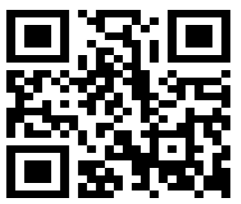


Language Policy and Quality Education in Ghana

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Abstract

The study is based on the concept of language policy in Ghana's education sector. It begins by defining this concept and explaining the factors that determine educational quality as far as language policy is concerned: listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. These factors are core to providing quality education because they help learners understand the content being taught, ultimately boosting their academic performance. Moreover, the study also notes that language policy is vital because it defines communication between learners and teachers. Furthermore, it analyzes the historical context of the Ghanaian language education policies and outlines how successful or unsuccessful they have been. From this analysis, the four authors used in the study agree that adopting English as the language policy has been historically a failure regarding quality education. Hence, the authors support adopting bilingual education, where the Ghanaian languages are used as the first language (L₁) to teach learners from basic one to three and use English as the second language (L₂) from basic four to nine. Consequently, the author agrees that language policy and quality education are directly related factors.

Key words: Language policy, Language in Education, Quality Education, English Language, Bilingual Education, First Language (L₁), Second Language (L₂)

INTRODUCTION

Language policy is one of the policies related to quality education globally. Indeed, the language policy is related to the listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills core to enhancing quality education. Such quality is possible because these skills promote the student's content understanding, improving their academic performance eventually. Therefore, effective language policy is key to the overall academic development of a country; the better the language policy adopted by governments, the better the performance of students as far as academic performance is concerned. According to the research completed by Awuor (2019), language in the educational context is a crucial tool that enhances communication between teachers, students, school administration, parents, and other stakeholders in the education sector. At the same time, the author explains that the core of education systems worldwide is the language policy adopted. He defines a language policy as the concept that dictates the language applied in imparting knowledge to learners at different levels. The author also notes that the language policy describes the exercises, rules,

concepts, and regulations that help education systems accomplish the nationally-required transformations (education-ministry-set transformations) in the school contexts; it helps achieve successful language transformations guided by the national language plan. Therefore, the importance of language policy can never be overemphasized as far as the goal of promoting student performance is concerned. This report analyzes the language policy in Ghana and its impact on the provision of quality education based on the different perspectives of various authors as summarized in the next section.

Policy Evaluation

First, according to Owu-Ewie (2006), the education language in societies that use a range of languages has raised concerns among educational planners and educators. Owu-Ewie bases his research on the literary work of Ouadraogo (2000), who explains that concepts of education and language are complex in the African context because the continent is characterized by the use of many

languages due to the multiple ethnic groups; a multilingual and multiethnic state describes it. The author notes that this state is worsened when the country's national language is not among the local languages spoken in the country because there is always a problem when determining which language should be used in school. This problem is most common in lower primary levels (grades one to three) in school situations in African multilingual and multiethnic societies. For example, the author notes that four decades and eight years since Ghana attained her independence, the country has been struggling to face the fact that it has not been easy to develop a language that could be used to teach and enhance communication among the lower primary learners. Additionally, the author explains that the Ghanaian language policy has historically been unsuccessful and successful at the same time. Indeed, twenty years ago, the Ghanaian government passed a law that required schools to use the English language as the official tool for instruction among learners from grades one to three. This law ensured that the English language (later known as the second language-L₂) replaced the Ghanaian language as a medium of instruction among these learners and ensured it was still used for grades four to nine.

Owu-Ewie (2006) also explains the reasons the English language was adopted in Ghanaian schools from grade one to senior secondary level (high school). The first reason that the English language once defined the educational language policy in the country and applied from grade one to high school was that students were not able to write and speak 'good' English words and sentences even when they had completed the Senior Secondary School level. Second, the author explains that the country's multilingual and multiethnic state made it hard for the government to come up with learning instructions, more so in urban schools. Consequently, it was not easy to decide which language among the over 79 languages used in the country, including Dagbani, Twi, and Ga, could have been used as its language policy. Third, the author notes that Ghana did not have a language that could have specifically been used in teaching the content subjects in the Ghanaian schools; the Ghanaian languages did not have standard written forms. Fourth, the author explains that the Ghanaian languages did not have the material that could have been used in the teaching/learning process and that much as there were five languages with linguistic material, it was not easy to impose these languages on people from other language groups in the country. Fifth, the use of the Ghanaian language as an instructional medium from grades one to three was not executed effectively because teachers avoided English and could not use it even in grade six. Sixth, the ministry of education noted that children could learn their local languages (L₁) better after learning the second language (L₂), which was the English language. Seventh, the author explains that the English language was picked as the language policy in the Ghanaian schools because there were no teachers with the capacity to teach in the local languages; speaking a Ghanaian language does not mean that one could teach in it. Lastly, the author observes that the ministry of education noted that since English was the lingua franca in the country, it was the role of the education system to ensure that all children could write and speak it fluently by

ensuring that they learned all forms of the language. In conclusion, the author suggests that adopting a proper language policy is the beginning of quality education in Ghana.

Second, Agbedor (1994) investigated language planning for national development in Ghana based on a sociolinguistic survey. This survey aimed to examine the then-current language policies in the country and what mistakes may have been made when adopting such policies. The study was also set to investigate the degree of bilingualism and multilingualism in three population samples in the country: urban, rural heterogeneous, and rural homogenous. Overall, the study by this author was meant to determine the role played by the different Ghanaian languages in the county in the context of the political, economic, and social lives of Ghanaians. Part of the survey was an English proficiency test carried out in six Junior Secondary Schools sampled from three of the districts that took part in the survey. This test was conducted to ascertain the importance of the English language in the Ghanaian education system. Various observations were made from the results of the study and this test.

First, it was discovered that most people have occupations that do not need the use of the English language. Second, the research outcomes revealed an increasing rate of school drop-out and that most learners left school with no understanding of English literacy or the literacy of a Ghanaian language. Third, it was discovered that most Ghanaians preferred the local languages to the English language; from the poorest to the elite Ghanaians were only using English as an instructional role. Fourth, the author found out that too much emphasis on English made it impossible for most Ghanaians to access essential information about concepts that would help them promote their social, political, and economic welfare. It was also clear from the research outcomes that such necessary information would have easily been achieved through quality education; a wrong language policy causes poor quality education. Fifth, the proficiency test outcomes showed an academic performance concern among the learners in the Junior Secondary Schools because those in the final year could not communicate meaningfully based on the English language. In other words, they were not receiving quality education as far as the English language is concerned. Sixth, it was evident from the research outcomes that learning English was not an easy task in the Ghanaian education system because of various challenges, including the reduced population of native English speakers and reduced English language teaching materials and teachers. Lastly, the author states that the uniting role the English language was supposed to play was better played by the local language spoken by most people in the country. Indeed, the author observes that minority people could learn the language of the majority people without having to relegate their local languages. From a conclusive perspective, it is clear that the English language was not the best language policy in the country because it was not primarily accepted, and neither did it enhance quality education. In other words, quality education can only be offered when the language policy adopted is effective and broadly accepted in a country. Besides acceptability, the results revealed that the logistics

involved in adopting a language policy should also be considered before learners can benefit from quality education.

Furthermore, the author explains that there was a need to adopt a different national language policy and the consequent language framework for education in the country based on a spectrum of facts and survey outcomes. First, the author discovered that the then-current language policy was not contributing to the overall national demands in Ghana based on two aspects. The first aspect was ensuring equitable access to information ranging from global issues related to population growth, workplace safety, and health to resource consumption, among other information areas. The second aspect was ensuring that the Ghanaians were aware of the information about and took part in three perspectives of the country: political, social, and political perspectives of the country. The author observes that the then language policy (English) would not have helped implement these aspects because only a few individuals could write and read English. Again, only a few individuals could proceed to higher education, making it impossible for most people to capitalize on the vital information related to the three perspectives noted earlier. As the author explains, such a situation resulted from being illiterate in English (the then official language), primarily used to encode information in the country. Therefore, the English language was not appropriate from the country's national perspective, including the country's education system.

Second, the author explained that bilingual education is critical and core among Ghanaian children based on the survey outcomes and pragmatic and theoretical facts. Third, the author explains that he observed that the mother tongue (L_1) is critical to the concept formation necessary in the first aspects of childhood education because this language is effective in transmitting knowledge. Lastly, the author states that various research works show that learning a second language supports the role of the first language (L_1) in acquiring the second language (L_2). In other words, the author observes that the Ghanaian languages (L_1) could have been better as the language policy because they would have helped children and adults learn the English language faster. Overall, the author proposes using a bilingual language framework emphasizing Ghanaian and English languages. Additionally, the author notes that this framework would ensure that the children who dropped out of school could write and read in at least one of the significant Ghanaian languages and English. The author concludes that this framework would enhance the provision of quality (bilingual) education such that people would positively contribute to the nation-building efforts in Ghana. Indeed, guided by Stern (1972), the author explains that bilingual education defines the learning offered partially or wholly based on the second language directed by the aim of ensuring that students remain proficient in the second language while ensuring that learning this language does not reduce their proficiency in the first language.

Third, Anani (2019) discusses the language planning and language-in-education policy in Ghana. As far as this discussion is concerned, the author explains that language is core to any

curriculum content's teaching/learning process. She emphasizes that students learn new concepts by acquiring four language skills: reading, speaking, writing, and listening. Thus, she notes that since these skills define success for a language policy, the weaker students are in these skills, the weaker their learning process. In other words, the language policy used in a school setting and how students are versed in it determines the quality of education; the better the language policy, the better the education quality.

Furthermore, the author notes that language is also vital in national development because it reflects the needs, values, expectations, and beliefs of the citizens of a country (Ghana in this case). Hence, the author observes that countries take language policies seriously because they almost affect every aspect of their societies. She also notes that there is an association between a language policy and these societies such that when societal interests, needs, and visions change, the language policies also vary. Consequently, the author notes that language policies are subject to change, which is why Ghana's language policy has been changing. Even so, she expresses concern that the issue in Ghana's language policy is the limited clarification on the educational needs of the Ghanaians and what language policy features best serve the country's national interests. Furthermore, she references her experience to reveal that the country's lack of an adequate language policy is to blame for the reduced effectiveness of Ghana's teaching and learning processes. Therefore, the outcome of the author's research shows that a poor language policy leads to the delivery of low-quality education and that an effective language policy creates quality education.

Lastly, USAID (2020) presents various facts about the relationship between language and education and emphasizes the importance of language policy in delivering quality education in Ghana. Indeed, according to the researchers under this organization, promoting reading techniques among learners in grades one to three needs to be a priority for all educational stakeholders. However, they observe that much as efforts have been made to promote access to education in sub-Saharan Africa (Ghana included), literacy levels have been dismal, and the inherent academic progress has not been fast enough. Consequently, the authors note that the endeavours to enhance education quality in this region emphasize the importance of the language of instruction (LOI). Indeed, these authors reference the University Research Co. (2019) to the effect that when the languages that teachers and learners speak do not match the LOI, they can prevent the delivery of quality education. As a result, USAID (2020) researchers note that information on the linguistic context and the LOI policy is core to enhancing students' learning outcomes in grades one to three since this policy and context can bar effective learning and literacy outcomes.

Implication for Quality Education

First, Owu-Ewie (2016) notes that the use of the English language as the language policy in Ghana's education was faced with increased criticism mainly because it affected academic performance and thus education quality negatively. Overall, the author proposes that the English language should not be used as the

only language in the Ghanaian education sector. He proposes the adoption of a bilingual learning model in the country to give students an easy time in classes and enhance their speaking, writing, reading, and listening skills; these skills will bolster education quality in the country.

Second, as Anani (2019) notes, language policy affects the quality of education offered depending on its status (whether effective or ineffective) because education and language cannot be separated. This observation is based on the fact that educational concepts, skills, and knowledge are imparted to children based on using language. For instance, mathematics concepts, knowledge, and skills can only be taught to students using a common language (English, for example). At the same time, language and education are inseparable because the success of the latter is determined by the degree of proficiency of the former and the competence of teachers in the chosen language policy. At the same time, the author references the research completed by Sekyere (2013), who emphasizes that education is based chiefly on language because success in any form of education or training is determined by one's capacity to understand a language and apply it proficiently and effectively. Even so, the author explains that in Ghana, studies (Owu-Ewie, 2015; Ankrah, 2015; Ansah, 2014, & Anyidoho, 2018) have revealed that the lack of consistency in the language-in-education policy is to blame for the lack of the execution of an adequate language policy. These inconsistencies are because while some people support that the English language should be used from grade one to three, others believe that one of the significant Ghanaian languages would be the best language for learners within this range of grades (lower primary). At the same time, the author blames the lack of quality education in the country for these inconsistencies.

Lastly, as far as providing quality education in Ghana is concerned, USAID advocates implementing the Early Grades Reading (EGR) initiatives across the country. The USAID (2020) researchers reveal that most of the policies in this country have recently been changed to incorporate the LOI used at home (dubbed LOI1) as the language policy suitable for the acquisition of initial literacy before the adoption of a second language (international or national language, for example) as the subsequent LOI (LOI2). With such a change in language policy, the researchers explain that the government strategies and policies associated with LOI and teachers are Ghana's objectives, approaches, and priorities for the literacy covered in grades one to three and are essential in designing the programs that reflect the country's literacy approaches and aims. The researchers also indicate that the LOI country profiles help understand the government LOI policies in the sub-Saharan African countries (Ghana in this case). Undoubtedly, based on the Ghanaian LOI country profile, the learners' first language (one of the Ghanaian languages-L1) is used as the instructional language from kindergarten to grade 3, and English is only adopted in later grades as the second language (L2). Indeed, USAID (2020) researchers observe that the Ghanaian languages are taught as subjects from grades four to nine, while English is taught as a subject from grades one to three.

Undoubtedly, according to the Ministry of Education in Ghana, when learning materials and teachers are within reach, and the linguistic aspect of classes share a fair uniformity, the learners' first language should be considered the overarching LOI from the kindergarten level to between grades one and three (known as the lower primary school). Overall, this language policy will enhance the delivery of quality education from kindergarten to basic nine because the LOI will be aligned to the language (first language in this case) that teachers and students use in their communication and understanding best.

Conclusion

By and large, the research presented in this paper is based on analyzing the Ghanaian language policy and its relationship to quality education. From the different authors' perspectives, as explained in this paper, it is clear that the English language is not suitable for the Ghanaian education system based on its multilingual and multiethnic status. Therefore, it would not be practical to use English in academics at the expense of the country's local languages because it has been shown that students finish high school without acquiring the required grade-level English literacy skills. Therefore, most of the authors advocate for a bilingual education system in the country, where the learners' first language is used in grades one to three and English is used from grades four to nine. Overall, the different authors' perspectives show that the better the language policy, the better the quality of education offered.

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