehend, such as Akan, sign language, or English.

Consultants were assured of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time. They were also informed that the recorded interviews would be used solely for academic purposes, such as seminar/workshop presentations, thesis publication, or journal articles. To foster a cordial and trusting relationship, I built strong rapport with consultants through follow-up visits and

informal interactions. At the end of each interview, consultants were compensated for their participation, showing appreciation for their valuable contributions to the research.

2.3.3 Data analysis

For data analysis, a thematic analysis approach was employed, following an inductive approach as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017). The primary data from the interviews were in video format, with signed information from deaf consultants and voice recordings from hearing consultants. To facilitate analysis, all data was represented in English.

The data was organised into themes (such as Andrew Foster, Oralism, and deaf-led activities) to address the research questions,. Each theme was given a keyword based on a central idea or recurring phrase that summarised the content of that section. This process involved reading the data multiple times, grouping related information, and reorganising themes. Organising the data into themes made it more manageable and allowed for a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation. Themes were categorised according to time period to understand the historical progression of events. Sub-themes were also identified within each theme to capture specific aspects of the data. To aid in identification, colour highlights were used to distinguish data under particular themes. The themes shared among consultants were analysed collectively to identify commonalities and differences in their experiences.

In the write-up, direct quotations from the data were occasionally included. To protect the privacy and anonymity of the consultants, quotes were used in a way that could not be linked to any specific individual. In some cases, permission was sought from consultants before directly quoting significant statements they made. The thematic analysis proved instrumental in this study, and the themes that directly addressed the research questions were presented in the respective sections of this chapter.

2.4 Research Results: Insights from Secondary and Primary Data

The research results section unveils the findings that address the research questions by examining insights obtained from both secondary and primary data sources. Section 2.4.1 presents the outcomes derived from secondary sources, delving into existing literature and documents to illuminate key aspects of the study. Subsequently, Section 2.4.2 delves into the primary data results, showcasing the outcomes of in-depth interviews conducted with key individuals closely associated with the realms of deaf education and the development of GSL.

2.4.1 Secondary Data: Historical Context of GSL Development

The 'Old School' Era: Challenges, Achievements, and Emergence of the Deaf Community

Formal education for hearing children has been available in Ghana since 1529 (Gadagbui, 1998; Pecku, 1977). However, it was not until 1957 that formal education became available for some deaf people. One significant hindrance to deaf education in the past was the superstitious beliefs about deafness held by some family members (Oteng, 1988).

Rev. Andrew Foster (an American) took a pioneering step by establishing the first deaf school, named Ghana Mission School for the Deaf. Upon Rev. Foster arrival in Ghana, he received assistance from various leaders of institutions, including Baptist Church (pastor Henry Dashinor Cobblah), Presbyterian Church (Rev. D. A. Konotey-Ahulu), the director of the Ghana Society for the Blind (Mrs. Semanyo), principal of the Akropong School for the Blind (Mr. Amoah), the Department of Social Welfare (Mr. J. Riby-Williams), and cabinet ministers (Mr. Kojo Botsio, Mr. K.A. Gbedemah, and Mr. C.T. Nylander). (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 148). Pastor Cobblah served as Reverend Foster's initial interpreter during his national outreach mission in Ghana and also part of the Board of Governors for the school (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 148). The Board of Governors, responsible for overseeing the school, comprised representatives from the Ministry of Education, Church leaders, traditional rulers, parents of deaf students, and a student representative. Remarkably, Seth Tetteh Ocloo, a deaf individual who became deaf at 17, played a pivotal role as a deaf student and Board of Governors member, later appointed as a teacher in the school (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 149). According to Okyere and Addo (1999: 149), Seth Tetteh Ocloo is the first deaf Ghanaian to serve as a teacher for deaf students. Ilabor (2010: 32 & 40) further noted that Seth Ocloo and Henry D. Cobblah were the two Ghanaians appointed by Rev. Foster to assist him during the initial phase of the school. Additionally, in Rev. Foster's recollection to Okyere and Addo in 1987, early teachers who assisted him included Ms. Florence Oteng, Ms. Grace Tetteh (later Mrs. Grace Amoah), and Mr. George Okae Tetteh (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 149).

The school initially located in a rented classroom within a Presbyterian public school building in Osu, Accra, began with 13 deaf children and 11 deaf adults (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 148; Ilabor, 2010). Since the school was nonresidential, Rev. Foster conducted classes for one hour each day, and he also trained Ghanaians to assist him with deaf education (Ilabor, 2010: 31; Oteng, 1997: 32ff). One of the main subjects taught was ASL vocabulary acquisition (Ilabor, 2010). Due to the increasing demand for deaf education across Ghana, the school moved to Mampong-Akwapim in January 1959, with government support for a boarding facility (Okyere

& Addo, 1999: 149; Ilabor, 2010). Okyere and Addo (1999: 149) mentioned that despite the school's relocation, classes and church services for deaf adults continued to be organised in Osu. Rev. Foster moved the school to Mampong-Akwapim due to accommodation needs and a health risk in Accra, which was later clarified to be malaria (Kwaffo, 1988: 3). Mampong's location in the Akuapim North District of the Eastern Region provided a more favourable environment for foreigners. Rev. Foster had already planned to move the school to farmland for expansion even before its establishment in Osu (Foster, 1957: 164). The school relocation allowed the acquisition of a sizable piece of farmland to serve academic and sustainable purposes (Ilabor, 2010; Foster, 1960a: 149; 1957). The move to Mampong led to the formation of a deaf community, with individuals from various regions coming together, bringing with them different 'home signs', 'gestures', and 'local Ghanaian signs' (Oteng, 1997; Gadagbui, 1998: 138). In a speech delivered in 1996, Dr. Ocloo lent further credibility to these reports, claiming that Rev. Foster introduced ASL and Signed English. He stated that:

> In the school and wherever possible, Dr. Foster used only Signed English. However, with older deaf adults who did not know English, he used a different form of signs, which I later learned, was American Sign Language. (Ocloo, 1996:1)

Rev. Foster's curriculum initially involved ASL and Signed English (Ocloo, 1996). However, he did not discourage the use of local signs or gestures among the students and acknowledged the need for sign language to reflect the African environment (Ocloo, 1996; Ilabor, 2010: 91). For example, during my research, I found that Dr. Ocloo, a deaf Ghanaian, played a role in inventing signs for local foods such as KENKEY, FUFU, and GARI (Ocloo, 1996:2). Additionally, Ilabor (2010:91) noted that Rev. Foster also occasionally created signs to compensate for ASL's limitations in accurately representing the African environment, including food and place names.

In 1961, the government developed a comprehensive plan to rehabilitate individuals with disabilities, leading to the Ministry of Education taking over the education of people with special needs in 1962, including the deaf school (Anson-Yevu, 1977). Rev. Foster was appointed headteacher with a monthly salary (Ilabor, 2010; Okyere & Addo, 1999). However, it appears that Rev. Foster may not have fully supported the government's takeover, as he expressed his desire to continue managing his school in a report to the government in 1960 (Foster, 1960a, b: 136-160). In his report, Rev. Foster suggested:

> That the school continues to be operated by the Christian Mission for the Deaf Africans under the Education laws of

> Ghana; that this organization [CMDA] should be granted full accreditation as a voluntary organization. (Foster, 1960a)

In the same report, Rev. Foster strongly advised against introducing oralism, emphasising its expensive nature and potential negative impact on academic and social success (Foster, 1960b: 156). Instead, he proposed a "combined system" (TC) that included ASL as a more suitable alternative (Foster, 1960a: 145; 1960b: 136-152). It is worth noting that Rev. Foster typically used generic terms for ASL in his writings, such as 'SL' (sign language) or 'formal SL' or 'language of sign', but in this particular report, he referred to it as "the American language of signs" when suggesting it to the government of Ghana (Foster, 1960a: 151). It is also worth emphasising that the term ASL did not exist before 1960 but gained prominence thereafter. As this term (ASL) emerged in academia, Foster also began incorporating it into his writings. Note that prior to the 1960s, sign language used in the United States was commonly perceived as a universal means of communication for deaf people. This is exemplified by Foster's (1976) recollection of his experiences in West Africa, where he asserted that the deaf individuals he encountered lacked language:

> "Most of the youths were not only deaf, but also illiterate. Deaf since birth or infancy, they had known no language or even words…Conversation was limited to natural gestures. A "language track" for thoughts to travel on was needed…" (Foster, 1976)

This statement above reflects the prevailing notion that, during that era, even if deaf Ghanaians had a locally evolved sign language like AdaSL, it would not have been recognised as such. Since the prevailing view regarded their communication method as a universal deaf language, which he, Rev. Foster, had brought to Ghana.

Despite Rev. Foster's advice, the government took over the school and appointed him the headteacher. Figure 5 depicts Rev. Foster in 1963, along with other staff members and students. Figure 6 shows an apartment that Rev. Foster rented in Mampong.

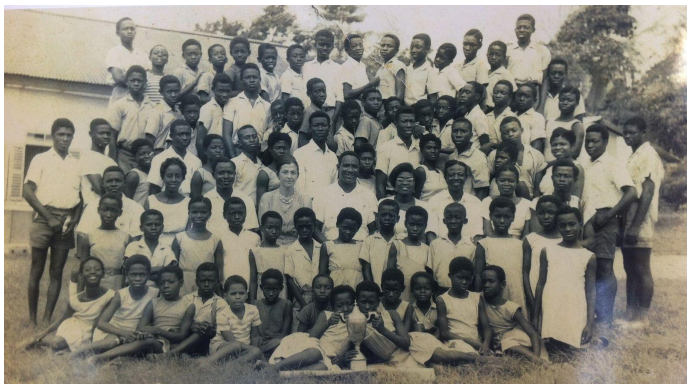

Figure 5: Staff and students at the Old School in November 1963
Photograph from the private collection of Godwin Amenumey
[From the 3rd front row are 9 staff members that include Ms. Grace Amoah, Mr. George Tetteh, Ms. Lewis[28], Rev. Dr. Andrew Foster (middle), Ms. Akrong, Rev. Henry D. Cobblah, Mrs. Elizabeth Tetteh-Ocloo]

Figure 6: The building rented by Rev. Foster as his residential abode at Mampong[29]
Photography by author. Taken and printed with permission

After serving as a government employee for three years, Rev. Foster resigned as headteacher of the Old School in 1965 to continue his missionary work in Nigeria and other African countries (Ilabor, 2010: 41). The Old School's closure is a topic of varying accounts. Gadagbui (1998: 70) noted the school's termination in 1977, while Pecku (1977: 2) mentioned that as of July 1977, the Old School had approximately 101 deaf students, but no new students were being admitted due to its termination.

---

[28] Ms. Lewis was a teacher from Czechoslovakia who was responsible for assisting students in how to communicate through the oral approach like lipreading. According to our informant, she personally invited herself to assist Rev. Foster with her skills. She was in Ghana because her husband was at that time working as a doctor at Tetteh Quarshie Memorial Hospital (informant D2).
[29] Currently the residence is an abandoned structure.

On the contrary, Fiaxe (1964 cited in Okyere & Addo, 1999: 152) stated that the school was terminated in 1979 out of fear that it might hinder the practice of oralism in the country.

In the next subsection, I highlight the Ghanaians who contributed to deaf education as found in the secondary data gathered.

Ghanaians Involvement in Deaf Education: Impact of Rev. Foster's Legacy

In the realm of deaf education in Ghana, Reverend Andrew Foster received significant support from Ghanaians, particularly from Baptist pastor Henry Dashinor Cobblah, who assisted Foster upon his arrival (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 148). Cobblah also acted as Foster's spokesperson during the initial phase of his work, which involved establishing a deaf school through an outreach program. To manage the school, Foster set up a board of Governors comprising Ghanaians, including Cobblah, Reverend Konotey-Ahulu, Reverend Obeng, and Seth Tetteh Ocloo (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 149).

During Foster's efforts to educate the deaf, many of his associates received scholarship opportunities to study abroad. In 1960, Foster reported that one Ghanaian had been sent to study in England, with plans to send others to America the following year (Foster, 1960b: 160). Other organisations, such as the Commonwealth Society for the Deaf and Gallaudet University, also offered scholarships to Ghanaians. The scholarship beneficiaries were Pastor H. D. Cobblah and David Tettey Kwashie Aryee, who returned as trained audiologists. Seth Tetteh Ocloo and Samael Agorgli Kwaku Fiaxe were recipients of the Gallaudet University scholarship, while George Okae Tetteh and Miss Vincential Diaba received support from the Danish Embassy Scholarship (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 149-150; Kwaffo, 1988).

However, not all Ghanaians who studied abroad returned to contribute to deaf education in Ghana (Okyere & Addo, 1999: 154). Those who did return, such as Mr. Fiaxe, Mr. Tetteh, Mr. Cobbinah, and Ms. Marion Obeng, became educators at the school for the deaf. Figure 7 displays the staff members at the school when Foster left, and Mr. Fiaxe succeeded Foster as the headteacher. Additionally, Figure 8 showcases the first deaf graduates from the Mampong school who completed their education in 1967 under the guidance of Ghanaian educators. Figure 9 displays a classroom section constructed of wood and roofing sheets.

Figure 7: Teaching and non-teaching Staff at Mampong School for the Deaf in 1965
Photograph from the private collection of Alexander D. Okyere

Figure 8: First graduate students[30] in 1967 with their teacher Ms. Obeng (middle)
Photograph from the private collection of Alexander D. Okyere
[In the back roll from left to right is Kpakpo Allotey, Kwabena Asare, Kwadwo Ansah & George Tagoe. In the front, from left to right, is Kwasi, Henry Forson, Ms Obeng, Thomas Marfo & Kofi Twum. Seated on the floor was George].

[30] The nine deaf students participated in the Middle School Leaving Certificate Examination alongside their hearing counterparts in Ghana, administered by the West African Examination Council. Nevertheless, the results revealed that only two deaf students successfully passed the exams (Okyere & Addo, 1999:150).

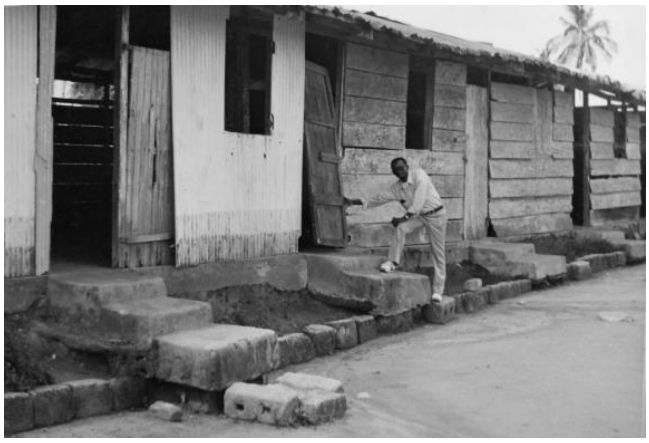

Figure 9: Alexander D. Okyere in Front of the Old School Classroom Structure, Post-1965
Photograph from the private collection of Alexander D. Okyere

In the following section, I explore the medium of instruction used in deaf education in Ghana after Foster's departure.

Medium of Instruction in Deaf Education in Ghana: The Battle between Manualism and Oralism

Within educational policies, Ghana's trajectory in formulating and executing language policies for deaf education has witnessed considerable fluctuations, both in official and unofficial capacities. In a seminal address delivered at a Ghanaian conference in 1972, Markidess (as referenced in Okyere & Addo, 1999:151) revealed Ghana's varied approach to communication modalities for Deaf education. Among the highlighted techniques were the Rochester Method[31], Combined Method[32], Simultaneous Method[33], Danish Method[34], Manual Method[35], and Total

[31] The Rochester Method entailed educating deaf students solely through the use of fingerspelling and oral language.
[32] Combined Method involved using both sign language and oral language for deaf education.
[33] The Simultaneous Method, also known as simultaneous communication or SimCom, involves the practice of concurrently using sign language and spoken language for communication.
[34] The Danish Method encompassed the integration of both hearing and deaf culture, as well as the incorporation of both sign language and spoken language in deaf education.
[35] Manual Method involved the use of sign language and fingerspelling in deaf education.

Communication[36] (Okyere & Addo, 1999:151). The exact mechanisms these methods were deployed remain unclear, probably due to unofficial practices. Despite the diversity of communication modalities acknowledged within the Ghanaian context, deaf schools demonstrated autonomy in the method to adopt. The criteria for such selections, as postulated by Appiah et al. (2016:39), predominantly hinged on the pedagogical background and expertise of the incumbent headteacher. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis by Okyere and Addo, (1999:152) on the method of communication also indicated that the Ministry of Education (at the time of their research) did not decisively select one method of communication to use for deaf education.

Since 1965, there has been an ongoing debate over the medium of instruction in deaf education in Ghana, primarily between the manual system (SL) and oralism (Kwaffo, 1988:3). Oralism was introduced in 1965, leading to controversy as manualists using sign language had already demonstrated pedagogical success (Kwaffo, 1988). The manual system used ASL, while oralism focused on oral communication (i.e., English & local Ghanaian languages) and Ghanaian gestures (ibid). Gadagbui (1998:87 & 105) also noted that oralism encouraged using Ghanaian gestures in the classroom.

During that time, it was commonly believed that any form of communication without speech would stigmatise individuals as less than human (Kwaffo, 1988:68). This echoes Rev. Foster's emotional advice to the Ghanaian government in 1960, strongly advocating against adopting oralism.

> …"Oralist" impose this system upon defenseless deaf children blindly and stubbornly. Is this good for Ghana? ...Ghana should heed this cry in the wilderness. (Foster 19606:155 - 156)

Pecku (1977) explained that in schools, deaf students were trained to adjust to society, supporting the idea behind oralism. Gadagbui (1998) also emphasised that sign language limited deaf individuals' social interaction with the public, leading to a push for the strong use of oralism and a ban on sign language. In 1967, sign language usage as a method of instruction was officially banned (Asamoah, GNAD Newsletter 2008a:5).

In 1992, authorities from all deaf schools in Ghana convened for a conference and decided to adopt Total Communication (TC) as the medium of

---

[36] Total Communication (TC) is an educational philosophy in deaf education that embraces a comprehensive approach to communication, encompassing the use of sign language, gestures, fingerspelling, body language, listening, lipreading, and speech.

instruction (Gadagbui 1998: 105). However, in 1999, the government reversed its stance and instructed all deaf schools to use only sign language as the medium of instruction (Deku & Kumedzro 2009:19; Appiah et al. 2016:36). This decision came after discussions in the 1990s involving stakeholders like Alexander D. Okyere, Edward Baiden, George Tetteh, Mary Addo, and Godfred (GES letter to stakeholders of GSL [1996, 9th August] [37]). The shift to sign language was attributed to concerns about students' poor academic performance and the perception that they were being forced/maltreated to use speech (Oppong, 2003 as cited in Appiah et al., 2016:40).

Additionally, the decline of oralism was also influenced by the lack of available equipment (e.g., Screening audiometer, Diagnostic audiometer, Speech training unit, Auditory training unit & Otoscopes) and qualified personnel (e.g., audiologists & speech therapists) to support the oral method (e.g., Appiah et al. 2016; Deku & Kumedzro 2009; Gadagbui 2005, 1998). Figure 10 illustrate a classroom environment showcasing oral approach practices and assessments in 1988 at Sekondi School for the Deaf (Kwaffo, 1988).

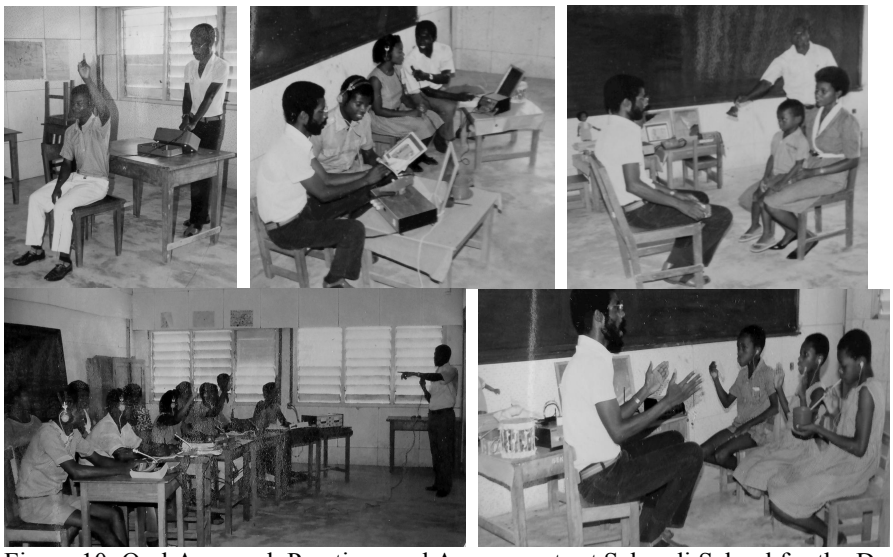

Figure 10: Oral Approach Practices and Assessments at Sekondi School for the Deaf in 1988
Photograph from the private collection of Edmund Kwasi Kwaffo

[37] GES Special Education Division. (1996, 9th August). Seminar on Deaf Education. Letter to stakeholders in Deaf education. Retrieved from J Amuah personal archive. Note: 2 of our informants (H1 & D4) were also personally invited to this workshop as their names appeared on the invitation letter. Other informants were also at the workshop, but they were there as GNAD representatives.

Pioneering Initiatives and Key Factors: Fostering the Development of GSL

The development of a national sign language can be attributed to the emergence of the deaf community's need for education and the initiatives undertaken by GNAD. In this section, I shed light on pioneers and actions that have played a crucial role in propelling the growth of a national sign language. The following subsections focus on the following aspects: 1) Sign language trainings; 2) the pivotal role of deaf associations and clubs; 3) the former involvement of the government and the national sign language learning materials (currently unavailable and out of print); and finally, 4) the significant impact of the national sign language broadcasting on national television.

Sign Language Trainings and influential Figures: A Catalyst for National Sign Language Development

In 1996, Ocloo (1996:1) estimated that approximately 90% of teachers lacked proficiency in signing (mostly hearing teachers), leading to several calls by GNAD for sign language training (GNAD Newsletter, 2010:22; 2009:7; 2008a,b:2). From 2003 to 2013, GNAD conducted a series of sign language teaching and interpretation training workshops in both northern (Upper West, Upper East & Northern Region) and southern parts of the country (GNAD Newsletter, 2009b:3; 2003:4-5). Sign language literacy skills were also provided to deaf individuals who had not attended deaf school (GFD Newsletter, 2005:5). GNAD even organised training for the hearing community, such as a two-week workshop in 2009 that trained 18 interpreters at the Akrofi-Christaller Institute in the Eastern Region.

> "The interpreters training was the first of its kind with facilitators; Mr. Philemon Akach, a renowned sign language interpreter's Lecturer and the Head of Afro-Asiatic Studies on sign language and Language Practice of Free State University-South Africa, and Ghana's own- Mr. Marco Nyarko, an undergraduate student at the University of Winneba who had undergone 2-month[s] training in sign language in England. (GNAD Newsletter, 2009b: 2)

One significant achievement of the interpreter's workshop was the establishment of the Ghana Association of Sign Language Interpreters[38], with Mr. Francis Atsu

[38] Over the years the association became inactive, and it is not known when and why. Currently, however, due to the covid-19 crises in 2020 and the need to disseminate

Agbenya as President and other elected members (GNAD Newsletter, 2009b). Figure 11 depicts the interpreters who underwent training, whereas Table 3 lists the members elected to oversee the association. Another notable interpreters' training occurred in 2012, where 18 interpreters from various regions received sign language training (GNAD Newsletter, 2012:7).

Table 3: First members of the Ghana Association of Sign Language Interpreters (GNAD Newsletter 2009b)

Vice President	Mr. John Jonas Kwame Dosoo
Public Relation Officer	Mr. Frank Owusu
Secretary	Mr. George Pinto
Treasurer	Ms. Lydia Boison
GNAD Representative	Mr. Johnson Mahama

Figure 11: Participants and Facilitators at the Interpreters Training Workshop **(GNAD Newsletter, 2009b)**
[The individual members involved Johnson Mahama (GNAD secretary), Pinto George, Stephen Akuba, Tom Gweru, Edem Doste, Lydia Boison, Ebenezer Asamoah (GNAD Director), Frank Owusu, Annang Boye, Daniel Amoah, Joyce Nyarko, E. Addo, Marco Nyarko (Facilitator), Dosu Jones, Phelimon Akach (Facilitator), Stephen Dadzie, Frimpong Mansu, Aaron Davis Ato, Haruna, M. I., Gideon Nii Kotey Quartey, Agbenya Francis, Matthew Dumah]

In the national sign language history annals, a pivotal moment occurred with the involvement of Philemon Akach, a consultant on deaf education and professor of

---

information, a GSL interpreters association came on the scene. The new association is known by the name National Association of Sign Language Interpreters Ghana and claims to have been formed in 2018 in the Western Region. (https://www.naslig.org).

sign language linguistics at Wits University in South Africa. His visit to Ghana in 1996 was supported by the Swedish Deaf Association, The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Back in 1992, the Ghanaian Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare collaborated with other ministries and NGOs to launch a community-based rehabilitation program (CBR) aimed at promoting the rights of people with disabilities in the country (WHO 2002b:7). As part of this initiative, several deaf individuals were integrated into mainstream schools, but communication became a significant challenge. Recognising the need for a local dictionary and learning materials for deaf education, the government established a national sign language committee in 1994 (UNESCO[39] 2001:31). Figure 12 displays a deaf member highlighting the benefits the deaf community accrued from CBR between 1992 and 1997. These benefits included the organisation of workshops, support in establishing GNAD branches, and the development of Sign Language.

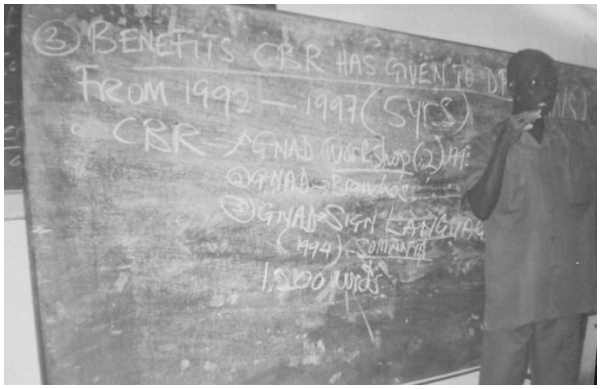

Figure 12: Presentation to Deaf Members on the Benefits GNAD Gained from CBR
Photograph from the private collection of Alexander D. Okyere

Responding to the government's call, UNESCO embarked on the Deaf Education Project Ghana from 1998 to 2000. Under this project, efforts were made to document GSL and develop teaching materials, including the GNAD (2001) dictionary[40]. Additionally, sign language teaching and interpreter training were key components of the program. Dr. Akach, as a consultant for the project, facilitated a series of workshops (UNESCO 2001:32). These workshops catered to deaf adults for sign language documentation and development, interpreters for sign language interpretation, and teachers for sign language structure and pedagogy (ibid). These workshops were held nationally, engaging participants from various regions in

[39] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
[40] The book itself did not provide a publication date, but based on my general knowledge, it can be inferred that it was published in 2001.

Ghana, which ultimately contributed to the transformation of a national sign language for deaf education (ibid).

The outcomes of the Deaf Education Project were momentous. A 6-member team of proficient national sign language signers was formed after the workshops. This team played a crucial role in disseminating their profound understanding of the national sign language to all deaf schools across the country (ibid:33). Linguistically, one of the major achievements was the identification of 76 handshapes, which resulted in around 2,500 national sign language signs specifically designed for teaching purposes (ibid).

Moreover, the influence of deaf churches was another significant factor in the propagation of a national sign language. As early as 1987, notable deaf-led churches emerged in various locations, including Mampong, Adamorobe, Koforidua, Tema, Tamale, Cape Coast, Sekondi, Takoradi, and Kumasi, largely under the guidance of Reverend Andrew Foster (Foster, 1987; 1976; 1965). Foster's January-March newsletter reported that these church gatherings nationwide amassed about 600 deaf members (Foster, 1987).

Philemon Akach's involvement and support from deaf groups have left indelible marks on the national sign language development and spread in Ghana. These efforts have significantly contributed to enhancing the education and empowerment of the deaf community in the country.

Empowering the Deaf Community in Ghana: The Role of Deaf Associations and Clubs

GNAD, the sole existing deaf-led association in Ghana, was founded by Dr. Seth Tetteh Ocloo (GNAD n.d.:15). Although it was formed in 1968, it officially obtained association registration in 1975 (Phillips 2002:20). With an initial membership of 25 individuals, predominantly male, GNAD's primary objective, according to Gadagbui (1998:137), was to bring together deaf graduates to exchange ideas and perspectives on their development. In 1976, GNAD became a member of the World Federation of the Deaf (Gadagbui 1998:138).

In the Northern region of Ghana, the Action on Disability and Development (ADD) [41], a benevolent non-governmental organisation (NGO), established a deaf club centre to serve as a social and talent showcase hub for the deaf community. Subsequently, in 1995, ADD set up an independent deaf association in the Upper East Region. However, it was only in 1997, with the intervention of the late Mr.

[41] ADD is a British NGO which started operating in Ghana since 1994.

Francis Boison, GNAD harmonised its relationship with the Northern deaf association established by ADD (GNAD Newsletter 1998:8).

Notably, GNAD was not the first deaf association in Ghana. The Ghana Society for the Deaf holds that distinction. The exact founding date is a subject of debate, with Grischow (2011) stating it was created in August 1962 as a lobby group for deaf Ghanaians under the control of the Convention People's Party (CPP) led by Nkrumah (Grischow 2011:196). In contrast, Oppong (2006:19) asserts that the Ghana Society for the Deaf was established in 1965. A tribute by GNAD (Newsletter 2004:8) to the late Edward Atta Gyan Baiden (deaf person) indicates that the Ghana Society for the Deaf was previously known as the Osu Mission Center. Limited information is available about the Ghana Society for the Deaf's leadership. However, records from 2003 suggest that a retired High Court judge named Mr. K. E. Boison headed the association during that period. Ghana Society for the Deaf also provided deaf education using sign language. The tribute to Baiden, for example, indicated he learned sign language from the Ghana Society for the Deaf (GNAD Newsletter 2004:8). Figure 13 illustrates a group of deaf adults participating in educational training at the Ghana Society for the Deaf office.

Figure 13: Francis Boison (in front) and other deaf individuals receiving training at the office of the Ghana Society for the Deaf
Photograph from the private collection of Alexander D. Okyere

In 1995, the Ghana Society for the Deaf, in collaboration with a religious organisation and facilitators from the University of Kansas in America, organised a workshop to train and certify Ghanaians as professional interpreters (UNESCO 2001:31). Similarly, a report by UNESCO (2001) and the WHO (2002a,b) also mentioned several sign language proficiency trainings were organised for deaf members in collaboration with the government (via CBR) and a deaf association.

However, it was unclear whether the association they referred to was GNAD or Ghana Society for the Deaf.

During the early 1990s, GNAD and the Ghana Society for the Deaf collaborated on various activities to foster unity within the deaf community. Noteworthy events included the Deaf Festival of Art and Culture in 1991, the Deaf Workers Durbar in 1992, and the Deaf tourist tour in 1994 (GNAD Newsletter 2004:8). Additionally, several sports (see Figure 14) and drama activities were organised, leading to the formation of the Ghana Deaf Sports Federation in 1994 to promote deaf sports in the country (Anonymous, 2006:22). It should be noted that the federation was established by Mr. Jonathan Amuah, a consultant featured in this chapter. Before the official registration of the federation in 1994, the federation organised several annual National Deaf festivals. These festivals took place in Takoradi in 1979, Kumasi in 1980, Cape Coast in 1981, and Tarkwa in 1984, as reported by Graphic Sports on 16 July 2004.

Figure 14: Ghanaian deaf football team celebrating their victory against Nigeria in 2004.[42] **(**Photograph from **GNAD Newsletter, 2004)**

The establishment of the two associations and joint efforts have significantly contributed to the empowerment and advancement of the deaf community in Ghana, fostering a sense of belonging and progress among its members.

---

[42] The following are the individual deaf members who were in the team: Alfred Deko, Isaac Eshun, Bernard Kwateng, Eric Sarkodie, Jonny Oti Agyei, Samuel Apprey, Awudu Anyass, Samuel Opuni, Kwame Asante, Godfred Baffoe, Yahaya Grushie, Prince Buronya and Alex Okyere (i.e., My deaf research assistant, Alex, was a member of the football team. In the photograph, he can be identified as the second individual from the right in the front row)

Government's Role in Developing the National Sign Language

In September 1996, the Ghana Education Service (GES) took a significant step towards national sign language development by organising a five-day workshop at the University of Education, Winneba. This workshop aimed to seek stakeholder input for the appropriate methodology in the national sign language documentation, as GES was about to begin this crucial undertaking (GES letter to stakeholders of GSL [1996, 14th August] [43]). During the workshop, Dr. Ocloo, in a written speech where he identified himself as the right-hand man of Rev. Andrew Foster, emphasised the need of expanding the national sign language vocabulary to include Ghanaian cultural concepts, festivals, and chieftaincy (Ocloo, 1996:1). On the issue of developing the national sign language, Ocloo (1996:2) noted that the "English signs" (i.e., Signed English with ASL vocabulary) already introduced into Ghana *need not* be changed, but rather the vocabulary needs to be increased to capture other concepts in our cultural environment.

GNAD played a pivotal role in pursuing the national sign language development by documenting it. Some members aimed to show how distinct it was from ASL (F. Boison, P.C, 26th Sept. 2015). Gadagbui (1998:55) also noted that GSL was being "formulated" by a team of experts. According to Gadagbui (2005; 1998) and Kudogo et al. (2001 as cited in Gadagbui 2005), GSL was being "developed" through the creation of a GSL dictionary. UNESCO's Deaf Education Project Ghana (1998-2000) also contributed significantly to GSL documentation and teaching material, culminating in identifying 76 handshapes capable of producing approximately 2,500 GSL signs for teaching purposes (UNESCO 2001:32).

In 2007, GES, in collaboration with GNAD and other stakeholders, established a committee dedicated to standardising "GSL" for deaf education. The committee included representatives from various organisations and institutions, aiming to enhance "GSL" materials for deaf students at different academic levels (Committee Report [2007, 27th November]) [44]. Table 4 presents the members of the committee.

Table 4: Committee members of GSL standardisation

Committee members	Affiliation
Mr. Ebenezer Asamoah (hearing)	GNAD

[43] Ghana Education Service, Special Education Division. (1996, 14th August). Workshop on the Development of Sign Language. Letter to stakeholders of GSL. Retrieved from J. Amuah personal archive.

[44] Ghana Education Service Special Education Division. (2007, 27th November). Committee report on Common sign language usage in Special Schools for the Deaf in Ghana. Retrieved from J Amuah personal archive.

Mr. Jonathan Amoah (deaf)	GNAD
Mr. Francis Kwame Boison (deaf)	GNAD
Mr. Emmanuel Ofosu-Boachie (hearing)	Koforidua School for the Deaf
Mr. A.M. Oppong (hearing)	University of Education, Winneba (UEW)
Mr. Owusu Sekeyre Frank (hearing)	UEW
Mrs. Victoria Donkor (hearing)	Special Education Division (SpED)-GES
Mr. Robert H. Akyea (hearing)	SpED- GES
Mr. Kobina Baidoo (hearing)	SpED- GES
Mr. Godfred K. Tay (hearing)	SpED- GES
Mr. A.K. Quansah (hearing)	SpED- GES
Mrs. Dinah Kwadade (hearing)	Africa Action, Ghana
Ms. Layla Zulekha Isam (hearing)	Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)
Ms. Patience Gamado (hearing)	VSO
Mr. Michael Cudjoe (hearing)	State School for the Deaf

As of 27th November 2007, the committee in their report acknowledged the existence of GNAD (2001) and Oppong's (2007) dictionaries and some GSL books by Mrs. Dinah Kwadade and Non-Formal Education Division, respectively. However, the report noted that due to the absence of linguistic advice, the available GSL books "lacked certain ingredients" as such were not adequate for deaf education in the country (Committee Report [2007, 27th November]:2). In the report, it was planned that the creation of a new GSL material would build on previous GSL books by capturing regional variations as well as creating various materials (both in print & video) to meet the need of deaf students at different academic heights under GES (Committee Report [2007, 27th November]). It was noted that GES successfully developed the GSL materials for deaf education (J. Amuah. Personal communication. 22, December 2020). However, the researcher could not get hold of some copies since they were out of the system.

Subsequently, in 2009, Mrs. Dinah Kwadade (past acting Director of Special Education Division) launched three GSL books titled "My First Book Sign," "Sign with me – My Books of Fruits and Vegetables," and "Bibo, My Friend" to aid sign language learning for deaf children and the public (GNAD Newsletter 2010:4). Additionally, Dr. Philemon Akach launched sign language Story Books in Ghana further to enrich sign language resources (GNAD Newsletter 2010:4). Attempts also to get copies of these books were not successful. There is also a handbook by GNAD that introduces GSL to its readers (GNAD, n.d.). This time I got a copy of this book. It was titled "Deaf Awareness Handbook". The handbook is an earlier

book that teaches signs and describes GSL syntax (GNAD n.d.:8). GSL parameters and non-manual markers are also illustrated. GSL was also demonstrated to have a different syntactic structure from English. However, the book is out of print, and I do not know how popular it became during its production.

Furthermore, GNAD published a valuable resource called the "Deaf Awareness Handbook," introducing GSL to its readers by illustrating GSL parameters, non-manual markers, and syntax (GNAD n.d.:8). Unfortunately, the handbook is currently out of print, but I managed to get a copy.

Overall, the efforts made by various organisations and stakeholders have been crucial in documenting and standardising GSL, enriching the educational experience and cultural awareness for the Ghanaian deaf community.

Empowering GSL through Television Broadcasting

In 1992, a groundbreaking sign language educational program called "The Missing Link" was introduced.[45] This 30-minute TV program aired every Saturday at 1:00 p.m., making it accessible to a wide audience (Nuviadenu, 2005). "The Missing Link" played a significant role in creating deaf awareness and promoting necessary support for the "official acceptance of Sign Language in the country" (Daily Graphic, 6th August 2007, p. 4; Martey-Markwei, 1989:5). Mr. Martey-Markwei was the producer of "The Missing Link". See Figure 15 for a depiction of "The Missing Link" in action during a broadcast.

A: Introducing the program[46] B: Presenting the news in GSL[47] C: Teaching GSL

Figure 15: The Missing Link: A TV program for the Deaf Community in Ghana (Photographs from a newsletter. Kind Courtesy of Martey-Markwei, 1989)

---

[45] The termination date of "The Missing Link" as a TV program is not documented in secondary data sources. See section 2.4.2.5, where Jonathan Amoah's information indicates that the program halted around the year 2000, citing a lack of support as a contributing factor.

[46] By Mr. Felix Ansah.

[47] By Ms Mary J. Addo (a participant in this chapter).

One of the remarkable aspects of "The Missing Link" was its ability to pave the way for various advertisements to be delivered using sign language (GNAD Newsletter, 2009b; 2003:3; GNAD, 2018:4). This provided an inclusive platform for advertisers and businesses to reach the deaf community in Ghana.

Several individuals actively contributed to the success of "The Missing Link," including Mr. Felix Ansah, Mr. Francis Boison, Ms. Mary Addo, Mr. Francis Agbenya, and Mr. Alexander D. Okyere (GNAD Newsletter, 2004:8; Martey-Markwei, 1989). These individuals played instrumental roles in ensuring that the program effectively promoted the national sign language and fostered greater understanding of the deaf community's needs and aspirations.

"The Missing Link" stands as a significant milestone in GSL history, and its impact continues to be felt in raising awareness, promoting sign language acceptance, and providing an inclusive platform for communication and advertisement. The efforts of the dedicated team behind the program have been essential in advancing the recognition and use of a national sign language across Ghana.

2.4.2 Primary source: Perspectives from Deaf Education and Activism

The 'Old School' Era: Challenges, Achievements, and Emergence of the Deaf Community

According to information gathered from Mr. Asamoah, the Ghana Mission School for the Deaf, established by Rev. Andrew Foster and later moved to Mampong-Akwapim, gained stability with the appointment of Mrs. Fathia Nkrumah[48] as its patron appointed by Dei Anan, a close associate of Kwame Nkrumah[49] (Mr. Asamoah's interview). This connection sparked Kwame Nkrumah's interest in Deaf education in Ghana, prompting the government to seek assistance from the Commonwealth Society for the Deaf in London. This led to the invitation of Ms. Anne Hewitt from the United Kingdom[50] (Massachusetts University), who became the first principal of the newly formed Special Training Teachers' College (STTC) at Mampong-Akwapim in 1965. STTC introduced oralism by training teachers as oralists to manage deaf education in the country.

---

[48] The first lady of Ghana/wife of the first president of Ghana.

[49] The first prime minister and subsequently president (in 1960) after the independence of Ghana in 1957. Nkrumah's government ended on 24 February 1966 with a coup d'état.

[50] Since Ghana gained independence from the British, it was not surprising that an expert from the United Kingdom was called on instead of America, where Rev. Foster came from. At that time oralism was also being practised in deaf education in the United Kingdom.

Table 5 lists the heads who managed STTC before it was eventually upgraded into a special education college and moved to the University of Education, Winneba (UEW). As the inaugural head, Ms. Hewitt successfully trained over 30 teachers during her tenure, leaving a lasting impact on the college before her departure in 1970. Dr. Carlin assumed the position briefly for less than a year, after which Dr. Andreas Markides took over and served as the college's head for four years. As recounted by Mr. Asamoah, Dr. Markides was critical of Ms. Hewitt's approach, suggesting that she had not adhered to a strictly oral method. Before Dr. Markides's tenure as head of college, the school had employed the Rochester method—a combination of fingerspelling with oral techniques. However, Dr. Markides took a more stringent stance on oralism and ceased the application of the Rochester method. Notably, fingerspelling was previously used for names and terms that were challenging to lip-read, but Dr. Markides insisted on a pure oral approach, asserting, "If it is oral, it is oral," as captured in Mr. Asamoah's interview. Following Dr. Markides' departure, Mr. David Aryee made history as the first Ghanaian to lead the college. Under his leadership, the college underwent amalgamation with other special colleges responsible for training teachers for special needs students. Then eventually got relocated to the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), continuing its vital role in shaping the future of deaf education in Ghana (Mr. Asamoah's interview).

Table 5: Heads of the Special Training Teachers' College (1965 – 1986)

College Head	Country of Origin	Period
Ms. Hewitt	United Kingdom	1965 - 1970
Dr. T.W. Carlin	United State of America	1971
Dr. Andreas Markides	Greece (or the United Kingdom)[51]	1971 - 1975
Mr. David Aryee	Ghana	1975 - 1986

According to Mr. Asamoah, during Ann Hewitt's leadership, newly enrolled deaf children at the Ghana Mission School for the Deaf were segregated from those already introduced to sign language. Ms. Hewitt adopted the oral approach for the new students. She rented a nearby premise to facilitate this approach and established the Demonstration School for the Deaf in 1968. The Demonstration School for the Deaf was situated approximately one kilometer from

[51] He was a Greek but naturalized as a British.

the Old School in Mampong-Akuapem, in close proximity to the Special Training Teachers' College. Trained teachers were assigned to practice the oral method at the Demonstration School for the Deaf. However, Mr. Amuah (interview) revealed that some deaf students at the Demonstration School secretly visited the Old School to learn sign language. Over time, the Old School faced a decline in new admissions due to the focus on the oral approach, which eventually led to the decision to transform it into a Secondary/Technical School for the Deaf in 1975 (Ms. Addo & Mr. Asamoah's interviews). Currently, it is the sole second-cycle institution for the deaf in Ghana. The Special Training Teachers' College played a crucial role in providing teacher training for deaf education, with the first cohort of 12 trainee teachers (8 males & 4 females) completing their program in 1967, and the second cohort of 16 male trainees[52] arriving in September 1967 (Mr. Asamoah interview).

In 1970, the thirteenth meeting of the International Congress on Education of the Deaf took place in Stockholm, Sweden. Following Ghana's participation in this congress, the country committed to supporting African teachers in pursuing Deaf Education. As a significant step in this direction, in 1975, the Special Teachers' Training College (STTC) started admitting aspiring teachers from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Swaziland, Kenya, Gambia, Botswana, and Seychelles (as indicated by Mr. Diaba; Gadagbui 1998:116).

Locally in Ghana, the establishment of STTC had a profound impact, acting as a catalyst for creating various deaf schools across the country, as shared by Mr. Asamoah. This initiative played a crucial role in expanding educational opportunities for deaf students and fostering a supportive environment for the deaf community in Ghana.

The Pioneers: How Deaf Schools Spread Across Ghana

Mr. Asamoah provided valuable insight into the spread of deaf schools nationwide. Interestingly, the information presented in this section was largely consistent with Gadagbui's (1998) and Pecku (1977) findings. However, there are a few contradictions that I address in the section.

According to Mr. Asamoah, after the graduation of the first trained oralists from STTC, eight teachers were sent to the Old School and three to the Demonstration school[53]. This dedicated group of teachers began advocating for establishing more schools. As these trained oralists hailed from different parts of Ghana, some chose to return to their regions and set up deaf schools, receiving strong support from the government. Table 6) below provides names of those responsible for initiating various deaf schools nationwide.

---

[52] Informant H3 happens to be among the second cohort of the 16 students.
[53] Note: One of the female students decided to leave special education.

Table 6: Deaf Schools in Ghana, their pioneers and initial medium of instruction[54]

Deaf Schools	Year of establishment	City & Region	Initiators	Initial method of instruction
Demonstration School for the Deaf	1968[55]	Mampong, Eastern Region	Ann Hewitt (British)	Oralism
State School for the Deaf	1965[56]	Accra, Greater Accra Region	Dr. Seth Ocloo	TC
Wa School for the Deaf	1968	Wa, Upper West Region	Mr. Bod Miller	Oralism
Cape Coast School for the Deaf	1970	Cape Coast, Central Region	Mr. I.K. Nkum	Oralism
Sekondi School for the Deaf	1971	Inchaban, Western Region	Ms. Theresa Rule	Oralism

[54] Currently there is no existing deaf school in Adamorobe village. However, historical accounts vary regarding its establishment and closure. According to Gadagbui (1998:78), Rev. Foster organized the Adamorobe School for the Deaf in the village between 1963 and 1975. Subsequently, Mr. Ofori, a trained oralist from STTC, supervised the deaf school from 1974 to 1980 (Gadagbui (1998:78). Contradictory information arises from Kusters (2015:154), stating that the school closed in 1980 due to conflicts between deaf students and their teacher. Kusters (2015:153) adds that the school originated in 1974 as a unit school initiated by the Ghanaian government, during a period when Foster was no longer in the country. Nyst (2007:26ff), however, provides a different perspective, noting that the school began in 1987 by the initiative of Rev. Foster and Mr. Adu. Despite the variance in timelines, Kusters (2015), Nyst (2007) and Gadagbui (1998) offer more detailed insights into the complex history of the deaf school in Adamorobe.

[55] This date is different from what was presented in figure 3 this was because in both my secondary data (Gadagbui, 1998) and interview, 1968 was what was given. Other literature (e.g., Okyere & Addo, 1999; Pecku, 1977) noted 1964, which I find hard to believe because the school cannot have preceded STTC which was in 1965. In figure 3 the year was taken from Amoako (2019), I also believe that Amoako mistakenly considered the Demonstration School as a continuation of Old School which was established in 1957.

[56] In 1965, the Mission Centre for the Deaf was established, and it was through this center that the school began as a private entity. Some (e.g., Runnels 2020 & Pecku, 1977) however use the year 1966 as the time teaching began at the centre.

Volta School for the Deaf	1971	Hohoe, Volta Region	Ms. Mary Adziimah (Mrs. Seneya)	Oralism
Bechem School for the Deaf	1975[57]	Bechem, Brong Ahafo Region	Mr. G. O. Tetteh	Total Communication (SimCom[58])
Kibi Unit School for the Deaf	1975	Kibi, Eastern Region	Mrs. E. Obeng & Mr. S.Y. Appiah[59]	Oralism
Koforidua Unit School for the Deaf	1975	Koforidua, Eastern Region	Mrs. E. Obeng & Mr. E. A. Odameh[60]	Oralism
Salvation Army School for the Deaf	1995	Agona Swedru, Centra Region	Mr. I.K. Nkum	Oralism
Secondary/Technical School for the Deaf	1975	Mampong, Eastern Region	Ghanaian government	Total Communication (SL+ Oralism)
Ashanti School for the Deaf	1977	Jamasi, Ashanti Region	Ms. Agnes Opoku	Oralism
Savelugu	1978	Savelugu,	Mr. I.K.	Oralism

[57] 1968 and 1969 was what I came across from the findings. But Amoako (2019) claimed it was 1975 which I doubt because, as early as the late 1960s, the initiator of the school Mr. G.O. Tetteh, had returned from his training in Denmark.

[58] In other words, Simultaneous Communication, or sign-supported speech (see section 1.2). It is a way of signing and speaking at the same time during communication. Linguists do not consider the technique of using SimCom as sign language since the signs are made to follow the grammatical structure of the spoken language being articulated.

[59] Mr. Odameh was the trained oralist sent to head the unit school, but Mrs. Obeng initiated the call for the unit.

[60] Mr. Appiah was the trained oralist sent to head the unit school, but Mrs. Obeng initiated the call for the unit.

School for the Deaf		Northern Region	Nkum	
Gbeogo School for the Deaf	1996	Tongo Bolgatanga, Upper East Region	Mr. Baiden & Mr. B. Kosusum	SL + Oralism

As could be observed in Table 6, several inspiring individuals played pivotal roles in starting deaf schools across different regions of Ghana. Let's explore some of these remarkable stories (Mr. Asamoah's interview):

1. Ms. Theresa Rhule from the Western Region initiated a deaf school, in Sekondi. She established the school in an abandoned technical school structure[61]. With her training in the oralist approach, oralism became the primary medium of instruction at the school.
2. Ms. Mary Adzimah, from the Volta Region, returned to her hometown and took the initiative to start the Volta School for the Deaf. She began the school in her uncle's (big) house in Gboxome until the government constructed a permanent building for it.
3. Mr. R. K. Nkum, originally from the Central Region began the Cape Coast School for the Deaf. Due to the lack of a student dormitory, the school adopted a foster system. This system was a situation where nearby families are paid to provide accommodation and feeding for the deaf students as their surrogate parent. Later Mr. Nkum was transferred by GES to the Northern Region to start the Savelugu School for the Deaf.
4. Assisted by the Catholic Church, Mr. Bod Miller initiated the Wa School for the Deaf. Interestingly, the literature (i.e., Gadagbui 1998) notes that Dagaare[62] was the school's predominant language. This is not surprising given that Mr. Miller was trained as an oralist. In different regions, languages like Ewe, Twi, and Ga were employed (Okyere & Addo, 1999:150 & 151).
5. The literature (Gadagbui 1998) mentions that Mr. Bawa Kosusum Sam (but the name pronounced by Mr. Asamoah in our interview sounded as KOSUSANYI) and an unknown NGO started the Gbeogo School for the Deaf in the Upper East Region. However, one consultant (Mr. Asamoah) clarified that a deaf man named Edward Baiden was the true initiator of the school. Although Mr. Baiden lacked the required teaching qualifications,

[61] The school was abandoned due to its proximity to the sea and the fear that the building would collapse after some few years.
[62] A language used in Ghana and Burkina Faso belonging to the Moore-Gurma language family.

> Kosusum, trained at STTC, stepped in as the headteacher. This claim was supported by information gathered from another secondary source. Edward Baiden, fondly known in the deaf community as EB, was recognised for his achievement by GNAD in a tribute:
>
> > In 1995, "EB" worked tirelessly in pursuit of the establishment of a school for the Deaf in the Upper East Region, which was the only region without such a deaf school. There he made contacts with the Bolga Na-Ba (Chief of Bolga) District Assembly, Bongo, and Bawku and pressed for establishing such a school. Through his effort, there is now a school for the Deaf at Tongo-Gbeogo in the Bolga District. (GNAD Newsletter, 2004:8)

On the other hand, there are deaf schools that were not established by locally trained oralists. Two such examples are the Becham School for the Deaf and the State (Adjei Kojo) School for the Deaf.

The State School in Osu, founded by Dr. Seth Ocloo in 1965, began as a private entity called Osu Mission Centre, aided by a government grant (Ocloo 2014; Gadagbui 1998:70). Dr. Ocloo secured a grant from the National Trust Fund to address the issue of overpopulation in the Old School and establish a new deaf school in Accra (Ocloo 2014). The school's history saw it relocated from Osu to Teshei in 1969[63], and later, it settled in its current location in Adjei Kojo.

The Becham School for the Deaf was initiated by Mr. G.O. Tetteh, who underwent training in Denmark after working with Foster. Mr. Tetteh utilized SimCom in his deaf education approach and received support from Ms. Agnes Opoku, a trained oralist. However, since Ms. Opoku hailed from the Ashanti Region, she decided to return there after working with Mr. Tetteh for two years to establish a deaf school.

In the case of the Kibi and Koforidua schools for the Deaf, Mr. Asamoah attributes their beginnings to Mrs. [Eudocia] Obeng, who formerly served as a headteacher at the Demonstration School in Mampong. Subsequently, Mrs. Obeng took on the role of the then called first "peripatetic teacher"[64]. Her responsibilities involved locating several deaf children in Koforidua and Kibi, leading to the initiation of Unit Schools for the Deaf in these locations. The concept of unit schools was influenced by British practices to promote oralism by integrating deaf students

---

[63] The school was taken over by the government this year (1969) and was renamed as the State School for the Deaf.

[64] According to the participants, peripatetic teachers were responsible for the early identification of children with disability for appropriate care.

into mainstream schools. Both schools have transitioned away from the integrated system/unit[65] and are recognised as Kibi School for the Deaf and Koforidua School for the Deaf, respectively.

Battle between Oralism and Sign Language in Deaf Education

In the late 1960s, Mr. Okyere, was hired as a deaf teacher at the Old School. He was post lingually deaf and first introduced to signing in the school. According to him, at that time, the school had two factions of teachers, one advocating for oralism and the other for sign language. Sadly, Mr. Okyere experienced a hurtful situation when a colleague teacher derogatorily called him an "animal" because of his preference for sign language. Recounting the incident, Mr. Okyere emotionally expressed his anguish during a big meeting, where the hurtful term was used. He highlighted that the teacher believed the deaf people should only sign like "people" and not like "animals.". Mr. Okyere, noted the following in the interview.

> The first time he called me [animal], we had a big meeting [conference] and he called me animal. I wept. I wept in the presence of the people."…. "he said that, I don't want the deaf to talk, I want the deaf to sign. When they sign like animal, they become animal, when they sign like people, they try to become like people. (Mr. Okyere's, Interview, November 2020)

This ridicule appeared to be an attempt to suppress Mr. Okyere from advocating for sign language to deaf students. Between 1965 and 1992, the government predominantly favored oralism as the acceptable medium of instruction. During this period, deaf students faced punishment for using sign language on campus, and authorities even chastised (i.e., rebuked & reprimanded) teachers for employing sign language (Mr. Kwaffo & Ms. Addo's interview). The misconception that sign language threatened oralism in Ghana led to banning sign language in the Old School (Mr. Asamoah & Mr. Amenumey's interview).

Despite the opposition to sign language by oralist teachers, they still used gestures, facial expressions, and lipreading as part of their teaching strategies for the deaf (Mr. Kwaffo & Mr. Asamoah's interview). However, in 1988, the Ministry of Education recommended that deaf schools adhere to Total Communication (Mr. Kwaffo's interview). Although Total Communication was officially recognised as the medium of instruction, sign language gradually gained prominence due to the costly nature of specialised equipment to practice oralism (Mr. Kwaffo's interview).

---

[65] Both authors experience the unit system in Koforidua as students

As a result, sign language began to dominate the educational approach in deaf schools in Ghana.

Evolution of a National Sign Language: From ASL and Signed English to Unification Efforts

Before the label GSL came into use in Ghana, the prevalent signing systems in deaf schools were ASL and Signed English, according to Mr. Amenumey, Mr. Amuah, Mr. Okyere, Ms. Addo, Mr. Kwaffo, and Mr. Asamoah. They also confirmed using a specific ASL dictionary called "Joy of Signing" by Riekehof (1978) at the Old School. From 1979 to 1983, Mr. Okyere had the opportunity to study in the United States (e.g., Gallaudet University, Western Maryland College), where he experienced SimCom and Signed English, which he noted were similar to what they used in Ghana. Upon returning to Ghana, Mr. Okyere continued as a teacher for the deaf at the Old School.

Mr. Adjei, who learned sign language outside of school, also noted that he was introduced to Signed English through interactions with deaf adults he met at Osu deaf church meetings, indicating that signing was not confined to the school domain.

Regarding naming the sign language used in the past, Mr. Asamoah referred to it in spoken English as "one-handed American Signs," while Mr. Kwaffo mentioned "American Conventional SL." Mr. Kwaffo further explained that during his time as a teacher at the Old School (from 1971), the specific name for the sign language they used was irrelevant to them, and they simply referred to it as sign language in spoken English.

When asked about the origin of the label “GSL”, Mr. Amuah stated that around 1992 - 1994, Mr. Okyere suggested it, with strong support from Mr. Francis Boison. However, when Mr. Okyere was asked the same question, he did not comment and expressed surprise that the national sign language was officially acknowledged as GSL. Mr. Asamoah and Ms. Addo also acknowledged the role of Mr. Francis Boison, Mr. Okyere, and some GNAD members in advocating for the GSL label, although they initially faced challenges. During this time, the GSL dictionary (GNAD, 2001) was produced, which contributed to the adoption of the GSL label. Mr. Asamoah and Mr. Amenumey confirmed that the label GSL gained prominence following the compilation of the GSL dictionary by GNAD. Below is a statement from Mr. Asamoah on the subject matter.

> At a point, the deaf community started to see whether we can have GSL, but I can say the time I was leaving [GNAD] we were not successful; we came out with a booklet [i.e., GNAD,

> 2001], and there was just a little difference between the GSL and ASL. (Mr. Asamoah's interview, December 2020).

One informant (Mr. Asamoah) emphasized that some people advocated for Ghana to abandon ASL and solely adopt local signs from the already existing sign language, such as AdaSL, for deaf education. However, contrary to this idea, informant Mr. Okyere, a committee member involved in the GSL dictionary's development, noted that their aim was to unify GSL due to existing variations.

The following subsections highlight two significant areas that, according to the informants, played key roles in the development of GSL, emphasizing the contributions of deaf-led associations and national advocacy and training on GSL.

Emergence and Growth of GSL: Influential Figures, Religious Contributions and Media Impact

According to Mr. Amuah, Dr. Akach from Kenya as consultant on Deaf Education played a significant role in developing GSL by introducing sign language linguistics and advocating for recognising deaf indigenous signs over ASL and Signed English. His visitation to Ghana marked a pivotal moment in the history of GSL. Akach's lecture served as a wake-up call, addressing the prevalent use of Signed English (i.e., english).

In response to this awakening, a national outreach program was initiated to educate deaf individuals and teachers on sign language in all deaf schools. This outreach was a collaborative effort with the Ghana Education Service (GES) and involved dedicated team members such as Mrs. Dinah Kwadade, Mr. George Tay, Mr. Francis Agbenya, Mr. Godwin Amenumey, Mr. Francis Boison, and Mr. Jonathan Amoah. The success of this project can be seen in the increased awareness and acceptance of GSL in deaf education across the country, leading to a gradual decline of oralism in the 1990s, as reported by Mr. Amuah and Mr. Okyere.

Religious institutions also played a crucial role in spreading sign language. Many church groups relied on various sign language dictionaries to teach their members, and deaf churches actively contributed to disseminating GSL among the deaf community, as mentioned by Ms. Addo, Mr. Adjei, and Mr. Amenumey. In some cases, older deaf members of the church took on the responsibility of teaching sign language to interested individuals.

Moreover, electronic media, specifically the television program "The Missing Link," was another effective medium for teaching GSL during the 1990s. At that time, there was a lack of awareness regarding sign language due to the prevalence of support for oralism in Ghana. "The Missing Link" was designed to raise awareness about sign language as a vital means of communication for the deaf,

as highlighted by Ms. Addo and Mr. Amuah. Ms. Addo noted the following in our interview.

> When we had the Missing Link, before then, we realised that many people didn't know the deaf have a language, and they could use sign language to get information (Mary Addo, Interview. November 2020).

Unfortunately, financial constraints led to the discontinuation of "The Missing Link" program around 2000, as mentioned by Mr. Amuah..

Deaf-led Clubs and Organizations in Ghana: Contributing to the Deaf and sign language Development

According to Mr. Amuah, local clubs were established by associates of the Old School and some deaf adults across various regions in Ghana. Figure 16 showcases the founding of deaf clubs in different areas, such as the Ashanti Region by Florence Oteng in 1970/71, the Western and Central Regions by Jonathan Amuah in 1979 and 1981, the Eastern Region by Samuel Bempong in 1980, the Volta Region by Mawunyo Awumee in 1990, and the Brong Ahafo Region by William Amankwah (date unknown) (Mr. Amuah's interview).

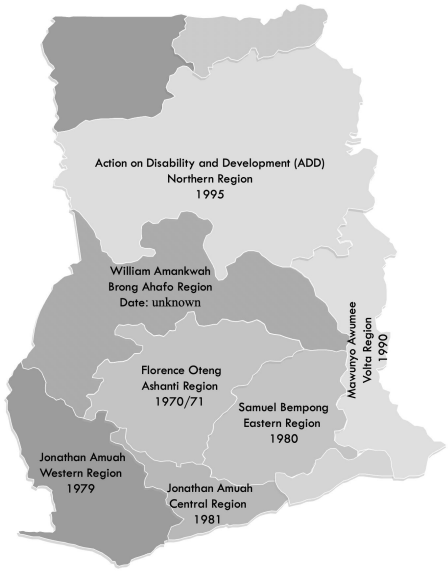

Figure 16: Establishment of regional deaf-led clubs

Furthermore, Mr. Asamoah mentioned that the Danish Deaf Association and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) played crucial roles in assisting the GNAD through their outreach program. Kasper Bergman served as the Danish Deaf Association's country coordinator in Ghana, contributing to GNAD's activities. A list of prominent deaf leaders, including Mr. Boison, a former board member for the World Federation of the Deaf, also features in Table 6: Deaf Schools in Ghana, their pioneers and initial medium of instruction, highlighting their contributions to deaf and sign language development.

Table 7: GNAD presidents and their tenure in office

Name		Time in office
President	**Vice President**	
Seth Ocloo	Emmanuel Dadzie	1968 – 1977
Daniel Atiemo	Andrew Nortey	1977 – 1978
Andrew Nortey	Samuel Adjei	1978 – 1979
Samuel Adjei	Nortey?	1979 – 1983
Godwin Amenumey	E. Baiden & Alexander D. Okyere	1983 – 1990
Francis Boison	Alexander D. Okyere	1990 – 2000
Paul Baarfi	Samuel Bempong	2000 – 2003
Samuel Asare	Jonathan Amuah	2003 – 2010
Emmanuel K. Sackey	Patricia Baffoe & Monica Dowuta	2010 – 2018
Matthew Kubachua	Monica Dowuta	2018 – to date

The Osu Mission Centre, alternatively known as Ghana Mission Christian for the Deaf or Ghana Centre for the Deaf, later became known as the Ghana Society of the Deaf, as stated by Mr. Amuah. Other informants corroborated the location change from Osu to Kokomlemle. Notable Ghanaians, such as Ben Kumah, Rev. Cobblah, George O. Tetteh, and Grace Amoah, headed the association, serving as role models within the deaf community.

Mr. Adjei, while not well-versed in Ghana Society for the Deaf's history, recalled a man named COBENA (C-handshape on the chin) who operated it. The site eventually transformed into a residential home for elderly deaf individuals after his retirement. Ghana Society for the Deaf provided valuable vocational skills training, including carpentry and tailoring, and adult education for the deaf, including those from Adamorobe. The association's collaboration with GNAD addressed various needs of the deaf community, further promoting their well-being and empowerment.

In 1988, GNAD became conscious of the importance of sign language teaching. This realisation occurred during their 20th-anniversary celebration, where

Mr. Wilkson, the vice president of the World Federation of the Deaf, visited Ghana and joined the festivities. During this occasion, Mr. Wilkson passionately pleaded with Ghana to prioritise the development of sign language and advocated for its teaching in schools (Mr. Amenumey's interview).

According to Mr. Amenumey, Wilkson's speech served as a wake-up call for GNAD, as before that moment, the association had been primarily focused on the socio-economic development of deaf Ghanaians, with little emphasis on sign language development for its members. His words prompted a shift in the organisation's priorities, leading them to recognise the crucial role of sign language in empowering and fostering communication among the deaf community in Ghana. This pivotal event marked the beginning of GNAD's active involvement in promoting and advocating for the recognition and teaching of sign language in the country.

2.5 Discussion

The chapter has shed light on the lesser-known aspects of Ghana's deaf history and the development of a national sign language in Ghana. Through a combination of secondary data and interviews with consultants, including deaf individuals and educators, a narrative of deaf history and its impact on sign language in Ghana has been presented. The following addresses the research questions and discusses some key findings in the study.

Research Question 1: How have deaf schools in Ghana contributed to the development and promotion of GSL?

Early deaf education in Ghana was characterised by the establishment of deaf schools nationwide, led mainly by locally trained oralists who graduated from the Special Teachers Training College. These oralists played a significant role in shaping educational approaches as they advocated for establishing more schools and promoted oralism as the predominant medium of instruction from 1967 to 1988. Oralism emphasised speech and lipreading as the primary means of communication for deaf students, which led to limited recognition and use of sign language.

The impact of oralism on GSL was profound, as it marginalised and suppressed the use of the school based sign language during this period. Deaf students and teachers faced challenges using sign language, and those who advocated for sign language were often ridiculed and stigmatised. However, it is worth noting that some oralist teachers still used gestures, facial expressions, and lipreading to communicate with their deaf students, indicating some accommodation to the deaf community's needs.

Ghana's contact with its colonial masters, the United Kingdom, led to the introduction of oralism in 1965. This was also shortly after Ghana gained

independence as a republic state. The government's emphasis on self-sufficiency and autonomy might have influenced their decision to disregard Rev. Foster's proposal to manage the deaf school according to his model. This apparent dismissal could also be seen as indicative of audism, especially when considering the lack of hesitation in calling in hearing foreigners from the UK. Such actions raise questions about inclusivity and whether decisions were made with a genuine understanding of the deaf community's needs and perspectives. Unfortunately, the government's decision led to Rev. Foster's departure from Ghana. The establishment of the Special Teachers Training College in 1965 further promoted oralism and became a hub for teaching teachers from other African countries in the oral approach. Consequently, oralism had some impact across the African continent.

Contrary to Runnels' report (2020:282) suggesting that Foster's in-service teacher training became Special Teachers Training College, my findings reveal that the College marked the end of Foster's education model. Rev. Foster had foreseen this development as early as 1960 and had warned the government against the introduction of oralism. Unfortunately, his warnings went unheard, and the government proceeded with its plans.

Subsequently, the use of sign language introduced in 1957 was gradually banned, leading to the closure of the Old School. Different sources, including Pecku (1977) and Gadagbui (1998), have provided varying dates for the termination of the Old School. While some claim it happened in 1979, others assert it occurred in 1977 due to concerns that it might hinder the practice of oralism at the Demonstration School, which was established a kilometre away. This fear was substantiated as students from the Old School actively sought to learn sign language from the Deaf spaces. Based on the primary data, the year 1977, as mentioned by Pecku (1977) and Gadagbui (1998), marked the end of admitting new students into the Old School. Nevertheless, the school did not shut down entirely. Instead, after a period of dormancy, it underwent a transformation into a second-cycle institution for deaf education. By 1979, no deaf children attended the Old School for their primary education.

Deaf signers faced challenges during the period of oralism as sign language was banned, and oralism dominated deaf education for the next 21 years. Contrary to popular belief, I propose that the controversy between the oral approach and sign language was more than just about using the hands versus the mouth. Society rejected anything foreign, including ASL, which did not fit the existing communication strategy. This aversion to foreign influences prompted the adoption of oralism to avoid incorporating ASL. Under the philosophy of oralism in Ghana, local languages where introduced (e.g., Dagaare, Ewe, Akan, Ga) and local gestures were allowed.

The conversion of the Old School into a secondary institution played a pivotal role in the development of GSL, serving as the sole deaf secondary school in

the country. Upon completing their first-cycle education in deaf schools across various regions, deaf students converged at the Old School for further education. This gathering at the Old School brought into contact regional signs and variants and as well contributed to the establishment of a nationwide network of deaf elites. The interaction among deaf teenagers from different regions, each bringing their newly emerged signing variety from initial schools, transformed the Old School into a nurturing ground for the evolving GSL.[66]

The deaf education history draws parallels with the development of ASL in North America, where Laurent Clerc introduced French Sign Language in 1816, akin to Rev. Foster's introduction of ASL in Ghana. An intriguing aspect is that Clerc and Foster acquired sign language after age 11. It can, therefore, be argued that this late age of acquisition challenges the classification of their signing as intergenerational transmission, given that they did not acquire the language as children (Power, 2022). Furthermore, it is worth noting that most of their students were not little children; many were at least above the age of 8. Power (2022) uses these arguments to demonstrate that ASL cannot be considered a direct linguistic descendant of French Sign Language, considering Clerc's age of acquisition and the age of his American students. It is fascinating how similar arguments parallel the Ghanaian situation.

Unlike the American story, where ASL diversified from the 19th-century variety French Sign Language, the Ghanaian narrative suggests that ASL continued as a lexifier language through linguistic borrowing. Currently, the labels america (ASL) or ghana (GSL) are used interchangeably in the Ghanaian deaf community to refer to the signing variety found in Ghana. Deaf schools in Ghana have been instrumental in transmitting sign languages, contributing to the development of GSL. The interaction between first-cycle deaf schools across the country and the second-cycle deaf school in Mampong influences the cross-regional development of GSL.

---

[66] Anecdotal Report: During a friendly discussion with three matured deaf members at a Christian conference on 23-24 December 2023, where I served as an interpreter, it was noted—primarily from one member's perspective—that secondary schools might not be the best environment for learning GSL. The rationale stemmed from the observed overuse of variant signs, notably due to initialization. When asked about the preferred GSL learning environment, the consensus was that schools were not ideal; instead, the most effective learning occurred within deaf groups in specific regions. Despite acknowledging potential regional variations within these groups, they unanimously asserted that local group gatherings were the optimal settings for learning GSL. In my view, this assertion arises from the observation that local group gatherings exhibit less influence from English and ASL signs during communication. This stands in contrast to the school environment, where influences may be prevalent to address lexical gaps for formal educational purposes. In a nutshell, there is a clear difference between the signing used by students and that used by deaf members in the urban deaf community.

Students, with their "school-lect" (referring to specific sign language varieties transmitted within deaf schools, actively serve as linguistic contributors to the evolution of GSL in the second-cycle deaf school. Graduates from the second-cycle deaf school often return to their communities or pursue advanced education to eventually become educators in first-cycle deaf schools, contributing to the dissemination of GSL within deaf education, similar to the dynamics observed in other countries (Okombo & Akach, 1997; Power & Meier, 2023).

It must be noted that, the arrival of the Old School marked a turning point for the deaf community in Ghana. Before its establishment, deaf individuals were scattered across the country, but with the Old School, a sense of unity and cohesion was fostered among them. The mixed enrollment of children and adults when Rev. Foster initiated the school further solidified this communal bond. The findings reveal that some adults from the initial cohort eventually became teachers in the school. This scenario likely had a significant impact on the signing environment, as adults were instrumental in maintaining a stable social network or serve as linguistic role models for the children. In this context, adults provided consistent linguistic input, ensuring continuity and stability within the signing community. Simultaneously, the children, akin to the observed case of Nicaraguan Sign Language, played a crucial role in expanding the grammar and intricacies of the emerging GSL (Power & Meier, 2023:304). After receiving formal education, a significant number of deaf individuals continued to contribute to the deaf community or become active members of GNAD. This highlights the enduring impact of the Old School not only during students' educational years but also in their ongoing participation within the broader deaf community in Ghana.

In summary, the findings on deaf education discovered the impact of oralism on the emergence of GSL. The government's advocacy for oralism prompted the establishment of deaf schools across the country. The ban on signing during the period of oralism led to the development of school-lect, influenced by local gestures and home signs. This became feasible because, despite the prohibition of ASL signing, the use of local Ghanaian gestures was actively encouraged. The reintroduction of Signed English based on ASL signs (i.e., ENGLISH) after the oralism era resulted in a contact situation, leading to a mixture of local signing (i.e., LOCAL) and ENGLISH, resulting into a signing variety identified as BROKEN. This historical narrative underscores the crucial role that deaf schools in Ghana have played in shaping, promoting, and preserving GSL.

Research Question 2: In what ways have deaf activists influenced the evolution of the national sign language, and what factors steered its emergence and maturation?

Beyond the influence of Rev. Dr. Andrew Foster, several deaf and hearing Ghanaians were pivotal in developing a national sign language in Ghana. Deaf individuals, associates of the Old School, and deaf adults played a crucial role in

establishing local clubs in various regions of the country for social interaction and activities. These clubs and deaf leaders provided platforms for deaf individuals to come together, share experiences, and foster sign language awareness.

Deaf associations and clubs, including GNAD, Ghana Society for the Deaf and Ghana's community-based rehabilitation program have played pivotal roles in fostering the growth of the GSL landscape. These organisations remained resilient in promoting signing despite the dominance of oralism in educational institutions, making significant contributions to the preservation of sign language varieties within Ghana. Tertiary institutions (e.g., University of Education, Winneba) and religious groups also played a key role in empowering deaf people and advocating for sign language development. After Rev. Andrew Foster departed from Ghana, he maintained connections with deaf-led centres, enabling adult signers to socialise and interact. Reports also indicate that deaf associations were key custodians of ASL materials such as dictionaries (Riekehof, 1978) and actively engaged with international conferences alongside Foster in Nigeria. The ban on sign language in deaf schools resulted in increased social gatherings among deaf adults, including religious events and sports. International organisations like the Danish Deaf Association, the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Action on Disability and Development (ADD), and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) have contributed to the development of the GSL community. International organisations supported in creating deaf spaces, outreach programs and awareness raising which then contributed to the evolution of GSL. It is important to note that the role of international organisations primarily also promoted local signing, as previous gatherings of deaf associations and clubs may have still relied on ENGLISH due to Foster's influence. The dynamic contributions of international organisations likely played a role in valuing LOCAL and may have fostered fluid communication in deaf spaces. This accounts for including LOCAL signs in the early days of dictionary documentation (as observed in the GNAD, 2001).

Factors that contributed to the emergence and evolution of GSL include the persistence and determination of the deaf community to advocate for their indigenous signs and embrace sign language as their preferred means of communication. Establishing local deaf clubs and outreach programs helped create awareness and acceptance of sign language among deaf Ghanaians. Additionally, the gradual decline of oralism in the 1990s contributed to the development of GSL as a recognised and valued language in deaf education. The advocacy efforts of deaf activists like Mr. Francis Boison and the compilation of a GSL dictionary by GNAD further solidified the recognition of GSL as a national sign language in Ghana.

The development of ENGLISH (under GSL) was influenced by contact with ASL and English through deaf education, resulting in lexical borrowing and

influences like fingerspelling and initialisation[67] (Abudu 2019). As reported in this chapter, adopting practices such as the Rochester Method might have also fostered the use of fingerspelling and initialisation. ASL dictionaries are still being used in deaf schools, as reported by study consultants. Deaf Ghanaians such as Dr. Seth Ocloo and Alexander Okyere, who studied at Gallaudet University, significantly contributed to the propagation of ASL in Ghana. Their return to Ghana to support deaf education likely strengthened the presence of ASL in the country.

The deaf church and deaf-led associations in addition to the establishment of the secondary school in Mampong played essential roles in fostering a strong sense of community among the deaf throughout the country. Regarding establishing the Ghana Society for the Deaf, discrepancies exist between sources. Fobi and Doku (2022) claim that the establishment of GNAD marked a new beginning, leading to the change in the name "Ghana Society of the Deaf" (Fobi & Doku, 2022:43). Contrarily, this research finds that the government-led Ghana Society of the Deaf and the deaf-led GNAD were two distinct entities that existed concurrently, each operating from different offices. Regarding year of establishment of Ghana Society of the Deaf, Grischow (2011) states 1962, while Oppong (2006) notes 1965. This study's findings link Ghana Society for the Deaf to the Osu Mission Centre, established in 1965 with the assistance of Dr. Ocloo. It is noteworthy that in September 1957, Rev. Foster commenced his deaf education initiative with 13 children and 11 adults in a rented classroom within a Presbyterian public school building in Osu, Accra. By January 1959, the school for deaf children relocated to a new site in Mampong-Akwapim, under the name Ghana Mission School for the Deaf. Although the children moved, church services and the school for deaf adults continued in Osu, Accra, under Rev. Foster's management. In 1965, a spacious house was rented in Osu, serving as a Christian centre for the deaf and gaining popularity as the Osu Mission Centre (Okyere & Addo, 1999). Church services and the school for deaf adults persisted at this Osu Mission Centre. The large rented apartment housed the Ghana Society for the Deaf and the State School for the Deaf (currently at Teshie), initially beginning as a day school for deaf children in Accra. Given the multifaceted activities at this rented large house and its connection with the initial adult school and church service initiated by Rev. Foster, discrepancies often arise in pinpointing specific dates for events that transpired at the Osu Mission Centre.

Deaf-led associations played a crucial role in spreading GSL nationwide. Their meetings and activities served as natural converging points for GSL, fostering mutual intelligibility despite regional lexical variations. The media, including broadcasting and print, promoted GSL acceptance and development. GSL

[67] Initialization involves using the fingerspelled letter that corresponds to the initial letter of an English word as the handshape for a sign.

dictionaries and early television broadcasting also contributed to the convergence of GSL as a national language.

I observed from the findings that during the reign of ASL signs in deaf education, local signs, gestures, and village sign languages were not discouraged despite the heavy influence of ASL. Rev. Foster embraced and accommodated these forms of communication from deaf students to the school. However, I hypothesise that Foster's embracing of local signs might have occurred after the 1960s when it became known that the sign language used in deaf education was not a universal deaf language as previously conceived and referred to as "formal sign language". Based on such misconception, he referred to the deaf he encountered in Africa as languageless (Foster, 1976).

Foster reportedly also invented signs to fill lexical gaps and reflect the African environment (see section 2.4.1.1). However, there are conflicting accounts, as some informants dispute the claim that Rev. Foster created signs, suggesting instead that he relied on Ghanaian coinage. Moreover, he is said to have used ASL, Signed English, and speech in his interactions. This makes me wonder about the linguistic implications. In addition, the description of a diglossia situation in GSL, as mentioned by Mr. Jonnathan Amuah during our interview, makes the exact definition of GSL complex. It could be interpreted as ASL given a new name because of its use in Ghana, or it might involve using ASL signs with English syntax, incorporating local signs to address lexical gaps. Additionally, it is essential to understand how members of the deaf community in Ghana perceive the national sign language and the names they prefer to use for it. This book aims to explore these linguistic and ideological aspects further. It emphasises the need for more research in lexical studies and an understanding of ideological influences. This study contributes to the deaf history and education in Ghana, urging further exploration of the intricacies of the sign language landscape.

In sum, early deaf education in Ghana from 1967 - 1999 was characterised by the influence of locally trained oralists who promoted oralism as the dominant approach, impacting the recognition and use of sign languages. However, beyond the influence of Rev. Andrew Foster, deaf individuals, deaf clubs, and international organisations contributed to the evolution of GSL in Ghana. Factors like advocacy, awareness campaigns, and the decline of oralism played significant roles in the emergence and evolution of a national sign language, shaping the landscape of deaf education in the country.

2.6 Conclusion

Historically, ASL signing was introduced in 1957 but was banned (10 years later) in 1967 when oralism was implemented. The oral approach dominated deaf education for 21 years, from 1967 to 1988. During this period, deaf students were exposed and

allowed to use Ghanaian gestures but no signing. Positively, oralism facilitated the development of GSL, setting it apart from the ASL which was introduced. However, on the negative side, oralism impeded the academic achievements of deaf students. In 1988, a mixed approach combining the oral method with ASL was allowed in deaf education for 11 years (1988-1999). However, in 1999, the government mandated that deaf education exclusively use sign language and began supporting its development due to advocacies made by educators and deaf groups. Following proposals by some deaf leaders (i.e., Mr. Francis Boison & Mr. Alexander D.Okyere) the ASL introduced in Ghana in 1957, was renamed GSL in the 1990s to emphasise its nativisation and the importance of developing a unique language for the deaf community, influenced by educational inputs from experts like Dr. Akach and advice from WFD. Before 2001, the term ASL was commonly used to refer to the national sign language in Ghana. After 2008, tertiary institutions began incorporating sign language into their curriculum and adopted the label GSL. Currently, the label GSL is widely recognised and used for the national sign language in Ghana.

The exploration of deaf history and education in Ghana beyond Rev. Dr. Andrew Foster has unraveled a complex and inspiring unfolding of events leading to and coinciding with the development of GSL. It is evident that GSL did not emerge in isolation but was shaped by deaf education and by the efforts and determination of the deaf community and their allies. Ironically, the event of oralism in deaf education in Ghana appears to have had an unexpected impact on the emergence of GSL in two ways. Firstly, it led to the proliferation of deaf schools nationwide through increased advocacy and the involvement of locally trained oralists in initiating the establishment of these schools. Secondly, the era of oralism banned ASL signing but permitted the use of local gestures and enabling the emergence of school-based varieties of signing (school-lect).

In conclusion, the emergence of GSL stands as a testament to the interplay between deaf education and the activism of the deaf community in Ghana. From the introduction and subsequent ban of ASL during the era of oralism to the pivotal government mandate in 1999, GSL's evolution reflects the resilience of deaf individuals and their advocates. The establishment of local deaf clubs and the outreach programs organised by local and international organisations demonstrate the collective efforts to foster social inclusion, awareness, and acceptance of a national sign language in various regions of Ghana. Deaf education, despite facing challenges, became a catalyst for GSL development through the encouragement of local gestures and the establishment of deaf schools. The renaming of ASL to GSL, coupled with the dedicated efforts of educators and deaf leaders, emphasizes GSL's nativization and unique identity. This collective journey demonstrates how the collaborative forces of deaf education and activism have not only shaped GSL but have also empowered the deaf community in Ghana.