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IMPLEMENTING GHANA'S LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICY IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM IN THE CITY OF ACCRA

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Abstract

The paper examines the implementation of Ghana's language-in-education policy in a multilingual classroom in the city of Accra, Ghana. The current policy stipulates the use of the dominant local language as the medium of instruction. Ten (10) public basic schools in the Krowor municipal district of Accra were used for the study. The study participants comprised one hundred pupils (ten pupils from each school) of Basic 1 and eleven teachers. Qualitative research tools were used in collecting and analyzing data. The analysis revealed that most of the classrooms in the district were made up of pupils with multilingual backgrounds. Pupils and teachers who were not proficient in Ga, the dominant language of the locality, had communication challenges. The researchers recommend, among other things, that for the policy to be workable, policy makers (Ministry of Education, Ghana) and implementers (Ghana Education Service) need to collaborate to ensure that, in posting teachers to Basic schools in Ghana, their indigenous language background is considered. In the case of the pupils, a bilingual approach, proffered by NALAP is recommended.

Keywords: Accra; language-in-education policy; multilingual classrooms; bilingual approach

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1. Introduction

In this paper, we discuss a study which investigated the implementation of Ghana's language-in-education policy in 10 multilingual classrooms in the Krowor Municipal (KM) district[2] in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The 2021 Population and Housing census results indicate a rapid upsurge in rural-urban migration, making Accra cosmopolitan with people from other parts of the country and elsewhere living in the nation's capital. With this occurrence, most of the classrooms are multilingual, as related studies testify (Akrofi Ansah & Agyeman 2015; Anyidoho 2018).

Languages in Ghana belong to the Niger-Congo family of languages, one of the 4 language families which is attested to be the largest (Heine & Nurse 2000). Languages spoken in Ghana may be broadly dichotomized as Northern and Southern languages. The number of indigenous languages of Ghana is reported differently. Lewis, Gary, and Fennig (2013) report that Ghana has about 68 indigenous languages from three language families: Gur, Mande, Kwa (Niger-Congo) (see Figure 1). However, individual researchers and research teams have pegged the number between 50 and 80. For example, the 2021 Population and Housing census reports 53 indigenous languages; Dakubu (1996) quotes 50 languages whereas Lewis (2009) reports 79 languages. The languages are distributed over a population of about 30.8 million (2021 Population and Housing Census of Ghana) in 16 administrative regions. Notwithstanding, what is most salient to our discussion is the heterogeneity which is reported in the literature (Dakubu, 1988; Eberhard, Gary, Fennig 2022) . The indigenous language, Ga, which is expected to be used as the language of instruction in the Krowor Municipal district is marked 65 on the map. We put the discussion in perspective by shedding light on the language situation of Ghana; the structure of the basic education system and the trajectory of the language-in-education policy.

The research questions which guided our study are:

1. Which first languages and or mother tongues are the pupils proficient in?
2. How proficient are the teachers in Ga, the dominant language of the area?
3. How does the linguistic nature of the classroom/pupils affect the implementation of the language-in-education policy?
4. How does the non-Ga background of teachers affect the implementation of the language-in-education policy?

[2] It is one of the 29 districts of the Greater Accra administrative region. The district capital is Nungua.

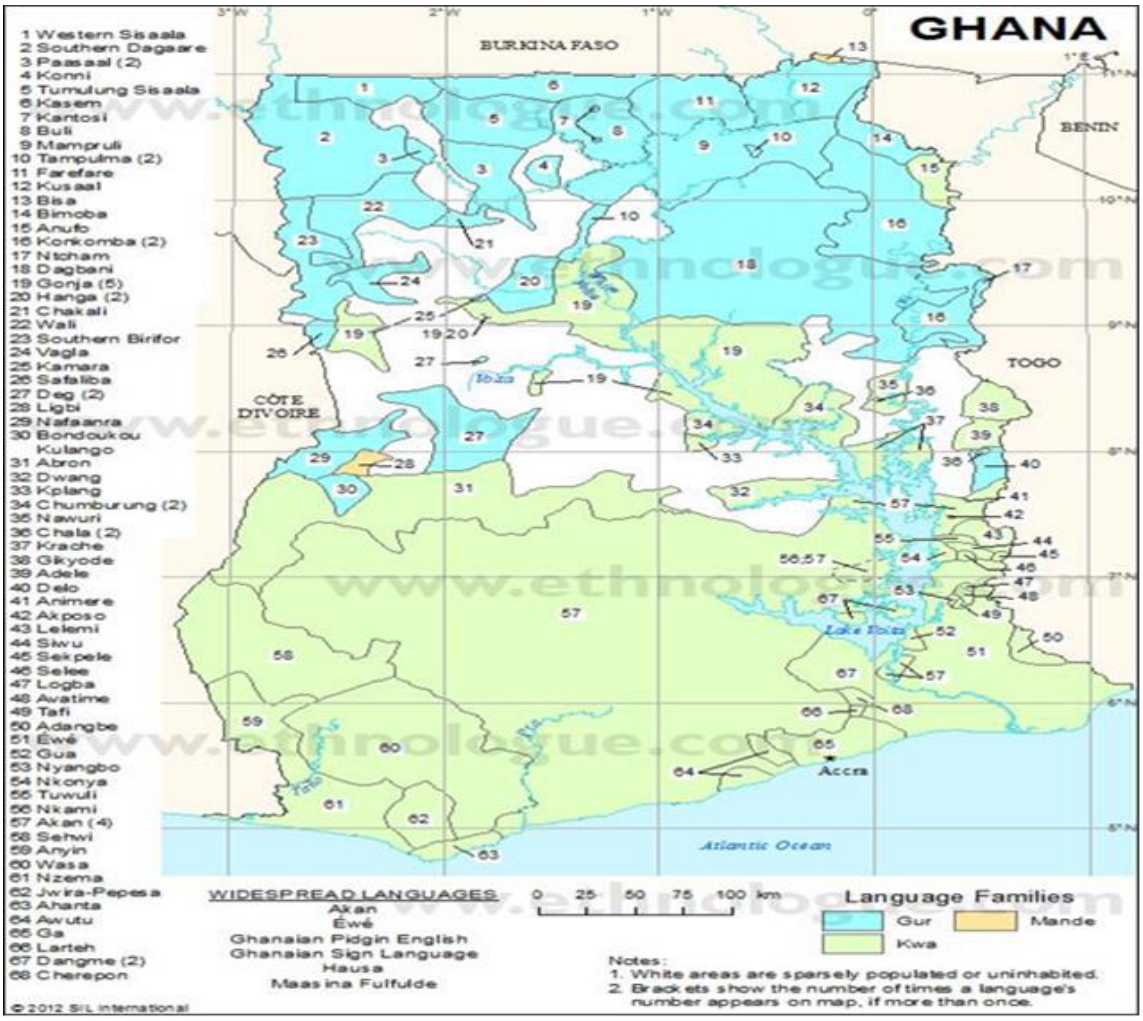

Figure 1: Language map of Ghana (Source: Lewis et al., 2013)

1.1 The basic education system in Ghana

It is the mandate of the Ghana Education Service (GES) to implement and supervise approved national policies and programs which concern pre-tertiary education (private and public) in Ghana (GES Act 506 3(1), 1995). It is noteworthy that in Ghana, basic education is run by both government and private entrepreneurs.

The duration of basic education in Ghana is 13 years, depending on whether the school is private or owned by the government[3]. In the public sector, children enter at age 4 to kindergarten, reducing the period of basic education to 11 years, unlike the private schools where children are admitted at age 2 to begin at the Nursery stage. Table 1 displays the basic education system in Ghana; level 1 applies to private schools only.

[3] Government schools are referred to as public schools.

Table 1: The basic education system in Ghana

Levels	Number of years	Age range
1. Nursery (private schools)	2	2-4 years
2. Kindergarten (KG1-KG2)	2	4-6 years
3. Lower Primary (B1-B3)	3	6-9 years
4. Upper Primary (B4-B6)	3	9-12
5. Junior High School JHS (1-3)	3	12-15

1.2 The trajectory of language-in-education policy in Ghana

Similar to many multilingual societies, Ghana has had to deal with the challenge of formulating an educational language policy whereby pupils will be equipped with the needed skills to move to higher levels of education. In putting together an effective policy, care has been taken to ensure national unity and social cohesion at the end of the day. This is necessary in the context of linguistic heterogeneity. For these and many other reasons, the country, Ghana, has maintained the use of English as the 'de facto' official language since independence. The political stability enjoyed by Ghana since the 4th Republic has not been the same in terms of the language-in-education policy. There have been fluctuations in the provisions of the language-in-education policy as Table 2 depicts.

Table 2 presents an overview of Ghana's educational language policy from 1529 to date.

Table 2: Ghana's language policy on education

PERIOD	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4 ONWARDS
1529-1925				
a. Castle schools era	-	-	-	-
b. Missionary era	+	+	+	-
1925-1951 (British Colonial Rule)	+	+	+	-
1951-1955 (British Colonial Rule)	+	-	-	-
1956-1966 (Independence 1957)	-	-	-	-
1967-1969	+	-	-	-
1970-1973	+	+	+	+
1974-2002	+	+	+	-
2002-2007	-	-	-	-
2007-present	+	+	+	-

Key: (+) medium of instruction includes Ghanaian language; (-) medium of instruction excludes Ghanaian language (Culled from Owu-Ewie, 2006)

Table 2 shows that there have been shifts regarding the emphasis on Ghana's indigenous languages in education over the years. It is observed that, contrary to what one would expect, there was a complete de-emphasis of Ghanaian languages, a few years after Ghana won independence from British rule in 1957. Following this period, between 1970-1973, there was a complete shift from English as a medium of instruction to Ghanaian languages. The restructuring of the policy which attracted the hottest debate was that of 2002-2007, which encouraged the use of English as a medium of instruction at all levels. From 2007 to present, we see a somewhat bilingual approach: a combination of Ghanaian languages and English as languages of instruction at the basic level of education. In all of this state of affairs, the bone of contention has been what the language of instruction should be at the lower primary level (kindergarten to Basic 3): should it be English or a Ghanaian language? It is important to note that the policy revolved around the so-called 9 government-sponsored languages: Akan (Akuapem, Asante, Fante dialects), Ewe, Ga, Dagbani, Dagaare, Dangme, Gonja, Kasem and Nzema. Another source of confusion was a number of nebulous statements in the policy. The policy which was operational between 1956-1966 was deemed favorable to pupils who studied in 'metropolitan and urban areas; a 'late exit' was proposed for such children who were more exposed to the English language. In that case, the policy seemed to have favored pupils of certain socio-economic statuses.

1.3 New Education Reform in relation to the Ghana's language-in-education policy

The language-in-education policy has undergone intense scrutiny over the years. The Government of Ghana in response has taken a number of measures to deal with the seeming inadequacies of the policy. The government introduced a New Education Reform (NER) in reaction to concerns expressed by stakeholders about a palpable national literacy and numeracy crisis. The reform was to guarantee that primary school pupils will be functionally literate and numerate, and will have reading fluency in the mother tongue (L1) and in English (L2) (Educational Strategic Plan 2003-2015). Hitherto, there had been reports pointing to low literacy rates among pupils: only 26% of pupils who reached the sixth and final year of primary school are literate in English and only 11% are numerate (2007 National Education Assessment).

Under the NER the Ministry of Education put together a task force, the National Literacy Task Force (NLTF) with support from United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to develop the National Literacy Acceleration Programme (NALAP) to address the poor educational standards. NALAP proposes a bilingual approach which would ,first of all, ensure literacy in the pupils' mother tongue, and a subsequent transference of skills acquired to literacy in English.

The aim of the National Literacy Acceleration Programme may be summarized as follows: to ensure that all children from Kindergarten to Basic 3 have quality literary materials; to promote effective instruction; and to access public support to learn to read and

write in their mother tongue and English Leherr 2009).). In Table 3, we present the implementation plan of NALAP.

Table 3: Implementation plan of NALAP

Level	% of Ghanaian Language (L1)	% of English (L2)
1.Kindergarten 1 and 2	90%	10%
2. Basic 1	80%	20%
3. Basic 2-3	50%	50%
4. Basic 4-Junior High School	0%	100%

For the purposes of implementing the plan, NALAP categorizes Basic school into 4 levels. At level 1, the pupils fall within the age range of 4-5 years whereas level 2 includes pupils who are 6 years crossing to age 7 years. Level 3 is constituted by Basic 2-3 pupils who are within the range of 7-8 years. Pupils at level 4 are within the age bracket of 9-14 years. Table 3 further shows the amounts of Ghanaian language and English that NALAP recommends at the various stages of basic education. The NALAP suggests that at level 1, the majority of instructional time should be in a Ghanaian language (L1), and be decreased gradually, while English is gradually introduced and increased until it finally replaces the L1 as instructional language by the beginning of Basic 4.

It was anticipated that the adherence to the bilingual approach will resolve the challenges faced in the implementation of the language-in-education policy. However, a critical assessment of the plan reveals that it seems to favour the teacher more than the pupil. Although it is expected that at level 3, the pupils' proficiency level in English and the dominant language is at par that cannot be ascertained. Additionally, its implementation face logistics support in some regions of the country (Fenyi, Appiagyei & Andoh 2022; Man et al 2019). The findings of the current study corroborate earlier results which report deficiencies of the bilingual approach. The remaining parts of the paper are ordered as follows: In section 2 we review literature that has reported related studies. This is followed by a discussion of the data collection procedures and analysis in section 3. The findings from questionnaire responses, interviews and observation notes are shared in section 4. In the penultimate section, 5, we discuss the implications of the findings and make recommendations to stakeholders. The discussion is concluded in section 6.

2. Literature review

2.1 Multilingualism and language policy in post-colonial Africa

Africa is highly multilingual; it is therefore not surprising that the formulation and implementation of policies regarding language use have often attracted debates in both political and intellectual circles. The challenge became most apparent in post-independence

Africa when nations had to choose between the language of the colonial master and indigenous languages. In response to the avalanche of debates, the intergovernmental conference on language policies in Africa was held in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1997, principally to devise ways and spell out prospects for the political and technical management of the African linguistic milieu, and to define the statuses and the functions of the languages (UNESCO 2002). Shohamy (2006, 47–48) summarises language policy as the "primary mechanism for manipulating and imposing language behaviours as it relates to decisions about languages and their uses in education and society". Again, Shohamy (2006) states that with regard to language policy, "decisions are made regarding the preferred languages to be used, where, when, and by whom through language policy." Consequently, African governments have been careful in formulating language policies such that social cohesion is not ruined, but maintained.

2.2 Multilingualism and language-in-education policy

Multilingualism in African countries usually presents a challenge to policy makers and implementers of language-in-education (LiEP) policies. In a heterogeneous country like Ghana, the flux in policy formulation attests to the myriad of challenges (refer to Table 2). Scholars have studied and reported on numerous scenarios of language-in-education policy implementation in multilingual communities in Africa. Ouadraogo (2000, 89) asserts that "Education and language issues are very complex in Africa because of the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual situation." The situation even becomes more challenging when the official language of that country is not an indigenous language. With regard to language choice as the medium of instruction, UNESCO (1953, 2008, 2016) advocates mother tongue education at the early stages, because it enhances pupils' learning.

Owu-Ewie (2006) investigates the language policies of education in Ghana, which dates back to the castle schools and the missionary schools. He focuses on the policy of 2002-2007 which dictates that English language should be used as the medium of instruction at all levels of basic education. The researcher debunks the reasons which support the argument for English-only education. He found that the English-only medium of instruction at the lower primary level is not pragmatic; the importance of mother-tongue education, especially for the cognitive development of the early learner is one strong reason. He further proposes a late-exit transitional bilingual education as a modification (Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) to the policy (2002-2007). He believes that the proposed policy would make the pupils balanced bilinguals, which would enhance learning. He concludes that denying Ghanaian children the use of their native language in education is synonymous with committing the crime of "linguistic genocide" in education.

Opoku-Amankwa (2009) examines an English-only policy in a multilingual classroom in Ghana from KG to Basic 3. The reasons offered by the government to justify its decision included the fact that urban classrooms are multilingual, and the majority of pupils do not

necessarily speak the local language which is required for use as the medium of instruction. Such pupils and the children transferred from one area to another would have to start learning new local languages before being able to follow the lessons (Government of Ghana, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2002). The study took place in Tomso, a suburb of Kumasi (Ashanti regional's capital). This town was selected because of its ethnic-linguistic diversity. The findings revealed that the language of instruction or the medium of instruction in the classroom is vital for achieving literacy and learning goals. Therefore, the choice of language used in the classroom becomes critical since it plays a crucial role in language learning. This study highlights the importance of using a familiar language in the classroom. However, what the policy makers lost sight of was that the policy has national implications; it was not meant to be applied in the urban areas only. The present study will reveal how such a policy could be a disaster even in schools in a cosmopolitan city like Accra.

Also, Anyidoho (2018) considers the policies of education that have been in existence since independence, bringing to fore the inconsistency in language-in-education policy in Ghana. She compares Greater Accra and Eastern Regions in terms of the feasibility of the policy. The findings indicate that whilst the policy seems to be fully implemented in the Eastern Region, there is a sharp contrast in policy implementation in the Greater Accra Region due to the multilingual nature of the pupils and teachers. She recommends that two or more local languages should be used as languages of instruction to meet the language needs of these pupils. According to her, the use of Ga only at the lower Primary level will be a disadvantage to some of the pupils. Our study is also based in Accra, a cosmopolitan city where classrooms are multilingual. Perhaps, the recommendation by Anyidoho (2018) will be applicable to our study area.

Ansah (2014) similarly interrogates the language-in-education policy of Ghana right after independence, taking into account the various policies implemented and how these policies contributed to teaching and learning. She admits that Ghana is multilingual, especially in the nation's capital. Implementing a language policy that advocates for the use of the local language of the area could be problematic due to the diverse linguistic nature of the classrooms. She attributes the flux in the language policy to the instability in our government system. She believes that the policies implemented lacked institutional support; therefore, successive governments have been unable to address the earlier policies' problems. She recommends that planners and implementers should consider the teachers' and pupils' sociolinguistic backgrounds for a language policy to achieve the intended results. There should be a broader consultation with the stakeholders involved (teachers, researchers, language planners) to team up and bring policies that cater for multilingual environments.

Quarcoo (2014) also examines the various language policies of education that have been implemented in Ghana by different governments and how they fared. The 1925 language

policy of education has been modified and amended by previous governments. According to her, all the policies implemented have not been able to meet the language needs of the populace. Setbacks identified in each of them do not make the policy entirely practical. She believes that selecting nine local languages for the NALAP programme would pose severe challenges for the government in developing the languages, printing books in them and training teachers to teach these subjects. She feels that a developing country like Ghana would not be able to achieve this task. She recommends that selecting one or two local languages and developing them would reduce the cost and be more beneficial.

In addition, Klu and Ansre (2018) analyse and discuss language policy and some emerging policy issues at the lower level. They espoused the following reasons as issues that hinder the implementation of the policy: low level of professionalism on the part of teachers; inappropriate use of classroom curricula; lack of adequate classroom facilities; and inadequately trained teachers in the mother-tongue. The researchers believe that for the policy to be successful there should be capacity building and workshops for Ghanaian language teachers and adequate learning materials on the local languages should be provided. They supported the call by Ansah (2014) that there should be a holistic approach toward the implementation of language policy to achieve the needed results.

Ahadzi, Ameka, and Essegbey (2012) added to the debate among the advocates of using the local language as a medium of instruction at the lower primary level as against the subscribers of English to measure the influence of the performance of the local language on English argumentative essays. The analysis and discussions indicated that students who combined English and native Ghanaian language(s) at home performed better than those who used only English or only Ghanaian languages. The findings from the study confirmed the probable efficacy of the bilingual education policy proposed by Owu-Ewie (2006).

Further, Ansah and Agyemang (2015) examine the language policy in Ghana, in relation to the fate of two languages: Leteh and Efutu. The findings from the two communities indicated that the policy is not implemented to the core because most teachers used in the study do not exhibit any form of competency in the local languages of where the schools are situated. They concluded that failure on the part of the government to allow all mother tongues to be used as the medium of instruction constitutes a denial of these children of their sociolinguistic right. Several scholars (Andoh-Kumi 2000; Anyidoho 2018; Bamgbose 1976; Bodomo 1994) have advocated the use of local languages as the medium of instruction because they believe that learning takes place from the known to the unknown and from concrete to abstract. Children learn and understand better when the medium of instruction is in their mother tongue, hence the need for the current language policy that allows the use of the local language of the area the school is located as the medium of instruction from Kindergarten to Basic 3.

Källkvist, Gyllstad, Sandlund & Sundqvist (2017) investigate the language used as the medium of instruction in Sweden schools. The majority of the classrooms in Sweden are multilingual, and most of the pupils at least speak one or two other languages. The survey outcome revealed that most of the participants preferred English only as a medium of instruction because of the linguistic diversity in the classroom. The pupils recognised the need for a common lingua franca that would serve their linguistic needs.

Finally, Amo-Mensah and Anthiossen (2015) examine the language-in-education policy in a multilingual international school in Namibia. The researchers chose this school because of the prestige they give to the English language and the linguistic diversity of students in the school. The conclusion drawn from the study is that in multilingual educational environments such as Windhoek International School (WIS), the choice of language as a Medium of Instruction (MoI) is highly determined by the linguistic habitus. Again, the findings revealed code-switching from French to Afrikaans and vice versa in the French classroom and the occasional use of Portuguese in the English classroom to bridge the knowledge gap was useful. In the context of the debates in the literature, this paper contributes to the discussion by investigating the implementation of the policy in the city's classrooms.

From the on-going discussion, it is evident that Ghana's language-in-education policies, over the years, have encountered numerous challenges at the level of implementation. These challenges, primarily, are as a result of the multilingual nature of the country. The current study is unique in the sense that it focuses on schools within communities which although situated in a cosmopolitan area of Accra, are largely dominated by native Ga speakers. The ensuing sections reveal how and why even within largely homogenous communities like Nungua, the current language-in-education policy has faced similar implementation challenges noted in earlier studies. This is a major gap the study fills.

3. Methodology

The study examined the implementation of Ghana's current language-in-education policy (LiEP) which stipulates the use of the local language or the dominant local language of the area the school is located as the medium of instruction at the lower primary level.

The study was qualitative. The qualitative approach made it possible for us to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying opinions and motivations of the language choices study participants made in the classroom, which either or not support the language-in-education policy.(Tenny, Brannan, Brannan, & Sharts-Hopko 2022) In addition, the study adopted the case study design which enabled us to focus on participants in specific public schools in order to gain 'concrete, contextual, and indepth- knowledge' (McCombes 2019) on the nuances of the implementation of the language-in-education policy. Data collection was conducted in July 2019 in the Krowor Municipal District (KMD). Letters requesting

for permission were sent to the headmasters of the schools, and parents' consent to interview their wards was sought after explaining to them the purpose of the study. We applied a purposive sampling method to select 10 public schools in the KMD which were multilingual. The purposive sampling helped us to identify the 10 public schools as they exhibit all the characteristics necessary for the implementation of the language-in-education policy. Our focus was on Basic 1 classrooms because according to the NALAP, it is at that level that the language of instruction was expected to be mostly the predominant language of the locality, with 80% of the indigenous language and 20% of English. Furthermore, it is regarded as the developmental and foundational stage of the child's language acquisition and development.

Participants of the study comprised one hundred pupils, 10 pupils from each school to interview and 11 teachers. In addition to the 3 researchers, 5 research assistants were engaged for data collection and transcription of audio recordings. The research assistants were given some basic training in audio recording and academic research interviewing, prior to the fieldwork.

The selected schools were Nungua R/C Basic School; Nungua Methodist 1 and 2 Basic Schools; Nungua Presby 1 and 2 Basic Schools, Nungua Anglican 1 and 2 Basic Schools, LEKMA 1, LEKMA 2 and LEKMA 3 Basic Schools. All these schools were selected from the Krowor South and Krowor North circuits. Due ethical clearance was sought from all the appropriate authorities, including the municipal office, headteachers, teachers, parents and students before the study was commenced.

Questionnaires of structured questions were administered to the teachers to confirm their language repertoires (Table 5). We also collected information on the language background of the 100 pupils from their school records. 10 pupils in Basic 1 of each school were randomly selected to be interviewed (Table 4).We observed how teaching is done with regard to the application of the LiEP in Basic 1 classrooms, and also noted pupils' reactions to teachers' questions. After the teaching sessions, we interviewed 2 groups of people: 10 children from each class for feedback on their learning experience and11 teachers to find out about their knowledge about the LiEP and challenges with reference to the application of the policy. The interviews were audio recorded. The interviews were carried out by the 3 researchers with help from 5 research assistants who were assigned to the schools; one research assistant interviewed 20 pupils from 2 schools. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the research assistants. The purpose of the interviews was to investigate how non-speaking Ga teachers coped with teaching; in other words, how they applied the policy to teaching in a district where the dominant language is Ga. On the contrary, in situations where the teacher spoke Ga, how pupils who were not proficient in Ga coped in the classroom.

The transcripts were analysed by the three researchers using the qualitative content analysis method (Hsiu-Fang & Shannon 2005; Williamson & Johanson, 2018;). Using QCA helped us to identify patterns and correlations in the transcripts, in order to make generalizations and draw conclusions.

4. Results

4.1 Participants' linguistic profile

The data we gathered on the language repertoire of pupils are reported in Table 4. The languages represent pupils' L1; because of the children's age (6-8years), we had to rely on school records to obtain accurate information on the language background of the pupils, especially on their mother tongue.

Table 4 Language background of pupils

Language	No. of pupils	Percentage
Ga	44	44
Akan	29	29
Ewe	19	19
Dagbani	1	1
Kasem	6	6
Gonja	1	1
Total	**100**	**100%**

From Table 4, pupils proficient in Ga are 44 representing 44% out of the total population of pupils sampled. This is followed by Akan speakers who constituted 29%. The least number represents 1% of the sample, Gonja. It must be noted that the data above highlights only the L1 of the pupil participants; this is in line with the aim of the study to ascertain the L1s of the pupils and the extent to which their L1s are represented in the classroom in support or otherwise of the implementation of the language-in-education policy. That notwithstanding, a few of the pupils equally have attained varied levels of proficiency in other local languages.

Table 5 Language repertoire of teachers

Language	No. of teachers	Percentage
Ga	5	45.5
Akan	5	45.5
Ewe	1	9.1
Total	11	100%

Responses from the questionnaires indicated that out of the eleven teachers involved in this study, those whose L1 were Ga and Akan were 5 each, constituting 45.5%. There was only 1 teacher whose L1 was Ewe, representing 9.1% (Table 5). In addition to their L1, the teachers indicated that they spoke other languages.

Three of the teachers responded that they were bilinguals; they speak only two languages, English and their L1; 8 teachers spoke 2 other indigenous languages in addition to their L1.

4.2 Classroom teaching observation notes

We observed 2 teaching sessions of each class to find out how teachers who did not speak any Ga coped in the classroom. We also took note of teachers who were proficient in Ga, but had pupils who were not proficient in Ga in their classroom. We reproduce excerpts of 3 lessons (Excerpts 1-3). The lessons were in Religious and Moral Education (RME)(Excerpt 1) and Language and Literacy (Excerpts 2 and 3).

In Excerpt 1, the teacher was proficient in Ga, she tried to adhere to the LiEP by mostly speaking Ga in a lesson in RME. The teacher was bilingual: English and Ga.

The pupils who understood Ga, but could not speak it, answered the questions in English. Those who were proficient in Ga answered in Ga. Pupils who were not proficient in both English and Ga did not participate in the lesson; they kept fidgeting. One pupil answered a question in Akan.

Excerpt 1

Subject: Religious and Moral Education

Lesson: The creation story

Teacher: (In Ga) *Gbii enyiɛ Naa Nyɔnmɔ kɛbɔ je lɛ?*

(How many days did God use to create the world?)

Pupil 1: (Responded in English) 7 days

Teacher: (In Ga) *Mɛɛ nibii enyɔ Naa Nyɔnmɔ bɔ klɛnklɛn?*

(What were the first 2 things God created?)

Pupil 2: (In Akan) *ɔsoro ne asase*

(Heaven and earth)

Teacher: (In Ga) *Tsɔɔmɔ nibii enyɔ krokomɛi ni Naa Nyɔnmɔ bɔ.*

(Mention 2 other things God created)

Pupil 3: (In Ga) *Nshɔ kɛ gɔn*

(The sea and mountain)

We observed that her questions were mostly answered by children whose L1 was Ga. There were pupils who seemed not to be paying attention in class and kept fidgeting; those children did not answer any questions. At the end of the lesson, we learnt from an interview that they did not understand the lesson. In another class where the teacher's L1 was Akan, she spoke only English in teaching a lesson in RME. Again, her questions were only answered by a few of the pupils who intimated that they spoke English at home with their siblings and parents. It was clear that the teachers we interviewed had knowledge about the LiEP, and made efforts to adhere to it. They however expressed their frustration about their inability to apply the tenets of the policy, due to what they described as 'indigenous language barriers' in the classroom. Similarly, pupils who did not understand Ga or speak it said they did not enjoy school due to their inability to answer questions in class. In the case of children who did not understand nor speak English, they looked embarrassed whenever their non-speaking Ga teacher directed questions at them.

We also took note of a teacher who spoke Ga during a lesson in Language (Ga) and Literacy, but in the interest of pupils who did not understand nor speak Ga, she tried to be innovative by using all the indigenous languages she could speak (Ga, Akan) and then English. We reproduce excerpts of the interaction below:

Excerpt 2

Subject: Language and Literacy (Ga)

Lesson: Picture story

The lesson we observed was a picture description of a hunter. The teacher asked the question in English,

Teacher: 'Which worker do you see in the book in front of you'?

(The same question was asked in Ga, in italics)

Teacher: '*mɛni nitsulɔ onaa yɛ wolo lɛ mli lɛ*'?

(The same question was repeated in Akan, in italics)

Teacher: '*odwumayeni bɛn na wuhu no wɔ nhwoma yi mu*'?

The following were the responses from the pupils:

Pupil 1: (English) 'a hunter'.

Pupil 2: (Ga) '*gbɔbilɔ*'

Pupil 3: (Akan) '*ɔbɔmmɔfoɔ*'

The teacher realised that there were some Ewe speakers in her class, but she was not proficient in Ewe so she asked some Ewe-speaking pupils who understood some Akan and Ga to tell the whole class the name of a hunter in Ewe. One Ewe speaking pupil replied as *'adela'*. In our quest to find out why this practice, we asked the teacher whether she was aware of the current education policy, and she responded in affirmation, yes. Nevertheless, she said that, with the diverse linguistic background of the pupils in her class, she could not adhere strictly to the use of Ga throughout the lesson delivery. Although she seemed to have gone beyond the stipulated period for the lesson, she was satisfied that her lesson objectives had been achieved.

In the following excerpt, the teacher was bilingual: English and Akan.

Excerpt 3

Subject: Our world, our people

Lesson: Days of the week

The teacher called the names in English/Akan and the pupils repeated them in the

2 languages.

Teacher: (in English) Today is Tuesday; tomorrow will be Wednesday; and yesterday was Monday.

(Pupils repeat in chorus, in English)

Teacher: (in Akan) *ɛnnɛ yɛ Benada, ɔkyena bɛyɛ Wukuada, na nnera yɛ Dwoada*.

(Pupils repeat in chorus, in Twi)

We questioned the teacher about the choice of these languages at the expense of the LiEP (the language of instruction). She replied that she could not speak Ga, hence falling on the two languages she was proficient in. She further explained that most of the pupils in her class understood Akan anyway. She was content with the feedback she received from the pupils.

In sum, we observed frustration on the part of parties who did not speak nor understand Ga, the stipulated language of instruction.

4.3 Summary of Key findings

The study found the following factors as affecting the implementation of the language-in-education policy. They are the (in)ability of both learners and pupils to speak the same mother tongue, the multilingual nature of the classroom, and both teachers and learners' (in)ability to speak other local languages and English in common, in the case of both not speaking the same mother tongue.

To answer research question 1, Tables 4 and 5 above present the linguistic profile of both teachers and learners. With regard to research question 2, according to our data, only 5 teachers (see Table 5 above) out of the 11 teachers sampled were proficient in Ga and could teach in Ga. This has obvious implications on the implementation of the LiEP as it requires that the teacher must be proficient in the dominant language of the community where the school is located.

Excerpts 1 and 2 help us to answer our research question 3. Obviously the multilingual nature of the classroom/pupils makes it challenging for the teachers to implement the LiEP to the fullest as it will mean that some learners will be linguistically excluded in the teaching and learning process (Anyidoho & Dakubu 2008; Markin-Yankah1999).

On research question 4 which sought to ascertain how the non-Ga backround of teachers affect the implementation of the language-in-education policy, it was found that the implementation of the policy was highly challenged because the non-Ga speaking teachers had to resort to the use of English to communicate with the pupils (see Excerpt 3 above) which is contrary to requirements of the policy.(Markin-Yankah1999). This in turn makes it difficult for those learners who are not proficient in the English language to understand the lesson being taught(Anyidoho & Dakubu 2008).

5. Discussion of Findings

The study findings paint quite an alarming picture with regard to the implementation of the LiEP. It is clear that pupils who did not understand and speak Ga, the language of instruction (LoI), were at a great disadvantage. This could affect the quality of foundational skills they are expected to grasp at that level (Nchindila 2018; Wilkinson 2015). For a subject like Language and Literacy where pupils are expected to build on knowledge and

skills they acquire at each level, such pupils are likely to be negatively affected. This could go a long way to affect their overall school performance (AlBakri 2017; Andoh-Kumi 1998). It will be interesting to investigate the effect on the school performance of such pupils.

In the case of the teachers, a couple of them stated that they are not able to achieve their lesson objectives, because communication in the classroom was a challenge. These teachers wished they had been posted to schools where they spoke the dominant language. There were also teachers who applied some innovation by using all the languages in their repertoire, with the aim of reaching more pupils. Overall, in all the classrooms we observed, the LiEP was not strictly adhered to due to the multilingual nature of the class and also, the teachers' deficiency in the LoI. These findings confirm earlier studies (Anani, 2021; Ankrah, 2015) which observed that in the Ghanaian classrooms teachers are usually posted to communities whose languages they are not proficientin , thereby making the implementation of the LiEP almost impossible.

As indicated earlier, most of the teachers contacted are not Gas and do not speak Ga at all. These teachers are fully aware of the policy, yet they cannot implement it, because they do not understand the language (Ga). Instead, such teachers employ a different Ghanaian language they are proficient in (mostly Twi) and English. This agrees with an earlier proposal made by Sakyim (2005) that the English language and Akan (Twi) should be used as the medium of instruction in Ghanaian schools.

It appears that the problem of non-implementation of the LiEP can partly be attributed to the headteachers and the Ghana Education Service (GES), who are responsible for posting teachers to the various schools. On the part of the headteachers, they have the responsibility of assigning classes to teachers, with or without the teachers' consent. But the evidence available suggests that teachers are assigned classes without probing their level of proficiency in the relevant local language. There is also the possibility that the headteachers may be aware of the issues but due to the inadequacy of teachers, they tend to assign classes to anyone who is available.

Again, it is equally clear that the Ghana Education Service does not always consider the linguistic background of teachers before posting them to schools. Even though they are aware of the policy, and wish to consider the linguistic repertoire of teachers they are not always successful, because the needed numbers are often not available. Thus even though it is stated on paper that preference is given to teachers who can teach the language of the community in which the school is located, it is not always the practice, due to certain constraints. Anani (2021: 4) rightly captured this issue when she observed that 'ideally, the posting of teachers should be based on the mother tongue of the teachers. The GES hardly considers this issue, thus postings of teachers are done ineffectively. This undermines the whole implementation of the policy'.

It is interesting to note that pupils who indicated that English was a key home language seemed to benefit when the teachers mostly spoke English. This finding contradicts the common notion that children will acquire the local language prior to coming to school, and will tend to learn the English language only through formal education (Obeng 1997). Indeed it is widely documented in the literature that some children in Ghana are exposed to the use of the English language as their home language and possibly as their first language (Quarcoo 2014). However, with all the benefits of mother tongue education espoused in the literature (Anyidoho 2018; Batibo 2005; Bamgbose 1991; 2000; Agbedor 1996) care must be taken to ensure that learning and instructional goals are achieved regardless of the linguistic heterogeneity that exists in urban classrooms.

In essence, the LiEP is known and well understood by teachers, but it is not fully implemented due to the linguistic diversity of the pupils and the inadequacy of teachers to teach in those classrooms.

5.1 Recommendations

The survey results have confirmed what authors like Ansah (2014) and Anyidodo (2018) identified that classrooms in Ghana are multilingual, especially in the Greater Accra region. As expressed by Anyidoho (2018), the implementation of such a policy is best achievable in monolingual communities but problematic in a multilingual society. The policy planners should know that the majority of the classrooms in cosmopolitan areas comprise people with different linguistic backgrounds, mainly due to rural-urban migration. In view of this, adhering strictly to the use of Ga in Accra, for example, would defeat the UNESCO's call to use the mother tongue in early education; and this would eventually lead to denying pupils who are not Ga-speaking the benefits of mother tongue education.

Bamgbose (1989) advocates that in an urban classroom, two or more indigenous languages should be used as the instructional languages. This must however not be done in an adhoc manner, but be incorporated in the LiEP of Ghana. Following Anyidoho (2018), perhaps LiEP must be crafted on a regional basis and not national. If this is done, the dominant language(s) of a linguistic area can be proposed as languages of instruction. In relatively homogenous areas, one language may be proposed. Furthermore, for the implementation of the policy to be effective, teachers who cannot speak or teach Ga should not be given lower classes, B1-B3 to teach; headmasters of Basic schools will have to ensure that. Furthermore, we suggest that in multilingual communities, there must be schools noted for about 3 major languages so that children will have the advantage of attending schools where their L1 is the designated language of instruction. The foregoing recommendations suggest a review of the current language-in-education policy (MOESS, 2008) so that it can cater for to the kinds of linguistic communities we have in Ghana: rural, peri-urban, and urban linguistic communities. If this is achieved, then the much advocated

for mother tongue education can be put into practice in the multilingual classroom in the cities.

6. Conclusion

The study looked at the current language policy of education that stipulates that the local language of the area or the dominant local language spoken by the pupils must be used as a medium of instruction from Kindergarten to Basic 3. The survey revealed clearly that the policy is not implemented fully due to the diverse linguistic background of pupils in the classroom and an inadequate number of teachers who are proficient in Ga. The teachers confirmed the use of the English language and any other local language depending on the linguistic background and competence of the teacher. This makes it impossible to implement the policy in multilingual classrooms. Any attempt to implement this policy defeats the call by UNESCO advocating for the use of the mother tongue in lower primary education. The study recommends that in posting teachers to various schools in the country, their L1 is considered. Furthermore, the bilingual approach advocated by NALAP must be practised. Finally, since the LiEP of Ghana emphasizes the local dominant language, parents should encourage their wards to learn the language, use it with peers who are proficient before they start school and speak it in the language community.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

We hereby declare that there is no real, potential or apparent conflict of interest known to us.

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