

# Researching the education of young deaf children and their caregivers

Prof Ruth Swanwick shares a report on recent impact activities in Ghana

During October 2022 I was able to make a final project trip to Ghana to support the impact work associated with our collaborative project that examines the early education and support for young deaf children and their caregivers. This project was funded by the British Academy's Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme, supported under the Global Challenge Research Fund.

## Project aims

The principal aim of the project was to improve opportunities to create quality early childhood care and pre-primary education that would enable young deaf children in Ghana to progress through early childhood developmentally in terms of language, communication, learning, and psychosocial well-being. Our aim was to build understandings of the social-cultural and resource dynamics that surround the developmental precarities of childhood deafness in Ghana, to support early education programming for young deaf children and their caregivers.

## The project team

As the project end date is nearing, this final visit gave me – as the project Principal Investigator (PI) – an opportunity to work in-person with the full team to deliver our impact objectives. This included co-investigators Dr Alexander Mills Oppong and Dr Yaw Nyadu Offei who are based at the University of Education (UEW), Winneba, as well as our research assistants Obed Appau and Joyce Fobi, and deaf consultants Derrick Asomaning, Richard Doku, and Linda Gibbah. The visit schedule was co-ordinated and overseen by project officer Dr Daniel Fobi.



Dr Dani Fobi- top guide for the week

## The Ministry of Education

Our first stop at the top of the week was a meeting with the Ministry of Education (MoE) to brief them about the project outcomes. In this meeting, we had the opportunity to make a case for the early education of deaf children and their caregivers to be given a specific focus in the Inclusive Education Policy because of the linguistic and cultural experiences of being deaf and the complexities of caregiving. The official briefing that we submitted will form the basis of planned on-going discussions between the MoE and UEW team.

## The Ghana National Association of the Deaf

This was followed by a meeting at the Ghana National Association of the Deaf (GNAD) office in Accra. Our discussions with the Executive Director of GNAD, Mr Juventus Duorinaa, and his team centred on the role of deaf leadership ECE. Juventus talked about the way this project has changed the perspectives and the potential of the deaf community to ensure that the needs of very young deaf children and their caregivers are understood by society at large. GNAD is fully supportive of our planned deaf ECE leaders' training initiative and also proposed a more extensive media campaign. This visit marks the beginning of stronger collaborations between GNAD, the MoE, and UEW.

## University of Education Executive

At the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), we were able to



ToD interpreting for deaf students in workshop





*Deaf child supporting teacher of the deaf to sign a concept the student has been introduced to*

present our findings to the Vice Chancellor, Prof Mawutor Avoke, Dean of Faculty of Education, Director of Directorate of Research Innovation, Dean Graduate School, and Development, and Head of Department of Special Education. We outlined our plan to develop training for



*Project presentation at UEW*

deaf leaders, Teachers of the Deaf, and teacher trainers, and the central role that UEW will play in this intervention. The university is very keen to see that the initiatives developed by the project are sustained and that the development of research and practice is supported

through a systematic approach to capacity building.

As part of the work with UEW, I had the opportunity to present to a large audience (over 300 research staff and students) on lessons learned from this collaborative project, and to talk about grant building and the development of African scholarships in deaf education more generally. There were many questions about project methodology, communication, and management. Participants were also interested to hear about how the collaboration was developed and how co-writing and capacity building is being supported.

**Radio Windy Bay**

During this busy week we also managed to fit in a radio interview at Radio Windy Bay on their Disability Focus show with their host Sampson Dzivor. This was streamed live on Facebook ([fb.watch/gzOCZkxzpV/](https://www.facebook.com/watch/gzOCZkxzpV/)) with Ghanaian Sign Language (GSL) interpreters. This medium provided the opportunity to reach a wider audience and extend the social impact of the work in terms of the visibility of deaf people and sign language in society. This is the third time we have had the opportunity to participate in this



*Research presentation at UEW*



*Research presentation at UEW*



type of radio interview that is accessible to deaf people and – nerves notwithstanding – we really enjoyed the provocative questions and lively discussion.

### Schools for the deaf

The extensive development of multilingual and multimodal resources for teachers and caregivers has been one of the central outcomes of the project. These were delivered to teachers and school leadership teams at one of the training workshops organised and hosted by UEW. During the week, we had the chance to visit one of these schools in Cape Coast that has over 400 deaf pupils and to talk to staff. The teachers that we met reiterated how beneficial the resources have been to their teaching and for the families.

### Writing workshops

During any spare moment, including working lunches, as a team we focused on the development of the project book in progress with Oxford University Press. We are writing this as a co-authored text that involves mentoring partnerships across the team of all deaf and hearing project colleagues. It was really nice to have the opportunity to talk in-person about the development of the chapters and our writing approach as so much of this work has been hitherto online. The first completed draft of the book is scheduled for June 2023.

Believe it or not, we also squeezed in some fun visiting



Discussion with GNAD colleagues

local beaches, markets, Cape Coast Castle, and Akwaaba National Park. We managed to eat as much Ghanaian food as was humanly possible – the team were insistent that I sample the full range – and it was all delicious. I was incredibly well looked after.

I said goodbye to the team on Saturday, and we hope that this is not the last visit as we now wait for the outcome of our two recent grant submissions. Both applications propose ways of extending the impact of the work to build professional and academic deaf ECE capacity in Ghana and across other African contexts. ■



Team building!

### Project publications to date

- Fobi D, Swanwick R, Fobi J and Doku R (2022). Promoting deaf adults' participation in the early care and education of deaf children in Ghana. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*.
- Swanwick R, Fobi D, Fobi J and Appau O (2022). Shaping the early care and education of young deaf children in Ghana. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 91, 102594.
- Swanwick R, Fobi J and Appau O (2022). The multilingual context of early support for deaf children and their caregivers in Ghana. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*.
- Swanwick R, Oppong A, Offei Y, Fobi D, Appau O, Fobi J and Fropomaa F (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on deaf adults, children, and their families in Ghana. *Journal of the British Academy*, 8, 141–165.

### Grant applications pending

- British Academy Maximizing Impact: Developing deaf leadership and teacher education in early childhood deaf education in Africa (£50K).
- British Academy International Writing Workshop: Dynamics of knowledge in deaf education: Developing southern theory in writing workshops for emerging scholars in Africa (£30K).



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*Dr Alexander Mills Oppong is a co-Investigator based at the University of Education (UEW).*

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