

Language of instruction in elementary school education: The tension between policy and implementation



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Different language policy aspirations



- **Policies to facilitate communication**
- **Policies that use national languages for learning**
- **Policies to satisfy nationalist demand**

(Nazam Halaoui, ADEA Newsletter, 2005)

Policies to facilitate communication



- Communication is best when involving a language understood by the speaker and that the transmission of learning is best when it uses a language understood by the learner
- The use of a foreign language is abnormal
- The better the communication, the better the chances of retaining educational content
- Promote the use of language understood by the learner in the first few years of education
- Intended to improve the quality of education from a cultural point of view

Policies that use national languages for learning



- National language(s) should be both the official language and the language of learning
- Foreign language should be replaced by a national African language
- Language of learning is not restricted to the first three years of primary schooling
- Is a policy towards Africanizing education – achieving purely African content using African language
- Methodological flaw: the longer the use of the African language the harder the transition to colonial language
- Social flaw: closing off the eternal world to someone who has only been educated in an African language

Policies to satisfy nationalist demands



- All languages are equal and hence colonial language must give way to an African language
- Foreign language is a symbol of colonialism but national language is a symbol of national identity
- Foreign language is used as a symbol of good relations with former power
- The policy usually stops with legislation or at most at the experimental stage

Ethnic and language landscape in Ghana



- **Five major ethnic groups: Akan (45.3%), Mole-Dagbane (15.2%), Ewe (11.7%), Ga-Adangbe (7.3%), Guan (4%) and others (17.5%)**
- **99 linguistic and cultural groups**
- **No part of Ghana is ethnically homogenous**
- **13 languages are written**

Language Policy in Ghana



In the first three years of primary education, the Ghanaian language prevalent in the local area is to be used as the medium of instruction, while English is studied as a subject. From Primary Four, English replaces the Ghanaian language as medium of instruction and the Ghanaian language is then treated as just another subject on the timetable.

Attitude towards Language Policy



- Use of the Ghanaian language as medium of instruction in Grades 1 – 3 (English in Grades 4-6) and as a subject of study in Ghanaian schools.
- Belief that the policy itself largely accounts for the low level of literacy in English among pupils and students.
- Apathy due to lack of resources, teacher preparedness, and other concerns confront schools' ability to carry out the policy as intended.

Attitude towards Language Policy



- **Negative attitudes toward the use of Ghanaian languages as medium of instruction**
- **Mandating and implementing English-only policies from grade one that oppose the national one by private schools and some public schools**

Why language policy is not working



- There is complete lack of textbooks or other curriculum materials written in Ghanaian languages. All subjects to be taught using the Ghanaian language have their texts written in English
- Teachers who are non-speakers of or non-literate in particular Ghanaian language are posted to areas where such languages are predominant
- Generally, parents, headteachers, teachers, supervisors and community members prefer instruction in English with some parents and community members rooting for bilingual approach

Why language policy is not working



- The issue of multi-language groups in schools is not necessarily an urban phenomenon but a rural one as well
- In some schools teachers do not speak the predominant language of the area
- A number of Ghanaian teachers cannot read and write the local language very well
- Many teachers have received no training in using Ghanaian language as medium of instruction

Conclusion



- In a multilingual country like Ghana implementing a language policy is not a straight forward issue and is more complex than many think.
- Improving quality of education requires that children are taught in an appropriate language. But what is the appropriate language?



THANK YOU