Access to English Language Acquisition in Ghana Schools for the Deaf: Are the Deaf Students Handicapped?

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Abstract
This paper primarily discusses the challenges deaf students in Ghana are likely to grapple with as they access education provided for them in English language. The arguments discussed in this paper are supported by findings from a multiple site case study of five Schools for the Deaf purposively sampled from four regions of Ghana. Observations were made of 15 classroom teaching and learning processes at the basic school level. Interviews were also conducted with seven teachers to gather qualitative data for the study. The findings were that deaf students in Ghana access education, provided for them in their classrooms and textbooks, in much the same ways as their hearing counterparts whereas they do not have the same abilities as their hearing counterparts to effectively acquire and use English language. The poor access to English language as well as the limitations in technology developed for deaf students in Ghana reflect in some learning difficulties. This stagnation stifles the educational advancements of deaf students in Ghana. It is recommended that the Special Education Division of the Ghana Education Service should look into the language policy for deaf students and give, in the interim, concessionary passes in English language to enable deaf students qualify into higher institutions of learning.
Keywords: English language, sign language, deaf education

1. Introduction
English language is the medium of instruction, communication and a core subject studied at all levels of the education system in Ghana including Schools for the Deaf. It is also prerequisite for any educational advancement in Ghana. The admission criteria into higher levels of education strictly require good passes in English Language (MoE, Ghana Education Service, 2007). Therefore, failure in English language at any level of Ghana education system threatens ones educational advancement and deaf students are not exceptional. This situation seems to entrench English language as the only language for instruction in Ghanaian schools and therefore the need to gain maximum proficiency in it. In May 2002, for example, the then minister of education, Professor Christopher Ameyaw-Akumfi, declared a language policy that allowed the use of English language to replace vernacular as a medium of instruction during the first three years of basic education (Ameyaw-Akumfi, 2002). Even though it was received with a lot of controversies and criticisms from all sections of the general populace including politicians and traditional leaders (Owu-Ewie, 2006), English language still became the language of instruction of every education formulated for Ghanaian students.

Recently in August 2014, the current minister of education, Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang made attempt to reverse the English language policy of 2002 by asking all heads and teachers of basic schools to desist from the use of English language as the medium of instruction at the lower primary school (The Ghanaian Times, August, 2014). Her goal was to support the plethora of evidence that proves that children do well at school when they are instructed in the language they best understand, specifically the primary language they have acquired from home. However, the minister's effort was beset with controversies because it appears that in Ghana, how well children are doing at school is assessed based on how fluently they speak English. Besides, many basic schools in Ghana pride themselves on how well their students are able to speak impeccable English which is the lingua franca of the Ghanaian education system (Owu-Ewie, 2006). Still, a large section of the society including educators place greater emphasis on English language to ensure that perhaps every child in Ghana attains the right level of English proficiency in both spoken and written formats. This state of affairs points to the fact that passes in English language at all levels of education in Ghana is a national requirement established by educational policies and entrenched in national laws for all Ghanaian students including the deaf.

Deaf students in Ghana are therefore expected to have full access to linguistic content of the education provided for them in their special schools. They are also expected to give the same English language output just like their hearing counterparts as if they have no exceptionalities. This situation may not be off beam per se, if measures are but in place to mitigate the spoken language difficulties of deaf students for them to have the same level of educational access and opportunities. However, unlike hearing students who use their good hearing to derive lessons accessible in English language even in written form and therefore can master and use English language effectively, deaf students do not have the same access to the rules of English language (Easterbrooks & Stoner, 2006) as their hearing peers do. By the nature of their disability, deaf students do not have the same basis for spoken language acquisition just as their hearing counterpart in regular schools. Majority of deaf people have not heard sound before and therefore cannot fully access the linguistic content of the education provided for them in

their textbooks. The sign language they use which is visual gestural in form, has its own linguistic properties different in form from the English language they are mandated to master.

The argument therefore is that since English is a spoken language different from sign language, deaf students will have difficulties mastering and using it effectively in their education. The expectation by the Ministry of Education in Ghana to have all deaf students produce the same English language output and therefore satisfy the same requirement for admission into higher levels of learning is unjust. This paper raises a concern for educational planners to give due attention to policies that affect deaf education in Ghana. As basis for argument, this paper outlines some of the challenges of access to English language deaf students are likely to grapple with as they obtain education provided for them in classroom teaching and learning and from their textbooks.

2. The Concept of Deafness

The term hearing impairment is a broad concept that covers a spectrum of hearing losses ranging from mild to profound (Hardman, Drew & Egan, 2013; Hallahan, Kauffman & Pullen, 2014). The severity of individual's hearing loss is determined by ranking any additional intensity recorded above the nominal threshold of hearing either as mild, moderate, moderately severe, severe or profound hearing loss (Gadagbui, 2013). In Ghana, the nominal hearing threshold is set at 0 - 25 dB which is the normal hearing level at which sounds are detected (Gadagbui, 2013). Students who have hearing loss of 26-70dB hearing level (HL) are considered as hard of hearing. They may not have difficulty in hearing speech in quiet conversational environments where the subject under discussion is known and vocabulary is not extensive. This group of individuals with hearing loss have mixed hearing abilities ranging from hearing faint or distant speeches to hearing only loud clear sounds. However, students who have a hearing loss of 71-90dB hearing level (HL) and above are considered as deaf. They cannot hear sounds for the ordinary purposes of life. Environmental sound such as gunshot or thunder can be detected although it cannot always be identified. They cannot benefit from oral communication at all even with amplification. Classroom oral discussions will therefore be challenging for deaf students to follow. They are those individuals whose hearing impairment is so severe such that ordinary classroom placement would not be profitable to them.

2.1 Prelingual and Postlingual Deafness

The audiological experience of deaf students are measured on a personal level and classified into two main categories: prelingual and postlingual based on the onset of hearing loss and its effect on language acquisition. A hearing loss at birth, in early childhood, or before exposure to spoken language is called prelingual deafness while deafness that occurs after speech and language has been acquired is termed as postlingual deafness (Turnbull, Turnbull III, Shank, & Leal, 2009; Hallahan et al., 2014). Both prelingual and postlingual deafness negatively affects a child's ability to acquire a spoken language normally (Easterbrooks and Stoner, 2006). However, the postlingual deaf child who becomes deaf at age 12 may have acquired at least the rudiments of his/her parents' language and therefore stands a better chance of getting exposed to spoken language at home or in school. They are able to make some gains in spoken English even in written format. Nonetheless, onset of deafness can make such deaf children lose their auditory feedback and the gains they have made may be lost with time.

Children who are either prelingual or postlingual deaf still meet enormous challenges to spoken English acquisition. A research conducted by Marschark and Mayer (1998) on interactions of language and memory in deaf children and adults (Both prelingual and postlingual) proves that deaf children have difficulty in phonological processing and are less likely to employ phonological (''speech-based'') codes in memory. The study suggests that there is an intimate relation between spoken language acquisition and memory. However, variation in spoken language abilities as a result of onset of deafness can have a direct impact on phonological memory. Apparently, the study clearly explains why deaf children who are either prelingual or postlingual would find it difficult to formulate thoughts in speed-based codes and effectively use spoken language which adversely affects their receptive and expressive English language skills (Easterbrooks & Stoner, 2006).

Deafness sustained prior to spoken language acquisition or in early childhood has serious setbacks for academic success. Undoubtedly, it is a complex phenomenon that adversely affects a person's educational performance (Heward, 2012). This is because deafness affects an individual's ability to perceive and use spoken language for the ordinary purposes of life. It also has adverse effect on an individual's potential academic and vocational success (Rowh, 2006). Research indicate that majority of deaf children face enormous challenges formulating their taught in spoken language at home and in school (Easterbrooks & Stoner, 2006). This situation makes deaf children lag behind in several academic areas such as reading, spelling and writing (Turnbull et al., 2009). Children who are deaf have reading problems in three general areas involving vocabulary, syntactic and figurative language. Similarly, children who are deaf do not have the same access to rules of spoken language as do children with normal hearing.

3. Methods

Descriptive case study research design of qualitative methodology was adopted for the study which sought to investigate the challenges deaf students grapple with as they access English language content of the education provided for them in Ghana Schools for the Deaf. Purposive sampling technique was used to sample five schools for the deaf located in the Greater Accra, Western, Ashanti and Eastern regions of Ghana. The major instruments for the data collection were observation and interview (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

The non-participant observation approach to data collection was used to observe teaching and learning activities in three different classrooms of all the five schools for the deaf using an observation guide. This included observation on students' responses to teaching and learning processes from textbooks and teachers' mode of delivery of English language content. A work sample analysis was also adopted marginally during the observations to identity the consistency of English language errors deaf students make. A semi-structured interview guide was used as framework to collect qualitative data from the teachers. The observation and interview instruments were both subjected to expert approval to control internal consistencies (Gay, Mills & Airasain, 2009).

3.1 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected by the lead authors who, prior to the data collection period, made some trips to some of the selected schools to establish contacts and rapport with the classroom teachers and the students. This aided in the smooth nature of the data collection. The teaching and learning activities in the selected schools were carefully observed in 15 classrooms at the Basic school level. The lead author is literate in Ghanaian sign language and therefore understood the classroom teaching and learning processes. Although the teachers and pupils were fully aware of the presence of the researchers and knew they were being observed, data collection was not hampered in any way as if the respondents were used to having visitors all the time. The teachers were relaxed and carried out their classroom activities normally.

Semi-structured interview was adopted to solicit data from seven teachers across the five schools. The teachers were purposively selected because all of them had taught English language lessons to deaf students before. The interviews yielded much insightful data which were gathered to understand the difficulty deaf students face using English language to access meaning from curricula content.

To ensure accuracy, audio and video recordings of the responses of the participants were made with permission from the teachers, to avoid rush in the data analysis. All the recordings of the interviews were transcribed and checked thoroughly to make sure that all errors, omissions and insertions were corrected (Gibbs, 2009). Respondent validation was used to reduce subjectivity and improve on the accuracy, credibility as well as the validity of the study (Angen, 2000). The researchers cross checked with the participants to confirm the accuracy of their narrative responses and the interpretations made out of the interviews and the observations.

3.2 Data Analysis

For a more accessible form of qualitative analysis, data were analyzed using the thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to report patterns or themes within the data collected which were transcribed to an appropriate level of detail. The report of the observations was used to supplement data from the interviews. The researchers played the all the recordings of the data several times to check for accuracy and completeness of data. First, participants were assigned pseudonyms against their responses for easy identification. Second, the major recurrent ideas that spanned across the data were coded by bolding and giving different font colours to the major ideas which were later grouped as themes. For this reason, verbatim responses of the participants were not included in the presentation of the findings. This was to make sure the coding process was done thoroughly and comprehensively. All the relevant themes extracted from the data were collated and developed and interpreted. Finally, the researchers put the findings in an analytic report by developing themes out of the analysis of data from the observations, interviews and work sample analysis. The discussion incorporated other findings reviewed from literature.

4. Findings

With regard to deaf students' linguistic access to curricula content, the study focused on how challenging it is for deaf students to access English language content from school textbooks and teaching and learning processes in their effort to meet the same standard of language competence and academic expectations as their hearing peers. The study found out that all the teaching and learning processes in the sampled schools took place within a formal organizational framework. This included measures to ensure that the teachers were punctual and reported to school on time. The head teachers served as supervisors and ensured that quality teaching was maintained and improved upon at all times.

Observations however, revealed that students in the sampled Schools for the Deaf were placed in mixed ability classes just like their hearing peers in the regular schools. Therefore, students who were hard of hearing, prelingually and postlingually deaf were all lumped up together in the same classrooms with different linguistic

experiences. For this reason, it was observed that the hard of hearing students dominated classroom discussions because most of the teachers who could not use the Ghanaian sign language resorted to speech which seemed to give hard of hearing students an advantage over their deaf counterparts who lacked sensitivity to sound.

The study revealed that the curriculum for basic school (1-6) consists of English, Mathematics, Creative Arts, Religious and Moral Education (RME), Natural Science, Citizenship Education, and Information Communication Technology (ICT) whereas the curriculum for basic school (7-9) consists of English, Mathematics, Integrated Science, Social Studies, Basic Design and Technology (BDT), RME and ICT for Junior High Schools. This number of subjects studied by deaf students were found to be the same as those taken by their hearing counterparts. Deaf students were only exempted from studying French and Ghanaian languages. It was confirmed from the interviews with the teachers that the curriculum model for Ghanaian schools is centralized and teachers are expected to deliver it in a prescribed manner.

At the basic school level (7-9), during English language lessons, the deaf students were made to read verbatim (via sign language) from their English language textbooks, the same ones used in regular schools and centrally supplied nationwide by the Ghana Education Service. Although the students were able to read the assigned passages in their textbooks as the teachers expected them to, it was realized that not all of them were able to make any substantive meaning from the passages they read using Ghanaian sign language.

The conventional "talk and chalk" lecture method of teaching that dominates classroom teaching in Ghanaian schools (Opoku-Asare, 2000; Siaw, 2010; Agbenatoe, 2011) was the predominant approach used by teachers observed in the five sampled schools for the deaf. Lesson delivery and interaction between the teachers and students occurred mainly through discussions and explanations using Ghanaian Sign language (GSL) which later observations revealed that the teachers were not fluent in the GSL. Rote learning skills were taught and mastered by the students while repetitive teaching was often used by the teachers.

Even though sign language is used as a mode of communication in the sampled schools, English language was the major means of access to the education provided for them from their textbooks and classroom teaching and learning processes. All the lessons observed in the sampled schools were presented in the structure of English language via Ghanaian sign language which only served as the mode of communication. Interviews with seven teachers of English Language as well as observations in the schools indicated that the use of sign language to learn English language was challenging. The explanation given by the teachers over this challenge was that English Language is a phonic language which deaf students find difficult to comprehend. From the observations, deaf students found it difficult to take up phonological words as in English Language to memory.

The teachers and students in the Schools for the Deaf make expressions in English using sign language. This situation naturally presents deaf students with confusion with respect to sentence construction and difficulty in understanding what they read from their textbooks. It was gathered that most of the English words found in their English language readers were understood literally using sign language to explain them. The statement "*Mavis poured her heart out to the teacher*" is one of such expressions used by teachers during teaching and learning sessions. Though this expression is fairly simply, it is misconstrued by most deaf students who, as the teachers explained, understand the expression literally to mean *pouring out the heart as though it were water to the teacher.*

It seemed, from the teachers' explanations cross all the five schools, that the use of verbal phrases such as give off, pass by, look into, and throw about in sentences pose a greater challenge to deaf students' comprehension of English language. Deaf students found it difficult to understand proverbial expressions, idioms and metaphors expressed in English language. The expressions "He fell between two stools" and "Esi takes after her mother" are both idiomatic expressions that are found in their English language textbooks for Basic school 7 that deaf students are expected to read and understand. However, it was gathered that whereas hearing students may identify such statements as idiomatic expressions and seek to understand them as such, the deaf students took such expressions literally and therefore misconstrue their meaning.

It was also observed that most of the deaf students' written expressions were telegraphic in form. This means that their written expressions omitted most of the auxiliary verbs and copulas that make full sentences in Standard English. Therefore, their written expressions were difficult to understand and in some cases unintelligible. Further interaction with the teachers revealed that sign modes used to express meaning in sign language use only key or class words that carry meaning in English language context. Therefore a statement such as "the headmaster has not come to school" will translate into "headmaster not come school" omitting the use of modal verbs when expressed in sign language. The challenge therefore is that as deaf students use the telegraphic format to express their knowledge, they become limited in using the full sentence form in Standard English to express their thoughts. Although most deaf students become entrenched in this format of expression, such format is unacceptable in Standard English usage.

The converse was also true in the analysis of reading language output of the deaf students. In all the sampled schools, deaf students found it difficult to understand expressions in Standard English language structure. The teachers explained that the use of copulas in sentences confuse deaf students in their understanding of what they read in Standard English. This means that verb tense forms such as had, has, have and having as well as aspect

of tenses such as go, going, went and gone tend to confuse deaf students who have little proficiency in the usage of these verb forms. The teachers were of the opinion that this difficulty emanates from the situation where deaf students formulate their understanding using sign language structure which omits all of such verb forms in its usage.

It also emerged from the interactions with the teachers that the deaf students encounter problems with synonyms. Since sign language does not provide sign modes for all words in English, words that express the same or similar meaning take one sign mode. Deaf students are forced to match their understanding of a particular sign mode with just one word of its English equivalence. This means that other synonym words which do not get aligned with a sign mode become underused and in time forgotten. For example the words *again* and *once more* are synonymous. However, only *again* receives a sign mode in translation while *once again* does not. In a context where *once more* is used instead of *again*, deaf students run into confusion.

The study also identified that words which have the same spelling but in pronunciation refer to different things confuse deaf students. For example, the word *refuse* (indicating unwillingness) and *refuse* (garbage) have the same spelling but refer to different things and are pronounced differently. It was also gathered that the sentences; *Please lead the class in discussion* and *Use only lead pencil for the test* mean differently because the word *lead* in both sentences are pronounced differently in the two statements and so connote different meanings in each context. The ditch of this problem is that deaf students were not able to distinguish between the differences in meaning because they could not hear the pronunciations to make out the distinctions. They attached same meaning to words that have the same spelling irrespective of their use in contexts and therefore misconstrue their meanings.

Sign language modes, in most cases, do not have exact word representation in English so expression of words which are technical in nature becomes difficult for both the teachers and their students. For example, per the school curriculum, deaf students are taught Science lessons on Elements, Compounds and Mixtures and are expected to understand and use such key terms as atmospheric pressure, atom particles, osmosis, transistors and emitters in writing. The challenge is that such key words do not have their exact representation in sign modes and so they are only explained to deaf students. Although deaf students may acquire the expected understanding of what the terms are, they are unable to use the exact words and reproduce them in writing as expected because the words do not have precise sign modes.

Another challenge borders on deaf students whose experiences exclude sound but have to describe sound in the context of lessons. Expressions of sounds such as *the screech of a car*, *the bleat of a goat* or *the roar of a lion* in their reading books may not evoke the necessary feelings the contexts demand and therefore mislead the deaf; they do not understand how interesting or terrifying these sounds may be to a hearing person. For example, in answering an examination question posed as "*you heard a roar around your vicinity after school one day, describe what happened afterwards*", it was realized that the deaf students were unable to appreciate the relevant concepts to enable them write the essay like a hearing person would; they had no ideas to help them to define 'roar' and also describe the feelings they evoke. Inability to understand the context of such expressions is likely to lead to failure in English Language and other subjects at both BECE and WASSCE. Furthermore, even if teachers of deaf students are able somehow, to help their students to conceptualize such expressions, reproduction of those expressions pose a major challenge to them.

Interviews with the teachers also revealed additional challenges to English language access to examination questions. The teachers acknowledged that deaf students encounter difficulties with regard to reading and comprehending examination questions. It was gathered from the teachers that deaf students were also unable to communicate their challenges to the invigilators during external examinations because the invigilators are neither deaf nor literate in sign language. It was also learned from interviews that examination scripts of deaf students are not marked by examiners who are special education professionals. This makes it difficult for such examiners to appreciate the deficiencies in the deaf students' answers in English language context, understanding of questions, and use of grammar, sentence construction and expression of ideas in written English. Invariably, such deficiencies would cause the deaf students to perform poorly or even fail these selective examinations and retard their progress through school.

5. Discussion
5.1 Home Factors
In Ghana, even though there are no statistics to buttress it, majority of deaf students are suspected to be born to hearing parents who are illiterate in Ghanaians sign language. Therefore, unlike their hearing counterparts who get early exposure to spoken language through family interaction before they begin schooling, a large majority of deaf children of school-going age get less exposed to language because they receive very little or no language input from home during the critical period of language acquisition (Malloy, 2003). The less exposure to language in the early years denies them from acquiring the requisite knowledge and information that children of their age are expected to hold and use by the time they begin school. Consequently, deaf children of hearing families lag behind their hearing peers in the competencies required for schooling. Besides, most families in Ghana are also superstitious and show ignorance about their children's hearing impairment (Gadagbui, 1998) such that most

deaf children in Ghana are kept at home for a long time before they start basic school, far advanced the required age of 4 years prescribed by the Ministry of Education (Reforms on Education, 2002).

Because deaf students are unable to pick sounds from their immediate environment, they have limitations in the amount of information they receive. The lack of incidental learning at home also adds to their difficulties. Whereas their hearing counterparts may acquire a measure of English language from Television or radio programmes, deaf students do not have such advantages and might rely on what is communicated to them via sign language of which the information may be lacking or misconstrued. Largely due to this reason, most deaf children begin school when they have not fully developed a functional language and this has serious academic setbacks with devastating and permanent consequences (Malloy, 2003). They also bear the early brunt of English language difficulties as academic tasks become more challenging (Heward, 2012).

Culture and home environment can affect one's English language acquisition (Bedard, Van Horn, & Garcia, 2011). Students who come from families who are literate and are regularly read to become more exposed to stories and concepts needed for English language literacy at school which deaf children in Ghana do not necessary get from their home environment. The pits of this situation is that deaf children miss out on the many opportunities to have early exposure to English language.

The belief is that because deaf children are unable to hear speech sounds from their home environment, they are limited in their ability to develop better understanding of English language at school. They become handicapped in employing phonological or speech-based codes in memory and lack the knowledge of the structure of English language even in print (Marschark & Mayer, 1998). Therefore, most deaf children have difficulty acquiring even written English language skills at school.

5.2 English Language Acquisition Difficulties at School
The study focused on how much of English language deaf students are able to access from school textbooks and teaching and learning processes in the classroom. The basis is that deaf students are expected to meet the same standard of language competence and academic expectations as their hearing peers whereas, as the study revealed, there are no additional services over and above the regular education provided for them in Ghana.

English language has its own syntactical rules guiding the use of adverbs and adjectives which deaf children cannot easily comprehend. Besides, Ghanaian sign language, the language deaf people in Ghana use, is also not a gestural rendition of English language. It has its own rules governing phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics just like all other sign languages which deaf students must consciously acquire and use (Stokoe, 2005). However, it seems that deaf children begin school without any strong language base and are consequently met with the challenge of being addressed in modes that might completely be unfamiliar to them during their early stay in school.

The study confirmed that most of the information communicated to deaf students in sign language either lack detail or is altogether misconstrued as a result of disparities that exist between spoken language and sign language. The findings illustrate in part, how the meanings of some English words are contingent on their pronunciation. At least, how a word is pronounced gives a clue to its meaning and spelling. The reality, however, is that deaf students cannot hear pronunciation of words, and therefore deriving meaning from most written words still pose a serious challenge to their education.

The crux of the matter is that English is a phonic language which must be heard to be understood. Changes in the tone, pitch and general modulation of the voice indicate feeling and understanding that becomes a mental technique for making information easier to memorize. The human brain is able to translate written words into sounds in the mind which depict feelings (Marschark & Mayer, 1998). As people lacking hearing, deaf students find it difficult to employ speech-based codes in memory. As deaf students compose thoughts based on the structure of sign language, the meanings they derive from English becomes different from what their hearing students would derive.

The study supports the fact that students who are deaf face enormous challenges developing English language at home and in school (Easterbrooks and Stoner, 2006; Moores, 2001; Bowe, 1998). This is because English language has rules governing vocabulary, syntax and figurative language and uses parts of speech such as adverbs and adjectives which deaf students cannot comprehend fully (Easterbrooks and Stoner, 2006). English language is a spoken language that needs to be heard in order to acquire it with sets of grammatical rules that are followed to make communication meaningful even when it is in text. Deaf students do not have such abilities. They do not have the same access to the rules of English language as do children with normal hearing.

5.3 Effect of English Language Acquisition Difficulties
Teaching and learning in Schools for the Deaf mimics those of regular schools which is contrary to the view that deaf students require specially trained teachers, special methods of teaching and specially designed curricula to enable them function well in school (Oppong, 2003). Schools for the Deaf in Ghana follow the same centralized curricula that govern teaching and learning in basic schools in Ghana and expect teachers to make maximum use

of them without any prescribed adaptation strategies for teachers to support deaf students. Perhaps the only different component in teaching and learning process of the deaf is the use of sign language of which majority of the teachers have not mastered. The implication is that deaf students are expected to make effective use of their limited knowledge base in English language to access linguistic content of the school curricula on their own just as their hearing peers as if they have no exceptionalities.

Consequently, deaf students often use the same descriptors to explain varied items while they lack the nuances of similar items (Smith, 1995, Bowe, 1998). In other words, they often describe or narrate stories in English language the same way as they did when they were younger. As a result of this poor and delayed language base, written language output and general education of deaf persons are typically poor and frustrating in Ghana. This stagnation in English language competencies is reflected in low academic achievement (Turnbull et al., 2009). The average deaf student may complete senior high school education in Ghana and still show considerable delays and variances in written language output (Bowe, 1998).

Although the poor and delayed language base of deaf children make their written English language output typically weak, they are not academically stupid (Turnbull et al., 2009; Bowe, 1998). They have the same distribution of intelligence as hearing people yet access to the linguistic content of the school curricular becomes a huge barrier to their educational advancement.

6. Conclusions

It is true that deaf students deviate significantly from what is considered "normal" as their hearing impairment interferes significantly with ordinary communication, educational advancement, and social integration. Since hearing facilitates both spoken and written communication, deaf students have a disadvantage of effectively understanding and contributing well in classroom teaching and learning processes which in Ghana, depends largely on English Language. The limited language input that deaf students are able to access, as well as the limitations in technology developed for deaf education reflect in some learning difficulties which make deaf students lag behind their hearing peers in areas of English language which may manifest as deficiencies in spelling, paragraph comprehension, vocabulary and conceptualization. The net result is that the average deaf student completes secondary education functionally sub-literate in English language, with considerable delays and variances in written output as compared to their hearing counterparts in Ghana. The pits of the matter is that this strict pass in English language as a requirement to further education in Ghana is stifling for the educational advancement of many deaf individuals in Ghana. Certainly, this is a concern for policy makers.

This is to inform educational policy makers in Ghana to look into deaf students' language use and come out clear with appropriate language policy that meets the unique linguistic needs of the deaf in Ghana. In the interim, it is recommended that deaf students should be given concessionary grades to meet the admission criteria into higher levels of education. The emergent issues in this study validate the need for further research to create public awareness of the difficulties that deaf students encounter while accessing education in Ghana with the hope that the Ghana Education Service of the Ministry of Education would resource the Special Education Division to mitigate the identified challenges and enhance educational opportunities for deaf students in Ghana.

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