



## EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN GHANA

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### Abstract

*The language of instruction in many African countries has been the language of the colonial masters but, citizens of these respective African countries seem to have different opinions regarding the appropriateness and benefits of these foreign languages. Till date, many of these countries have not had a stable education language policy. This study investigated the educational language policy in Africa, using Ghana as a case study, mainly focusing on existing literature. The key findings have been that language in education policy in Ghana has shifted between the use of English language and a local language in the early years of formal education, from the use of the mother tongue or L1 for the first three years of education as the medium of instruction and English as a subject from the fourth year to tertiary level. The review has also found that Ghana's justification of the policy to use the mother tongue or L1 is based mainly on studies around the world rather than empirical studies from Ghana. There has also not been commitment on the part of the basic schools to enforce the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction for the first three years, as stipulated in the language policy. The study therefore concludes, that to some extent, and especially, in rural communities the intended outcomes such as acquiring knowledge, creating opportunities for a majority of people to acquire skills leading to jobs and consequently the well-being of people has not been achieved. It was also found that there is a mismatch between the preference of the citizenry and the policy planners on the language for early years of formal education. The study suggests that given the new trend of multilingualism, issues of language and power, more empirical studies should be conducted on multilingualism in Ghana and wide consultations be made with the citizenry for an accepted education language policy.*

**Keywords:** *Education, language, mother tongue, policy, educational outcomes.*

### Introduction

The choice of what language to use as a medium of instruction in the early years of a child's education has been an issue of debate for many years in Ghana. The debate has been heightened by the continuous decline in standards in the educational sector since independence (MOE, 2013). For example, Educational Research

Network for West and Central Africa (ERNWCA) (2003), revealed a below average performance of primary schools in reading, spoken and written English in parts of Ghana, particularly northern Ghana. Konadu (1998) had earlier reported of the comparative poor academic performance in public schools in the

rural areas across the country as against the urban areas due to poor performance in English.

Other reasons cited for the falling standards include the lack of or inadequate text books and other learning materials, low teacher to pupil's contact hours and inadequate in-service training for teachers (ERNWCA, 2003). Several studies and investigations have been conducted to determine the causes of the falling standards of education in Ghana (Andoh-Kumi, 1992; ERNWCA, 2003; Owu-Ewie, 2006; MOE, 2013; UNESCO, 2013), but apart from the general reasons mentioned above and poor incentives and lack of motivation for teachers, little focus has been put on the role of the language policy as a possible cause of the deteriorating standards in the country.

The trend in falling standards of education led to reforms in the education sector, prominent among which were the 1987 Education Sector Reforms and the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education of 1995 (ERNWCA, 2003; MOE, 2013). While these academic and politically motivated debates are going on, the primary stakeholder at the centre, the Ghanaian child, is the one who is negatively affected as the standards continue to decline, as indicated in poor examination results. This is particularly so for children in Northern Ghana, who consistently record low literacy rates and academic performance in the country (GLSS, 2014).

One of the main causes of the decline in standards has been the weak foundation that children had in their early years in schooling (Twumasi-Ankrah, 2015). This weak foundation is believed to result from the instructional medium during the early stages of the child's education. As early as in the 60s, UNESCO (1963) stated that the medium of instruction helps to build a solid foundation in the ability of the child to understand basic concepts of what is being taught and to adequately prepare him or her for future learning. Critical, therefore, among cases of falling standards is the poor performance in the English language in both reading and writing. This is because the poor performance in

the English language has a direct relationship with how well a child performs in the other subjects since the subjects and the learning materials are written and taught in the English language.

In Ghana, the language policy has shifted several times from the use of mother tongue (L1) to English (L2) at the early stages of education. The frequent revisions of the language policy according to Andoh-Kumi, (1992) have not yielded the intended results but rather had a more negative impact on children's educational outcomes than solving the language challenges.

In this regard, this paper explored the link between language of instruction and educational outcomes in Ghana by reviewing the policies critically and proffering suggestions for policy makers as a contribution to the on-going debate on the appropriate language policy for the Ghanaian educational system.

### **Language in education policies in some Africa countries**

Language policies that are developed in African countries after independence are as diverse as the countries of origin of the colonial masters, that is to say Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain and Portugal (Andoh- Kumi, 1996). These countries had much influence on the kind of language policy that their colonies developed for use as media of instruction in schools. For example, the English showed linguistic tolerance for and permitted indigenous African languages to be used as media of instruction for the first three years (primary level) and so supported the development and use of indigenous languages at the lower primary level in schools, after which these were to be studied as a subject while English became the medium of instruction. The French, Portuguese, Belgians and Spaniards, on the contrary did not show the same tolerance for the use of indigenous African languages in the public domain and insisted on the use of the official language for all public discourses. The French for example, pursued a policy of total assimilation that would make people from their

colonies use the French language as well as have a cultural behaviour similar to what pertains in France (Egudu, 1978).

In spite of the freedom that the English-speaking countries had to use indigenous languages, there were many challenges. The main challenge such countries faced was a question of choice of language among these multilingual countries as a mother tongue L1 without probably creating problems amongst the different ethnic groups. It was to solve this challenge that at independence, countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania in East Africa identified Swahili, a language that was widely accepted by all the ethnic language groups in these countries as a national language. This was developed and used alongside the official language, English (Albaugh, 2012).

In the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the constitution allows for each State to choose one indigenous language to be used alongside English for official communication and the transaction of government business. Ghana has so far developed eleven indigenous languages to be used for education and for information delivery, but English still remains the language used for all official businesses.

Little is found in the current language for education policy of Ghana suggesting that the use of a Ghanaian language might be a means of improving education. Instead, it focuses much on improving the quality of education by the provision of teaching and learning materials and services. For example, the policy emphasises the production, review and distribution of teaching materials and giving more training, particularly in-service training to personnel of the Ghana Education Service. In most of its planning, attempts have been made to use Ghanaian languages at least in the lower classes as the medium of instruction and treated as subjects in the upper classes.

In their studies of the use of Yoruba as a medium of instruction in Nigerian schools, Schmied (1991) and Fafunwa (1975) showed that teaching by means of the local language was better than a foreign language with regard to pupils'

competence in Yoruba and English. Schmied's study was an experimental one in which the hypotheses were that children would benefit culturally, socially, linguistically and cognitively if they used the mother-tongue as the instructional medium at the early stages. It was also projected that the pupils would still have a good command of English if it was just taught as a subject. The project set out to provide all the necessities for implementation. These included the production of new instructional material in the Yoruba language. Teachers were also given in-service training. The results of the project showed that the use of the mother tongue as instructional medium under these conditions was superior with regard to pupils' competence in both Yoruba and English (Schmied 1991; Afolayan 1976; Fafunwa 1975).

Another study of the use of mother tongue was conducted in 1982 in Sudan. This was done by the "Local Languages Literacy Project" in Southern Sudan and the results implemented by the Southern Regional Ministry of Education at the end of the 70s in collaboration with SIL, principally to upgrade the teaching of the local language. The project also consisted of the development and production of materials in the local language and training of teachers. Contrary to the results of the examples above, the results did not show any positive effects on pupils' academic performance. Cziko (1982) concludes in a study that the use of mother tongue is no actual guarantee that its use would improve the learning skills and comprehension of pupils because of other factors.

From the on-going, the studies above on the use of L1 for early education revealed different outcomes from one country to the other. It is very obvious that the use of the mother tongue for instruction alone without dealing with the complementing issues will not yield the required results. Andoh-Kumi (1999) addressed the "other factors" cited in (Cziko, 1982) when he identified the significant contribution of teacher motivation, training and in-service training, timely provision of teaching and learning

materials among others as contributing to positive educational outcomes.

Reflecting on Language policies in the 1970s, Ricento (2006) opined that they mirrored the socio-political conditions of the time and were mainly top-down centralized policies and had a rationalist technocratic view of planning, which allowed technocrats to dictate what needed to be done and not what ought to be done. This view is still the practice in many situations with little or no reference to language ecologies and context realities surrounding the political policies and decisions (Freedman, 2010). Ricento (2006) explained that this led to learning difficulties as pupils got frustrated at having to struggle to understand what is being taught instead of building new knowledge. Ideally, when formulating a language policy, considerations should be given to the contextual realities of language ecologies.

### **Ghana`s Language in education Policy**

The language choice from Ghana`s educational history has been bilingual, that is, Mother tongue (L1) and English (L2). The first legislated Language in Education policy was approved in 1925 by the colonial government, which advocated and made use of the mother tongue or indigenous language as a medium of instruction, compulsory for the first three years of education, while English is taught as a subject and thereafter, the reverse, English used as medium of instruction while the mother tongue is taught as a subject (Agbedor, 1984 cited in Owu-Ewie, 2006). This was reviewed in 1927 in line with Guggisberg`s idea that Ghanaian children should not be denationalised, so the use of mother tongue was again reinforced for the first three years of primary schooling, and textbooks in vernacular produced for teaching.

In 1951, under the governments` Accelerated Development Plan, this policy was again reviewed when the mother tongue as a medium of instruction was reintroduced for the “first year only and English thereafter, because some native Ghanaians interpreted the first mother tongue

policy as a ploy by the British to give Ghanaian children an inferior quality of education” (Dzameshie, 1998 :19) This policy was again changed in 1957 to English only policy which was different to the Bernard Committee`s Report in 1956 which recommended the use of mother tongue policy for first three years.

Nyarko-Ansah (2014) described the period after independence as the most fluctuating in terms of implementation of the language in education policy in Ghana. During this period as many as 6 reviews were made to the language in education policies. Between 1960 and 1966, no Ghanaian language was used as a medium of instruction and from 1967 to 1969, it was only in the first year that a Ghanaian language was used. Between 1970 and 1973, Ghanaian language was used for all first four years (P1-P4). The period of 1974 – 2002 is said to be the longest period that a single policy was used in Ghana. During this period, Ghanaian language was used for the first three years of primary school (P1-P3). A major revision of the policy was after the 2002 declaration of using the Ghanaian language in the first three years. This time, no Ghanaian language was used at any level. The policy was revised to the use of English as the medium of instruction from primary one and Ghanaian language studied as a compulsory subject from primary to secondary school, now Senior High School. (Andoh-Kumi, 1999; Ameyaw-Akumfi, 2000). Again, in 2003, and 2009 these policies were reviewed with recommendations to exclude the study of L1 at the secondary education level, nursery and kindergarten.

In the same 2009, the policy was reviewed again. The reviewed policy advocated the return to the first three years of mother tongue instruction and then English afterwards. The argument in favour of the policy is that when children are instructed in the mother tongue from the beginning, they acquire literacy skills faster and are able to grasp basic concepts, which then makes it easier for learning the L2 or second language later in literacy acquisition in line with UNESCO (2008). The policy recommends that English or the L2 is

taught as a subject at one point (Awubuluyi, 2013). This unstable nature of the policy is often

cited by many as being one of the main reasons for the falling standards in education.

**Table 1. Chronological order of different language in education policies in Ghana**

Period	1 <sup>st</sup> year	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	4 <sup>th</sup> year
1529-1925				
a. Castle school era	-	-	-	-
b. Missionary era	+	+	+	-
1925-1951	+	+	+	-
1951-1955	+	-	-	-
1956-1966	-	-	-	-
1967-1969	+	-	-	-
1970-1973	+	+	+	+
1974-2002 Sept	+	+	+	-
Present	-	-	-	-

+ means Ghanaian language was used

- No Ghanaian language was used

Source: Owu-Ewie, C. (2006: 77)

Andoh- Kumi (1992) attests to the effectiveness of the mother tongue as medium of instruction at the beginning stages of a child`s education. The use of the L1 at the beginning of schooling is said to aid the child`s ability to grasp concepts and principles easily and faster than they would, when they are taught in a second language (UNESCO, 1953; Collison, 1975; & Fafunwa et al, 1989). Research has shown that the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the earlier years of a child`s education sets the tone for effective acquisition of any other language later in their education (Andoh – Kumi, 1992). The UNESCO (1953) document and other earlier findings have formed the basis for some of the policies that were developed for schools in Ghana after independence from colonial rule and not necessarily from Ghana.

There is the general perception that the standards of education are falling in Ghana (MOE, 2013; ERNWCA, 2013; & UNESCO, 2003). Whether

this is a perception or the reality, it is generally acknowledged that the quality of students that are produced lately is substandard. Several causes have been attributed to the phenomenon, including poor teacher motivation, poor supervision, inadequate and or late supply of teaching materials, poor implementation of curricular, large class size etc. and above all, the language policies that have been used in formal education since colonial rule (Ando-Kumi, 1992, Ewu- Ewie, 2006, Ansah, 2013).

Language, as an integral part of humans, surpasses communication and social interaction. It influences thought, which conditions action and conduct and therefore the strongest medium of transmitting culture and social reality (Ani, 2004). Trudgil (1985) asserts that apart from serving as a vehicle of communication, language is also a means of establishing and monitoring relationships with other people. It is a powerful tool for social development. Language policies



have not only played a very important role in education throughout the world but have also had implications for cultural politics (Tollefson, 2013). The cultural politics may work out well at the local level if a particular local language is dominant and recommended as a medium for instruction in school.

### Ghana's linguistics landscape

The linguistic environment certainly gives direction to the language policy in education.

There is no consensus on the number of languages spoken in Ghana. For example, the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation identified sixty – nine (69) languages in Ghana (GILLBT, 1992), Grimes (1984) identified 64, while Lewis (2009) citing the Ethnologue, puts the number at seventy-nine (79). The map below shows the several language groups of Ghana.

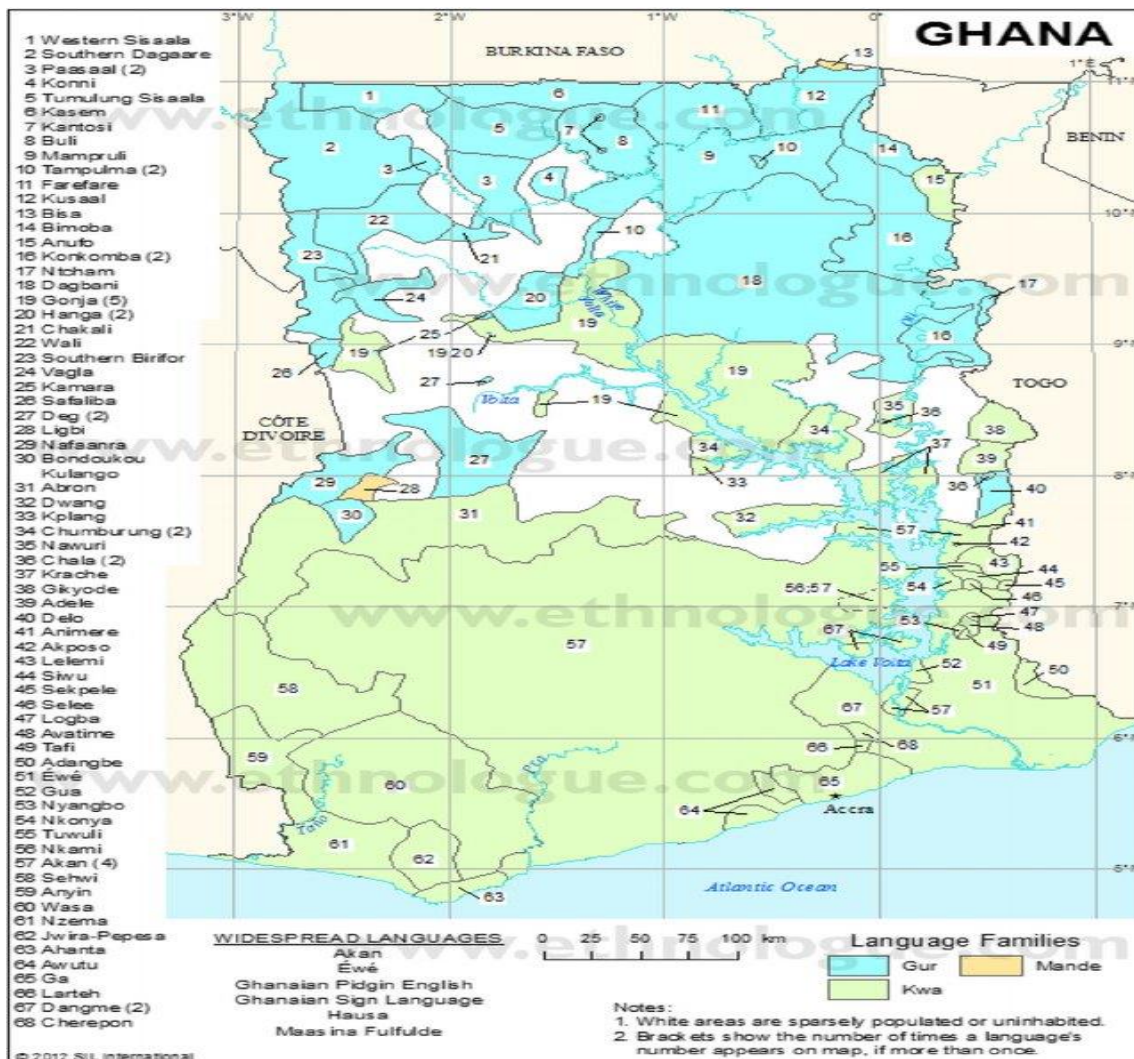


Figure 1: Language Map of Ghana, Source: Ethnologue, 2013

Ghana's status as a multicultural and multilingual society makes it difficult to have a class in a school that consists of only one ethnic group, a condition that would make it

convenient to use a single local language as a medium of instruction in education. For example, Bamgbose (1991) revealed in his study in Ghana the rarity in finding a classroom

in most parts of Ghana that has more than ten (10) speakers of the same language. Yet the schools have very large classes.

The languages spoken in Ghana belong mainly to the Niger – Congo family of languages. These languages are clustered according to the linguistic classification they belong to, that is, the Kwa, Gur and Mande. These are further grouped according to linguistic similarity with features such as mutual intelligibility or lexical similarity. The largest linguistic group in Ghana in terms of speakers is the Akan or Twi speaking group, which belongs to the Kwa classification and situated in the mid southern part of Ghana. The group has about five main variations, the Asante, Fante, Akwapim, Akyem and Nzema. The Guan speaking group also falls under the Kwa classification. It is composed of Gonja, Chumburung, Nawuri, Krachi, Anufo, Larteh and a few others which are scattered between the southern and northern parts of the country. The Ga/Dangbe, Krobo, and Ewe/Anlo speaking groups also belong to the Kwa classification and are found in the southern and south eastern part of the country. In the northern part of the country is the Mole/Dagbon group which belongs to the Gur classification. It also has about eight variations, Dagbani, Mampruli, Nanuni, Kamara, Hanga, Wali, Grune, Dagaare and Kusaal. These languages are found in the northern part of the country.

There are also smaller groups still in the northern part of the country. They include Sisaala, Vagla, Tampulma, Chakali, Kasena etc. belonging to the Gurunsi group and others such as the Komkomba, Basaare, Bimoba who belong to the Gurma group located along the border on the north eastern part of Ghana. In spite of belonging to the same family, there are lexical and tonal differences between and among members of the same group. Similarly, there are very many similarities in both lexical items and structure. Some of the tonal differences are due to different geographical

locations. The further the languages are away from each other the likelihood of a greater difference and the closer, the greater the mutual intelligibility.

Recognising the multilingual nature of the country and language diversity, the framers of the language in education policy chose and developed eleven (11) languages to be used for instruction in schools. These languages are chosen from the different regions of the country. Perhaps, there was an assumption that these languages are widespread and widely spoken in their respective regions and will be easily understood within their locations. If these languages are so diverse, which languages will be considered for education if each group chooses to start with its L1? This has obvious challenges. What will be the reactions and attitudes of those whose languages are not used, particularly when language is considered as a thing of power?

#### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Use of L1**

From the presentation above, it is clear that there are strengths and weaknesses of each policy. Strengths of the use of L1 in the early years of formal school include a continuity of the use of a medium of expression from home, thus making the child use the language very freely. As they express themselves freely, they expand their thinking capacity (Agyekum (2001). Auerbach (1993) adds that it reduces anxiety as the child does not have to worry about using a different language. According to him, it creates a relaxing atmosphere for the child and because of that the child participates more actively in school

Sharma (2015) maintains that language is a vehicle for cultural aspects of life and to use a foreign language, especially at the beginning of a child's development will not be helpful. The author cites Auerbach (1993) as saying that when the native language is used, learners consistently record positive results. For Sharma, there is no need for arguing for the

relevance of the use of the native language for education. The concern should be when and how to use it. In the same vein, Kavaliauskiena et al (2010) say that the native language can be an aid in learning English in a classroom. For them, all learners need the support of the mother tongue in the English classroom but the amount needed depends on the learner's proficiency.

Kinyua (2015) sees the use of the mother tongue as a basis for learning a new language such as English. According to her, children perform better when they are taught in the mother tongue first although teachers have a negative attitude towards it. She concludes that the use of mother tongue as medium of instruction positively contributes to the acquisition of English. Similar to arguments for cultural relevance, Anyidoho (2018) in her study of language policy in education and implementation challenges in Ghana, insists on the use of the local language so as not to lose the indigenous knowledge and culture of the different ethnic groups in the country even if English remains the official language of the country.

Other arguments made in support of the use of L1 are that, its use keeps the Ghanaian identity, children have the ability to grasp basic concepts in L1 and are able to transfer knowledge better from L1 to L2 and finally, that the use of L1 has been theoretically tried and proven successful.

Just as there are strengths, so are there are weaknesses with the use of L1. The use of L1 seems very feasible in rural areas where there might be one dominant language but this is not the case in bigger towns and cities, so the language to use poses a challenge for those who do not understand the chosen L1. The question of which language is the L1 comes up. Increasingly, many Ghanaians speak English to their children as a first language even if they do not speak very good English. UNESCO (2013) defined first language or L1 of a child as the language that a child speaks first when he

began to speak, speaks at home and hears around him/her on a daily basis. What is therefore an L1 in their case?

Instead of expanding their thinking capacity as postulated by Agyekum (2001), children are overwhelmed. and consequently, increase anxiety and unable to participate actively in class. Some Ghanaian languages are just as 'alien' as English to some of the children because of the complex multilingual context of the country. Besides, there are not enough developed materials to use in class. Similarly, there are not enough teachers to teach the various Ghanaian languages. The question of impact is also raised. If L1 would be used for more than three years, it might have more impact on the child but if it is used for only the first three years it may not have much significant influence on the child. Interactions with some Ghanaian language teachers show that there is the lack of confidence in many of the Ghanaian language trained teachers who claim to be English teachers and end up teaching English, in contrast to the claim that L1 has been theoretically justified and proven successful, Literature shows that English only is not pedagogically justified. Tollefson (2013) highlights four pertinent issues regarding the role of language policy in societal development. First, language policies serve the interest of the dominant group in society. Secondly, language polices marginalise some students while granting privileges to others, thirdly, the use of language in schools create inequalities among learners and finally, the challenge of how schools can further the educational, social and economic interest of linguistic minorities.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the use of L2**

Cook (2008) points out that the use of English from the beginning is a kind of immersion that helps the child to learn the L2 fast. He adds that it will help the child think in the L2. Because all children will start with the same language in



school, they will begin to interact with each and learn to participate in English. For those with this view, L2 in the early years gives pupils maximum exposure and a plain playing field to all children. The use of L2 is also seen as not promoting one local language over the other. It is for similar reasons that the nation has continued to keep English as the official language.

The anticipated linguistic immersion mentioned above will not be achieved when the child gets back home except in homes where children speak English. This may not result in an easy way to learn for the child. Children who are transitioning so abruptly will face challenges learning even things they know and this might slow down their educational process leading to frustration and demotivation. Concepts will be more difficult to grasp because they are explained in the L2 that the child is not very familiar with yet.

### **Challenges of effective implementation of the language in education policy**

The general observation of policies in Ghana is not about the policies themselves. The problem has been with implementation. A political will is the most critical issue for the effective implementation of any policy. Successive governments have not been persistent enough in the implementation of the L1 policy. Instead, the policy was left to the heads of institutions who did what they thought was appropriate under their peculiar circumstances. This created a big challenge.

In spite of strong arguments for the use of L1, Denteh (1991), Agyekum (2000), Andoh-Kumi (2001), and Asamoah (2002) all agree that there are challenges to the effective implementation of the L1 policy. The inconsistent language in education policies has not been helpful as each time, is a start all over and treated as an experiment. Ghana is a multilingual nation and the issue of which language should be chosen for particular schools becomes crucial. The use of a

particular language will be a disadvantage to others. Related to this is the fact that not all Ghanaian languages are even developed to be used in school so some children will not have the opportunity to use their own mother tongue. Language is power and the use of dominant languages will disempower people of minority language groups and perhaps cause them to lose their true identity. Imposing a dominant language on a people or preferring another language because of its superiority over others causes inequity for those minority languages in a particular community. (Samuelson and Freedman, 2010).

In an attempt to address the above situation, the current policy, (2008 - date) has introduced a clause that instructs that the “dominant language of the area” be used as medium of instruction. Although this policy gives flexibility and a possibility for a majority of children to benefit, children from minority language backgrounds are disadvantaged.

Also, there are standardization, human and material resource challenges. There is the challenge of low numbers of teachers who speak, read and are able to teach in the language of the locality and the availability of reading materials in these languages (Andoh-Kumi, 1999). If using eleven local languages pose such tremendous challenges, how would planners deal with resources for over sixty languages?

Dzameshie (2003) thinks that one of the strongest motivations for the use of a local language is to feel entirely independent of the colonial master but these feelings came with several challenges that did not really allow this idea to grow that much. Some of these challenges include working on the standardisation of the vernacular languages, the production of literature and the lack of capacity to produce materials in all the languages spoken in Ghana, as they worked on only few of them.

The social environment is changing and the social environment of the past created the

opportunity for children to learn other languages without problem. Children of neighbouring homes played together and interacted with families and so learnt other languages easily. Today, many people speak English to their children and children are also kept in homes to interact with English medium gadgets and instruments. The assumption that children will learn the dominant local languages requires investigations.

For the early anti mother tongue proponents, the mother tongue first policy by the then outgoing colonial government was given a negative connotation. It was interpreted to mean giving inferior education to Ghanaians. This reasoning still lingers on with some people even today.

The L1 language policy in Ghana seems to be adopted based on findings from other parts of Africa because there is very little empirical evidence from Ghana. Many people who have the financial means send their children to private schools where the L1 is not used even at the lower levels, yet academic performance is better in most of them than in the public schools.

Because of the international character of English, it gets a higher merit than an L1 even in the educational system of the country. For example, a failure in English cannot be substituted with a pass in a local language. Consequently, there is no motivation both on the side of teachers and pupils to be serious with the local language used as medium of instruction or even as a subject. Many literates who did not use this are doubtful of its success, as many Ghanaians equate a good school to one where children speak English in both the early as well as the advanced stages.

The Bureau of Ghana languages was funded by UNESCO because of its support for mother tongue first policy, but it could not take care of all Ghanaian languages. In the Northern Region, it had only one office in Tamale, the regional capital consequently, working on Dagbani, the language of the area producing

and supervising materials for its teaching. The Ajumako School of Languages was established initially to give in-service training to Ghanaian language teachers to equip them with the needed skills to teach the local languages.

This has not produced the desired effect in the schools because the objective of many of the teachers who underwent the training was to acquire certificates of higher education for an increase in their salaries and earn promotions within the service but had no interest in teaching the languages, because it was not prestigious to do so. After completion of their training, they either went back to the schools to teach other subjects that they regarded as more prestigious, particularly English or left the teaching service entirely for better jobs with their higher certificates (Schroder 1999: 370).

Over time, other institutions such as the University of Cape Coast, the University of Ghana, and the University of Education, Winneba, opened Language centres for the teaching of Ghanaian languages to underscore the importance that the Ghana Education Service places on the study of Ghanaian languages in Ghana and in line with the Language in education policy, but this does not seem to be changing the attitudes of average Ghanaians towards the use of mother tongue for education.

Non-governmental Organisations such as the Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy, and Bible Translation (GILLBT) has done extensive literacy work in northern and other parts of Ghana with the aim of giving literacy skills to the indigenous people in their own languages. Unfortunately, the majority of the languages that they have developed are not approved for teaching in schools. In the Northern Region for example, out of the total of about fifteen spoken languages, only two, Dagbani and Gonja have been approved for teaching in schools and so have the materials for teaching and learning.

Despite the establishment and contribution of these institutions for mother tongue first policy,

there is still great emphasis placed on English by the government because of poor grades in English in later stages of school, since it is the main language used for instruction at higher levels. Proponents of the English first policy argue that the poor academic performance that is being experienced is because of the inability of students to speak or write good English. They explained that the reason why the mother tongue first policy failed was because of its abuse by some schools in the rural areas where they never used English in the classroom as a medium of instruction throughout the primary education. This resulted in a lack of competence in fluency in the English language even after completing the Senior High School (Ameyaw, 2008).

### Conclusion

It is clear that the shifts in the language policy have not left Ghana with a permanent policy. Both the L1 as first policy and the L2 also as first policy, all have strengths and weaknesses. However, literature has shown that the use of L1 has more theoretical and pedagogical benefits than L2. In addition, language policies go beyond just a medium of instruction in school and are also associated with identity. English should therefore not be the determinant of one's educational progress. This paper therefore recommends the use of L1. Given evidence around the world on the role of the L1 or mother tongue for better educational outcomes, it is useful to have citizenry that believe in this. This must be informed by empirical evidence from the country so that the language policy will be accepted by everyone and one that people will be committed to. To achieve this, this paper makes the following recommendations:

There is not enough documentation to show that any of the shifts in the past has yielded better outcomes. Therefore, it will be useful to do very critical investigations and establish what the situation is for the local context (in this case, Ghana) after which there should be a

national dissemination of the policy, provision of the required resources and monitoring. Minority language groups must be considered in planning the policy. The Government should invest in the development of the minority languages if L1 has to be used as first language. Planners of the policy should be realistic and not underestimate the problem with teachers and materials that are required for a smooth implementation. There should be a conscious effort by the Ghana Education Service to train more L1 teachers, get more teaching and learning materials and also organise a nationwide consultation with all stakeholders in the educational sector for acceptance and commitment.

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