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Effects of Switching from Ghanaian Language to English Language as a Medium of Instruction in Sefwi-Wiawso Municipality

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Abstract

Ghana is implementing National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP) where children in kindergarten to grade three are required to have quality literacy materials, effective instruction, and public support to learn to read and write in their mother tongue and English. This study, therefore, assessed the effects of switching from Ghanaian Language to English Language as a medium of instruction among students in Wiawso Municipality in the Western North Region, Ghana. The population consists of all 60 students and 2 teachers in basic four; and all were purposively sampled. Semi-structured interview guide was used for the data collection. The data gathered were transcribed and coded, using descriptive coding methods, from which themes were generated to construct conceptual linkages. The study yielded three major findings: Students performed poorly academically and had lower class participation when taught using English language as the primary medium of instruction among basic four (4) students. The study also revealed that students and teachers had a positive attitude toward the use of English Language as the primary medium of instruction. As a result, it is recommended that basic four teachers should try as much as possible to blend Ghanaian language with English language at the initial stage until the majority of the students gain interest and confidence in the English language.

Keywords: Ghanaian Language, English Language, Basic Four Students, Academic Performance, Class Participation and Students' Attitude

1.1. Introduction

Academic success of students is contingent on their ability to communicate effectively in the educational environment (Owu-ewie, 2015; Abbasi & Izadpanah, 2018). As a result, countries whose indigenous languages are not used in education have enacted language policies to address communication issues within their educational systems (Owu-ewie, 2015). The disregard for prescribed language policies in education is not unique to Ghana; it affects the majority of African and developing countries that use English or another second language as a medium of instruction

(Kadodo & Mhindu, 2013). Ghana is a multilingual country that speaks approximately 79 indigenous languages in addition to English, which serves as the official language (Lewis 2009). Akan, Dagaare, Dangme, Dagbane, Ewe, Gonja, Ga, Kasem, and Nzema are all officially recognized indigenous languages in the country's constitution and are supported by the government. Asante-Twi, Fante, and Akwapem-Twi are all Akan dialects.

The majority of multilingual nations have adopted bilingual education systems that acknowledge both the child's native

language and a second language, which is typically the nation's official language (Owu-ewie, 2015). Ghana's multilingualism necessitates the implementation of a language policy that utilizes the child's L1 as the medium of instruction at the lower elementary level (KG1 to Primary 3) and English (L2) from the upper primary level (Primary 4) (Owu-ewie, 2015). According to Travers et al. (1993), transitional bilingual programs utilize the learners' native language to promote rapid development of English L2 so that students can quickly switch to an English-only program.

The purpose of transitional models is to prepare students for immersion in English as a second language by utilizing their native tongue exclusively to compensate for their English proficiency deficit (Lemlech, 1994). Robinson (1996) believes that in the African context, official and indigenous languages are viewed as antagonistic rather than complementary, as evidenced by the fact that one of the two languages may be considered more appropriate for specific domains, and the characteristic functions are viewed in binary terms. According to Robinson (1996), local languages are defined by their oral usage, individual/community usage, emotional attachment, village solidarity, and personal allegiances.

However, at the infant level, both parents and children preferred English as the instruction language over their native tongue (Taiwo, n.d.). Westermann (1949) that African schools prefer to use English language as a medium of instruction, even at the basic level with no regard for the use of local language for instruction. Africans, according to Setati (2005), continue to oppose mother tongue education in favor of English, which they view as a knowledge language. One possible explanation for children's preference for English over the L1 is that their parents inform them that they attend school to learn English (Schechter, Sharken-Taboada and Bayley, 1996). Taiwo (n.d.) conducted a study to ascertain children's and parents' language preferences in light of Zimbabwe's 1987 Education Act, which mandates mother tongue instruction in grades 1-3. It was discovered that students and parents preferred English as the infant level language of instruction (Taiwo, n.d.).

It is important to note that the continuous use of English language as medium of instruction at the basic schools has not yielded the needed benefits (Amissah et al. 2001). In view of this many continues to advocate for use of L1 for instruction at the basic level of education. For example, Almohaimeed and Almurshed (2018) asserted that judicious and controlled use of the L1 can be beneficial for social, communicative, and cognitive purposes in L2 learning. Cook (2001) believes that teachers can use the native language of their students to explain difficult grammar, teach new vocabulary, and manage the classroom.

To address the challenges associated with using only English Language for instruction, Clegg and Afitska (2011) summarize pedagogical benefits of using codeswitching in teaching and learning in African classrooms. Clegg and Afitska (2011) assertion is consistent with the threshold hypothesis by Cummins (1976) which posits that **minimum threshold in language proficiency must be passed before a second-language speaker can reap any benefits from second language**. This demonstrates that codeswitching that is transition from Ghanaian language to English language is advantageous for teaching and learning of English language. This helps in clarifying and expanding on concepts, increasing classroom participation, establishing positive classroom relationships, ensuring the lesson runs smoothly, and connecting with the learners' native culture (Qorro, 2009; Tackie-ofosu &

Dosoo, 2015; Ankrah, 2015). According to Yevudey (2012), codeswitching has become a natural choice of code in Ghana as its acceptance and normalcy among bilinguals and multilinguals has grown. Codeswitching from Ghanaian language to English language promotes learners' active engagement and participation in the learning process (Owu-Ewie & Edu-Boandoh, 2014; Cummins, 2000; Shohamy, 2011; Owu-ewie & Eshun, 2019).

Based on threshold theory by Cummins (1967), one of the advantages of using code switching, that switching from Ghanaian language to English language in basic four is to prove performance of the students. However, none of the empirical studies (for example, Owu-ewie & Eshun, 2019; Owu-Ewie, 2012) on code switching in Ghana looked at ease or difficulty with which students in lower primary schools switch from Ghanaian Language (L1) to English Language (L2) in line with the implementation of National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP) in Ghana. This makes it difficult to determine how instruction is effectively done under the framework in Ghana. This study therefore assessed the ease with which pupils switch from Ghanaian Language to English Language during instruction. The study further assessed the effect that the switch from Ghanaian Language to English Language has had on the class participation, attitudes towards teaching and learning and academic performance of the pupils.

This study is very relevant as it would help the policy makers in Ghanaian education to be aware based on empirical evidence, the effect that the implementation of National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP) has had on educational outcomes in Ghana. This would help in the effective and efficient revision of the framework in the future. Moreover, the study is significant as it offers contribution to existing literature about code switching, particularly, switching from Ghanaian Language to English Language in classrooms.

The study progressed as follows; the next section, section 1.2 was the methods and materials, section 1.3 was results, section 1.4 was discussion of the findings and section 1.5 was the conclusions and recommends.

1.2. Methods and Materials

The population consists of all of the students in Pentecost Primary School's Basic Four class, as well as their teachers. Pentecost was chosen for the study because it is one of the few schools in the Sefwi-Wiawso District in Ghana that follows the Basic schools' language policy. Aside from that, Pentecost Primary School is a model school in that all activities are closely monitored by circuit supervisors, head teachers, and the district director. The population of basic four students were 60 and teachers of Basic Four were 2, and all the students and teachers participated in the study. The study purposively selected basic four Basic because English Language as the medium of instruction begins at this level. All the teachers were familiar with the Ghanaian school language policies and had lived with the policy for at least five years.

The researchers visited the school prior to the data collection to seek permission for data collection from the students and the teachers and also to familiarize themselves with the school environment. Permission was granted and 14th-16th, March 2022 was scheduled for the interview with the teachers and the students. The interview was done with the help of a semi-structured interview guide, developed by the researchers consistent with the research objectives. The interviews were conducted by the researchers and every participant was given a maximum of 30

minutes for the interview. The interview for the pupils/students was conducted in English because the school administration insists on using English as the primary means of communication. The researchers with the consents of the interview participants recorded the interviews with a recording app on their Mobile Phones. Participation in the interview was voluntary but all participated for a smooth interview. The data collected were transcribed in English Language. The study used both narrative and thematic analysis. To aid thematic analysis, the researchers coded the transcribed data, using descriptive coding method in ATLAS.ti and generated themes for development of conceptual linkages or framework to show the effect of switch from Ghanaian Language into English Language on the students' academic performance. All the themes and quotations were then synthesized for coherent understanding of the effect of the switch from Ghanaian Language to English Language on students' learning outcomes.

1.3. Findings

Research Question One: Effect of Switching from Ghanaian Language to English Language on the academic performance of Primary Four students

The results show that most of the students had difficulty of findings right English expression for some of the twi expression and this according to most of them affected their writing and speaking skills. Most of the participants (about 83.3%) could communicate fluently and this according them undermined their writing ability and performance in almost all the subjects. According to the two teachers, students' performance in English Language and other subjects always decrease in the first term of Basic Four, before they are able to adjust in the second and third terms. They claimed that students' performance in all subjects, including their favorite subjects, declined unpredictably. It was discovered that in three instances where teachers gave exercises in first term, the majority of students scored below average and this according to the teachers can be blamed on the switching to English Language as many could not write meaningfully.

Below are some of the quotations from the participants to buttress the above findings;

My performance in mathematics, science, English, and social studies has fallen since I came to class four. What pains me is my favourite subject "Social Studies". In most of the class work I have done, I am not even able to score more than 6 (10 years, Female Student)

A teacher from class B interviewed confirmed this when he said:

Usually, when the students come to class four, they find it difficult to adjust to the use of English language in teaching and learning. As a result of that pupils perform poorly in the first term but it improves a bit in the second term. Sometimes when class exercises are given to the pupils, they expect the teacher to translate it to L1 before commencing. Their performance are heavily affected especially in English language (31 years, Male Teacher, Class B)

A teacher from Class A also confirmed this when he said:

The issue with pupils' performance has been an issue for the past years since this policy was introduced. Pupils always perform well in the lower class in all the subjects except in some few cases. However, when the pupils get to basic four especially first term their performance fall in almost all subject. For example the average scores of pupils in class three third term in mathematics and

English were around 75 and 65 respectively, however just this first term their average scores in mathematics and English drop woefully to 66 and 51 respectively (28 Years, Female Teacher, Class A)

Research question Two. Effect of Switching from Ghanaian Language to English Language on Student Class Participation

Based on the interviews with the students and teachers, it was revealed that almost all students do not ask questions and give contributions in class, especially, in the first term in basic four. When the teachers were asked what might have accounted for this, all attributed these to the switching from twi to English Language as required by NALAP.

One of the Teachers indicated in an interview that

Pupils normally participate less in both the whole class discussion and at the group discussion. Sometimes I feel like the pupils do not get what I am teaching but when you ask them do you understand they indicates that they don't understand. When you ask them what aspect make them confuse, then the problem starts. Other times too, the pupils may want to contribute but may start the contribution and end half ways others prefer to complete with the use of the Asante twi. At the group level discussion, pupils always contribute less and most at times those are a little fluency in English try to hijack the class or dominate the discussion. (31 years, Male Teacher, Class B).

One of the pupils in class B affirm this when she said that;

I used to make contribution to lessons in almost all subjects especially in science when I was in class three because in class three we were permitted to express ourselves using English and Asanti Twi but in class four, even if you can't speak English you have to try. Not me alone who is not contributing or talking in class but my friends too. In addition, our class three teacher used to explain things to us especially mathematics in Asante Twi and in our class three classroom there wasn't anything like "Do NOT SPEAK TWI" put on the classroom walls but in class four just look on the walls (9 Years, Male Student, class B)

Research Question three: Effect of Switching from Ghanaian Language to English Language on Attitude toward Teaching and Learning

All the teachers seem to have common understanding of the benefits of the use of English Language as a medium of instruction. Common themes that emerged include, English language is used for instruction in all other subjects at all level of education, English Language breaks language barrier in class as most students have different local language, English language helps people to communicate well with other since it is regarded as official language for many countries, including Ghana. Given this knowledge, teachers feel comfortable to use English Language as primary medium of instrument than their local language. It also emerged from the interviews with the students that students prefer English Language as a primary medium of instruction since they want to speak good English to help them communicate well with friends and parents. They also perceived speaking of good English Language as an indicator of good academic performance and intelligence.

The following quotations are given to complete the above findings;

The use of the L2 is beneficial in that it help the learners to sail through the education ladder, especially at the higher level. English is a core subject at the junior high and senior high schools and a requirement for the learners at the tertiary level. In addition, the English language is employed in the teaching of all the other subjects including mathematics. Moreover, English is an official language for many nations and as such the use of English language as medium of instruction help people to communicate well with others after school (31 years, Male Teacher, Class B).

One learner from group A indicated as follows;

I like the teacher when he is teaching us using English because I want to be able to speak English to my friends and to my mother when I get home. My mother has been asking me to learn how to speak English so when teachers use it to teach I like it. (9 Years, Male Student, Class A).

A learner from group B also indicated that,

Hmm, even though I find it difficult to understand all English language expressions, I like my teacher when he teaches us using the English language. By the time we leave school we can also speak good English like my friends at the other private schools. (10 Years, Female Student, Class B).

1.4. Discussions

On the effect of switching from Ghanaian language to English language on the academic performance of the learners, the study revealed that students' academic achievement is negatively affected, particularly in the first term of basic four. This is consistent with the assertion that switching from local language to a foreign language of instruction has a significant effect on learners' performance and success (Owu-ewie & Eshun, 2019). This also supports the notion that using children's L1/mother tongue in school is beneficial emotionally, psychologically, linguistically, and academically (UNESCO, 1953). Switching from local language to English language initially negatively affect the thinking ability and writing skills as most students find it difficult to know English expression for most of the local language expression (Kioko et al., 2008). As performance in schools depends most often on what students write in examination, they are graded lower due to weaknesses in fluency in English language expression and writing skills (Owu-Ewie, 2012). This means that switching from local language, for example Asanti Twi to English language most often lead to lower students' academic performance. According to Qorro (2009), the corollary of this is that students who are not proficient in the language of instruction perform poorly in subjects taught in that language

On the effect of switching on the extent to which students participated in the teaching and learning process, the study found that students participate less in class when English is the primary language of instruction. This finding corroborates those of the following studies. The use of L1 in education fosters learners' active engagement and participation in the learning process (Andoh-Kumi, 2001; Owu-Ewie & Edu-Boandoh, 2014). On the other hand, the use of an unfamiliar language in education violates the structure of thought, creating a barrier to effective classroom communication and discussion (Mekonnen, 2009). By utilizing the

learners' native language, the likelihood of them participating in the learning process increases. It rebalances the learning environment in favor of the student (Eshun & Owu-Ewie, 2019). Additionally, Kioko (2015) discovered that a learner-centered approach thrives in environments where learners are proficient in the instructional language. The following statements were made by participants (both teachers and students) to corroborate this:

On the effect of the switching on students' and teachers' attitudes toward the use of English as the primary medium of instruction, the study found that both students and teachers expressed a favorable attitude toward the use of L2 as the primary medium of instruction. This is consistent with Taiwa's (n.d.) finding that pupils and teachers preferred English as the language of instruction at the infant level, despite difficulties in accessing the curriculum through the use of the second language. According to Setati (2005), Africans continue to resist mother tongue education in favor of English, which they view as a language of knowledge in instruction, as the majority of students interviewed preferred to read and write in English rather than the local language. One possible explanation for preferring English over the L1 is that children are told by their parents that they go to school to learn English (Potowski, 2004). Similarly, Amissah et al. (2001) noted that students want their teachers to teach in English language, since they perceive English language as indicator of intelligence. This is more peculiar in Ghana as those who are fluent in English language are seen as wise and intelligent people over those who often communicate in their local language (Owu-ewie & Eshun, 2019). However, Tackie-Ofosu and Dosoo (2015) noted that situation where speaking of English language was seen as synonymous to intelligence in Ghana is changing as now many parents prefer their wards to be taught in their local language at the infant stage. This suggests that education embarked upon by Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service in the recent times is making some impact and the education needs to be on-going.

1.5. Conclusion

The study focused on effect of switching from Ghanaian language to English language in basic four. Data was gathered from 60 students and 2 teachers, using interview guide. Based on thematic and narrative analysis, the following conclusions are made. Firstly, switching from Ghanaian language to English language reduces academic performance of students in almost all the subjects in the first term in basic four. The decrease in performance is due to difficulties in translating certain (Asanti Twi) expression in English language. Secondly, switching from Ghanaian language to English reduced active class participation of students as they found it difficult to ask questions and make contributions in English language in class. However, both teachers and students preferred instruction in English language over their local language as English language is regarded as common medium of communication and seen as synonymous to intelligence.

To ensure effective transition from Asanti twi to English language, teachers should use the L1 in some situations to make things easier for the students. Thus, as students' progress from basic three to basic four, the transition should be gradual in order to maintain their interest in the teaching and learning situation.

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Contributions of Authors

¹ MA wrote the entire study, took part in the data collection and transcription of the interview data and analyzed the interview data. MA also responded to all reviewers comments.

² PKA took part in the data collection and transcription of the interview data, assisted in the data analysis and proofed the entire work.

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