

The Use of English as Medium of Instruction at the Upper Basic Level (Primary four to Junior High School) in Ghana: From Theory to Practice

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Abstract

The language of education is crucial to learners' academic success. As a result, nations whose native languages are not the languages of education have promulgated language policies to solve communication problems in their school systems. Most multilingual nations have adopted bilingual education systems that recognize the child's native language and a second language, which in most cases is the official language of the nation. Ghana, because of its multilingual nature, has promulgated a language policy which uses the child's L1 as medium of instruction at the lower basic level (KG1 to Primary 3) and English (L2) used from Primary four onwards. However, this policy has not been rigorously observed and enforced by teachers and educational administrators respectively. This qualitative study, therefore sought to examine the factors that have militated against the use of English as medium of instruction in the upper section of the basic educational system in Ghana (Primary 4 to Junior High School) and examined ways to facilitate the use of English as medium of instruction in this sector of the educational system.

Keywords: Medium of Instruction, Language Policy, Junior High School, L1 Instruction, L2 Instruction (English)

1. Introduction

Language and education are two inseparable concepts because education is disseminated via language. As Dube and Ncube (2013, p. 250) put it, "education and language are dependent on each other. If education is to be attained, language has to be used and for language to endure, survive and be respected, it has to be taught in schools". However, Wolff (2005, p. 3) is of the opinion that "language is not everything in education, but without language, everything is nothing in education". Though language is not everything in education, the language of education has always been a bone of contention, especially in multilingual societies because of the effect it has on educational success. Opinion is divided on whether to use L1 as medium of instruction or a foreign language (English, French, etc). Again, opinion is divided on when to use the L1 or L2 as medium of instruction. As a result, nations whose native languages are not the dominant languages of education have promulgated language policies to solve communication problems in their school systems. Most multilingual nations have adopted bilingual education systems that recognize the child's native language and a second language, which in most cases is the official language of the nation. Though most countries have sound language policies in their educational system on paper (theory), they lack the political will to implement them. As UNESCO (2008a) indicates, some multilingual countries have constitutional clauses and even education policy documents that honour the rights of diverse groups to use their own languages and promote their own cultures, but meanwhile the same countries lack implementation strategies that would benefit such groups in real terms.

Ghana, like many African countries has problem selecting a language for education and ensuring its successful implementation because of her multilingual nature. Ghana is linguistically and ethnically diverse with about 83 languages present (see Owu-Ewie, 2013). In addition, English is Ghana's official language because of her historical past with the British. Though Ghana is a multilingual society, the country has no official/explicit language policy. The only language policy in Ghana is that formulated in education. The policy stipulates that L1 (a Ghanaian language) should be used as medium of instruction from KG1 to Primary three and English studied as a subject. The second part of the policy indicates that English should be used as medium of instruction from Primary 4 onwards and Ghanaian language studied as a core subject up till the Junior High School level. The current language policy adds that where teachers and learning materials are available and the linguistic composition of classes are fairly uniform, the children's first language must be used as the dominant medium of instruction in kindergarten and lower primary school. The corollary of this is that where these two conditions (lack of learning materials and fair linguistic uniformity of classes) are not met, the policy should not be implemented. This has made most teachers/educational practitioners to hide behind this caveat and disregard the

implementation of the policy. Most teachers disregard the language policy and do what they think is appropriate to them in the classroom. Teachers use English where the policy states that Ghanaian language should be used and do the contrary when they are to use English as the medium of instruction (Andoh-Kumi, 2001; Amoah, 2001). These studies and others (Andoh-Kumi, Amisah, Amoah, Awedoba, Mensah, Wilmot, & Miske, 2001) indicate that the language policy of education in Ghana is not adhered to at the basic level classroom. It is therefore crucial to research into how in practice teachers are implementing the language policy of education (the theory) in the Upper Primary and Junior High School in Ghana and strategies that can be employed to improve the use of English as medium of instruction at the upper primary and the JHS levels.

2. Literature Review

Language policies are formulated in multilingual societies to solve communication problems. Language policy according to Bamgbose (1991, p. 1) is “a program of action on the role or status of a language in a given community”. In almost a parallel situation, Schiffman (1990) sees language policy as what governments officially do through legislation, executive actions or other means to determine how languages are to be used in public contexts, cultivate language skills needed to meet national priorities or establish rights of individuals or groups to learn, use and maintain languages in a multilingual setup. This definition shows that language policy is a deliberate act by a government or an agency/organization. There are three main types of language policies; official language policy, educational language policy and general language policy (Noss, 1971). In this paper, the focus is on educational language policy, which is the recognition given to some languages in a country by the government and educational authorities and agencies for use as medium of instruction. In countries where there are no official language policies as to how languages are to be used, the language policy of education serves the purpose. As stated earlier, the only explicitly stated language policy in Ghana is that formulated for education. The only instance where the government of Ghana is officially committed to language issue in the country is in Article 35(3) of the Ghanaian constitution which states “The State shall foster the development of Ghanaian languages and pride in Ghanaian culture”. This does not go far enough towards the development of Ghanaian languages and cultures because what should be done to foster language development is not explicitly stated. This gives an alibi for the government to neglect the development of Ghanaian languages in the country in general and in education in particular.

In multilingual countries where the official language is different from the indigenous languages and where there is no indigenous national language, it is a daunting task for most governments to initiate a far-reaching language policy of education which will have positive effect on children’s learning. This has made some multilingual countries take short-cut policies which have detrimental effects on children’s academic success. They resort to using the official language of the nation which is not an indigenous language. They use a second language (a language of wider communication) as the medium of instruction. This violates UNESCO Committee Report of 1953 that the child’s language should be used as medium of instruction because it is cognitively, psychologically and linguistically beneficial to learners.

Research has shown that the language of instruction has repercussion on students’ academic success (Mwamwenda, 1996; Bamgbose, 1991). There is positive and significant correlation between language performance and performance in other academic subjects (Owu-Ewie, 2012). This implies that students who are proficient in the language of instruction generally perform well in subjects taught in that language. The corollary of this, according to Qorro (2009) is that students who are not proficient in the language of instruction generally perform poorly in subjects taught in that language. The language of instruction plays a major role in ensuring effective communication in the classroom. This is realized when the child’s primary language is used. Mensah (2010), for example in a study on *Pedagogic language policy in Ghana and its implementation in primary schools at Ketu Education District* in the Volta Region of Ghana among primary schools, found that teachers were in agreement that the use of the local languages are more reliable vehicles of communication through which pupils learn better and faster.

The scenario described above has made most multilingual countries embark on bilingual language policies that commence with the child’s language and a second language later. Most African countries have adopted language policies that begin formal education in the child’s language as medium of instruction for the first three years of schooling and a second language from Primary 4 (Grade four) onwards. Ghana is among such African countries. The country practices an early-exit transitional bilingual education system where the child’s L1 (Ghanaian Language) is used as medium of instruction from Kindergarten to Primary three and then English as medium of instruction from Primary 4 onwards. However, the use of English as medium of instruction in prescribed classrooms is not strictly adhered to; most teachers use both Ghanaian language and English in teaching science, mathematics, social studies and all other subjects. This is a gross violation of the language policy of education in

Ghana. Though this phenomenon is persisting in Ghanaian classrooms, there has not been any scientific study to establish this fact. The violation of prescribed language policies in education is not only a Ghanaian phenomenon; most African and developing countries that use English or any second language as medium of instruction are caught in this web (Kadodo & Mhindu, 2013).

In bilingual classrooms, the frequent switch between two or more languages is customary (Baker, 2001). The use of two languages in a bilingual classroom is regularly practiced sometimes without any official backing from the policy makers. Teachers integrate the two languages concerned to achieve their teaching tasks. Jacobson (1990) argues that the integration of both L1 and L2 in a lesson is of great value. He indicates four ways L1 is used in L2 medium of instruction classroom when in actuality they are not supposed to do so. These include randomly switching languages, translating, previewing and reviewing, and purposeful concurrent use of the two languages. Baker (2001, p. 280; citing Jacobson, 1990) stipulates that a variety of cues can trigger a switch from one language to another in the teaching-learning process. Among such cues are reinforcement of concepts, reviewing, capturing students' attention, and change of topic. Others are gaining rapport, changing from formality to informality and praising or reprimanding students. Translanguaging in the classroom has some potential advantages which encapsulate the promotion of deeper understanding of the subject matter, the development of skills in the weaker language and the facilitation of home-school cooperation (Baker, 2001).

Mwinsheikhe (2009), in a study to investigate the English proficiency of students and teachers in Tanzania secondary schools and the way they cope with the English/Kiswahili dilemma during science lessons, found that the use of English as medium of instruction was a problem for majority of the teachers and students. He noted that both teachers and students were unable to express themselves clearly in English. As a result, teachers and students used coping strategies as code-switching, safe talk, negative reinforcement and teaching English during lessons. The study concluded that English as medium of instruction is a barrier to effective teaching and learning in Tanzania Secondary Schools; hence the use of Kiswahili to complement the use of English as medium of instruction.

The scenarios above motivated the researcher to investigate the phenomenon in a local context to ascertain whether the current language policy of education in Ghana, which makes it mandatory to use English as medium of instruction from Primary four to the JHS is observed. It is also to identify the factors that prompt teachers and pupils/students at the upper primary and JHS to violate the language policy of education and how the use of English as medium of instruction in this sector of the educational system can be facilitated.

3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to find out whether the current language policy of education in Ghana which makes it mandatory to use English as medium of instruction from Primary four to the JHS is observed. The study also sought to examine the factors that militate against the use of English as medium of instruction in the upper primary to the JHS classroom and ways the use of English as medium of instruction in this sector of the educational system can be enhanced.

4. Research Questions

The study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

1. In practice, what language is used as medium of instruction in Ghanaian upper basic schools (P4 to JHS) despite government's policy of using English as medium of instruction?
2. What factors have militated against the use of English as medium of instruction in Ghanaian upper basic schools?
3. What strategies can be employed to facilitate the use of English as medium of instruction at the upper basic level (Primary 4 to the JHS)?

5. Methodology

5.1 Design

This is a qualitative research aimed at examining how the use of English as medium of instruction from Upper Primary to the JHS is practiced. The study was conducted in ten (10) schools in the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District in the Central Region of Ghana. The population for the study were pupils and teachers in Upper Primary and Junior High Schools in the selected district. To gain access to the participants, the researcher wrote a permission letter to the District Director of Education to use the schools under his jurisdiction for the study. After I had been given the permission, I went to the selected schools and had oral discussions with the headteachers and teachers in the selected schools for their consent and willingness to use their schools and also to participate in the study.

5.2 Sampling technique and sample size

The sampling technique I used was purposive. I used this strategy because I wanted to get an in-depth knowledge of the case using a small population. The district was selected because the researcher is a lecturer at the University of Education, Winneba, Ajumako Campus and is therefore close to the selected schools (research sites). This ensured constant contact with the schools and participants which facilitated the data collection process. In addition, the schools were selected because the researcher during his internship supervision in the area identified that some permanent teachers of the schools were using L1 (Fante) to teach in classes where they were supposed to use English (L2). The teachers used in the study were those with a teaching experience of three years or more. This was necessary because the researcher wanted teachers who were conversant with the language policy of instruction in Ghanaian schools and have lived with the phenomenon. In all, 140 participants were involved in the study; made up of 100 pupils/students and 40 teachers. This translates to 10 pupils/students from each school (5 each from Upper Primary and JHS) and four teachers from each school (2 each from Upper Primary and JHS). This was the population used for the interview.

5.3 Data collection strategy

The data collection strategies used were semi-structured interview and complete observation. The triangulation of these data collection strategies ensured credibility and trustworthiness of the research. The focus group interview approach was used for both pupils/students and teachers. Each focus group involved ten pupils/students; this implies that there were ten focus groups (five for primary and five for JHS of each school). The teachers from the ten schools were put into four focus groups of ten; two groups for the upper primary teachers and two for the JHS teachers. Each interview lasted between forty-five minutes and one hour. The interview for the pupils/students were conducted in both L1 (Fante) and English because they had limited proficiency in English. Most times the researcher had to translate questions from English to the L1 (Fante) for them to understand and respond. Besides, most responses by students were better said in the L1 because they had difficulty expressing themselves in English.

In addition to the interview, the researcher used complete observation technique for twenty teachers who were part of the interview. Each teacher was observed on four occasions teaching any of the following subjects: English, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science and Religion and Moral Education. Lessons observed lasted between forty and fifty minutes. These subjects were chosen because they are the most commonly taught on the school curriculum. To ensure that teachers do not contrive the teaching situation because of the presence of the researcher, the first two observations of every teacher was not used in the analysis rather the last two were used because by that time the teachers had been familiar with the presence of the researcher. The observation was conducted before the interview so that much information about the study will not be divulged for teachers to alter their teaching should the interview be conducted first.

5.4 Data analysis and presentation

The data analysis technique used is the inductive analysis and creative synthesis approach. This approach was used because it allowed the researcher to create themes and then put them into conceptual categories that helped him to describe the phenomenon in question. In this data analysis, I grouped responses based on my judgment that the responses were similar. I later described these similarities conceptually and created categories into which domains were grouped. This is a bottom-up approach to data analysis which is crucial in qualitative research. The presentation approach that was employed in this study is the narrative logic approach. This approach was used because it enabled the researcher to transition from one exemplar to another just as narrators employ in storytelling.

6. Findings and Discussions

The findings and discussions of this study were done based on the three main research questions indicated earlier in this study. In the present study, the researcher wanted to find out whether teachers abide by the language policy of education in Ghana, especially in the Upper Primary and JHS (upper basic level) where English is supposed to be used as the medium of instruction. The study also sought to examine the factors that have militated against the use of English as medium of instruction at the upper basic level and strategies that can be employed to facilitate the use of English as medium of instruction at the upper basic level. But before answering these questions, the demographic information of the teachers used in the study is presented.

Demographic information of teachers used in the study

The following basic information relevant to the study was collected from the teachers: class taught, academic qualification, teaching experience, native language and second Ghanaian language. The information is presented in the table below:

Table 1: Demographic information of teachers used for the observation

Teacher	Gender	Class Teaching	Academic Qualification	Teaching Experience	Native Language	Second Gh. Language
1	Female	JHS	BA Fante	4	*Fante	N/A
2	Female	Pri. 4	*DBE	5	Fante	Twi
3	Male	JHS	BSc. Biology	8	Nzema	Fante
4	Male	Pri. 6	DBE (Sci.)	3	Fante	Ewe
5	Male	JHS	3 yr. Post Sec.	10	Fante	N/A
6	Female	JHS	DBE (Maths)	5	*Twi (As)	Ewe
7	Male	Pri. 5	3 yr. Post Sec.	11	Twi (As)	Ewe
8	Male	Pri. 4	3 yr. Post Sec.	12	Fante	N/A
9	Male	JHS	DBE (Math/Tech)	5	Fante	N/A
10	Female	JHS	BA English	10	Ewe	Twi
11	Male	Pri. 5	DBE	5	Fante	N/A
12	Male	JHS	BA Soc. Studies	5	Fante	N/A
13	Female	JHS	BA English	4	Twi (As)	Fante
14	Male	Pri. 6	DBE	7	Fante	N/A
15	Female	Pri. 6	DBE	9	Fante	Ewe
16	Female	Pri. 5	DBE	5	Ewe	Twi
17	Male	JHS	BA Soc. Studies	3	Ga	Fante
18	Female	JHS	BA English	3	Fante	N/A
19	Male	Pri. 4	DBE - Math	5	Fante	N/A
20	Male	Pri. 5	DBE	6	Twi (Ak)	Fante

* Diploma in Basic Education

* Fante and Twi are mutually intelligible

The table above indicates that eight (8) of the teachers were non-native speakers of the dominant Ghanaian language (Fante) in the area of study. However, it was realized from the study that these teachers spoke and understood Fante very well and could use it to teach to their pupil's understanding. Two of these teachers indicated that they studied Fante at the College of Education (Pre-service teacher training) because their L1 was not a language of study at the pre-service teacher college they attended. This scenario made it possible for them to interact with the pupils/students in Fante in the teaching-learning process. This has influence on classroom dynamics in terms of language of instruction.

The following is the analysis of the data collected to answer the three main research questions posed earlier:

Research Question 1: In practice, what language is used as medium of instruction in Ghanaian upper basic schools (P4 to JHS) despite government's policy of using English as medium of instruction?

The researcher used this question to find out the language used for instruction despite the language policy which stipulates that English should be medium of instruction. The data from the observation and the interview indicated that there was no single classroom in the schools used in the study in the upper basic level which used English as the sole medium of instruction. There was no monolingual classroom in terms of medium of instruction. The study found that both English and Ghanaian language (in this case Fante) were used as media of instruction. In most classrooms, the percentage use of Ghanaian language (Fante) was more than English, which is supposed to be the medium of instruction. Lessons were delivered as if Ghanaian language was the prescribed medium of instruction in theory. Even some English lessons were taught in the Ghanaian language. Both teachers and learners were culprits. When asked in the interview about the language used in teaching all teachers unanimously said they use both Ghanaian language and English because students/pupils find it difficult to comprehend lessons taught in English only. Some teachers indicated that they sometimes use Ghanaian language more than English. Students interviewed confirmed that when their teachers use English as medium of instruction they do not understand the lesson. Most of the time, learners wanted their teachers to explain whatever was said in English in the Ghanaian language. It was a daily routine; teachers had to use the two languages. It was observed during the data collection period that students/pupils sometimes asked teachers indirectly to translate what was said in English to Fante (Ghanaian language) by either being silent when questions were asked or they directly told their teachers to say what was said in English in Fante. A Primary 5 pupil, for instance indicated in the interview in Fante:

Se wɔdze borɔfo kyere me adze a, menntse ase ntsi se wobisa me asem a, mennkasa. Metsena hɔ dzinn. Se tikya hu no dem a, ɔka asem no wɔ Fantse kasa mu ansaana matse ase na meyi ano wɔ Fantse mu. Asem a meka no Fantse mu no, ɔboa me ma meka no borɔfo mu. [Eng. Trans - If they use English to

teach me, I don't understand so when they ask me question I don't talk. I sit down quietly. When the teacher sees this he says it in Fante before I understand and answer it in Fante. What I say in Fante he helps me to say it in English.]

Another pupil said:

Menntse adze biara a me tikya kyere no borɔfo mu ase na ɔnam de munntum nka borɔfo ntsi asem biara ɔbeka no meka de matse ase. Naaso se me tikya dze Fantse kyere adze a, metse ase yie. [Eng. trans - I do not understand anything taught by my teacher in English and since I cannot speak English everything he says, I say, yes sir. But I understand the lesson better when my teacher uses Fante to teach me]

It was also realized from the interview and the observation data that students did not fully understand lessons conducted in English medium unless some explanations and/or translation were done in the native language (Fante). A primary four pupil confirmed this in the local language (Fante):

Se wɔdze borɔfo kyere adze a, menntse ase yie papa na se wɔdze Mfantse kyerekyere mu a, metse ase paa. Se wobisa asem wɔ borɔfokasa mu na wɔka de minyi ano wɔ borɔfo mu a, munntum gyede wɔka de menka no wɔ Mfantse mu [Eng. Trans - If they use English to teach, I don't understand very well but when they use Fante to explain I understand. If they ask question in English and ask me to respond to it in English, I am unable to do it unless they ask me to say it in Fante].

A Junior High School 3 student authenticated the above assertion when he said *our teachers teach us in Fante and English because when they use only English we don't understand. When the teachers use Fante we hear or we understand the lesson very well.*

An excerpt from a P6 Science lesson observed gives a clear picture of how the use of English as medium of instruction is violated in the classroom. The lesson was on living and non-living things. Below is the excerpt:

Teacher: Today we are going to look at living and non-living things; *ndzembra a nkwa wɔ mu na ndzembra a nkwa nnyi mu* [things that have life and things that do not have life]. Do you understand? [He writes the topic on the board]

Pupils: Yes sir.

Teacher: Let us look at what a living thing is. *Yebɔhwɛ ndzembra a nkwa wɔ mu* [English translation - We will look at things that have life] [writes *living things* on the board].

Pupils: [Write topic in their exercise books]

Tr: Stop writing; I will give you time to write. *Hom ngyae akyerew* [English translation - You should stop writing] *Ndzembra a nkwa wɔ mu grow, give birth and die; wonyin, wɔwo na wowu.* [Eng. Trans - Living things grow, give birth and die]. [He continues]. Living things *dze edziban sie* (Eng. Trans. - store food) in the form of starch. Give me examples of living things; *hom mma me mfatoho* (Eng. Trans - Give me examples).

Pupils: [silent]

Tr: Are you with me?

Pupils: Yes, sir.

Pupil 1: Crab, rat,

Tr: Yes, obi so mma bi (Eng. Trans. - Yes, somebody else should give some examples)

Pupil 2: *Akyem*

Tr.: What is the English name of *akyem*?

Pupils: [quiet]

Tr.: *Wɔfrɛ no sparrow* [Eng. Trans. - it is called sparrow]. (He continues). What is the distinction between birds and animals? (He asks) Do you understand? (He translates to Fante) *Hom tse ase?*

When teachers were asked why they use Ghanaian language (Fante) in a class where English is supposed to be the sole medium of instruction they indicated that the proficiency of the pupils/students in English language is very low. They hardly make a single meaningful sentence in English. This revelation coincides with findings by Mwinsheikhe (2009) in a study about the dilemma of using English and Swahili as medium of instruction in the Tanzanian Secondary School classroom that the use of English by students in class was a problem. The teachers in the present study submitted that they use the local language (Fante) so that pupils/students can understand the lessons which will culminate in the achievement of lesson objectives. One other reason they gave was that they wanted pupils/students to take active part in the lessons but when they use English as the only medium of instruction participation is very low; hence the use of the local language. A Science teacher indicated:

Our students' knowledge in English is very low. They can't even make simple sentences and when you

use English to deliver the lesson they don't understand so the best way is to use Fante to help them understand the lesson and participate fully.

An English teacher also noted:

Though we are teaching English; sometimes we have to use Fante to explain so many things because if you do not do that, the class becomes silent since students will not contribute to the lesson. Also if you use only English, they don't understand the lesson but they will not tell you; when you ask any question they don't respond and when you ask they say 'yes madam' but when you give them exercises they get them wrong.

A primary four teacher expressed the view that she uses Fante because it makes students participate fully in lessons. She indicated:

When you use only English the class becomes quiet but when you say they can use Fante everybody contributes and the class becomes lively. The use of English inhibits understanding and also obstructs pupils from communicating in class.

These comments confirm Andoh-Kumi's (1992, 2001) findings that pupils class participation is raised when they understand the language used as medium of instruction.

The question to be answered at this juncture is what strategies were used by both teachers and students in the classroom to disseminate information to students. From the data, it was found that the teachers used four main strategies. These include translation. Almost everything was said and explained in both Fante (local language) and English. Everything was said twice for the benefit of the pupils. There was no laid down procedure for doing this; sometimes the teachers used the local language first followed by English or vice-versa. It was realized that most of the students did not pay attention when the explanation is transmitted in English because they know the same thing will be said in Fante. Another strategy used is code-switching/mixing. This was done within sentences and across sentences. It was found that this strategy sometimes confused pupils/students. There was also concurrent use of the two languages in question. In this way, teachers taught certain things in Fante (local language) and others in English. Jacobson (1990) refers to this as purposeful concurrent usage. The use of these strategies in the Ghanaian upper basic classroom agrees with earlier studies by Jacobson (1990) and Mwinskheikhe (2009). Besides, teachers who tried to use English most of the time in class used questions to check whether students understood what was said or not. This is what Mwinskheikhe (2009) refers to as *safe talk*. Examples from the data include, *Are you with me? Do you understand? Any problem? Is it clear? Should I go on?* Students most of the time responded 'Yes sir or Yes madam' when in actual sense most of them did not understand because the exposition of the lesson was in English. It must be noted that these strategies identified were not used discretely in a lesson. Sometimes, the strategies were mixed up in one lesson as in the science lesson excerpt indicated above.

Research Question 2: What factors have militated against the use of English as medium of instruction in Ghanaian upper basic schools?

The rationale for posing this question was to find out what necessitates the use of Ghanaian language as medium of instruction in the upper primary school and JHS which goes contrary to use of English as medium of instruction at this level of education. The data analysis showed that the non-adherence to the use of English as medium of instruction is due to the following factors: students' lack of proficiency in English, the monolingual nature of the classrooms, teachers' willingness to use Ghanaian language in teaching, and lack of enforcement of the language policy. The observation also revealed that most teachers used in the study were not proficient in English language which corroborates with Mwinskheikhe's (2009) findings that Tanzanian teachers were not proficient in English to confidently use it as medium of instruction. This revelation also corroborates with earlier findings by Kraft (2003) that most Ghanaian language teachers are neither proficient in their L1 nor the L2.

The study found that a major factor that militates against the use of English as the medium of instruction at the Upper Primary to the JHS is pupils'/students' lack of proficiency in the English language. Most students used in the study could not express themselves appropriately in English. It is an undisputable fact that one's ability to use and understand the language of instruction has repercussion on class participation and performance (Andoh-Kumi, 1992, 2001). Communicating in English was a problem to many pupils. The following statements from teachers and pupils/students attest to this: The science teacher of School A succinctly indicated:

Most students cannot speak and understand simple English. When you speak English they find it difficult to understand; they just sit down quietly and stare at you.

Additionally, a Primary 6 teacher of School E said:

Sometimes it is demoralizing; you use English to teach them and when you ask any question they cannot answer because they do not understand what you said in English so you need to say the whole thing in Fante (local language). It wastes a lot of time in the teaching and learning process. Sometimes, I am discouraged but what can I do?

One other factor which forces teachers to use English most of the time as MoI even in the lower primary is the monolingual nature of the classroom. In some Ghanaian classrooms, about three or more Ghanaian languages are represented with the teacher speaking a different native language (Andoh-Kumi, 2001) which makes it difficult for a teacher to use a Ghanaian language. However, in monolingual classrooms where all children speak the same Ghanaian language, it is common for the teacher to use the native language as a supplementary language in the teaching-learning process. In this study, this phenomenon was seen to propel teachers to use the local language at will without making any serious effort to use English which is the prescribed language of instruction. A JHS teacher indicated:

Because all the children speak and understand the same Ghanaian language it is easy to use the native language but if they speak different Ghanaian languages which of them will you use. So I think the one language classroom has motivated teachers to use Fante though we are not supposed to do so.

In addition, lack of enforcement of the policy has resulted in the use of Ghanaian language (Fante) in English medium of instruction classrooms. Almost every teacher interviewed expressed concern about the enforcement of the language policy of education in Ghana. They indicated that some Circuit Supervisor encourage them to use Ghanaian language (Fante) to teach at the upper primary, if students do not comprehend lesson taught in English. The English teacher of JHS B indicated:

Nobody supervises the use of English as medium of instruction in our schools. The teacher is allowed to do what he or she thinks must be done to help students understand the lesson. There have been instances where Circuit Supervisors reprimanded teachers for not using Ghanaian language to help students understand lessons conducted in English.

Another teacher added *nobody supervises us on whether we are using English as medium of instruction or not so we do what we want and think will help our students.*

In addition, it was observed from the data analysis that teachers were not proficient in English so they used Ghanaian language (Fante) as a compensatory strategy. This finding confirms Mekonnen's (2005b) observation that teachers' English language problems are more often than not a constraining factor in the teaching and learning process in Ethiopian education system. They lack the necessary skills to use English as medium of instruction. This phenomenon obstructs effective teaching in the Ghanaian classroom. This is what Zawdie (1998) refers to the use of English as medium in Ethiopia as the *medium of obstruction*. In the interview, a teacher indicated:

I think we lack the expertise to use English to teach other subject like science or mathematics to achieve our objectives, especially when you meet students who do not know the English language.

He added:

We learned English just to pass our English examination and not how to use it to teach as a second language. I must confess, this is not to disgrace some teachers, but most of us do not speak and write good English so we have difficulty using it to teach as medium of instruction.

It was also identified from the study that what made the use of Ghanaian language (Fante) as language of instruction thrives in an English-medium of instruction classroom is the monolingual nature of the classroom and teachers' willingness to use Fante. In the schools used in the study, almost ninety-eight percent of the pupils/students spoke Fante as their first language (L1) and even the remaining two percent spoke Fante as if it is their L1. This phenomenon makes the use of Fante more thriving than the use of English, which is in most cases not available to students. One would ask what would have happened if the class is multilingual with the teacher speaking a different Ghanaian language. In such a situation, the use of the L1 would have been impossible and therefore the teacher will be forced to use English.

Research Question 3: *What strategies can be employed to facilitate the use of English as medium of instruction at the upper basic level (Primary 4 to the JHS)?*

This section of the data analysis deals with strategies to be employed to facilitate the use of English as medium of instruction as enshrined in the language policy of education in Ghana. From the data, the following were identified as strategies that can be employed to facilitate the use of English as MoI: strict enforcement of the language policy of education, improvement in the teaching of English, extension of the use of L1 as MoI, and creation of a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to the use of English. Participants (teachers) interviewed

were of the opinion that lack of enforcement of the policy had been a major factor militating against the use of English as MoI at the Upper basic level. Participants thought enforcing the policy is likely to have positive impact on the use and study of English by students and teachers. This agrees with earlier findings by Wong (2010) that the use of English as the sole medium of instruction improves students performance in English. A teacher interviewee said:

The best way to ensure that the policy of using English as MoI in the upper primary and beyond can be improved is by strictly enforcing the policy. There should be proper monitoring and supervision. Anything short of this will let both teachers and pupils use the L1 instead of English.

Another important outcome from the data in relation to strategies to improve the use of English as MoI is the need to improve the teaching of English. Respondents (teachers) were of the opinion that teachers need to be trained in using English as MoI so that they can enhance the use of English in the classroom. A respondent (a social studies teacher) reiterated *I think teachers in the course of their pre-service training should be exposed to how they will use English as a language for teaching other subjects but not just the content.* A related strategy that emanated from the data is the extension of the use of L1 as medium of instruction. Interviewees were of the view that the transition from the use of L1 as MoI to L2 should be extended to at least Primary 4 and where possible to primary five so that pupils can transfer that knowledge and skills acquired in the L1 to the learning and use of the L2 (English). They were of the opinion that the use of L1 as MoI just to primary three and the transition process is premature and abrupt respectively. They think the transition process should be gradual. This was explicitly stated by an interviewee in the following words:

... we also need to extend the use of Ghanaian language as MoI to maybe Primary 4 and gradually transition students to the use of English. This will help the students to have a grasp of their L1 so that they will be able to transfer the skill to the learning of English ...

This statement corroborates suggestion by Owu-Ewie (2003, 2013) that the language policy of education in Ghana should be changed from the early-exit transitional to the late-exit transitional bilingual education model. Participants believe that when we extend the use of the L1, it will build confidence in the learners to be able to use the L2 at later stages. This was unambiguously stated by a mathematics teacher of School 6 in the following words:

Children need to be allowed to use their L1 as medium of instruction up to about Primary five to make them build confidence in their L1 to propel them to learn the English language and use it in studying.

She added, *how can I use English when I cannot use my L1 properly and understand what I am learning. It makes things difficult for the children.*

This suggestion is in line with Ball (2011) that for a transition program to realize its outcome there should be about 6 to 8 years of schooling in the L1 before transitioning to the use of the L2.

Another strategy which emanated from the data was that the use of both Ghanaian language and English in the classroom should be institutionalized and well planned for effective use. The teachers interviewed were of the opinion that the use of the two languages will enhance understanding, improve academic performance and also improve English proficiency. The argument put forward was that sometimes the pupils/students need the local language to help boost understanding and class participation. This is in line with Jacobson's (1990) argument that the integration of both L1 and L2 in a lesson is of great value to academic performance. However, teachers interviewed were of the opinion that the use of the local languages beyond upper primary should be minimal. A Primary four teacher argued:

I think that government needs to formally make it part of the policy that teachers can use L1 in some restricted ways in the upper primary classroom to support the use of English as medium of instruction. This will make students understand the lesson very well. But I think there should be proper monitoring to ensure that teachers do not overuse the L1.

Another teacher intimated:

In my own opinion, I think we can use the local language in conjunction with English especially in the rural areas but we should make sure that we use the local language to explain certain things taught in English.

Additionally, the study noted that teachers need to create a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to the use of English in the teaching learning process so that students can take risk in using English language without fear of intimidation. During the observation, it was realized that the classroom atmosphere was intimidating in terms of language use. Teachers treated errors from students as a 'disease' which should be avoided. Students were

sometimes punished for making errors. In this way, students felt reluctant to risk to use English in the classroom. They were quiet in most lessons unless teachers allowed them to use the local languages. Learning cannot take place when students harbor fears of being punished. In situations like this, there is anxiety which leads to feelings of apprehension and unwillingness to speak in class (see Mwinsheikhe, 2009). To boost the use of English in the classroom, pupils/students should be allowed to practice the use of English in a welcome environment despite their errors.

7. Recommendations for further studies

The present study looked at the violation of the current language policy of education in Ghana at the upper primary and Junior High School. The study was conducted in a predominantly monolingual classroom setting. It is therefore essential to conduct a similar study in a multilingual classroom to examine how the language policy of education is practiced in such classrooms. It will also be of interest to investigate how the language policy is violated in the lower primary school. Finally, further studies can be conducted with a larger population (more schools and participants).

8. Conclusion

The main focus of the present study was to find out whether in practice the language policy of education (use of English as MoI) from primary four to the Junior High school is adhered to. It was identified that in theory, Ghana has a language policy that uses English as medium of instruction from Primary Four (P4) to JHS and beyond but in practice, this language policy of education is violated. Teachers use both the L1 and English (L2) in such classrooms. The main reason found to be the cause of the present situation is the students' lack of proficiency in the use of English in the classroom. The study also found that the violation of the policy is due to the monolingual nature of the classrooms, teachers' willingness to use Ghanaian language in teaching, and lack of enforcement of the language policy. It was also observed that the main strategies teachers used included translation, code-switching/mixing, concurrent use of the two languages, and safe-talk. It was again noted that the use of English at the Upper primary and JHS can be improved by strict enforcement of the language policy of education, improvement in the teaching of English, extension of the use of L1 as MoI, and creation of a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to the use of English.

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Appendix

a. Interview questions for teachers

1. Qualification
2. Area of study in College of Education
3. Teaching Experience
4. Class taught
5. Native language
6. Second Ghanaian language
7. Knowledge about language policy
8. Knowledge about bilingual education
9. Language use in instruction
10. Native language of learners (Languages represented in your class)
11. Students knowledge about English
12. Students' perception about use of English as medium of instruction
13. Students' perception about use of Ghanaian language as medium of instruction
14. Why don't you obey language policy?
15. What is your perception of using Ghanaian language as medium of instruction?
16. What is your perception of using English as medium of instruction?
17. How can the use of English as medium of instruction be improved?

b. Interview questions for Students

1. Native language
2. Second Ghanaian language
3. Language use in instruction
4. Your knowledge about English
5. Language you communicate with friends in and outside class
6. What language you feel comfortable using in class?
7. Perception about use of English as medium of instruction
8. Perception about use of Ghanaian language as medium of instruction
9. Why do you like the use of L1 as medium of instruction?
10. How can the use of English as medium of instruction be improved?

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