Sociological Variables Perceived in the Study of Ghanaian languages in Central and Western Regional Colleges of Education in Ghana

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Abstract

The study was conducted in two Colleges of Education in the Western and Central Regions of Ghana to find out how Colleges of Education students and tutors perceive the study of Ghanaian Languages. The target population comprised all staff and students of the Colleges of Education but the accessible population comprised students and tutors of the two Colleges. The purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the students and tutors. The sample size that participated in the study was 280 students and 32 tutors. Among the findings were that Ghanaian Languages are not taught in very practical ways, most students and tutors had a positive perception of students of Ghanaian Languages, students and tutors did not show disrespect to students offering Ghanaian Languages.

Key words: Language, mother tongues, language policy

Introduction

From the lay man's point of view, language is a tool used by people of a community or a society for communication. Akpanglo-Nartey (2002) however, defines language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.   Olatunbosun (1979) in his work "History of West Africa" also defines culture as the advanced development of human powers intellectually, physically and spiritually by training and experience. The evidence of people's culture is expressed in their arts, language, music, law, literature, social and political institutions, religion and science. Therefore, the role language plays in our society is very significant. Language is not only a medium of communication but it also serves as a library that stores people's elements of culture, customs and institutions. The most reliable means through which the elements of culture are transmitted from generation to generation is language. Educators and educational planners have always been concerned with the language to be used as the medium of instruction in multilingual societies. Ouedraogo (2000) points out that education and languages issues are very complex in Africa because of the multi- ethnic- lingual situation. The situation is more severe when the official language of the nation is different from any of the local languages. There is always a struggle over which language to use in schools, especially at the lower primary level in a multilingual society.

The teaching of Ghanaian Languages can lay a very good foundation for the Ghanaian child, but it has been observed that the attitudes of many Ghanaians towards the study of their local languages do not encourage many classroom teachers to take the teaching of Ghanaian Languages seriously. Such attitudes go a long way to affect its teaching and because of this, pupils seem also not to be serious about its study. Ghana, after fifty five years of independence is deemed to be still struggling with which language to use as a medium of instruction in the lower primary school (Basic 1 – 3). Apart from Ghanaian Language lessons, all levels of schooling from basic to university in Ghana use English language as a medium of instruction.

Many people including some stakeholders of education have various perceptions with regard to the teaching or studying of the mother tongue in Ghanaian schools. In the Colleges of Education especially in the Holy Child College of Education where the researcher conducted this study, the students are enjoined to speak only English on campus even though the College also offers Ghanaian Language as both are core and elective courses.

Students who violate this rule and speak any of the mother tongues are severely sanctioned. Both tutors and students are known to look down upon the L1 and regard it as unimportant. Students, who select any of the L1 as elective are regarded as unintelligent, hence, ridiculed. Apart from the Ghanaian Languages tutors in the colleges, all other tutors strictly enforce the rule of compulsory speaking of English.

In the basic school, some people still prefer the use of L2 in teaching from lower primary through to the   Junior High School, (JHS) contrary to Government's policy. The "Statesman" Newspaper of 7th December, 2002 outlined the following points as reasons why the NPP Government prefers the use of English Language as a medium of instruction to the mother tongue:

1. The policy of using a Ghanaian language as medium of instruction in the lower primary level is often abused, especially in rural schools. Teachers never speak English in class even in primary six.

2. Students are unable to speak and write 'good' English sentences even by the time they complete Senior Secondary School.

3. The multilingual situation in the country especially in urban schools has made instruction in a Ghanaian language very difficult. Fifty (50) to sixty (60) percent of children in each class in the urban areas speak a different language.

4. There is a lack of materials in the Ghanaian languages to be used in teaching.

5. There is a lack of Ghanaian language teachers specifically trained to teach content subjects in the Ghanaian languages.

6. There is no standard written form for nearly all of the Ghanaian languages. (Cited in Owu-Ewie, 2006, p. 78)

Writing on 'Language, Education and Politics', Bodomo (1993) outlined the following as some of the problems and perceptions confronting the study of Ghanaian Languages in Ghana:
1. The competition between our Ghanaian languages and English in our educational system.

2. The controversies over orthography and lack of agreement on what the standard form of each language should be.

3. The discontinuous manner in which certain languages are taught and examined from the lower to the higher rungs of the educational ladder. With the exception of Akan, Ewe and Ga in which students can take the 'Ordinary' and 'Advanced' level examinations of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), a diploma examination at the School of Ghana languages, Ajumako, a Bachelor's degree examination at Cape Coast University and a Post-graduate degree examination at Legon, no other language in Ghana has such a continuous system of examinations.

4. It is a fact that in Ghana pupils and students do not read materials written in Ghanaian languages (and even in English) for pleasure but in order to pass examinations. This is one of the reasons why students do not show enthusiasm in learning these languages in the first and second cycle schools. The challenges mentioned above can be traced to the absence of well-defined and systematic language planning policies and their implementation, both in the pre- and post- independence eras.

In the pre-independence era groups of missionaries did a lot to write down and teach some Ghanaian languages like Akan, Ewe and Ga (Owu-Ewie, 2006). This may go a long way to dispel the perception nationalists had that the colonialists thought nothing short of imposing their culture upon the indigenes.
The attitude of Ghanaian politicians towards the teaching and learning of Ghanaian Language after independence has been nothing to write home about. They had no definite and clear-cut policy statement as regards the teaching of these languages. On the contrary, these politicians began to put more emphasis on the English language to the neglect of the Ghanaian languages.
The problem of policy implementation further complicates the situation. Even in later years when it looked as if Ghanaian languages were to be encouraged - as is evidenced by the setting up of structures such as the Bureau of Ghana Languages, the School of Ghana Languages and various Departments and Units dealing with these languages at the Universities and in the Ministry of Education- the implementation of these laid down policies were half-hearted. Even Directors and Education Officers who were supposed to implement these policies did this only by word of mouth, but sent their own children to International Schools where no Ghanaian languages were taught.
Presently (2013), some people still speak only English to their children at home and many parents measure their children's rate of progress at school, not by the amount of Akan, Dagaare, Ewe or Kasem they can speak and write, but by their level of proficiency in spoken and written English.

The lack of a well-defined policy and a half-hearted implementation of even the sketchy ones where they exist are undoubtedly then, the major problems confronting the teaching of Ghanaian languages in schools and all the other problems can always be traced to it.

Ansre (1969) sees the problem in the right perspective. According to him, the tone of the root causes, if not the only one, is the lack of a clearly-stated policy on the study of Ghanaian languages in the educational system. There is no policy statement on what should be the ultimate aim in their study, no suggestions on the content of the course and no provision for obtaining adequately trained staff and carefully prepared teaching material. As a result of this absence of policy there is lack of coordination between what is done at the various levels of the educational system.

The point about lack of coordination is pertinent. That is why there are gaps in the examining of some of the languages throughout the educational system since there is hardly any liaison between the WAEC and the educational institutions. That is why there is the absence of suitable textbook since there is no provision for an annual workshop for textbook writers in the various languages.

That is why the Bureau of Ghana Languages claimed that it did not receive suitable literature for publication from the public. According to (Otoo 1969) the reason for not receiving publishable literature was that it did not liaise with the higher institutions like the Universities and the School of Ghana Languages where, presumably, there existed a good number of long essays and dissertations that could be adapted and published.

Students who study Ghanaian Languages in higher educational institutions are known to face some difficulties from other students. Some of the difficulties they face are as follows: in some of the universities, some of the students go to the extent of asking questions like, "why should one decide to study Ghanaian Language as a course while there are other courses.

The difficulties, to the researcher, arise out of certain views and perceptions non- Ghanaian Languages students hold and have toward indigenous languages and those who study them. Again, the researcher, as a tutor of Ghanaian Language in a College of Education has observed that her students find it difficult to study the Ghanaian Language. Informal interactions with some of them indicated that the views held by some Ghanaians, including students, about the study of Ghanaian Languages discouraged them.

In the light of the researcher's observations and informal findings, she concluded that in order to have a fairly accurate knowledge about students' perception about their study of Ghanaian Languages as a course of study, there was the need for a scientific study of the issue, hence this study.

The study was to investigate into the College of Education Students' and Tutors' Perception of the Study of Ghanaian Languages: A Study in the Central and Western Regions of Ghana.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate into the perception students and tutors had about the study of Ghanaian languages in the Colleges of Education focussing particularly on the two selected Colleges of Education in the Western and Central Regions of Ghana

The following objectives were set to address the purpose of the study.

To find out:

1. the perception of students and tutors about the study of Ghanaian Languages

2. the efforts students and College authorities make toward students studying a Ghanaian Language as a Core or an Elective subject

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions

1. What is students and tutors' perception of the study of Ghanaian Languages in the Colleges of Education?

2. What efforts do students and College authorities make toward students studying of Ghanaian Language as a Core or Elective subject?

Methodology

The descriptive research design was used for the study because it is the most appropriate design. Descriptive research deals with phenomena and reports the way things are. It involves data collection in order to test hypothesis or answer research questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. The purpose of descriptive research is to observe, describe and document aspect of a situation as it naturally occurs (Osuala, 1982).The descriptive design enabled the researcher to get all the necessary information needed to fairly describe the situation as it is on the ground.

The target population for the study consisted of all Staff and levels hundred and two hundred students of Holy Child College of Education, Takoradi and OLA College of Education, Cape Coast. The accessible population was made up of selected students and staff of OLA and Holy Child. The systematic sampling technique was used to sample out students for information, whiles the purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select staff members. Systematic sampling entails the selection of each member from a list in a manner that is orderly. Systematic sampling is ideal when a frame of a population can be accurately listed and is finite (Awoyemi, Mereku, Onivehu, Quarshigah & Quartey 2002). Since the students' population on the two campuses was known and the sampling frame (list of names) was readily available, the systematic sample technique was therefore the best option to use. One hundred and fifty (150) students were selected from each College making a total of three hundred (300). Purposive sampling was used to select key members of staff of the Colleges based on the strategic positions they held. They were: The two Principals, the two Vice Principals in charge of Academics, four Ghanaian Languages tutors; two from each College, and twenty six non-Ghanaian Languages tutors, thirteen from each College. The total number of staff was 34. The sample size selected for the research was therefore 334, made up of three hundred (300) students and thirty four (34) staff.

Two Colleges of Education were chosen for the study because they have similar characteristics. First, they are all female institutions and second, they are Catholic institutions. It is believed that the two institutions would have same or similar ways of doing things. The researcher therefore wanted to know if the tutors and students of the two institutions could have different perceptions toward the study of Ghanaian languages.

The major research instrument used was the questionnaire. Open-ended and closed–ended questions were used. The reason for the use of questionnaire was that it is a quick way of collecting data. It is also known to be quite valid and reliable if well constructed. It is also economical in terms of money and time spent in its usage (Awoyemi et al., 2002). Questionnaires have some disadvantages; for example, responses may not be the same. More so, questions may not mean the same to respondents. Again, when the questions are mostly open-ended, many generated data becomes difficult to analyze and difficult to compare with other respondents (Osuala, 1982). There was one main set of questionnaire for students, and staff. This is because all the respondents looked at the same issues.

Results and discussions

Research question 1
Research question 1 was "What is the perception of students and tutors about the study of Ghanaian Languages in the Colleges of Education?" Items 6 and 7 of the tutors' and 5, 6 and 10 of the students' questionnaires were used to answer this question.

Table 1 presents data on the view that teaching Ghanaian Languages involves less preparation and energy.

Table 1: perceptions of tutors and students about the study of Ghanaian languages

	Tutors				Students			
Perceptions	SA	A	D	SD	SA	A	D	SD
1. Less preparation and energy involved in teaching Ghanaian language	6.2	3.1	34.4	56.3	5.0	4.3	39.6	51.1
2. Choice of elective Ghanaian language after study as core	12.5	43.8	37.5	6.2	20.4	42.5	29.6	7.5

For the purposes of presentation and analysis, data for 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' have been combined and treated as 'Agreement', while 'Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree' have been similarly treated as 'Disagreement'

Data in Table 1 shows that 29 (91%) of the tutors and 254 (91%) of the students disagreed that there is less preparation and energy involved in the teaching of Ghanaian Languages, while 3 (9%) and 26 (9%) of tutors and students respectively agreed with the statement that less preparation and energy were involved in the teaching of Ghanaian Languages.

The data in Table 1 shows that the same percentages of both tutors and students (91%) disagreed and (9%) agreed with the statement. The researcher agrees with the majority view. It is significant to observe that both the tutors and students overwhelmingly thought that teaching Ghanaian Languages does not involve less preparation and energy than teaching any other subject on the curriculum.

Table 1 presents data on most students choosing a Ghanaian Language as an Elective after learning it as a core subject.
Data in Table 1 shows that 18 (56%) of the tutors and 176 (63%) of the students agreed that most students in their Colleges offered Ghanaian Languages as Elective subjects while 14 (44%) and 104 (37%) of tutors and students respectively disagreed with the statement.

The data shows that even though majority of both tutors and students held the view that most students in their Colleges offered Ghanaian Languages, a significant number, especially tutors, did not think so. For those who thought most students chose Ghanaian Languages as Elective subjects may have either observed that trend over the years or might have had the view through personal interaction with students.

If most students opted for Ghanaian Languages as Elective subjects after being exposed to the Languages as Core subject, it would be reasonable to conclude that doing the Core subject might have influenced their decision to make them Elective subjects. They might have disoriented their negative perception of what it meant to read a Ghanaian Language and, may be, helped them decide to read it and teach it after graduation. If their view was correct, then their study of Ghanaian Languages as Core subject had had a positive impact on students and their perception of Ghanaian Languages.

It is possible that those who did not accept the view that studying a Ghanaian Language as a Core subject influenced most students to read them as Elective subjects, did either not believe it was so, or had not observed that trend or interacted with students on that issue.

Research question 2

Research question 3 was "What efforts do students and College authorities make toward students studying a Ghanaian Language as a Core or Elective subject?"

Efforts by College Authorities
Table 2 presents data on the availability of adequate Ghanaian Languages textbooks in the College.

Statement	Tutors	Students
1. Availability of adequate Ghanaian language textbooks	Yes: 12.5	Yes**:** 23.2
	No **:** 87.5	No: 76.8
2. Availability of adequate Ghanaian language TLMs	Yes: 9.4	Yes: 24.3
	No: 90.6	No: 75.7
3. College supplies Ghanaian language textbooks	Yes: 15.6	Yes: 32.9
	No: 84.4	No: 67.1
4. Students buy other Ghanaian language books	Yes: 12.5	Yes: 63.9
	No: 87.5	No: 36.1
5. Student consult Ghanaian language tutors	Yes: 59.4	Yes: 53.6
	No: 40.6	No: 46.4

From Table 2, the data shows that 28 (87.5%) of the tutors and 215 (76.8%) of the students responded negatively to the issue of the availability of adequate Ghanaian Languages textbooks in the Colleges while 4 (12.5%) of the tutors and 65 (23.2%) responded positively.

The data indicates that majority of both students and tutors agreed that there was inadequate supply of Ghanaian Languages textbooks, which would be an unfortunate situation for trainees who would go out to teach, at least, one Ghanaian Language in the Basic school, after they had graduated from the College. If they did not have access to the textbooks or materials they need in the College it would be unfair to expect them to perform efficiently and effectively thereafter. The minority who stated that there were adequate textbooks might have had them in their particular language areas but might not have known about other language areas.

Table 2 again presents data on the availability of adequate Ghanaian Languages Teaching-Learning Materials (TLMs). Data in Table 2 shows that 29 (90.6%) of the tutors and 212 (75.7%) of the students stated that TLMs in Ghanaian Languages were inadequate while 3(9.4%) of the tutors and 68(24.3%) responded that they were adequate.

The data indicates that majority of both the students and tutors agreed that the supply of TLMs in Ghanaian Languages was inadequate. Again, the inadequacy of TLMs would also be an unfortunate situation for trainees who would go out to teach, at least, one Ghanaian Language in the Basic school, after they had graduated from the College. The issue that arises is whether the TLMs are teacher-made or supplied by the Ghana Education Service (GES). If they are supplied by the GES, it may be that Ghanaian Language teachers do not prepare TLMs themselves. On the other hand, if it is teacher-made ones, then the tutors would be expected to prepare their own and use them in teaching.

However, the inadequacy of TLMs may be due to lack of any clearly-stated policy on Ghanaian Languages, as observed by Ansre (1969) who states that the tone of the root causes, is the lack of a clearly-stated policy on the study of Ghanaian languages in the educational system. There is no policy statement on what should be the ultimate aim in their study, no suggestions on the content of the course and no provision for obtaining adequately trained staff and carefully prepared teaching materials. As a result of this absence of policy there is lack of coordination between what is done at the various levels of the educational system.

From Table 2, 27 (84%) of the tutors and 188 (67%) of the students responded "No" to the question whether their College supplies adequate textbooks in Ghanaian Languages while 5(16%) of the tutors and 92 (33%) responded "Yes". The data indicates that majority of both students and tutors agreed that their Colleges did not supply textbooks in Ghanaian Languages. A question that may arise is that "Are the textbooks available or have they been written?" A partial answer may be what the Statesman of 7th December, 2002, cited by Owu-Ewie (2006) stated, that "There is a lack of materials in the Ghanaian Languages to be used in teaching". If they are not available then the authorities cannot supply them to the students. It is possible that the minority may be right about the availability of the books but they (the books) may not be enough for all students in those Languages to get copies.

Efforts by students

 Table 2 presents data on whether students buy Ghanaian Languages textbooks apart from what the Colleges provide to them. From Table 2, the data shows that 4 (13%) of the tutors and 179 (64%) of the students agreed that students who study Ghanaian Languages buy other books in their Language areas in addition to what the Colleges supply while 28 (87%) of the tutors and 101 (36%) did not think so. The data indicates that there was a disagreement between the two groups of respondents on this issue. While majority of students thought that their colleagues studying Ghanaian Languages bought books outside the officially prescribed ones majority of the tutors did not think so. It is possible that because the students were closer to each other than the tutors, they might have seen their friends buying extra Ghanaian Languages books. But a significant number of student respondents (36%) also seemed to agree with the majority of the tutor respondents. If the majority view of students were acceptable, then it would be a praiseworthy effort on the part of students of Ghanaian Languages.

Table 2 presents data also on whether or not students consult tutors of Ghanaian Languages for assistance. The data, shows that 19 (59.4%) of the tutors and 150 (53.6%) of the students responded positively that Ghanaian Languages students consult their tutors for assistance outside the classroom while 13(40.6%) of the tutors and 130(46.4%) responded in the negative. The data indicates that majority of both students and tutors were sure that Ghanaian Languages students consulted their tutors for assistance. The differences between them and those who responded negatively are not very wide. The closeness of the positive and negative responses to each other in both groups may either be due to the fact that the 'Yes' respondents either knew or had observed or been told about the consultations but those who responded 'No' did not.

It is interesting to observe that the percentage of tutors who responded positively was higher than that of the students. It may be reasonable to conclude, by the majority responses, that students of Ghanaian Languages consult their tutors for assistance outside the normal classroom meetings. On the other hand, the minority

responses may seem to suggest that the students of Ghanaian Languages should do more consultation with their tutors for assistance.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study has shown that the perceived belief or notion that Ghanaians had a negative perception about the study of Ghanaian Languages and those who studied them, was not supported in reality. That notion is therefore not true. There is however the need to encourage the study and use of Ghanaian Languages (as the L1) if they are not to become dead, as Latin has become, or lost. The encouragement should come from the government, Ministry of Education, educators and educational institutions which are the main instruments for carrying out the policy.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made: First, teachers who have been trained in Ghanaian Languages should teach those Languages, Secondly, all Colleges of Education should have a common policy of supporting and encouraging students to speak Ghanaian Languages on campus and lastly, the Colleges should endeavour to acquire relevant and adequate textbooks and TLMs in Ghanaian Languages for use by both tutors and students

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