

Language Contact in Ghanaian Islamic Schools

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Abstract

Using Islamic schools as a point of reference, this paper investigates the language contact phenomenon within the Islamic schools in Ghana and how it affects the teaching and learning of English in the classrooms across schools located in the Islamic communities. This investigation is done in relation to language policy of education for the primary schools in Ghana. Data was collected from three primary Islamic schools located in three different communities namely in Accra. This study provides insight into the language contact situation in Islamic schools: codeswitching and language interference. The implication of the issues for the planning of literacy in multicultural contexts is also highlighted.

Keywords: Language contact, Ghanaian Islamic schools

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1.0 Background of the study

Public perception of Islamic schools that integrate the secular subjects are quite positive among parents and Islamic communities at large. Boyle et al. (2007) opines that in terms of effect and impact of Islamic schools on education in Ghana, 213,893 children are enrolled in Islamic education unit schools alone. It is equally interesting to note that most of these schools are located in the Zongos where the lingua franca in Hausa.

Under the Islamic Education Unit of the Ghana Education Service, Islamic schools have been stratified into three major categories: conventional Qur'anic schools, Arabic schools, and Arabic-English schools. To start with, the conventional Qur'anic schools focus exclusively on Qur'anic memorization called *makaranta*. This type normally takes place in the mosques especially in the evening and weekends. The second type is the Arabic schools where some secular subjects have been introduced into the curriculum but the language of instruction is Arabic and the focus is still heavily tilted toward religious subjects. The third group¹ falls under the management of the Islamic Education Unit (IEU). These schools are officially and legally government schools and they teach the Ghana Education Service curriculum in addition to the Arabic and Islamic studies. Thus, because they are state-owned schools, government takes full responsibility of such schools through the provision of the needed accoutrement, facilities and resources for the discharge of their duties including salaries and other emoluments of the staff.

Islamic Education Unit (IEU) of the GES was established in 1987 to oversee the activities of these Arabic-English schools. Boyle et al. (2007) claims that the task of the IEU was to absorb other Qur'anic schools into the main educational sector so that pupils of these schools could benefit from secular education. Its main objective was to coordinate and regulate teaching/learning activities leading to the provision of an all-round education to the Muslim child.

The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to identify the language contact situation in lower primary schools under the Islamic Education Unit and its effect on English. The work also investigated the understanding of the teachers on the National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP). This is the language policy to be used in the lower primary schools in Ghana.

1.1 Statement of problem

National Literacy Acceleration Program is a pedagogical policy meant to govern the mode of instructions in Primary schools in Ghana. The policy clearly stipulates unequivocally that the medium of instructions in the Lower Primary Schools should be the L1 of the immediate community where the school is located; so that if the L1 of the immediate community is Ga then the medium of instruction at the Lower Primary Schools in that community should be Ga. Unfortunately, some of the Islamic schools do not follow the policy directive of NALAP. The change-over to English normally occurs in the class 4 of primary school and one of the major Ghanaian languages continues as a subject up to the secondary school. Problems of pupils not understanding what is being taught often necessitate the use of other mother tongues in crucial explanations even beyond the level to which the policy gives them legitimacy as a medium. In the Islamic schools however, the reality of the policy implementation is that the predominant lingua franca of the areas in which the schools are located is Hausa, which is not part of NALAP since it is considered as non-Ghanaian language. For this reason, some teachers therefore mix Hausa with the local Ghanaian languages in teaching.

¹ Where the interest of this work is based

Arabic is also part of the languages taught in some of the schools and this creates a number of problems. It creates writing problem for the beginners. Unlike English, Arabic is written from right to left. The use of Arabic also affects their pronunciation of some English words. It also reduces the number of the contact hours of the other subjects including English. Comparatively, their contact hours are drastically reduced due to the teaching of Arabic.

1.2 Objectives

- i. To find out the language(s) used for teaching.
- ii. To find out the language the teachers prefer in teaching the students.
- iii. To find out whether Arabic is taught in the schools.
- iv. To find out how far the teaching of Arabic influences the teaching of English on the students.
- v. To find out whether the teachers code-switch in teaching and with which languages.
- vi. To ascertain the teachers' knowledge about National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP).

1.3 Research questions

- i. What language (s) the teachers use in teaching?
- ii. Which language the teachers think should be used in teaching lower primary in their schools?
- iii. Do the schools teach Arabic?
- iv. Does the teaching of Arabic influence the teaching of English on the students?
- v. Do the teachers use more than one language in teaching?
- vi. What do the teachers know about National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP)?

1.4 Significance of the study

The purpose of this study is primarily to investigate the language contact situation in public schools located in the Islamic communities and its effects on English. The significance of this study is therefore to assist policy makers to reconsider the effectiveness of NALAP's introduction strategies in order to understand what is happening on the ground, what gaps exist, and what strategies might be best employed to address the gaps, both in the short- and long-term medium. Other players in the education sector will also benefit from the study in order to restructure their pedagogy in the Islamic schools. More importantly, this work will help GES assess whether and how some of these schools could be assisted in terms of language policy in order to expand access to high-quality formal education for Muslim populations in Ghana.

1.5 Methodology

A purposeful sample of three schools in three districts within Greater Accra regions were selected for the study. Five teachers of KG 1, KG2, P1, P2 and P3 were selected to fill the questionnaire. Follow up interviewed was also conducted. We also observed teaching process in one class from each school.

2.0 Related research works

This section is divided into two: works on Islamic schools and works on language contact.

2.1 Works on Islamic schools

Islamic Education Unit is one of the units under Ghana Education Service. Fortunately, there are avalanche of works done on Ghana Education Service; however, minimal works have been done on Islamic schools in Ghana and in this respect, Mumuni (2003) noted that unlike works on Islamic education in Ghana, a full section on Islamic education in Nigeria exists at Bayreuth University. Braimah (1973) traced the origins of the *makaranta* system in Accra by citing some of the *makaranta* at Cowlane, Tudu, and Zongo Lane, among others. He also provided a catalogue of teachers who initiated these *makaranta*. Addae (2001) also observed that by the sixteenth century, Muslims had established large schools in Ghana—particularly in the North. He further contended that scholars at these centers of learning were sensitive to intellectual and literacy influences from other parts of the Muslim world. Sulemana (2002) has identified three forms of literacy acquisition in the Ghanaian *makaranta*: the *madrassa* system, the *madrassa* mode, and the secular method. These forms produced scholars with different approaches to teaching and learning Islamic literacy. He has also identified problems in the *makaranta* system, such as lack of teaching and learning materials (TLMs), lack of qualified teachers, lack of infrastructure, little effective coordination of teaching and learning processes, and lack of supervision. Sulemanu (2002) finally described the *makaranta* system as a place of rote learning to read and write Arabic text. Other areas of study in the *makaranta* system include theology, mathematics, grammar, and ethics.

2.2 Works on language contact

Historically, language contacts have taken place under different kinds of conditions such wars, colonialism, slavery,

and migrations. In Ghana, however, our language contact situations come as result of urbanization, trade or migration. Although the dominant trend in language contact studies has been SLA, language contact is a social phenomenon as claim by Sankoff (2001:639) “language contact is not individual enterprise but it has always been the historical product of social forces.”

The impact of situation in the classroom such as student-teacher relationships and opportunities for interaction may make a difference in the pupils’ performance. Moyer (2006) is of the view that second language researchers have largely adopted first language (L1) cognitive processing models of “top-down” versus “bottom-up” processing which stress the importance of background knowledge for speech comprehension. Once an individual speaks more than one language, he or she may face interference in one way or the other. In support of this, Sankoff (2001:638) observes that “languages spoken by bilinguals influence each other in various ways.” Weinreich (1968:1) sees *interference* as “those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of language contact.” Sankoff (2001:639) added that “the linguistic outcomes of language contact are determined in large part by the history of social relations among populations, including economic, political and demographic factors.” Thomason & Kaufman (1988:21) identify two outcomes of language contact based on the direction of influence: *borrowing* and *substratum interference*. They reserve the term *borrowing* to refer only to “the incorporation of foreign elements into the speakers’ native language”. On the other hand, when the native language structures influence the second language, they speak of *substratum interference*.

2.2.1 Code-switching

Code-switching is a widely observed phenomenon especially in foreign language classrooms and multilingual communities, and Zongo is no exception. Numan and Carter (2001:275) briefly define the term as “a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse” Sert (2005:1) is of the view that code-switch in ELT classrooms, comes into use “either in the teachers’ or the students’ discourse.” He added that even though code-switching is not favoured by many educators, one should understand its underlying reasons and the functions of switching between the native language and the foreign language. This understanding will create awareness about its use in classroom discourse for language teachers. If this awareness is created, the teachers can judge for themselves either to abolish or control its use during language instruction.

In typical Ghanaian classroom the languages between which alternation is performed are the native language of the students, and the English language that students are expected to gain competence in. Code-switching in the classroom can be grouped into teachers’ classroom discourse and students’ classroom discourse. Mattson and Burenhult (1999:61) establish the teachers classroom discourse into the following aspect: topic switch, affective functions, and repetitive functions. The functional perspectives of students’ discourse are: equivalence, floor holding, reiteration, and conflict control.

According to Trudgill (2000:105) “speakers switch to manipulate or influence or define the situation as they wish, and to convey nuances of meaning and personal intention”. In other words, bilinguals modify language for the sake of personal intentions. In this respect, Sert (2005) claimed that code-switch is a tool for creating linguistic solidarity especially between individuals who share the same ethno-cultural identity.

Even though, we can have both teachers’ classroom discourse and students’ classroom discourse, this data was drawn from only the teachers’ perspective. There are commonalities in functions of code-switching in natural contexts outside classroom and applications in language classrooms. To confirm this, Sert (2005:1) says “it should be kept in mind that a language classroom is a social group; therefore, a phenomenon related to naturally occurring daily discourse of any social group has the potential to be applicable to and valid for any language classroom”

The teachers’ use of code-switching can be conscious and unconscious behaviour. We believe either of these may be beneficial in language learning environments. In explaining the teachers’ function, Sert (2005) explains the topic switch function as the teacher alters his/her language according to the topic that is under discussion and this is mostly observed in grammar instruction. Cole (1998) confirmed that “a teacher can exploit students’ previous L1 learning experience to increase their understanding of L2”. As teachers, we always have the slogan ‘teach from known to unknown’. Sert (2005) confirmed that the use of code-switching somehow builds a bridge from known to unknown and may be considered as an important element in language teaching when used efficiently. We realized in one of my observation in class 2; a teacher was drilling key words in listening comprehension. There was a word ‘mosque’ and the teacher said:

‘This is ‘**masalachi**’, ie mosque in Hausa.

The affective function expresses emotions and this is done by teacher in this respect in order to build solidarity and intimate relations with the students. Below is the conversation that took place in one of the class:

Student: Madam, Yasmin has beat me.

teacher: Ha, Yasmin, why did you do that?

Student: [the student kept crying]

Teacher: Stop crying, **yayi** (ei, it is ok or don’t cry in Hausa).

The third function of code-switching in classroom settings by a teacher is the repetitive function. This is when

the teacher uses code-switching in order to transfer the necessary knowledge for the students for clarity. Another instance from my observation. The teacher said:

This is my head. **Na kye** (ei, I said) this is my head.

Albeit, all these positives of code-switching in classroom, others are of the view that it has negative effects on students. Cook (2002:333) is concerned with the application of code-switch in classes where the students do not share the same native language. This, Cook asserts, may create problems, as some of the students; though maybe few in number, will somehow be neglected. However, Sert (2005) balanced the assertion of Cook (2002) by postulating that the competence of the teacher in mother tongue of students also plays a vital role, if positive contributions of code-switching are expected.

Macaro (1997: 73) identifies three perspectives in teacher code-switching debate, namely, the ‘virtually all’, ‘maximal’, and ‘optimal’ perspectives. This is how Macaro explained these perspectives:

The ‘virtually all’ argument promotes the view that L1 has no value whatsoever and should be avoided at all costs. Similarly, the ‘maximal’ view does not acknowledge the role of L1, although its position in this respect is less extreme than that held by the proponents of the ‘virtually all’ view. The ‘maximalists’ perspective upholds that while the use of L1 should be avoided, in view of the fact that the ideal classroom state does not exist, the use of L2, where necessary, is inevitable.

Those proponents of the third perspective, the ‘optimal’ view, consider the use of L1 to have pedagogical value, and they believe that its role should be acknowledged. We therefore strongly support this third view.

2.3 National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP).

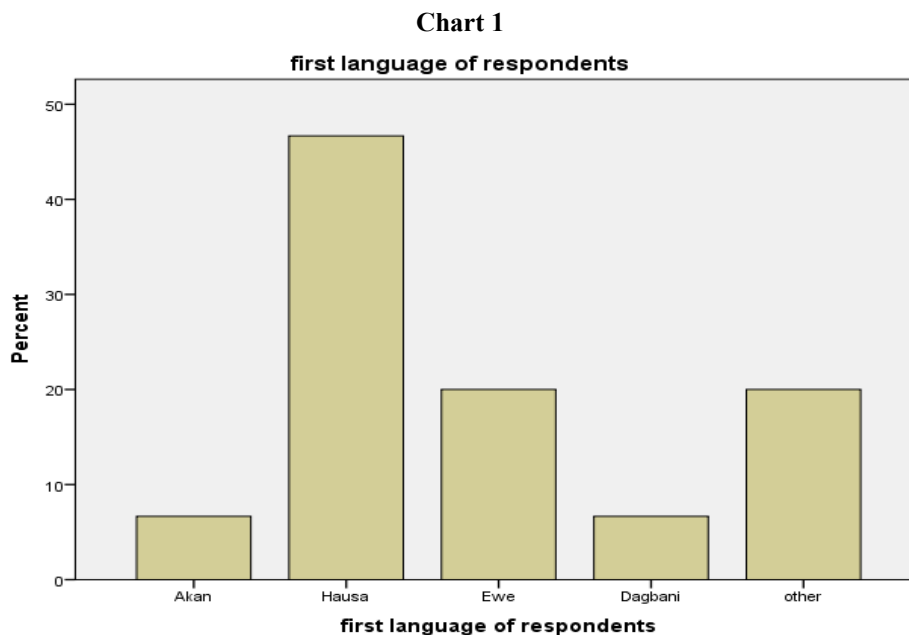
The cardinal principle of Ghana’s National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP) is to increase in the literacy rate for early grade primary school pupils. Hartwell (2010:1) confirms that the National assessments indicate that great majority of primary pupils can neither read nor understand in their first language or in English. This explains why in June 2006, the NALAP was introduced by the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service, with USAID’s assistance to help ameliorate this qualm. The aim is to improve pupils’ ability to read and write in the early grades (KG to P3) using a bilingual Ghanaian and English languages approach. The national implementation of the program began during the 2009/2010 school year and includes the production and dissemination of teacher guides and instructional materials; training for national and district education staff, and workshops for all primary head teachers and lower grade teachers; and a public awareness and publicity campaign. The program is devised to improve Ghana’s low rates of pupil literacy and numeracy. The synopsis of NALAP is what Hartwell (2010: iv) stated:

NALAP is based on the premise that pupils learn to read and write best when they do so in a language that they understand and speak. In NALAP, pupils learn how to read and write in a Ghanaian language, with English introduced gradually, and initially only orally. By P2 pupils also start to learn to read and write in English, and by P3 pupils should be able to read with fluency and understanding in both a Ghanaian language and English.

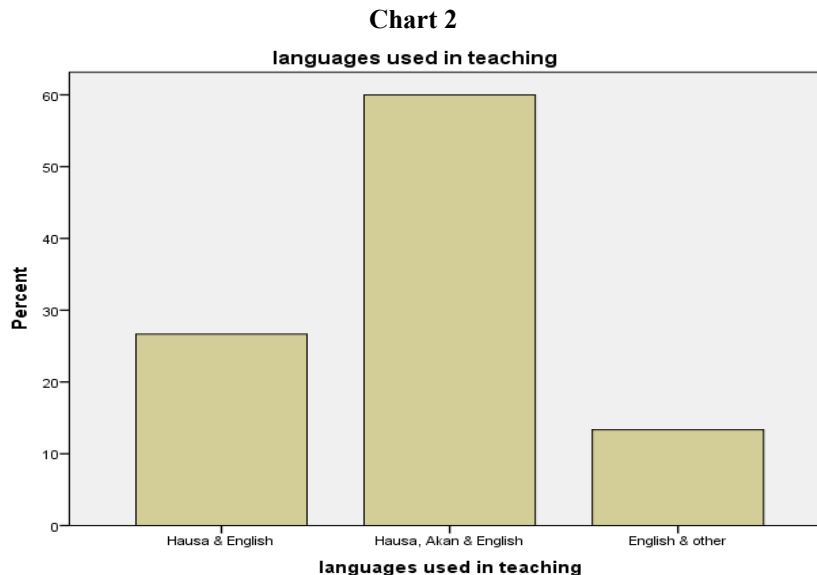
3.0 Data analysis and discussions

The instrument used in the data analysis was Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This program was chosen because of its effectiveness in analyzing statistical data. It can be used to analyze data collected from surveys, test observations, etc. It can perform a variety of analysis and presentation functions, including statistical analysis and graphical presentation of data.

Most of the teachers in the Islamic schools speak Hausa. For religious reasons, most Islamic teachers want to be posted to the Islamic schools after their teachers’ training. Currently, most of the head teachers are Muslims. The data of this research attest to fact that teachers in the Islamic schools speak Hausa and this shown in **chart 1**. Out of 15 respondents, 7 speak Hausa as their first language representing 47%. Those whose first language is not Hausa but use Hausa in their teaching or as a second language also have a very significant percentage as indicates in **chart 2**. Talking about the significant role of Hausa in Ghana, Anyidoho and Dakubu (2008:143) affirm that “besides the indigenous languages, two languages belonging to very different language families are used throughout the country: Hausa, a Chadic (Afro-Asiatic) language, and English, a Germanic (Indo-European) language.”

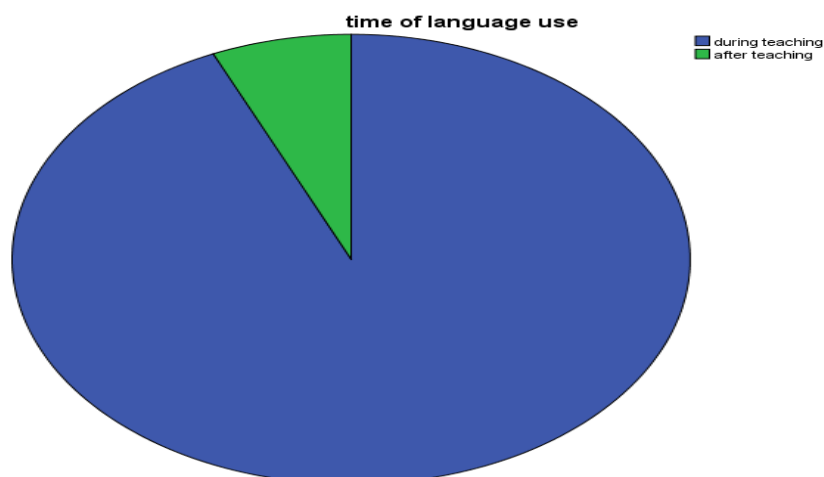


It is a common knowledge that most Ghanaians are bilinguals and teachers of Islamic schools are no exception. All the teachers code-switch in the delivery of their lesson. In other words, they use more than one language in their teaching. The number of languages used in teaching ranges from 2 to 3 with English and Hausa being the mostly used languages in the lower primary schools. Teachers who use two to three languages (English, Hausa and Akan) are 60% followed by teachers who use two languages (English and Hausa) with 27%. It means 87% of the teachers in the lower primary school use Hausa in the classroom. It is a clear indication that the lingua franca of the people of the zongos is Hausa. Therefore, it is not surprising to see this trend in the schools.



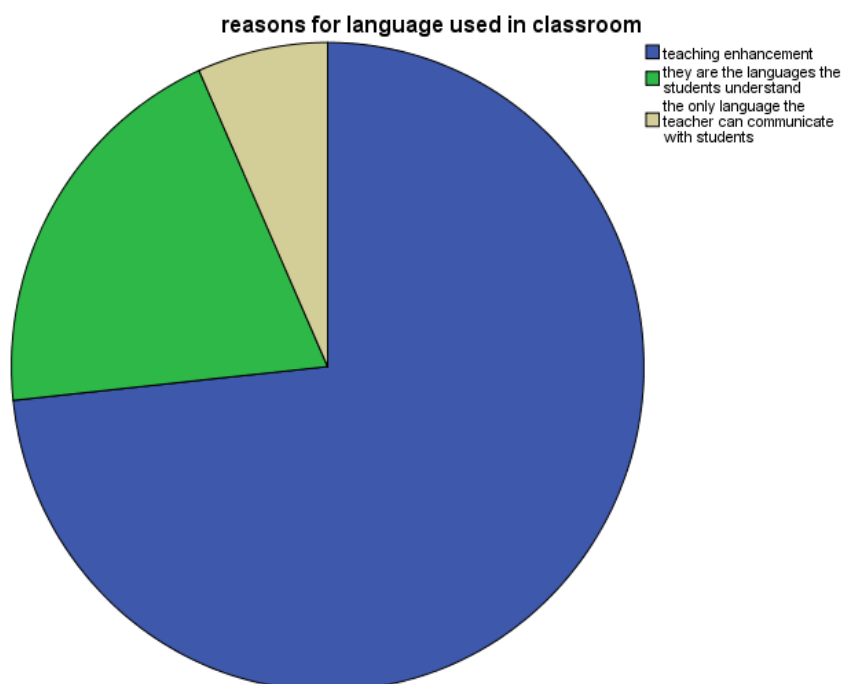
Apart from the rampant use of code-switching on the street of the zongos, it also takes place right in their classrooms. Out of the 15 teachers, 14 of them representing 93% say they code-switch during teaching in the classroom. These teachers use either two languages or three languages. **Chart 3** indicates the illustration:

Chart 3



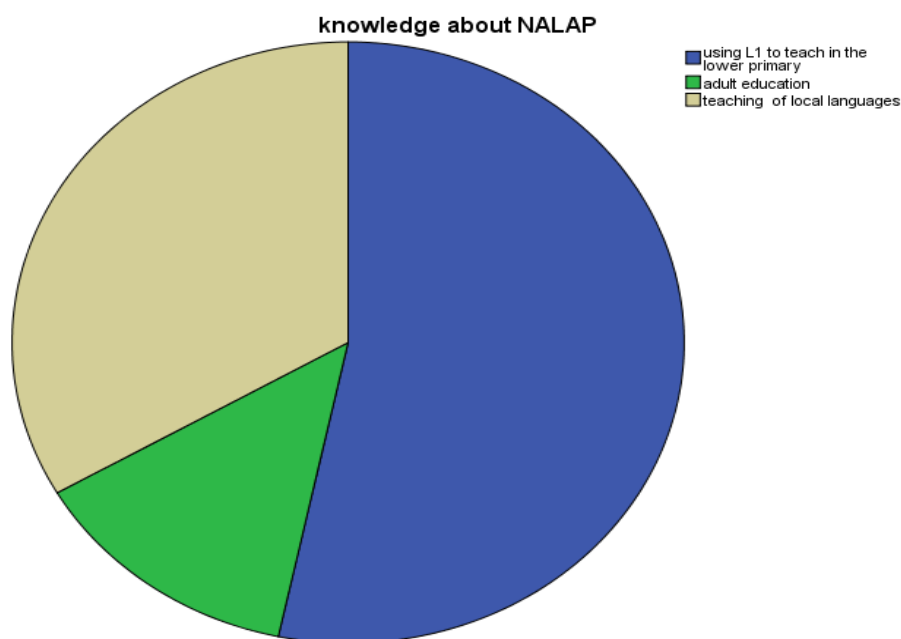
Most of the teachers claim that they code-switch in order to enhance their teaching methods in the classrooms. The reason given by the teachers is one of the general reasons why people code-switch, especially when one needs an available expression or words. The illustration is seen in **chart 4**:

Chart 4



All the teachers affirmed that they know about NALAP. However, their knowledge about NALAP varied from one teacher to the other. 53 % of the teachers have correct knowledge about NALAP. These teachers mention that it is meant to use the local languages to teach at the local level. Those who said that NALAP is teaching the local language represent 33% followed by teachers whose knowledge about NALAP is teaching adult in the classroom. These teachers are of the view that NALAP is all about ‘adult education’. This is illustrated in **Chart 6** :

Chart 6



4.0 Some contact issues

According to one of the teachers some people pronounce every letter they see in a word. When the teacher was drilling the key words in listening comprehension, some of the students mention the word 'arm' /aam/ as /arim/. The teacher mentioned that it is the Arabic influence. During my interview with the teachers, We found the effect of Arabic writing system on English. One teacher showed me an exercise book of a class 3 student who has written English from write to left: **'mine is book the' (the book is mine)**.

The teachers added that apart from the pronunciation and writing effects on students, Arabic teaching eat into the instructional hours meant for other subjects including English. When the teacher mentioned the word 'understand', the teacher said /andastandi/- the teacher mentioned this when speaking Hausa. He used it to conform with the syllabic nature of the language which must always be open syllable. According Sankoff (2001) such alterations may include processes that apply only to the foreign-origin vocabulary, but may also spread to native vocabulary.

5.0 Findings

- i. The study finds out that there is persistent code-switching in the classroom in all the schools visited.
- ii. Hausa is frequent in the classroom by both teachers and the students.
- iii. Some teachers do not know the task of the NALAP but they want it to be reviewed in other to include Hausa. As mentioned by Hartwell (2010) that the selection of an appropriate language can be easily determined by observing the language pupils use on the playground.
- iv. With the current situation in the public schools, Awedoba (2001) observed that vast majority of written materials available have been English language texts with very limited access to text in Ghanaian language. In view of this, local materials should be made available to enhance the teaching and learning processes in the lower primary.

6.0 Recommendations

It is very prudent for the policy makers to consider the happenings on the ground in other to make the implementation of their policies feasible and practical. It is in light of this that we recommend code-switching should be encouraged in our schools in order to increase the understanding of the pupils. As we all agree that learners do well when taught in the language of their best understand, we will also recommend that Hausa, even though not an indigenous Ghanaian language, should be given a second look in the NALAP program. This will capture the schools in the Zongo areas in Ghana. It is a common fact that Hausa has come to stay as one of the formidable languages in Ghana, especially in the zongos and market centres as Dakubu (1988) mentions and supported by Dako (2012). More importantly, the NALAP is not known by some teachers, therefore the publicity should be intensified in other to make it popular among the teachers and the nation at large.

On the issue of writing system, we will encourage the authorities of the Islamic Education Unit to employ experts in the teaching of Arabic language in order to minimize the incident of students writing from right to left

when it comes to English. We also add that the contact hours should be extended in order to cater for the lost hours used for teaching Arabic.

7.0 Conclusion

The results of this study have raised some important questions warranting further research into the Islamic schools. Future research is needed regarding the nature of the contact that students are encountering outside of the classroom and what kind of contact students would benefit from the most. Also needed is further investigation of the influence of Arabic on students' performance at the BECE. Answers to these questions would be potentially beneficial to teachers, administrators and staff who aim to facilitate students' comprehension in the lower primary,

Hartwell (2010) attest to the fact that there are cases where the schools selected in Accra received materials in a language which the majority of the pupils in the school do not understand or speak. Hartwell added that there are schools, particularly where pupils and teachers do not know or speak one of the 11 official languages. It is against this backdrop that we recommend the use of code-switching in the NALAP.

This study did not measure student achievement among students in Islamic schools. However, it discusses the critical issues in the Islamic schools in relation to medium of instructions in the classroom. It realized that the teachers have added a language¹ for which is not part of the language policy for the public schools. We therefore recommend that the policy makers should consider Hausa as one of the languages to be used in the lower primary schools in the Zongos.

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¹ Hausa