

# Implications of Medium of Instruction Policy on Teaching and Learning: A Reference to the Perspectives of Teachers in Rural Kindergarten and Lower Primary Schools in Ghana

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## Abstract

The research explored the views of teachers in rural schools regarding the relevance of the medium of instruction policy and the challenges they face in implementing it. A qualitative research design was used in which 12 teachers were selected from kindergarten (KG) and lower primary across rural schools in Ghana. Data was gathered using telephone interviews and analysed thematically. The research found that all teachers considered the policy important to their practice and children's learning as it fostered better understanding of lessons and positive feelings among pupils and teachers themselves, thereby making lessons interesting and enjoyable. The research also found that teachers were however, concerned about some challenges militating against successful implementation of the policy in rural schools. Not only were parents not supporting teachers as they rather preferred that their children be taught in the English Language only but also there were no teacher's reference materials including textbooks in the local languages to support them. The training that teachers received in the local languages was also inadequate to make them proficient in them. Yet, they were posted and or transferred to teach in the KG or lower classes in schools that they had no knowledge of pupils' mother tongue. The research recommends effective training programmes for teachers in the local languages and deploying teachers to schools in communities that they are proficient to teach. The Ghana Education Service in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and all relevant stakeholders in children's education should also mobilise resources to produce teaching and learning materials in the local languages.

**Keywords:** Instruction, rural, mother-tongue, identity, social justice

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## 1. Introduction

The medium of instruction for schools is a critical educational decision globally. This has led many policy makers across the globe to propose language policies for teaching and learning with mixed outcomes (Hélot and Laoire, 2011). In Ghana, the medium of instruction policy states that both the mother-tongue (L1) and English Language (L2) should be used for teaching and learning from the kindergarten (KG) to the lower primary (i.e. primary 1 to 3). The policy further specifies that only the English Language should be used as the medium of instruction from primary 4 to the tertiary level. The crux of the policy is that children have already acquired L1 at home and therefore blending the L1 with the L2 in the early phases of their education will facilitate learning. Yet, it is reported that only 18.6% of basic school teachers in the country are fully proficient in the L1 (Seidu et al., 2008). Out of the over 60 minor and 10 major local languages in the country, only nine are approved and taught in the Colleges of Education and some universities as part of training for teachers. This implies that, many children may not be taught by teachers proficient in the L1. Yet, research evidence indicates that language proficiency of teachers has lasting effect on children learning outcomes (Graham et al. 2017); with those taught by less proficient teachers most likely to perform poorly (Szpotowicz, 2009). In the Netherlands, Unsworth et al. (2015) investigated the impact of teacher language proficiency on children learning. They found that teacher language proficiency was a key factor in teachers' practice as it influenced children's vocabulary development and performance.

Considering the significance of teacher language proficiency on children learning outcome, the situation with regard to teachers and the implementation of the medium of instruction policy in Ghana is a matter of concern. Trudell (2007:552) makes the point that in sub-Saharan African, 'national level policies abound which permit mother-tongue instruction in primary grades, and yet successful implementation of those policies is not merely so common'. This is why this research focuses on exploring the perspectives of teachers at the KG and lower primary schools in rural parts of Ghana, on the relevance of the medium of instruction policy for their practice and the challenges teachers encounter in implementing it. Thus, the following two questions guided the research:

1. How do teachers in rural schools in Ghana think about the relevance of the medium of instruction policy?
2. What challenges confront teachers in rural areas in their bit to implement the policy?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Historical Overview of Medium of Instruction in Basic School in Ghana

In Ghana, basic education consists of 2 years of KG, 6 years of primary school and 3 years of junior high school. Formal basic education in the country was established by the European missionaries in the 1800s. The medium of instruction was English (Graham, 1971). The goal was to provide training for the local folks to serve as church leaders. This continued until the 19th century when the local language replaced English. Some described this intervention as appropriate since many Ghanaians at that time were likely not to be conversant with the English Language in order to express themselves as well as participate effectively in teaching and learning in schools.

Under colonial governance by the British, the mother tongue was substituted with British structure of education as claimed by Mfum-Mensah (2005:75) that:

*...formal education in Ghana changed from missionary-oriented schooling ...to a British model dubbed 'Westminster education'. This system was elitist in its form and structure and promoted British ideologies... The 'fortunate few' indigenous children who enrolled in school received instruction in English.*

Arguably, the British form of education was biased, culturally inappropriate and imposing ideas which were contextually unsuitable for Ghanaian children. There is evidence that for children who have to learn in multiple languages, denying them of the opportunity to learn any one of them amounts to injustice to their identity (Lee and Suarez, 2009). Anyidoho (2003) also claims that instruction in mother tongue is an essential way of preserving the cultural identity of society and passing it on to generations. Therefore, using a foreign language as a medium of instruction 'takes away something from their humanness and lets them feel they are representing themselves badly, showing only some of their real personality and intelligence' (Allwright and Bailey, 2004:173). Thus, children who are not able to confidently express their thoughts in the foreign language are likely to feel inferior and lack the courage to partake in activities in the classroom.

The Phelps-Stokes Commission, which was a missionary commission tasked with the mandate of formulating educational plans in British colonial Africa, anticipated possible challenges the British system of education would create. It thus proposed the restoration of the mother tongue in schools although some critics opposed the commission's recommendation arguing that considering the linguistic diversity of the country, localising the medium of instruction could result in disunity in the country (McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh, 1975). This position seemed to be presumptuous as the main aim of a medium of instruction is to facilitate both teaching and learning, therefore, aiming at maintaining unity in the country through language could be described as a misplaced priority.

The immediate government after the country's independence, was influenced by the ideologies of the British as it linked literacy with capability to speak English and therefore embraced the idea of one country, one language (Djite, 2008). English language was thus readopted by the government as the medium of instruction.

Although, most subsequent postcolonial governments in the country have promoted the use of mother tongue as reflected in the current medium of instruction in schools, the ideas of British seem to influence educational policies as revealed in the British Council's own report that:

*...although the British government no longer has the economic and military power to impose its will in other parts of the world, British influence endures through 'the insatiable demand for the English language... English language is Britain's greatest asset, 'greater than the North Sea Oil...' (British Council Annual Report, 1983 cited in Brock-Utne, 2001:122).*

### 2.2 Perspectives on Medium of Instruction Policy in Education

The medium of instruction world-wide is a matter of debate. There is often controversy regarding which language to adopt in schools. According to Owu-ewie (2006), the cultural disposition of the different tribes is commonly the basis of disagreement regarding which of their languages to consider for instruction in schools.

Some are also of the view that the rise in globalisation and the spread of the English Language has led to an increase in demand for English globally as seen in the language policy of many countries (Hamid, 2010; Watson, 2007). Many international bodies carry out their businesses in English either as the sole language or a combined language. It is projected that in a few years' time, English will form a major part of the national educational curricular in school systems in most parts of the world, particularly in developing countries (Wedell, 2008). Some describe this as a form of colonialism which adversely affects efforts to improve local language knowledge for social and economic growth. For instance, Djite (2008:X) observes that:

*...Africa is the only continent where a school child can have access to knowledge and science only through a language other than the one spoken at home or in the wider community; the only continent where the majority of people cannot have access to justice in their own language(s).*

The profound reason for this is that in many developing countries, English language is seen as essential for

developing human capital, which is believed to contribute to their economic development (Hamid, 2010). While this standpoint may be true philosophically, it may not be realistic if children, in the first place, do not have the ability to develop and understand concepts taught in the classroom. There is evidence that in a class where English is used as the sole medium of instruction, children are silent and likely to guess answers (Brock-Utne and Alidou, 2006). According to Opoku-Amankwa (2009) using a foreign language in classrooms makes children feel anxious and uneasy. This may warrant the suggestion that rather than concentrating on and treating English as a global language, individual countries need to prioritise strategies and policies that will lead to overall development of children in their education.

For some scholars, rather than promoting one language over the another, the social parameters of the society should govern the purpose and use of language in schools (David and Agbenyega, 2012). Thus, in urban schools which usually comprise multilingual classrooms where all the children tend not to speak the same mother tongue, adopting a single language as a medium of instruction may be more appropriate than in the rural areas.

### *2.3 Medium of Instruction from Social Justice Perspective*

Since this research focuses on a particular marginalised population in society-that is teachers in rural schools, it is important to also review the medium of instruction from a social justice perspective. In conceiving social justice, Fraser (1997) claims that justice entails social systems that permit people to partake in social life with other people. Injustice occurs when some people are deprived of the opportunity to partake in equal level with others. Considered as the proponent of the capability framework, Sen (1973) also contends that in issues of social justice, the actual opportunities that people have to do the things that they value matter a lot. The emphasis here is that all abilities match the choices that an individual has to live a life that he or she has reason to value. Therefore, disparities in opportunities can significantly result in variations in capabilities (Robeyns, 2003).

Contemporary advocates for social justice in education such as Tikly and Barrett (2011) have proposed three interconnected dimensions in assessing educational needs for children: inclusion, relevance and democracy. They conceptualised inclusion as ‘the access that different individuals and groups have to a good quality education and the opportunities they have for achieving desired outcomes’ (ibid, p.9). In other words, it is about creating a good quality system that is accessible to every child and takes into account diversity (Polat, 2011). This has implications for how resources are distributed. Resources must be suitable for learner’s environment, cognitive abilities and language proficiency. However, these factors do not function independently to improve learning outcomes. Rather, they depend on teachers’ language proficiency. Overcoming injustice in relation to medium of instruction, therefore entails a learning atmosphere which promotes opportunities for every child to participate in the learning process (Opoku-Amankwa and Brew-Hammond, 2011).

Tikly and Barrett (2011) refer to the relevance dimension as the degree to which the outcomes of learning are meaningful for every learner, cherished by their communities and congruous with national agenda for development. From social justice standpoint, teaching and learning become relevant when the curriculum is suitable to the context and language abilities of every learner (EdQual, 2005). The curriculum must consider the distinctiveness of the culture of the people, create a balance between ‘relevance to context, relevance to the present and future needs of learners and relevance to humanity’ (Hawes and Stephens, 1990:17). Broadening this argument, Tikly and Barrett (2011) claim that building children’s knowledge this way will instill in them a sense of identity.

The democracy aspect focuses on how decisions regarding education quality at all levels are made and the nature of stakeholder participation in them. The fundamental idea of democracy is that all stakeholders need to have opportunities to make choices and participate in matters which concern them (Fraser, 2008). What it also draws attention to is the significance of engaging in broader conversations regarding the purpose of education for different persons including minority and less privileged groups (Tikly and Barrett, 2011).

### **3. Methodology**

The research used a qualitative design where telephone interviews were used to gather data from 12 teachers selected from rural schools across the country. As the focus of this research was not on generalizing its findings statistically, the sample size was considered adequate. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) remind researchers that, sample need not be large to show evidence regarding issues of prevalence. Participants were basic school teachers. The criteria for selecting participants were that; they should be teaching in either the KG or lower primary; and teaching in a rural school (see table1 below).

Table 1: Background of participants

Name of Participant (pseudonyms)	Gender	Level of Teaching	Qualification	Region (pseudonyms)
Anonga	Male	Primary 3	First degree	Cenema
Atam	Female	Primary 1	Diploma	Tihan
Nsomah	Female	KG 2	Diploma	Foaha
Kumi	Female	Primary 3	First degree	Pawe
Azuma	Male	Primary 1	First degree	Gamna
Momo	Female	Primary 2	Certificate 'A'	Nagana
Foze	Male	KG 1	Diploma	Kalva
Beaboa	Female	Primary 2	First degree	Tinsoka
Alema	Male	Primary 1	First degree	Puwa
Nyata	Male	KG2	Diploma	Zuku
Dima	Female	Primary 2	Diploma	Kenkelega
Hamila	Female	Primary 1	Certificate 'A'	Rongona

Source: Field Data, 2020

The snowball technique was used to select teachers. Here, initial contacts were made to some of the teachers I met in 2016 during my PhD research fieldwork who then linked me to some of their colleagues. Initially, data was to be gathered through face to face interviews with participants. However, due to the covid-19 pandemic coupled with the need to observe protocol in the country, participants were interviewed through telephone and audio recorded. Two months were spent in accessing and interviewing participants. Arranging convenient time and place for most of them for the interviews was fairly easy since they were at home as basic schools in the country had closed in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

All interviews were carried out in English Language although on a few times some participants chipped in their mother tongue just to make some of their expressions clearer. I allowed this in situations where I understood the mother tongue of the participant. In carrying out interviews with participants, I was wary of probable challenges of this technique. As Selltiz et al. (1967, p.583) claim, 'interviewers are human beings and not machines and that the manner in which the interview is conducted may influence interviewees' responses. To minimize any influences on participants' responses, I avoided leading questions. I also sought clarifications on matters that were not clear to me.

Data was analysed by searching for themes across the data. In doing this, all interviews were transcribed and coded to identify patterns in the data (Sandelowski, 1995). Next, codes were drawn together and organised into themes. I was not too strict in my search for the themes as this was a qualitative research. Hence, the concentration was not on what fraction of participants' views was required to form a theme. Instead, a theme depended on whether it contained something substantial with respect to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In order to make meaning of the data in the writing and discussing of the findings, themes needed to be interpreted. In doing so, quotations from participants in the research were used in some instances to substantiate the interpretation. As Sandelowski (1994) points out, researchers can enhance the value of their findings and, thus, attract attention to the voices of participants with the adept use of quotes. Using direct quotations in this research contributed to ensuring that the data was presented in a logical and convincing manner.

Ethical guidelines for researchers were observed in this research. Before intrviewing and audio recording interviews, informed consent was sought from participants. They were made to understand that participation in the research was voluntary. Confidentiality was also ensured through the use of pseudonyms to represent participants, their schools, communities and regions.

#### 4. Findings

The findings of this research are organised under the research questions: Teachers' perceptions about the relevance of the medium of instruction policy and perceptions about challenges teachers encounter in implementing it.

##### 4.1 Perceptions about the relevance of the policy

Analysis of the data showed that all participants think that the medium of instruction policy of teaching and learning in the KG and lower primary in both the mother-tongue and English Language is relevant for children in rural areas as many children in these areas have poor English Language background. Three themes emerged from the data under this research question: *Fostering of understanding, better recall and fostering of positive feelings.*

##### 4.1.1 Fostering of understanding

When asked how the policy was relevant, some participants expressed that teaching children in both the L1 and



L2 facilitated their understanding as expressed by Foze that;

*When we are explaining concepts to the children, they understand you more as compared to the English Language alone. When you mention something in the local language because they can see, they understand it well and this aids our teaching. So I think that the policy is good. The L1 helps us to explain our teaching better to the children because they are already conversant with the L1.*

Nsomah first of all gave a background regarding why the policy was relevant for children in rural areas. She claimed;

*...you know when the children are brought from the home, some of them don't know anything about the English Language...because in the villages that they are coming from their parents are not educated, they can't teach them anything in English in the house. It's only in the school that they are exposed to the English Language.*

Therefore, 'when you use the L1 and L2 to teach they always pick it well but to use only the English they find it difficult. So that is why combining both English and the local language is helping us'. Atam seemed to share similar views by claiming that 'in my school their local language is the only language that they[children] understand when they are admitted into the KG'. Therefore, teaching children in both the L1 and L2 is 'good' because her pupils were able to grasp lessons better.

#### 4.1.2 Better recall

Some participants shared that not only did children understand lessons, but also they remembered what was taught better. From Hamila's experience, 'sometimes, you will teach them something in the English Language only and the next day, they forget but when we blend it with the L1, they remember because they understand you more than only in the English Language'. She however cautions her colleague teachers not to overindulge in the use of the L1 in their teaching but 'should ensure a balance in the use of both languages in their teaching'.

Nyata pupils were also able to recall previous lessons better because of the blending of the L1 and L2 during teaching and learning. Kumi recounted one of her literacy revision lessons in which almost all the pupils were able to recollect the names of items, places and animals in a passage they read the previous day because it was translated from English to the mother-tongue.

#### 4.1.3 Fostering of positive feelings

Some participants also claimed that the medium of instruction also had an emotional impact on children's learning as 'the children become happy' when they understood lessons as claimed by Kumi;

*You can see that when you translate it from English into the L1 and they [children] understand, you see them happy and talking among themselves... and they will start calling madam, madam, and raising their hands to contribute...some of them if it is exercise, they will be looking for erasers to erase their wrong answers and write the correct answers.*

For Alema, there is always 'excitement among them[pupils] in the class whenever I translate it in the L1' and they understand. According to him, there were instances that those pupils who understood better and faster tended to help their colleagues and this made his lesson in the class enjoyable.

Interestingly, not only were children happy but some teachers themselves as well as pupils were able to ask critical questions as Dima claimed that when 'they understand what I am teaching, some of them will be asking me critical questions which I am always happy'.

## 4.2 Perceptions about Challenges

Four key themes emerged from the data under this research question; *poor parental support; inadequate training, lack of resource materials and nature of posting and transfer.*

### 4.2.1 Poor parental support

It emerged from the data that parental support for teachers for the implementation of the policy was poor. According to some participants, 'parents don't support when contacted [with regard to translation] because they think you[teachers] are responsible for their children's learning', said Beaboa.

Anonya who was teaching in primary three also expressed that;

*some parents are not interested... The way you give the homework, it's the same way they[children] will bring it back to you...the children will say my father or mother says this or that...so many excuses. I used to trace their parents in their houses and explain to them that some of us don't understand your language, so you have to help us.*

For Nyata, the poor support from parents is attributable to some parents' preference for their children to be taught in English Language. She shared her experience;

*The parents too... one parent wanted to send her daughter to a private school and the class teacher asked why and he said when the child comes [home] he always reads something in twi [twi is one of the approved L1s taught in schools in the southern part of the country] ... meaning we have been teaching them twi but he wants his child to learn English. So he*

*decided to take his child away to a private school in Yanisun town...*

She claimed further that;

*some parents, uhmm! They think that when their child is speaking English...the child is the best...it's common here. Even some educated parents think that way...they wish we will be teaching their children in only English...some parents say they feel happy if their children speak in English. They feel proud...[but] this is not also helping the children to learn...*

Teachers in her school therefore had an extra responsibility of explaining to parents why their children should be taught in both the L1 and L2. For Kumi, *'some parents are against the use of the L1 ...[because] they want us to be teaching their children only the English so that their children can be become fluent in the English Language early...that is what they tell us'*.

However, the situation with parents in Atam's school appeared to be different as she claimed that they received support from parents through an NGO operating in their district. According to her, *'...parents too do help... there is a programme call LIBRARY MIND run by an NGO. They train some mothers to come and help the teachers in translating the L1 into L2...*

#### 4.2.2 Inadequate training

Some participants claimed the training that teachers received in the local languages in the Colleges of Education and some of the universities to become teachers was not adequate to make them proficient in the L1 for the implementation of the policy.

Kumi claimed that, *'we were taught dagare in only the first semester in the first year [in the college]*. Although she was posted to a community where she understands the L1 of her pupils, she was not able to translate some lessons from the L2 to L1 as she bemoaned that...*although I understand the language...some of the things I cannot translate them from English to dagare*. She and some of her colleagues in her school *'teach and translate in only words or sentences that we understand ourselves'*.

Beaboa made similar claims that the training she received in the college was not enough. Hence, it has not been easy teaching some topics although she understands her pupils' mother tongue;

*In the KG it is not easy ooo teaching them in both the English and mother tongue ...It's difficult, it's difficult when it comes to the spelling and translating some of the words even though I am an Akan. And even how to blend the sound is a bit difficult for me.*

Atam also bemoaned that;

*The way they introduce us to the Ghanaian Language in the training college for two semesters is not good. If actually they want us to really teach well then they should make it compulsory for all the three years in the college where we will be taught full courses in the language like the way they train French teachers in some of the colleges. Or they should make[it] an elective course so that those who are interested can study that one alone...*

Beaboa also shared that;

*...most of the alphabets in English are not easy to pronounce in twi... I don't think they take rural schools into consideration because many of the languages in the rural areas are not among the approved ones for training teachers in the college.*

Some participants claimed that they did not receive any training at all in any L1 in the college as indicated by Momo that; *'no...We didn't do a Ghanaian language [L1]*. She felt that authority;

*'presume that once you complete [the training in the college], you will be posted to where you can speak the language but this is not true... because after completion you can be posted to anywhere that you may not understand the L1. We should have learnt the Ghanaian Language back at the college'*.

According to Beaboa, because the L1 was optional, she did not study it during her pre-service training. She however thought *'they should make it compulsory for all teacher trainees'*. Similarly, Foze claimed that she did not study the L1 of the children in the community she was first posted to. She recounted the challenges she faced in teaching the children;

*When I was posted to Nagana region in 2014, it wasn't easy at all because I don't understand the language and I didn't study it in the college...I was supposed to teach them in both the English and the L1 ... so what I used to do is that I used gestures or sign language and if they were still not getting it [understanding it] then I have to call somebody, either one of my colleagues or a student in the higher class, who can explain to them. That is what I used until I started learning the L1 small small [gradually].*

Although Azuma studied the L1 of his pupils, *'what we did in the training college wasn't sufficient for us to be able to teach'*. She, therefore, felt that she and some of her colleagues *'...need in-service training so that we can understand the concepts and the language very well'* to be able to teach effectively.

#### 4.2.3 Lack of resource materials

It appears the lack of resource materials was also militating against some teachers' efforts to teach pupils in both

the L1 and L2 as contained in the excerpt below;

*There are also instances where you want to translate certain words and it will be difficult, because there are certain words or things that may not have direct translation from L2 to L1 for example the shapes and some secondary colours and some foreign animals that do not have names in the L1...And meanwhile we don't have any teachers' guide or textbook to guide us (Nsomah)*

Although Alema understands and speaks the L1 of her pupils, he still had difficulty particularly in translating some colours, yet there were no materials to guide him;

*Even though I speak the language, when it comes to the teaching it is not the same. It is difficult. So I think there should be a translation book or text book to guide teachers in order to teach...The primary colours are better but when it comes to the secondary colours, it is not easy. In my tribe I don't know the names of the secondary colours...*

Momo expressed that some teachers in her school therefore tended to teach children in only the L2 but likened the outcome of teaching children that way to 'just pouring water on rocks...[because]by the time you finish the lesson the children will be sitting down ...no questions, they won't participate in the lesson'. She asked rhetorically, 'if you teach them and they don't understand, how will they ask you a question? She expressed further that 'in their[children's] mind, you did not teach them anything...so GES [Ghana Education Service] should develop books that translate certain words or sentences ... it will help us'.

Anonga also shared her experience;

*Sometimes you will be in the class and you will find yourself wanting. Some of the children will ask you that what is this thing in gurune [that is their mother tongue] and you the teacher you don't know...We don't have textbook or teacher handbook in gurune. We don't have anything like that. Even the new curriculum that they introduced, gurune is now a subject but up to now we have not seen any book or guide in it. They give us the syllables and we see what is there but where is the content in a text book?*

He explained that notwithstanding this, she made effort to ensure children benefited from lessons by consulting his colleagues;

*...I ask my colleague teachers who I think might be able to help. So within the school I consult my colleague teachers to help me out. When there are certain words or sentences, let me say words because it is mostly words that I have problems translating, some of the teachers help. There was one teacher in the school who was very good in gurune, any time I found it difficult to translate certain words or anything I used to consult him and he was helping me a lot.*

It seemed this was not limited to him alone as participant Dima made similar claims that;

*It's not been easy but we are managing. Because of this teacher relationship, if there is something I am supposed to translate into the L1 and I am finding it difficult, I go to a different teacher to ask for help so that I can explain to the understanding of the pupils. In our school, we have a good relationship among ourselves... we can easily ask for help from another teacher if you are finding it difficult in a particular area. We have this teacher platform on WhatsApp so we do share even before we come to the classroom. That's how we have been doing it in our school. Sometimes if the explanation my colleague has given I cannot explain it properly to the children, me and my colleague will schedule a day that will fit all of us. Sometimes, we interchange our classes where I go to engage his pupils while he or she comes to explain to my pupils.*

Some teachers also consulted their own pupils as seen below;

*And some of the children themselves are helping. It is not like all of them are just empty in terms of the language...some of them know. So I involve the children so that those who know can help the others. Some of them are amazing in terms of the way they understand the L1 at that early years[Nyata].*

Dima did not only rely on his pupils but also their parents for help;

*I use the pupils and the parents as the media... I give to them[pupils] as homework to go and ask their parents and tell me the next day. I will tell them that if you get home, ask your mother or father what this thing is...that way I'm seeking the support of the parents too. A topic like 'human being and nature' rather than struggling to translate some of the living things like names of trees, some insects... I will ask them to go and find out from their parents and come and tell me ...You see.*

#### 4.2.4 Nature of posting and transfer

Some participants attributed their challenges to inappropriate posting and transfer of teachers by the Ghana Education Service. Newly trained teachers are posted by the Ghana Education Service. That means in some cases, teachers have little or no choice as to where they would like to teach. Some claimed that they were posted

to and allocated to teach at the lower level in schools that they had no knowledge of the mother tongue of the pupils as seen in extract below;

*GES [Ghana Education Service] should be mindful of their posting...some of us were trained in Dagbani [one of the local languages in Kalva Region] but they have posted me to teach here in primary one in Assin-Fosu [in the Cenema Region]. I don't speak Fanti [language] (Hamila).*

Foze cited a situation in her school to back her claim;

*...a practical example is in my school. There is one Ashanti lady[teacher]. She did early childhood education course and twi. This lady was put in KG1 in a school in Fumbisi. You can imagine...someone from Ashanti coming to Fumbisi to teach in KG. She is there. She does not understand the L1. So I am now assisting her. If not what can she be teaching? Nothing... even greeting, she can't say it in the L1...*

She was assisting her colleague teacher but bemoaned the negative effect this was having on her own classroom work;

*...this is affecting my own class...the workload on me is too much because it is like I am teaching two classes... at the end of the term, the number of topics I have to cover, I can't...So for me, the officers [Ghana Education Service officials across the country] should know how to post teachers.*

Some participants also claimed that sometimes teachers were transferred to schools that they were not proficient in the L1 of the pupils as claimed by Momo that;

*Sometimes they post you[referring to teachers] to teach in a particular area that you can... you are good [proficient] in the language but later in your career they can transfer you to another school that you don't understand the language and they still put you in class 1 or 2 ...to teach...*

According to her, this negatively affected teachers' ability to effectively implement the policy and when such teachers complained, they were often told that 'your service is needed there'.

## 5. Discussion

The main focus of this research was to understand teachers' views regarding the implication of the medium of instruction policy for teaching and learning in rural areas. That is, the relevance of the policy and the challenges confronting teachers in implementing it. This research identified that teachers hailed the policy as relevant to their work. As seen in the findings, not only did it enhance pupils' understanding of lessons but also pupils were more motivated to actively participate in teaching and learning. For other teachers, pupils seemed to remember lessons better and asked critical questions. This made not only pupils feel happy and enjoy lessons but some teachers as well. This implies that language is critical in pedagogy (Davis and Agbenyega, 2012). As it is argued, when children are taught in a language familiar to them, the learning process not only becomes engaging and meaningful (UNESCO, 2014); but also it imbues in them a sense of cultural and national identity (Tikly and Barrett, 2011).

Notwithstanding the relevance of the policy, the research identified some challenges which suggest that there appears not to be a strong commitment from stakeholders, including parents to the implementation of the objectives of the policy in the rural parts of the country. Contrary to the policy aims, pupils' textbooks and or teachers' reference guides are not available in the L1 for the KG and lower primary. As seen in the findings, some teachers relied on the expertise of their colleagues and or pupils. This situation has the potential to disempower the use of the L1 for teaching and learning in schools in these underprivileged parts of the country, which is a disadvantage to many children there, who do not have the luxury to learn in English. As Guerini (2007) points out, the ability to communicate in English Language in Ghana is the privilege of a few people who often reside in the urban parts of the country. The only language that children in most parts of the rural communities have access to is the L1. Hence, the lack of resource materials to facilitate teaching and learning will exclude many children from fully enjoying education as a fundamental human right; what Fraser (1997) refers to as injustice.

Some teachers also bemoaned that they received little or no training in the L1. Yet, they were assigned to basic schools in communities they were not proficient to teach in the L1 at the KG and lower level. The effect is that some teachers were not able to teach and relate classroom lessons to the daily experiences of children in a manner that children understood. Teachers' concerns may be true to some extent as earlier research in the country also reported that the major cause of poor teaching and learning in basic schools in Ghana was teachers' lack of professional mastery of the local language. The researchers observed that many teachers in the country 'do not understand the predominant language of the locality where they are posted to teach...they are compelled to use English Language only as a medium ... of instruction at all levels' (Ankomah et al., 2005: 10). What this seems to imply is that instead of the policy promoting opportunities for all children to learn, it rather denies some,



especially the less privileged ones from engaging in the learning process. As the 2013 EFA Global Monitoring Report makes us understand, 'learning outcomes remain widely unequal if the best teachers are not deployed to remote or poor areas' (UNESCO, 2014: 233). The findings in this research appears to corroborate Trudell's (2007) argument that in many countries in Sub-Sahara Africa, educational policies thrive which advocate L1 use in the lower levels of children's education. However, effective implementation of such policies is rare.

Arguably, the global demand for English has created an incredible appetite for it all over the world. In this research, the perceived importance of the English Language seemed to affect parents' support for teachers in the use of the medium of instruction in schools. Some teachers received little or no support from parents. As some teachers claimed, parents wanted their children to be taught in English Language only so that they could become fluent in it early. For some parents, this was a source of pride for them. Therefore, teaching them in a language (L1) that they were already fluent in amounted to no learning. The findings here both differ and corroborate Muthwii's (2004) study of parental perceptions of the language policy in Kenya. In one dimension, parents in both researches opposed the use of the L1 as a medium of instruction for their wards in school. However, while Muthwii's found that parents felt that the ability to communicate fluently in the English Language provided better access to lucrative jobs for their children, my research found that it was a source of pride for parents. Some scholars describe these perceptions by parents as 'erroneous impressions' which can adversely influence the desire of children to learn in the L1 (EdQual, 2005:12). The ability to read and write effectively in English does not solely and necessarily constitute good education. Rather, a good quality education should be one that empowers learners to discover the capabilities they need to become productive and to improve their livelihoods (EdQual, 2010). There is evidence that mother tongue rather augments learning through the development of the fundamental skills of writing and reading and acquiring and mastering a foreign language (ADEA, 2001). Likewise, Trudell (2007) argues that introducing the mother tongue in the classroom enhances children's understanding and capacity to critically criticise their own thoughts and learning. That said, the perceptions of parents here may not be entirely their fault. Arguably, the apparent lack of sensitisation of parents on the educational relevance of L1 could account for parents' strong demand for L2 throughout children's education. Parents need to be convinced through awareness creation programmes that the use of L1 to teach their children will not compromise the quality of education for their wards. Besides, vigorous and wider engagements about the purpose of education is a significant hallmark for not only raising but also achieving quality education.

## 6. Conclusion

An essential way forward to a sustainable medium of instruction policy and its effective execution, entails considering the realities of the teaching environment as a first step. Although, the medium of instruction policy in Ghana is designed to prepare children for the 21st century and safeguard the country's cultural identity, its implementation in rural schools rather appears to deny children in these parts of the country from benefitting from it. The findings in this research show that the policy is not currently being implemented as defined in the policy document. In this period of globalisation where foreign languages particularly English is gradually gaining strong grounds as an international language, including English Language in the curriculum may be laudable. Nonetheless, children should not be deprived of the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue in the early phases of their education. Encouraging and promoting language proficiency on the part of teachers through effective training programmes is a crucial step towards realising this. The Ghana Education Service together with all relevant stakeholders should commit more resources to train more teachers and organise in-service training programmes for them in the L1. The kind of training teachers receive as well as the way they are posted and transferred does not appear to adequately prepare them to implement the policy, thereby denying many children in these rural schools of the opportunity to learn meaningfully in the L1. Teacher programmes need to educate teachers to be aware of and be able to teach and use local language materials effectively.

Promoting public awareness is also a necessary step going forward. All relevant stakeholders need to embark on awareness creation activities particularly for parents in these rural areas on the implications of the selection of the medium of instruction for their children. Considering the educational relevance of L1, it is necessary to educate them on the significance of L1 at the early stages of children's learning. This can help to win their support for a comprehensive execution of the policy. As Bunyi (1999) maintains, considering the views of local grassroots concerning language is vital to understanding the context in which local implementation of broader national educational policies will be successful. Additional to creating awareness, approving more local languages as part of training for teachers and producing teaching and learning materials in the approved languages for schools can play a key role in changing public views about the academic significance of L1. The Ghana Education Service together with the Ministry of Education should therefore mobilise resources for this purpose.

Teachers should also be posted and or transferred to areas that they have been trained in the pupils' mother tongue and from the upper primary where the medium of instruction changes to English Language only, there should still be avenues to continue to support children in rural areas. That is, the transition for children in these

rural areas needs be a gradual process to allow them to get adjusted to the English Language only.

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