CHALLENGES IN CONDUCTING ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN GHANA

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Abstract

The tri-focal functions of the academic workforce in a Higher Educational Institution are research, teaching and community engagement. The study is an attempt to empirically identify, investigate and report the experiences of language tutors relative to the challenges they encounter in the process of conducting research and publication. The study sample was all the 16 language tutors from the Colleges of Education who had gathered to undertake Conference Marking for the first semester of the 2020/2021 academic year. The study is qualitative and adopts interview as the main data collection instrument. The data were analysed using descriptive and thematic analysis. The outcome of the study reveals that the language tutor encounters several language-related challenges in the conduct of research and publication such as language barrier between researcher and study sample, language of journals and publication outlets, language of targeted audience/readership, language of technology, attitude towards language, challenge with qualitative nature of language studies, language policy inconsistencies, conceptualization issues, writing skill issues and funding. The findings of this study have implications for designing measures to increase research output and enculturate research attitude in the Colleges. It is recommended that a future study would adopt the mixed method approach and expand the study sample to make the outcome more generalizable.

*Keywords***:** Research, Publication, Teaching, Community Engagement, Challenges

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1. Introduction

The tri-focal functions of the academic workforce in Higher Educational Institutions are research, teaching and community engagement or extension services (Badat, 2009; Chireshe et al, 2014). Among the three, research is deemed central because what to teach is informed by research while community services are established through research (Chireshe, 2010). However, while knowledge production reflected in the conduct and publication of research outcomes are fast increasing in the rest of the world, the case of Africa as a producer of knowledge is decreasing gradually (Njuguna & Itegi, 2013). In fact, Azizah and Budiman (2017) put the research figures specifically that there are about 5.5 million scholars, 2,000 publishers and 17,500 research/higher education institutions across the globe that are engaged in research projects.

However, the Sub-Saharan Africa, which Ghana, the context of this study, is a part, contributes less than 1% of the world's research and scientific outputs (Ngongalah, 2018; Njuguna & Itegi, 2013). This is despite the fact that Africa accounts for 14% of the world's population (Kumwenda et al, 2017). These low and worrying research outputs must be of critical concern to the African academic research community. Contributing only a small part of global knowledge production in terms of research is definitely not an exciting revelation. What prevents the African academic from conducting more robust and regular research projects deserves to be investigated, if the appropriate measures can be developed to foster research productivity. This paper is, therefore, a contribution to the attempt to investigate, reveal and critical conversations on the challenges the African academic researcher encounter in conducting research projects, from the perspective of the language teacher in higher education institutions in Ghana, specifically, the Colleges of Education.

Researchers are unanimous in their conviction that research is a 'complicated subject', 'difficult', complex', 'stressful', 'sophisticated' and a 'critical challenging task' (Murshed et al, 2020; Qasem & Zayid, 2019; Yalçin & Yalçin, 2017). This implies that the process of research is not a simple straightforward process. However, regardless of its difficulties, because tertiary institutions are the main center for knowledge production and advancement and these can only be achieved through research, conducting research is a non-negotiable enterprise for academics in higher educational institutions, in addition to the teaching and extension services (Brown, 2019; Erdem, 2013). In fact, one characteristic of higher education institutions that distinguishes them from the other levels of education is the ability and requirement of the academic workforce to conduct and publish research (Sewagegn & Diale, 2021). Indeed, the local, national and international reputation and status of higher education institutions are closely rooted in the research profiles of their academic workforce, reflected in the publication records and citations of published works of their academic staff (Woodiwss, 2012).

After a research has been conducted, the second phase is publication (Amusan and Olanisini, 2011). Sewagegn and Diale (2021; 28) insist that, "If the research is not documented/published, this equates to it not being done". In fact, a crucial part of research is

publication, where the 'new knowledge' arriving out of the research is put into accessible and readable forms and disseminated widely in scholarly outlets or journals (Kapp, Albertyn & Frick, 2011; Ocholla, 2007). It is important to publish one's research findings because it is only through publication that the findings, ideas, 'new knowledge' and discoveries of a research are documented and made known and accessible to a wider research community locally (within one's institution), nationally and/or internationally (Chireshe, Oupa & Soul, 2014; Neave, Connor & Crawford, 2007; Svensson & Wood, 2006). Publication is also a form of documentation that becomes a resource material that is used in advancing further research and scientific and empirical arguments (Parasuraman & Mueen Ahmed, 2013).

The fact must be emphasized that research outcomes cannot be published in just any outlet. It can only be done in professional or academic journals, patents, creative works, books, peer refereed conference papers, book chapters, monographs and research reports such as thesis and dissertations (Chireshe, 2010). Derebssa (2004) also adds some more publishing outlets such as editorials, workshops, symposia, seminars and newsletters. When the findings of a study are published in these outlets, it helps to promote the positive impact of research on development practices.

Research and publication in the Colleges of Education (CoEs) in Ghana are a relatively new enterprise. The need for the academic workforce to conduct research and publication became an integral part of the CoE structure from 2018, when, the CoEs, as part of the 'tertiarisation' processes, were converted from diploma-awarding institutions to degree-awarding ones. Research and publication have become a requirement to secure promotion and the extension of an academic's tenure in the College. Generally, it is established that academics and researchers encounter various challenges in their line of research duty, especially in the context of developing countries such as Ghana where efficient and effective research facilities are rare (Njuguna & Itegi, 2013). Identifying these challenges and their causes are some of the fundamental steps towards enhancing research output in Africa (Ngongalah et al, 2018). This study therefore aims to explore the language-related research challenges of the academic staff in Higher Educational Institutions in Ghana, specifically, the Colleges of Education. The findings of this study will be instrumental in the development of interventions to increase research output and enculturate research attitude in the Colleges. The study answers the question; *what challenges do language teachers in the Colleges of Education in Ghana encounter in the process of conducting research and publication?*

2. Literature Review

Research is the scientific and systematic investigation of a phenomena or a problem in a given discipline (Pingle, 2013). The term 'research' can be expressed as a hyphenated compound word, 're-search', which connotes that the subject of study could be already known, but requires to be studied again, for one reason or the other (Bandele, 2004; Pingle, 2013). Typically, the outcome of a research should establish facts, introduce new or expand existing knowledge, solve problems, inform decisions and, generally, push back the frontiers of

ignorance (Bandele, 2004; Pingle, 2013). Creswell (2002) cited in Pingle (2013:149) elucidates that research is a cyclical process that starts with

> *identifying a research problem or issue of study. It then involves reviewing the literature, specifying a purpose for the study, collecting and analyzing data, and forming an interpretation of the information. This process culminates in a report, disseminated to audiences that is evaluated and used in the educational community.*

The current study is triggered by the general lack of literature and empirical documentation on the language-specific challenges faced by language scholars in undertaking research and publication in higher educational institutions in Ghana. Many of the available related studies on the topic are conducted outside the context of Ghana, and often, the focus has been on the challenges researchers encounter generally. For instance, in their study entitled, "Research in Institutions of Higher Education in Africa: Challenges and Prospects", Njuguna and Itegi (2013) examined the challenges and implications of research in higher education institutions in Africa. After reviewing textbooks, journals and personal experiences of researchers as the sources of data, the research confirmed that researchers face an array of academic and non-academic challenges in their line of duty. Some of the challenges include research capacity (deficiency in the technical skills and competencies of individuals engaged in the research), financial constraints, policy issues (most developing countries do not have national and institutions policies on the use of the outcomes of research), publishing issues (insufficient home-grown publication outlets, hence, researchers are compelled to publish in international journals or leave their materials to gather dusts on shelves), incongruent political patterns in developing countries (most African political leaders are not ready to accept the truths exposed in research) and information technology (research is fast becoming a technology-driven enterprise but many African researchers are not technologically inclined). Njuguna and Itegi's (2013) study found all these factors as challenges the African researcher faces.

In a similar study, Kumwenda, Niang, Orondo, William, Oyinlola, Bongo and Chiwona (2017) adopted the qualitative exploratory design to investigate the challenges of young African scientists in their research careers. The participants were the young researchers who attended the Teaching and Research in Natural Sciences for Development workshop held in Malawi in September 2015. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to solicit data from the 15 respondents. The outcome of the study revealed that young African researchers face challenges such as the lack of funds, lack of mentorship, lack of research and writing skills, lack of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic), lack of interest in research by policymakers and heavy workload, that is, juggling work as full-time teachers and researchers. The study also looked at how some of the challenges can be mitigated. The respondents suggested that their research challenges can be curbed through the provision of research grants/funds, establishment of mentorship programmes and frequent training and professional development on research and writing skills.

While the above studies focused on the challenges of researchers in the African context, other studies also focused on other non-African contexts. One of such study is Bakhshi, Weisi and Yousofi (2019), who explored "the insights and experiences of ELT (English Language Teaching) faculty members regarding the challenges of conducting qualitative research (QR) in the Iranian higher education context" (p. 243). Data were solicited using semi-structured interviews from 20 ELT faculty members. The interviews were then recorded, transcribed and analysed employing the grounded theory approach. The outcome of the study revealed that, the main challenges that ELT faculty members in Iran face in conducting qualitative research are the dominance of positivism in the Iranian educational context, lack of training and QR course in the ELT postgraduate syllabus, the time consuming nature of qualitative research, interpretation and analysis of data, writing proficiency and lack of funding.

The study of Qasem and Zayid (2019) also investigated the problems and challenges in the writing of research projects in ESL (English as Second Language) in Saudi Arabia. Using questionnaire and informal interviews, 60 final year undergraduate students from the Department of English and the Department of Computer Science of the University of Bisha were engaged in the study. These final year students, as part of the requirement in attaining a degree, are required to undertake research projects. The study sought to unravel the challenges these students go through when conducting the research. The outcome of the study reveals that 70% of the participants hold the view that conducting and writing the projects in English language is problematic. They prefer to conduct and write the research in their L1 (native language). The study further revealed that the lack of knowledge on the methodology, inability to decide on researchable topics/issues, lack of interest/motivation in research, lack of knowledge on subject matter, inability to find relevant related references/studies and insufficient funding are challenges of the researchers.

The studies of Njuguna and Itegi (2013) and Kumwenda et al (2017) focused on African researchers and the general challenges they encounter in their research projects. Their studies focused on the African context. However, outside the African context, Bakhshi et al (2019) and Qasem and Zayid (2019) investigated the challenges of ELT faculty and students in Iran and Saudi Arabia respectively relative to conducting research. It is discovered in these earlier studies that researchers face challenges in their line of duty. What, however, is yet to receive the needed scholarly attention is the challenges in conducting a language research and publication? The lack of studies on the challenges of language researchers in Ghana makes policy makers and relevant stakeholders lack knowledge on what language-specific challenges teachers face in conducting research in Ghana. This 'knowledge gap' makes it difficult for policy makers and stakeholders to design the appropriate measures to mitigate such challenges. Hence, the current study anticipates filling this 'knowledge gap'.

3. Methods

The main purpose of this study is to investigate and report the experiences, relative to the challenges, of College language teachers in conducting research and publication, which, since 2018, have become a mandatory part of their work as teachers in the tertiary. The anticipation

is that, when these challenges are revealed, documented and made accessible, relevant stakeholders can then design measures to curb them and make the Colleges a research and publication hub, just as is happening in the universities.

The qualitative approach is adopted for the study and the design is case study (Atai et al., 2018). This design is considered appropriate for the study in consonance with the argument of Bakhshi et al (2019) that investigating the life experiences, challenges and realities of a group of people is ideally done through a qualitative approach. This is because, a qualitative approach offers an in-depth description of the immeasurable qualities of human experiences (AlMarwani, 2020). The study examines the challenges of language researchers/teachers and the qualitative approach affords the researchers the opportunity to critically assess the lived experiences and challenges of the language teachers. The main data collection instrument for the study was semi-structured interview. This was adopted to gain the standpoints of the language teachers regarding their language-related challenges in conducting research. The interview consisted of 15 open-ended questions vetted by two experts in the field, ensuring the validity of the instrument (Williams, 2021). These two experts have PhD in Applied Linguistics and have several scholarly publications in language teaching and learning, aside the fact that they have a minimum of 5 years teaching experience in the university. The study sample was all the 16 language tutors from the Colleges of Education who had gathered to undertake Conference Marking for the first semester of the 2020/2021 academic year. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. Ethically, participation was absolutely voluntary. No participant was compelled against their wish to participate. In fact, the participants were given explanations on the purpose of the study, and assured that any information they provided was being used solely for academic purposes. Hence, making oneself available to be interviewed was deemed as a consent.

The analysis of data was done guided by Creswell's (2007) 3-step outline for analyzing data for a qualitative research. The first step was preparing and organizing the data. Here, the oral interviews were transcribed and put into a text form. Second, reducing the data into themes. At this stage, the text data were put into thematic areas through the process of coding. Thus, similar and related issues emerging from the data were collapsed into common themes. This was to render the data easier to analyse. The final step is the presentation of the data. Here, Creswell insinuate that tables, figures and/or description/discussions can be used to present the data. In the study, description and discussions have been used to analyse and present the data. Having coded the transcribed data into themes, 10 themes emerged and are discussed in the next section. Each theme is supported by relevant excerpts from the interview.

4. Results and Discussion

Through deductive coding, the qualitative data were thematised and examined (Gehman et al, 2018). These findings are presented in table 4.1 below.

Table 1. Results of the qualitative data analysis

Codes	Definition	Sample of Coded Text
Language Barrier between Researcher and Study Sample	The researcher speaks and uses a language different from what the sample speaks and uses.	*My studies focus on endangered languages even though I speak Twi, a dominant language.*
Language Demands of Journals and Publication Outlets	A journal requests for manuscripts to be written in a specific language, e.g. English, French but a research writes a manuscript in a language such as Fante, Twi	*A journal rejected a paper I submitted last year saying I should translate everything into English*
Language of Targeted Audience/Readership	Published articles are supposed to be read by an audience some of whom speak and use languages other than that of the researcher.	*A lot of people in academia, especially from international communities, cannot read Fante.*
Language of Technology	Technology is indispensable in modern day research. Predominantly, technology is configured in English, hence, any attempt to write a manuscript in another language becomes challenging.	*Computers are configured in English. Therefore, writing in a local language such as Dagbani is difficult.*
Attitude towards language	People whose language are investigated feel they are 'owners' of the language and not see why an outsider/researcher should investigate their language	*A sample I used for a study told me that they own their language hence cannot be part of a research process conducted by a non-native*
Challenge with Qualitative Nature of Language Research	Qualitative research investigates complex phenomenon. But unfortunately, after going through all the hectic processes, its findings cannot be generalized.	*Language studies are ideally carried out qualitatively, or at most, the mixed method approach. Look at how complex a qualitative process, only to complete and not be able to generalize the findings. It's worrying*
Language policy inconsistencies	Ghana has gone through series of language policies. In fact, the changes are related to political regimes.	*Almost every political regime changes, modifies the language policy of the country. The inconsistency does not help language research.*
Conceptualization issues	Language belongs to the people. When conducting a research in a non-native	*Language carries the concept of its 'owners'. If*

	language, certain 'technical' ideas/concepts would not come to the researcher easily	*you're a part of the natives, it is sometimes difficult to fully grasp some of the some 'technical' concepts expressed in the language.*
The Technicality of Writing Skill	Writing is proven to be the most complex of the four language skills.	*Writing is a difficult process.*
Funding	Money to sponsor research activities is major challenge	*I use my meager salary to fund research projects I conduct.*

The codes are developed and elaborated in the sub-sections below and supported with evidences or extracts from the interview.

4.1   Language Barrier between Researcher and Study Sample

In his study, Squires (2008) recounts that language barrier between a researcher and the participants is an impediment to the research process. Given the high rate of illiteracy in Ghana, where reading and writing, especially in English, are problematic to many people, engaging participants in studies that would require them to read and write in response to data solicitation becomes a problem (Bronteng, 2018). Language tutors who conduct studies in English language find it difficult in conducting action researches and field studies that, ideally, would need participants to respond to questionnaire and other data collection instruments in English. In such situations, the language researcher orally translates the questionnaire to the participants in their local language for them to be able to respond appropriately. More so, in cases where the respondents cannot write, the researcher is compelled to listen to the participants make oral contributions and write the responses. In situations where the researcher does not speak the native language of the participants, the work becomes even more laborious and challenging. This finding corroborates the studies of Larkin et al (2007) and Temple (2002) who found that language barrier is a major challenge to a research process. A participant shared her story.

> *Last year, I wanted to investigate and document the Mole language, which is an endangered language. However, the native people, especially the older folks, elders, chiefs, who I considered as the actual custodians of the language could not communicate with me in English. They were ready to cooperate in the research process but language became a huge barrier. Even though I was able to successfully carry out the research eventually, I didn't find it easy at all.*

Another participant also emphasized,

> *Even though I am an Ewe, I have taken interest in the Dagaare language of the people of the Northern region. This is a language I don't speak, read, write or understand. I must confess that conducting studies in non-familiar languages is a very difficult endeavour, but as a student of linguistics, I need to do it.*

4.2   Language Demands of Journals and Publication Outlets

One of the seeming natural sequences of conducting a research is to publish the findings. In fact, Amusan and Olanisini (2011) refer to publication as the 'second phase' of research. In academia, publication serve as the outlet where research findings and reports are released for a wider audience to access and peruse the information and knowledge therein usually done through written documents, often made available on a website and distributing copies through magazines, editorials, books, periodicals and scholarly journals (Njuguna & Itegi, 2013). Most researchers would love to publish their research reports and findings in reputable journals, especially in the context of higher education institutions in Ghana where the number and quality of publications of a teacher contribute to one's promotion and security of tenure. In fact, several researchers believe in the aphorism that, 'if it is not published, it was never done' (Sewagegn & Diale, 2021). In other words, one would not love to go through all the herculean challenges of conducting a research only to finish and hide it somewhere where no one would have access to and read.

However, most of the international journals, and even national journals, where Ghanaian researchers consider ideal for publication require that the manuscripts are predominantly written in English language (Azizah & Budiman, 2017). In fact, at the moment, there are no known international journals that accept manuscripts written in any of the native languages in Ghana. Chang (2014) justifies the situation arguing that English is the lingua franca of the world, which is frequently used by both native and non-native users, especially for academic purposes. Similarly, Graddol (2006) is emphatic that English language is increasingly used for education across most universities of the world. These reasons, among others, make it ideal that, English is used as a medium of academic publication given that the publication usually targets audiences and readers in the university/academic communities. This makes language scholars, whose manuscripts are coded in the local language, find it challenging to publish in the reputable journals. A participant insinuated,

> *I am yet to meet any international journal that accepts manuscripts written in Ahanta language. I conducted a study in Ahanta language last year and the findings were very intriguing but, after sending it to about 5 journals, all of them rejected it. I was told to translate it into English before it will be accepted.*

Another respondent shared his experience,

> *Those of us whose research interests are in the local languages in Ghana are really suffering. Most times, we wish to publish in the local languages in order*

> *to sell these languages to the international community but journals are not willing to accept our papers. I have suffered countless rejections for papers I have written in my local language, Nzema.*

These findings corroborate the assertion of Azizah and Budiman (2017; 191) that, "the dominance of English in international research has been becoming a current issue in publication. This has made writing scholarly articles in English become increasingly necessary."

4.3   Language of Targeted Audience/Readership

Generally, the readership of research publications is the general academic and reading community. However, every research work has a specific target group of people who are either directly affected by the problem investigated in the research or whose attention is being drawn by the research to undertake actions to solve the problem. Writing the research in a language or register that suits these groups is non-negotiable. Generally, a research should be seen as contributing relevant knowledge to the specific target group. This targeted group can be discipline-based, such as people in medicine, engineering, education, psychology, philosophy, etc, or geographical-based such as Africa, Asia, Europe, etc. or gender-based such as feminists, children, widows, homosexuals, etc or any other target.

Therefore, while conducting a study and scripting the manuscript, the language of such targeted audience becomes one of the utmost priorities. There is no point in coding a manuscript in a language that cannot be read and understood by the targeted audience. The studies of Hart (2007) and Bhatia (2002) equally emphasize the need for a researcher to take a critical consideration of the language of the targeted audience. They opine that the researcher should consider the goals of the audience, characteristics of the community/audience and the linguistic traditions of the audience. A respondent shared his experience by quizzing,

> *How many people can read a Tuule language? I speak Tuule and I have conducted some studies in the Tuule language but if I publish the paper in that language, how many people can read and understand the knowledge in it? If care is not taken, the knowledge I would wish to share in the paper will go unread.*

4.4   Language of Technology

Technology has become a major tool in academic research. In fact, conducting a scientific and empirical study in this modern era without the employment of technological tools is nearly impossible, if not totally impossible. In their study entitled, "The significant role of Technology in Conducting the Academic Research", Murshed et al (2020) established that technology has become an indispensable tool in modern day research and it is time efficient, saves effort and cost effective. However, the default language coded in many of these technological tools is the English language. It is therefore difficult for a researcher in the L1

languages in Ghana to efficiently and conveniently use technology in their research. For instance, some of the letters of the L1 alphabets cannot be found on the computer, hence, typing a research report on the computer becomes a challenge. One would have to purchase or download and install several cost-intensive softwares that have configurations of some of the L1 alphabets before he/she is able to complete the research task. A participants recounts,

> *In fact, conducting, reporting and writing research findings using modern technological tools is another challenge of the language researcher. Many of the L1 characters are yet to be installed onto these tools, therefore, it is difficult to manipulate these tools effectively in the research process.*

Apart from computers which rarely have writing tools for the native letters of the alphabets, other technological tools such "speech-to-text" transcription tools are also not able to fully recognize the intonations and pronunciations of Ghanaian speakers of English. Therefore, using acoustic and other voice/sound-recording devices is a bane to language scholars. A participant shared his experience,

> *I was using a "speech-to-text" transcription tool on my mobile device. However, there are several times the tool could not recognise my speeches. The technological devices are programmed with the standard spoken English so when the Second language speaker speaks, it is sometimes difficult for the tool to recognise exactly what is pronounced.*

4.5   Attitude towards language

One of the major aims of research is to identify a problem, investigate it and, ideally, proffer plausible solutions to the identified problem or expose the problem to the necessary stakeholders and draw their attention to it so that the next necessary steps could be taken (Ngongalah, 2018). However, if the attitude of the people, whose 'problem' is being investigated, suggest that they do not recognise the 'problem' as one, their participation in the research process is often passive, and sometimes, uncooperative.

Some of the respondents indicated that, one of the challenges they face when conducting studies into the language situations of people is that, sometimes, the people usually feel they do not need any 'academic' or 'third party' to tell them anything about their 'own' language. They see themselves as the custodians or 'owners' of the language, hence, no one has any better knowledge in it than them to investigate the 'problems' of their 'own' language. Some respondents shared their experiences,

> *Some native speakers believe that they are the custodians of their language. Therefore, if you identify a problem as an academic and wish to investigate and expose it, the people become jittery. They are not comfortable with such exercise and tend not to be cooperative in the research process.*

Another respondent indicated how a group of participants believe that their language carries their identity. Hence, availing themselves for a study that seeks to unravel and document their 'language problems' is akin to cooperating to a process that seeks to reveal their shortcomings and washing their 'dirty linen' in public. A respondent insinuated,

> *I had an experience where I was investigating some phonetic and pronunciation problems among a group of people in their native language. The people refused to actively participate and avail themselves for data collection. And their justification was that, their language is their identity, hence, they won't collaborate with anyone who wants to wash their dirty linen in public.*

4.6   Challenge with Qualitative Nature of Language Research

Bakhshi et al (2019: 248) argue that qualitative research has gained a "significant status" in Applied Linguistics/Language studies. Generally, a qualitative study investigates complex social and life phenomena and undertakes an in-depth analysis and description of same (Atai et al., 2018). The language of people encapsulates their identity, belief system, culture and tradition. These immeasurable and unquantifiable qualities are best investigated using a qualitative research approach. Unlike quantitative studies which take interest in the numerical strength of cases and, hence, are able to draw generalizable conclusions, qualitative studies usually engage a limited number of cases to be able to do an in-depth analysis and description. This makes the results of qualitative research difficult to generalize.

Some of the language scholars believe that a qualitative study is a very complex, difficult and time-consuming enterprise (Rahimi et al., 2019). Having to read, understand, highlight, code, analyse and offer in-depth descriptions and interpretations of the data are very challenging and time-consuming as compared to quantitative studies where statistical tools and devices are able to aid with the interpretation of data. One of the participants indicated that,

> *Conducting qualitative studies is a difficult enterprise. It is too time-consuming*

Another participant noted,

> *To think that after going through all the laborious processes of a qualitative study, the findings and interpretations are deemed subjective (not objective) is discouraging.*

4.7   Language policy inconsistencies

It is a proven fact that, Ghana has had a very checkered language policy history (Fenyi et al, 2022). The language policies have been somewhat consistent with the changing regimes of political leadership in the country. In the past two decades, Ghana has recorded over five language policies (Ankrah, 2015). Therefore, the outcomes and relevance of any research project conducted in the area of language policy risks being relevant over a short period of time. This is a challenge to the language researcher. After committing a good amount of time,

energy, capital and other resources to conduct a research, one would wish that the relevance of the outcome would last over a decent period of time before it is classified as dated. However, with the unpredictable changes in the policies, a study conducted six months ago can be said to be dated because a new language policy could be introduced in that period, which would erase the effect and use of such research outcome (Owu-Ewie, 2006). On this point, a participant indicated,

> *The inconsistencies in the language policies in Ghana do not make studies in language policies attractive. Conduct a language policy research today and its usefulness will erase in just about a year or two due to the introduction of another policy.*

4.8   Conceptualization issues

Language is used to talk about the concepts and realities of its 'owners'. What people say, how they speak, the vocabularies/lexemes in their language and their expressions reflect their reality. In other words, people use their language to talk about their reality. Therefore, if one is not a part of the native speaker's reality, understanding their language thoroughly like a native speaker becomes difficult. Language researchers who do not work on, in or with their native languages but rather with other languages may encounter problems with thoroughly understanding some of the 'technical' concepts in the language. This challenge is underscored in the study of Karimnia (2013) who found that non-native speakers of a language usually find it challenging to make an absolute knowledge claim. Earlier, the study of Flowerdew (1999) had made the same claims as well.

For instance, English is a non-native language in Ghana. It is spoken and used in Ghana as a second or official language (Fenyi et al, 2021). Some language researchers teach and conduct studies on English language. However, a number of these researchers have never lived in countries or places where English is the native language, neither have they encountered or worked with natives of the English language. Their entire knowledge about the English language is what they have read and learnt in books. For such scholars, conceptualizing some of the issues in the language becomes difficult, especially on issues that are entirely peculiar to the experiences of the natives. This finding is consistent with the study of Dong (1998) who studied non-native English speaking post-graduate students in USA and found that such researchers are unable to make absolute knowledge claims. A participant cited examples of experiences such as the seasons of the weather- summer, winter, fall and autumn- which reflect the reality of the natives but are not experienced the context of the study. One can only depend on his imaginations to conceptualize these. A participant opined,

> *For those of us who are scholars in ESL, sometimes, conceptualizing some of the native-specific issues is difficult. Our understanding of these concepts are often imaginary and this impacts the quality of our research outputs.*

Another participant insinuated,

Language belongs to the people- natives. So, if you are not part of the people, their language does not belong to you. It is sometimes difficult to thoroughly understand concepts in other people's language. Take for example, the concept of COLOURS. Look at the colours below (showing me a chart). They are different shades of Pink.

PINK	BABY PINK	CARNATION PINK	KOBI
#FFC0CB	#F4C2C2	#F7ACCF	#EC9EC0
NADESHIKO PINK	MAUVELOUS	SALMON PINK	PINK FLAMINGO
#EEA7C6	#FFA3B8	#FF92A5	#FC74FD
HOT PINK	FRENCH PINK	ULTRA RED	BRINK PINK
#FF69B4	#FB6F90	#FF647F	#FB607F
FIERY ROSE	SHOCKING PINK	ROSE	BARBIE PINK
#FB4570	#FC0FC0	#FF0080	#DA1884

Figure 1. Chart of shade and language

In the Ghanaian context, all these colours above are pink. Therefore, conceptualizing these specific shades might be quite cumbersome for the second language speaker as compared to the native. This issue cuts across many other concepts in a non-native use of language.

4.9   The Technicality of Writing Skill

Writing is generally a difficult skill for researchers (Qasem & Zayid, 2019). In fact, writing is proven to be the most difficult of the four language competencies. Even for the language teacher, the skill of writing does not come in handy, especially because, every research and publication outlets have their own peculiar writing demands in terms of the structure, wording and format of the texts (Singh, 2019). In fact, Nolan and Rocco (2009) believe that writing for publication is different and more technical than writing any 'normal' essay or responding to examination questions. Many language teachers have had cause to recount situations where their research projects were rejected by various journals and publishers for failure to meet their in-house writing style. In fact, this finding corroborates Rind's (2020) assertion that it is

almost impossible to write a text devoid of mistakes in grammar, vocabulary, spelling and well-structured paragraphs especially for L2 users. Similarly, Azizah and Budiman (2017) contend that textual organisation such as writing chronologically, analytically (for compare/contrast and cause-and-effect writing), descriptively, evaluating writing and summary writing are potential troubleshoots for writing. A respondent shares his experience,

> *For me, writing is one of the most difficult parts of the research process. People think language teachers should not have any difficulty writing and documenting their research findings. But that is not the case. Every journal or publication outlet demands specified writing style, hence, researchers have to update themselves with all sorts of writing styles.*

Another respondent asserted that,

> *Writing is a difficult part of the research process. It is one thing identifying a problem, reviewing literature, gathering and analysing data and it is another thing writing the outcomes impeccably.*

4.10   Funding

One of the most consistent challenges of conducting research is funding (Memarpour, 2015; Rind, 2020; Saidinia, 2013). Securing or raising funds to sponsor the ever-increasing cost of conducting research in Ghana has always been a challenge. The situation of the language teacher and researcher in higher education institutions is not an exception. The prices of audio and video recorders, transcription tools, acoustic facilities, hiring the services of translators (where necessary) and sometimes, publication fees of reputable journals are on the rise. Even though the government of Ghana gives stipends in the form of 'Book and Research Allowance' to the academic staff the Colleges of Education, participants indicate that it is insufficient just as their salaries are equally insufficient to self-fund research projects. Some participants emphasized,

> *Funding is one of my major issues in this research enterprise. About two months, I decided to procure transcription softwares but the amount of money involved is overwhelming. I couldn't afford it so the project is currently hanging.*

> *I was undertaking a study on political discourse analysis and had to download and analyse speeches of politicians. The amount of money I spent to surf YouTube for the speeches drained my finances completely. I had to borrow money from some friends to survive the month.*

5.   Conclusion and Recommendation

In this period of time when research and publication have become an integral development in the College of Education structure in Ghana, this study has investigated and reported on data-

driven challenges that language teachers encounter in conducting research and publication. The findings of the study provide some relative useful insights into the language-related research challenges of the Ghanaian academic. Despite the benefits of research and publication to the academic and academia, it is observed that not all academics in the Colleges of Education are effectively and regularly researching and publishing in local and international journals. The study confirms that language teachers and researchers encounter challenges in their line of research duty. The challenges include language barrier between researcher and study sample, the language demands of journals and publication outlets, the language of targeted audience/readership and the language of technology. In addition, language academics suffer from study participants' negative attitude towards language, the inherent complex nature of qualitative research, language policy inconsistencies, conceptualization issues, the technicality of writing skill and funding issues.

Based on these findings, the following 4 recommendations are made to the language academic, the Colleges of Education, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) under whose auspices the colleges were transformed into full-fledged tertiary institutions and the Ministry of Education (MoE).

1. The colleges should establish research and publication offices under the guidance of GTEC and the MoE to offer 'technical' support and training to academic staff, part of which could include running regular seminars and workshops for staff by hosting experienced researchers from other institutions (such as the mentoring universities) with good research and publication records.
2. Concerted scholarly efforts need to be mobilized towards the establishment of credible journals and publication outlets, which can accept research manuscripts written in some of the popular local languages.
3. Academic staff should make conscious effort to develop their writing skills. Staff should take responsibility for their Professional Development in language and take up training opportunities in writing. Also, universities should take courses such as "Academic writing" more seriously, especially at the postgraduate levels.
4. People in ICT and Engineering programmes should be trained to develop technological devices that have some of the local language as default language. This will reduce the cost of procuring expensive foreign transcription and translation softwares to conduct language researches.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests and Ethics

"The authors declare no conflict of interest."

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