

LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICIES IN GHANA: IDENTIFYING THE GAPS

Nana Ama Agyeman & Gladys Nyarko Ansah

University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana

agyeman@ug.edu.gh

Abstract

Language planning and language policy are activities undertaken by governments and institutions to guide and inform language choices and language use with the aim of achieving certain desired outcomes. Within the education sector, language-in-education policies are undertaken usually by governments or educational departments to inform and guide the choices and use of language in education settings with the aim of achieving certain goals. Although Ghana has experimented with several language-in-education policies, the country repeatedly fails to achieve the desired goals with the policies. There is therefore the need to examine the policies to find out what may possibly be responsible for their inefficiency. While many studies have examined these policies from different perspectives, e.g., sociolinguistic gaps, implementation challenges, unavailability of both material and human resources, this study focuses on the identification of possible gaps in the policy statements. The study used interviews, library search, and information from relevant institutions to access past and present language-in-education policies in the country for analysis. The findings revealed that Ghana has neither an explicit national language policy nor substantial independent language-in-education policy documents. Instead, a few statements about language-in-education are located in educational reform documents and ordinances. It was also revealed that details of the language-in-education policy containing reforms and ordinances are generally not available or accessible (probably because of poor record keeping), and that only references and some comments and remarks are available in various studies. The study, therefore, recommends a number of actions, including the establishment of a functional language bureau, a draft of explicit policies on national language, language-in-education as well as guidelines to their implementation, monitoring and review.

Keywords: Language policy, language-in-education, Ghana, formal education, basic education, multilingualism.

1. Introduction¹

This study formed part of a larger research project titled “*Professionalizing Language Teaching and Advocating for an Entrenched Language Policy to Position Ghana on the*

¹ Abbreviations: BECE – Basic Education Certificate Examination; BGL – Bureau of Ghana Languages; GES – Ghana Education Service; GIL – Ghana Institute of Languages; JHS – Junior High School; KG – Kindergarten; LAG – Linguistics Association of Ghana; MoE – Ministry of Education; P1, P2, P3 – Primary 1, Primary 2, Primary 3; SHS – Senior High School; WASSCE – West African Senior School Certificate Examination.



Global Market". The project investigated pertinent issues surrounding language-in-education policies and language teaching practices in Basic schools across Ghana. This paper reports on an aspect of the project that focused on identifying gaps in the country's language-in-education policy statements. In any given multilingual setting, there is the need to plan or decide on language use in public spaces such as formal educational institutions. In some situations, the choice of language comes naturally. In other situations, however, the choice of language becomes a major concern, such that no resolution may be readily available. Such language choice dilemmas could be viewed in a continuum: at one end there is no need to decide on the language choice because the choice is automatic or obvious, and at the other end, there is the need for a careful consideration of several factors before arriving at an appropriate choice. As such, in any multilingual setting, there almost invariably is the need for language policy and language planning. It is against this background that Ghana as a highly multilingual country (see discussion of multilingualism in in Ghana in Section 4) requires a language policy and planning. In other words, the nature of linguistic complexity in Ghana requires an intentional and explicit policy regarding language use in public spaces, especially, informal basic education. Even though Ghana has experimented with various language-in-education policies, there has not been any noticeable success in achieving the goals of these policies. This setback compels the focus of this study.

The research questions that guided this study are outlined as follows:

- What are the various language-in-education policies that have been recommended and implemented in Ghana?
- What are the specific policy-statements contained in the policies?
- Are there any gaps in the policies/ policy-statements?
- What is the nature of the gaps?
- How can the gaps be filled or eliminated to strengthen the policies for enhanced results?

Methods used to access relevant information for this study included review of past policies from various sources, both published and unpublished. Library search, and general Internet search were also employed to retrieve relevant documents. Visits to relevant institutions, and interviews with key stakeholders, including teachers and headteachers, directors of education, staff of Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Ministry of Education

(MoE) also formed a major part in gathering data for this study. Websites of relevant institutions were also accessed for information.

2. A. brief linguistic background of Ghana

Ghana is linguistically very diverse. Indigenous Ghanaian languages count to about eighty (Eberhard et al., 2024). Some of the indigenous languages have dialects and sub-dialects. For instance, the Akan language, the most widely-spoken indigenous language, has three major dialects, Twi, Fante and Bono. Whereas the Twi dialect has over six sub-dialects, including Asante, Akuapem, Kwahu and Akyem, Fante has several sub-dialects, including, Gomoa, Assin, Agona, Breman. Nine of the indigenous languages in Ghana are referred to as government-sponsored languages because they are developed for use in basic education, especially for the so-called bilingual² model of education (Eberhard et al., 2024). These nine languages are Akan (comprising Asante-Twi, Akuapem-Twi, and Fante), Dagbani, Dagaare, Dangme, Ewe, Ga, Gonja, Kasem and Nzema. These are dominant languages in the various regions of Ghana and depending on the region where a school is located, one of these nine languages may not only be used as a medium of instruction between class1-3 but students are also expected to study one of these nine as a school subject.

In addition to the indigenous languages, several non-indigenous languages are present in Ghana (Eberhard et al., 2024), among which English, a colonial legacy which has emerged as the defacto official language, is the most prominent. Besides being used for most formal functions, English is taught and studied in schools at all levels; it is the main language of instruction at all levels, except in lower primary in (rural) public schools. English is a core subject in both Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE); thus, a student requires a minimum of a credit (about 60%) grade in English in both examinations to move on to the next level of education. Other prominent non-indigenous languages include French and Hausa. Ghana's immediate neighbours, Togo, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire are francophone. Besides, French is studied at all levels of education; it is a compulsory subject at the basic level and features as one of nine subjects of BECE in the Junior High School (JHS). At the Senior High School (SHS) level, French is an elective subject in the WASSCE. Hausa is widely spoken in Ghana, and it is used as a trade language in many places in the country. Less prominent non-

² See Section 6 for discussion of bilingual education policy; see also Ansah & Agyeman (2015, p. 92).

indigenous languages in Ghana include Swahili, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, all of which could be studied at the University of Ghana and other institutions such as the Ghana Institute of Languages.

Considering the complexity of the linguistic situation of Ghana, there is the need to have a policy regarding language choice and language use. But unfortunately, Ghana seems to have no formal explicit national language policy. The only explicit policy on language concerns formal education. There have been different policies from time to time, but these policies fail to achieve the expected goals. The sections below discuss in detail some of these issues.

3. Language Policy and Planning

Studies in language policy in general and language-in-education policy in particular abound (see for instance Maraf, 2024; Loncon, 2023; Appiah & Ardila, 2021; Yevudey & Agbozo, 2019; Anyidoho, 2018; Ansah & Agyeman, 2015; Ansah, 2014; Phyak, 2013; Cenoz & Gorter, 2012; Walter & Benson, 2012; Samuelson & Freedman, 2010; Martin, 2005; Muthwii, 2002; Spolsky, 2002, 2004, 2012; Ricento, 2000; Lin & Hornberger, 1998). Different scholars have approached the discussion from different angles in different linguistic landscapes. In addition, various terminologies have emerged in the discussion of language policy. Among them, and relevant to the discussion of this study are the notions of language planning and language management (Spolsky, 2012; Kaplan, 2013). On the one hand, Spolsky (2012, p. 3) defines a language policy as "an officially mandated set of rules for language use and form within a nation-state". Spolsky (2012) also perceives the field of language policy as comprising three independent, yet interrelated components. The first component which is considered as the most important component is said to be the actual language practices in the community. The second component is said to be the speech community members' beliefs about the language varieties and variants based on the values they assigned to them. The third component is referred to as language planning or management and it is said to be a modification of the actual language practices by some authority through force or encouragement (Spolsky, 2012, p. 5).

On the other hand, Kaplan (2013) distinguishes between language planning and language policy and defines language planning as

“an activity, most visibly undertaken by government ... intended to promote systematic linguistic change in some community of speakers”, and a language policy on the other hand as “a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the society, group or system” (Kaplan, 2013, p. 2).

Language policy may be realised at several levels, from very formal language planning documents and pronouncements to informal statements of intent that may not at first glance seem like language policies at all (Kaplan, 2013, p. 2). Two types of policy statements are recognized as symbolic and substantive policy statements; a symbolic language policy is said to “articulate good feelings toward change” whereas a substantive language policy “articulates specific steps to be taken” (Kaplan, 2013, pp. 2-3; Peddie, 1991).

From the above definitions of a language policy, a policy on language-in-education may therefore be characterised as an officially mandated set of rules for language use and form intended to achieve a planned educational goal within an education setting. Such an educational goal may not pertain to language exclusively but to the overall education outcome. Language-in-education policy could be on its own or be part of a national language policy or an educational policy. Arguably, a policy on education should include a statement on language use as language is the main vehicle for education.

However, a national language policy may include or exclude a statement on language-in-education, depending on the goals of the policy. On the one hand, policy on language-in-education could focus on instructional language where language is regarded as a mere vehicle for dissemination of knowledge and information. Such a policy may, for instance, specify what language to use as a medium of instruction at various levels, as in the case of policies for basic education in Ghana (see Ansah & Agyeman, 2015, p. 90). Such a policy is indispensable in a multilingual education setting. On the other hand, the focus of a policy on language-in-education could be on language as a subject of instruction, where the policy specifies the various languages to be taught and learned in schools, which ones are compulsory, which ones are optional, and so on. Nevertheless, the focus of a policy on language-in-education could be on language as both a medium of instruction and a subject of instruction. In some countries, there are institutions, such as language bureaus that are responsible for language regulations and policies. Ghana has a couple of institutions (e.g.,

The Bureau of Ghana Languages, The Ghana Institute of Languages) that are mandated, in principle, to attend to language needs of the nation.

4. A brief background of formal education in Ghana

According to studies that have discussed the subject of formal education in Ghana (Graham, 1971; George, 1976, Martin, 1976, Agbedor, 1994, Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016), it could be traced back into the Gold Coast era, that is, the colonial era. According to these studies, formal education was first introduced in the Gold Coast in the 15th century by European merchants. These earliest schools were held in castles where the European merchants lived, hence they are referred to as castle schools (Agbedor, 1994, p. 135). Students at the castle schools comprised children of the European merchants that they had with local women (George, 1976, p. 23; Martin, 1976, p. 46; Agbedor, 1994, p. 135). Different European nationals, including the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes, and the British were involved in the castle schools at different times (George, 1976, p. 23; Martin, 1976, pp. 46-47; Agbedor, 1994, pp. 135-137). As far as language of education is concerned, the castle schools were organized in the respective European languages of the different European group (Agbedor, 1994, p. 139). Subjects taught in the castle schools included reading, writing and Catholic religion (Martin, 1976, p. 46; Agbedor, 1994, p. 135).

Establishment of mission schools in the Gold Coast followed the castle schools. The mission schools, as the name suggests, were organized by missionary societies from abroad. They included the Basel Missionary Society from Switzerland, the Wesleyan Missionary Society from England, and the Bremen Missionary Society from Germany (George, 1976, p. 23; Martin, 1976, p. 49; Agbedor, 1994, p. 137). Unlike the castle schools that served only children of European merchants, as stated in above, the mission schools served local children in general.

The missionary schools, especially the Basel mission introduced technical education in addition to the academic education. The technical subjects included woodwork, blacksmith, shoemaking, and bookbinding. (Agbedor, 1994, p. 138). The mission schools used the native languages of the people in the places that they operated. So, for instance the Basel missionaries used Twi in their schools while the Bremen mission schools used Ewe (Agbedor, 1994, p. 142). The primary aim of education for the missionaries was to establish Christian societies (Agbedor, 1994, p. 142). Nevertheless, the missionary societies are

recognized for the strong foundation of education that they established in the country (Agbedor, 1994, p. 142).

The British colonial government got involved in the nation's education management from 1844 (Agebor, 1994, p. 143; Martin, 1976, p. 48). In 1890, Gold Coast had an Education office with a director of education to oversee the nation's education administration and supervision (Martin, 1976, p. 48). In 1920s, education discussion was spearhead through the leadership of Sir Gordon Guggisberg (Martin, 1976, p. 50).

After independence, in 1961, the first president of Ghana, Dr Kwame Nkrumah took steps to strengthen all levels of formal education (primary, secondary, and tertiary) in Ghana.

There have been varying structures of formal education over time. The current structure of formal education in Ghana has various components, as illustrated in Table 1 (see Ansah & Agyeman (2015) for further information on Ghana's current system of basic education).

Table 1: The current structure of formal education system in Ghana

Basic			Secondary	Tertiary
KG (1-2)	Primary (1-6)	JHS (1-3)	SHS/ Technical/ Vocational (1-3)	University/ College of Education/ Polytechnic (1-4) or (1-3)

5. Language-in-education policies in Ghana

As mentioned in Section 3, a policy on language-in-education could be an independent document. Alternatively, it could either be a part of an education policy or a national language policy. In the case of Ghana, although it has a highly multilingual setting, there is no explicit national language policy, as mentioned in Section 1. Apparently, Ghana has an Institute of Languages (GIL) and a Bureau of Ghana languages (BGL), yet neither of these organisations is concerned with the developing of a national language policy.³ The Linguistics Association of Ghana (LAG), another organization with an interest in language affairs, although might have considered the issue of a national language, has not yet produced a policy document to that effect. Indeed, the recognition and use of English as an official

³ The GIL is mainly concerned with the teaching of foreign languages, including English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, German, Russian, and Portuguese, and translations into and bilingual skills in these languages. The BGL on the other hand is concerned with the production of literature in the various Ghanaian languages.



language is not backed by a formal policy. Arguably, the emergence of English as an official language could be attributed mainly to past colonial ties.

Regarding a policy on language-in-education, except for a programme introduced in 2009,⁴ Ghana had not had an exclusive, independent document on it. Nevertheless, there have been policy statements on language-in-education forming part of education policies, ordinances, and reforms. Such education ordinances detailed policies on various aspects of education, such as its structure, content, funding, and any vital changes deemed necessary. Findings from this study revealed a total of about thirteen different education policies, ordinances, and reforms by different governments from 1852 to-date. The rest of this section examines the approved policy statements on-language-in-education, as contained in the various education policies, ordinances, and reforms.⁵

For the castles schools which were the first form of formal education in the country, there is no record of education policy or ordinance. However, there are reports that lessons were carried out in the respective European languages, as stated in Section 5 (again, see Agbedor, 1994, p. 139). In the case of the mission schools however, it is reported that lessons were delivery mainly through the local Ghanaian languages of the places where the missionaries operated (Agbedor, 1994, p. 139). Thus, for instance, the Basel mission which settled in the Akuapem area of the Eastern region used Akuapem-Twi for teaching and learning in the schools they established. Likewise, the Bremen missionaries used Ewe in the schools in the Volta region where they operated. It is however not recorded whether these practices were back by a formal policy or an ordinance.

The earliest recorded formal legislations on education were ordinances passed in 1852 and 1882, respectively (Agbedor, 1994, p. 144). Details of these ordinances however are not available to ascertain whether they contained statements on language-in-education. The next recorded education ordinance which was passed in 1887 is reported to had advocated for the inclusion of reading and writing of English language (Agbedor, 1994, p. 145). This policy statement unambiguously recommended English as a subject of instruction rather that a medium of instruction. Regarding a medium of instruction however, it is not reported whether the ordinance provided any statement. The next recorded ordinance was passed in

⁴ Further discussion of the National Acceleration Literacy Programme (NALAP) appears later in this section.

⁵ Since the focus of this study is on language-in-education, other aspects of the education policies will not be discussed.



1925 and it is said to contain a statement on language-in-education that “while an English education must be given, it must be based solidly on the vernacular” (Agbedor, 1994, pp. 148-149; Klu & Ansre, 2018, p. 596). This policy statement explicitly advocates for a bilingual approach and could be interpreted as referring to both the medium and subject of instruction.

The Accelerated Development Plan of 1951 is the next recorded policy document on education, and it contained a statement on language-in-education which recommended literacy in both English and vernacular in primary school. The policy directed that at the start of primary school, children’s mother tongue should be the medium of instruction while English is taught as a new language, and “as soon as possible”, there will be transition from vernacular to English as the medium of instruction, and the upper classes will receive instruction through the medium of English, except that throughout the whole course, the vernacular will receive a special study (Agbedor, 1994, pp. 150-153; Klu & Ansre, 2018, p. 597). This policy addresses language as medium of instruction as well as subject of instruction, except that there are elements of imprecision, as discussed in Section 7.

Another juncture in Ghana’s language-in-education policy recorded the government’s acceptance of an English-only medium of instruction policy for the entire primary education in 1956 (Agbedor, 1994, p. 153). Notably, it is reported that although there were not enough competent teachers to implement the English-only policy and therefore proposals were submitted for a return to a bilingual model to include mother tongue as a medium of instruction for the start of primary education, as was practiced before, the then education minister is said to have rejected the proposal (Agbedor, 1994, p. 153). Nonetheless, a switch from the English-only policy for the entire primary to a mother tongue medium for the first year of primary school was implemented in 1967, following a change in government in 1966 (Agbedor, 1994, p. 153).

With another change of government in 1970, a new education reform by the Ministry of Education (MoE) changed the language-in-education policy once again. This new policy which came into force in 1971 recommended the use of vernacular in first three years, and if necessary, longer, in primary education. It further recommended the learning of a second Ghanaian language by all children, in addition to their mother tongue (Agbedor, 1994, p. 154; Klu & Ansre, 2018, p. 597). Another change of government in 1972 led to a slight

modification of the policy to include the learning of French at the primary level (Agbedor, 1994, p. 154).

Then, in 1974, a new reform which changed considerably the structure and content of education was introduced (Agbedor, 1994, p. 154). With regards to language-in-education, the policy recommended a Ghanaian language medium of instruction from the first three years of Primary education and as a taught subject throughout basic education. It should be clarified that this reform did not receive a full implementation at the beginning; it only started on a sort of pilot basis until 1987 when it was implemented fully nationwide as the new 1987 JSS Education Reforms.

The next recorded change in education policy was in 2001 (Anyidoho, 2018, p. 227). Regarding language-in-education, the 2001 policy emphasized a bilingual model of a Ghanaian language medium of instruction and English as taught subject from P1-P3. From P4 onwards, English becomes a medium of instruction and a Ghanaian language becomes a subject of instruction. However, in 2002, another change in policy into an English-only medium of instruction throughout Primary education was issued, and a Ghanaian language was to be taught as a subject from P1, and the learning of French was encouraged (Anyidoho, 2018, pp. 227-228). Then again, in 2004, another change in policy recommended a bilingual model of the use of both English and a Ghanaian language as medium of instruction from KG up to P3 (Anyidoho, 2018, p. 229). Apparently, it is not clear whether the changes to the language-in-education in 2001, 2002 and 2004, respectively, were contained in education reforms, as in previous cases, or whether they were independent policies aside from other education reforms. The next recorded change in education policy is the 2007 Education Reform. Regarding language-in-education, the 2007 reform replicated the 2004 model, stating that “medium of instruction in Kindergarten and Lower Primary will be a Ghanaian language and English, where necessary” (Ghana Education Reform, 2007, p. 2).

As indicated earlier in this section, the National Literacy Acceleration Programme (NALAP) introduced by the GES and the MoE in 2009 with the aim of improving literacy in early grade pupils at the basic level may be described as an independent policy on language-in-education. In the NALAP approach, children are taught to read and write in a Ghanaian language from KG, while English is introduced only orally, until P2, where the teaching of reading and writing in English begins (Hartwell & Casely-Hayford, 2010, p. 2). NALAP may



qualify as an independent policy document on language-in-education because it did not form part of a general education reform but specifically and exclusively for language-in-education. Table 2 lists the various education ordinances, and reforms discussed in this section.

Table 2: A list of education ordinances/reforms and Language-in-education policies

	ORDINANCE/REFORM	Language-in-education policy
1.	1852 Ordinance	Details of ordinance not available
2.	1882 Ordinance	Details of ordinance not available
3.	1887 Ordinance	Recommended English as taught subject; medium of instruction not specified.
4.	1925 Education Ordinance - Phelps Stokes Commission Report https://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/142347?show=full	Bilingual medium of instruction
5.	1951 Accelerated Development Plan https://ioe.ucc.edu.gh/sites/default/files/2023-04/UNIT%204%20ADP.pdf	Bilingual medium of instruction: Start with L1 in KG and transition to English in P4
6.	1956 Bernard Committee Report (not digitized).	English-only medium of instruction
7.	1967 Education Review Committee	Bilingual medium of instruction: Start with L1 and transition to English in P2
8.	1971, Ministry of Education	Bilingual medium of instruction: Start with L1 in KG and transition to English in P4, or longer
9.	1972, A New Directive	Bilingual medium of instruction: Start with L1 in KG and transition to English in P4
10.	1974/1987, New JSS Education Reforms https://1library.net/article/background-basic-education-reform-ghana.yn92grlq	Bilingual medium of instruction: Start with L1 in KG and transition to English in P4

11.	2001 (not readily available to the general public)	Bilingual medium of instruction: Start with L1 in KG and transition to English in P4
12.	2002 (https://www.academia.edu/73058030/English_only_language_in_education_policy_in_multilingual_classrooms_in_Ghana)	English-only medium of instruction
13.	2004 (see Anyidoho, 2018)	Bilingual medium of instruction: Start with both L1 and English from KG to P3 and transition to English from P4
14.	2007 Education Reforms https://www.rgs.org/media/4eilhxn2/africalesson6ghanaeducationalreform.pdf	Bilingual medium of instruction: Start with both L1 and English from KG to P3, where necessary
15.	2009, NALAP https://www.associatesforchange.org/download3/Education%20Research/NALAP%20Study/EQUALL%20NALAP%20Implementation%20Study%20Final%20Report.pdf	Read and write in a Ghanaian language from KG, while English is introduced only orally, until P2, where the teaching of reading and writing in English begins

6. Gaps in the framing of the policies

The above-described situation reveals several distinct yet closely related gaps in Ghana's policies on language-in-education. One of such gaps pertains to lack of an independent policy document on language-in-education. As indicated in Section 6, with the exception of NALAP in 2009, and perhaps, the guidelines issued in 2001, 2002, and 2004, all the rest were issued alongside other educational policies and reforms. In such an overall educational policy document, the language-in-education section might tend to be weak or inadequate since there are several other subjects at stake. Emphasis may be on other aspects of education, to the detriment of matters on language-in-education. For instance, in the 1887 education ordinance, recommendations included the acceptance of all children regardless of religion and race, the stipulated average number of children in attendance, qualification of teachers, and subjects to be taught. Thus, regarding language-in-education, it simply recommended the inclusion of



‘reading and writing of English’ (Agbedor, 1994, p. 145). Likewise, in the 1951 Accelerated Development Plan, greater emphasis was on rapid increase in education at all levels, especially the primary level, and also, an increase in the number of teachers (Agbedor, 1994, pp. 150-151). In such omnibus policy documents, other matters may be deemed weightier and tend to overshadow the language-in-education aspect. In that way, the due recognition for matters on language-in-education may be compromised. Thus, the absence of an independent policy document on language-in-education constitutes a major gap.

Closely related to the above-described gap is the absence of an independent body responsible for language-in-education policies. Ghana has no independent establishment for such responsibilities as drafting, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and reviewing of policies on language-in-education, as intimated in Section 6. In the absence of an independent body for these activities, the MoE and its subsidiary sector GES are the two main bodies that undertake the task in Ghana. Meanwhile, the MoE and the GES are concerned with all issues in education and the language aspect may not necessarily be their main concern. If they are left to handle language-in-education policy, they may attend to it only when they deal with other matters of education, and even then, whatever policy they issue on language-in-education may not be adequate. Actually, they tend to issue rather generic education policies, with the aspect on language-in-education being only a segment and rather sketchy, as in the 1887 and the 1925 education ordinances, the 1951 Accelerated Development Plan, the 1956 Education reform, and other subsequent education reforms.⁶ Nonetheless, given the multilingual nature of the Ghanaian classroom, coupled with the fact that academic performance is largely dependent on or directly linked with language-in-education, it is important to pay attention to matters on language-in-education. Therefore, the need to have an independent body tasked with the responsibility cannot be overemphasized. Arguably, such an independent body devoted to language and language-in-education matters is likely to provide better services by issuing policies on language-in-education which are well researched, well thought through, well focused, comprehensive, and thorough.

Another gap identified in the policies involved insufficient details. Such details may include specific guidelines on implementation and other relevant modalities. In many cases of the bilingual medium of instruction policies, including the 1951, 1967, 1971, and 1974

⁶ See Section 6. <https://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/11295/142347?show=full>

models⁷, the guidelines simply specified that children should be started with L1 instruction medium from P1, and change over to English instruction medium from a stipulated class, say P2, or P4, without providing details on what stage to start a gradual introduction of the English medium alongside the L1, and what percentage of each to use at the various stages until a complete switch to the English medium. Such lack of details made the policies sound more like recommendations. Again, the lack of such details created the impression of an abrupt switch from L1 instruction medium to English instruction medium, a method that will make it difficult or impossible for children to understand a totally new medium of instruction. Another example of insufficient details is when the policy recommends the use of both L1 and English media of instruction from KG without specifying what percentage of each to use at the various stages. Also, directives or caveats for exceptional cases are often not specified in the policies. Such lack of adequate details may lead to poor implementation, and consequently, poor outcomes.

Another dimension of the inadequate details relates to the lack of specific directives regarding language use both as a medium of instruction and a subject of instruction. Sometimes the policy fails to include both. For instance, the policy may be solely for language as a subject of instructions and fail to talk about the medium of instruction, as in the case of the 1887 ordinance. But a policy on language-in-education that focuses on language as a subject of instruction to the neglect of medium of instruction is inadequate. Essentially, a policy on language-in-education should primarily attend to the medium of instruction, above all else.

Another gap identified in these policies is the lack of precision in the policy statements. Often, the policy statements are sketchy, with elements of vagueness and imprecision. Example of such statements are illustrated from the 1925 education ordinance and the 1951 accelerated Development Plan, as follows:

- 1) ‘while an English education must be given, it must be based solidly on the vernacular’ (1925 education ordinance).
- 2) ‘as soon as possible, there will be transition from vernacular to English as the medium of instruction’ (1951 Accelerated Development Plan).
- 3) ‘... except that throughout the whole course, the vernacular will receive a special study’ (1951 Accelerated Development Plan).

⁷ Again, see Section 6.

In (1), it is not clear whether the statement is about subject of instruction or medium of instruction or both. Likewise, in (2), the expression ‘as soon as possible’ is imprecise and therefore can be interpreted to mean different timelines. Likewise, in (3), it is not clear what the expression ‘a special study’ is referring to, or how it should be interpreted. Unclear expressions like those in (1), (2), and (3) may lead to confusion and therefore result in an unintended interpretation. Different people may give such confusing statements different interpretations, and implementors may tend to apply such statements wrongly.

Another gap is that the policies fail to outline the rationale behind the policy. Explaining its rationale may help stakeholders appreciate the policy. For instance, it is reported that some teachers, parents, students, and community members find L1 instruction medium unpopular and resist it (see Agyeman, 2013, p. 270). Meanwhile, research has continually provided evidence that L1 instruction medium at the beginning of school has unparalleled benefits and valuable implications for learners (MacSwan et al., 2017; Cantero, 2008; Cummins, 2001; Fafunwa, 1989).

In such circumstances, where stakeholders may oppose a policy out of ignorance, providing information on the rationale for the proposed policy and its benefits may help the stakeholders appreciate it and stop the resistance and tend to accept it. In addition, these policies tend to be silent on several other important details such as the training of teachers in the proposed medium of instruction. It is one thing to possess the qualification to teach a language as a subject and another thing to teach other subjects in that particular language. For instance, a teacher may have the necessary qualification to teach, say, Mathematics, or History in English, but not in the learners’ L1 or even the teacher’s L1. Unfortunately, the policies do not provide guidelines for such situations (which abound in the Ghanaian context). The absence of such guidelines may be a form of impediment. From our interaction with teachers and headteachers, a lot of teachers, particularly of lower primary school where the medium of instruction is supposed to be in an L1, are not following the dictates of the policies because they have no competence to teach in the proposed medium of instruction. For an effective implementation of the policy, such guidelines are required. Furthermore, the policies do not provide specific guidelines for implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and review processes.

The lack of explicit statements on these processes appear to render their application and implementation problematic. It is expected that a comprehensive policy on language-in-



education should include statements on these processes to ensure uniformity in implementation. Again, even though Ghanaian society is sociolinguistically and ethnolinguistically very diverse, the policies appear to treat the society as ethnolinguistically and sociolinguistically homogeneous - they do not include guidelines for handling different classroom settings. Due to the highly multilingual nature of Ghana, its classrooms, especially those in urban areas, tend to be linguistically heterogeneous while classrooms in some rural communities are linguistically less heterogeneous, or even, homogeneous. All these conditions have implications for the choice of medium of instruction in ensuring inclusive education. Yet, the policies often fail to address these concerns and tend to be one-size-fits-all in nature, to the neglect of some pupils. Our interactions with stakeholders in basic education, e.g., teachers, headteachers, revealed that because of this problem, a lot of schools particularly, in urban areas, are unable to implement these policies (the policies become unimplementable).

Finally, we identified the unavailability and inaccessibility of the policy documents to stakeholders as a major gap. From Section 6, it could be realised that the main sources of information on the various education ordinances and reforms were from different studies.⁸ Moreover, the sources sometimes contained only part rather than full details of the language-in-education policies they described. Attempts to trace copies of the policy documents from various repositories, including physical and virtual libraries, as well as online and other electronic sources did not yield much success. Throughout the search, only one document, namely, an abridged version of the 2007 educational reform, was retrieved from the internet. Visits to some regional offices of the GES and interviews with key officers to gain access to the policy documents also proved futile.

7. Conclusion

Language-in-education policy has a nexus with basic education in many jurisdictions. In Ghana, where the linguistic landscape is so diverse, the classroom, especially, in the urban areas, often reflects this high linguistic diversity, there is a need for a robust language policy to ensure inclusive education, a sustainable Development Goal. This paper has touched on one of the key problems affecting basic education in Ghana, viz., language-in-education policies. The discussion began with a brief introduction describing the objectives of the study, namely, to review policies on language-in-education in Ghana in order to identify gaps

⁸ Notable among them are Agbedor (1994) and Anyidoho (2018).

in the policies and provide recommendations for filling the gaps. The discussion continued with a brief description of the methods used in gathering relevant information for the study, followed by a review of literature on topics in language policies in general and language-in-education policies in particular. The discussion continued with a description of the linguistic background of Ghana, the nation in focus to situate the specific context. The discussion then provided a historic background of formal education in Ghana, after which an enumeration and a detailed description of the policies on language-in-education, past and present were provided. The discussion further continued with an identification and outlining of gaps found in the policies, followed by recommendations to close the gaps. Following the gaps and associated problems as outlined in the discussion, we conclude that until there is a major shift in the connection between language and education outcomes, language in education policies will continue to shift. Consequently, we propose the following recommendations for consideration.

First, we recommend the establishment of an independent office for language-in-education policies, as practiced in some countries, such as South Africa where the National Language Policy Framework is tasked with shaping language policy in the country. Ghana should establish an office for the purpose of planning and driving national language policy, including language-in-education policy. This could be done by reviving and restructuring the existing Bureau of Ghana Languages to undertake the work. Alternatively, an entirely new office could be established by the Ghana government for the task. Such an establishment should be independent, such that it does not exist and operate on the oars of any political, social, or economic regime. Primarily, its leadership should be constituted by experts in the fields of language planning, language policies, and language teaching and research. The office should work in collaboration with major stakeholders, such as the MoE and the GES. The office may create departments to handle various aspects of the work.

In addition, this autonomous body should be tasked to draft a robust policy on language-in-education that is tailored for the Ghanaian context. Such a policy should be research-based in many fronts. The research should investigate Ghana's peculiar context by taking into consideration its sociolinguistic factors to clearly define the context. Secondly, the research should view the context in relation to fundamental frameworks and theories on language-in-education policy and planning for adjustments and adaptation. Furthermore, the research should include lessons drawn from experiences of other similar contexts, e.g., South



Africa, Nigeria and Kenya. In drafting a new policy, care should be taken to eliminate all forms of identifiable inadequacies such as the ones outlined in this paper.

We also recommend that policies must be accessible, available and known to implementation bodies like schools and individual stakeholders like teachers, headteachers, education officers, and the GES. In this regard, a proper documentation and safekeeping of policy documents should be ensured. Again, policies should be carefully worded to contain explicit and clear statement to avoid vagueness and ambiguity, for instance, differentiating directives/policies on language as a medium of instruction from those on language as subject of instruction. Additionally, it is expected that language-in-education policy should clearly outline important details, such as guidelines for the following:

- training and qualification to teach in a medium of instruction, e.g., policy should specify that teachers should be qualified in languages they teach in
- training and qualification to teach a language as a subject of instruction
- training and qualification to teach a multilingual class
- posting of trained teachers
- refresher training for qualified teachers
- development and distribution of teaching and learning materials
- evaluation and monitoring of the policy

References

- Adu-Gyamfi, S., Donkoh, W. J., & Addo, A. A. (2016). Educational reforms in Ghana: Past and present. *Journal of Education and Human Development*, 5(3), 158-72.
- Agbedor, P. K. (1994). *Language planning for national development: the case of Ghana*. Doctoral dissertation. University of Victoria.
- Agyeman, N. A. (2013). "Language Use in Winneba - Some Preliminary Observations." In *SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics* Vol. 16, edited by Connor Youngberg and Laura Kipp, 259-277.
- Ansah, G. N. (2014). Re-examining the fluctuations in language in-education policies in post-independence Ghana. *Multilingual education*, 4(1), 12.
- Ansah, M. A., & Agyeman, N. A. (2015). Ghana language-in-education policy: the survival of two south Guan minority dialects. *Per Linguam: a Journal of Language Learning*, 31(1), 89-104.
- Anyidoho, A. (2018). Shifting Sands: Language Policies in Education in Ghana And Implementation Challenges. *Ghana Journal of Linguistics*, 7(2), 225-243.
- Appiah, S. O., & Ardila, A. (2021). The dilemma of instructional language in education: The case of Ghana. *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 11(4), 440-448.
- Cantero, G. V. (2008). The use of "integrability" in the process of linguistic transfer from L1 to L2 or how to enhance the interactivity of language in the communicative processes of the bilingual educational model. *Didactica (Lengua y Literatura)*, 20, 37-60.



- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2012). Language policy in education: Additional languages. *The Cambridge handbook of language policy*, 301-319.
- Cummins, J. (1978). Educational implications of mother tongue maintenance in minority language groups. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 34(3), 395-416.
- Cummins, J. (2001). Bilingual children's mother tongue: why is it important for education. *Sprogforum*, 19, 15-20.
- Eberhard, David M., Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds. (2024). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty-seventh Edition. SIL International. Online version: <https://www.ethnologue.com/>
- Fafunwa, A. B. (1989). Education in mother tongue: The Ife Primary Education Research Project (1970-1978)
- George, B. S. (1976). Education in Ghana.
- Ghana Education Reform (2007).
<https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/https://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ressources/ghana_education_reform_2007.pdf>
- Graham, C. K. (1971). *The History of Education in Ghana: From the earliest time to the declaration of independence*. F. Cass. pp. 181-185.
- Hartwell, A., & Casely-Hayford, L. (2010). National literacy acceleration programme (NALAP): Implementation study. *USAID, Ghana*.
- Hornberger, N. H. (1998). Language policy, language education, language rights: Indigenous, immigrant, and international perspectives. *Language in society*, 27(4), 439-458. Cambridge University Press. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4168870>> Accessed: 08-11-2019.
- Kaplan, R. B. (2013). Language planning. *Applied Research on English Language*: 2(1).
- Klu, K. E., & Ansre, M. A. (2018). An Overview of the Language-in-Education Policy in Ghana: Emerging Issues. *The Social Sciences*, 13(3), 596-601.
- Leherr, K. (2009). National literacy acceleration programme (NALAP) baseline assessment. *USAID/EDC Report*. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADW581.pdf.
- Lin, A., & Martin, P. W. (Eds.). (2005). *Decolonisation, globalisation: Language-in-education policy and practice* (Vol. 3). Multilingual Matters.
- Loncon, E. (2023). The Impact of Colonization on Language Policy in Indigenous Languages. *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 30(1).
- MacSwan, J., Thompson, M. S., Rolstad, K., McAlister, K., & Lobo, G. (2017). Three theories of the effects of language education programmes: An empirical evaluation of bilingual and English-only policies. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 37, 218-240.
- Maraf, B. (2024). English Language Policy in Algeria: Perspectives of University Teachers and Students. *African Educational Research Journal*, 12(1), 38-52.
- Martin, C. A. (1976). Significant trends in the development of Ghanaian education. *The journal of Negro education*.
- Muthwii, M. (2002). Language policy and practices in education in Kenya and Uganda. Perceptions of parents, pupils and teachers in the use of mother tongue, Kiswahili and English in primary schools. Makerere university.
- Peddie, R. A. (1991). One, two, or many? The development and implementation of language policy in New Zealand. University of Auckland.
- Phyak, P. (2013). Language ideologies and local languages as the medium-of-instruction policy: A critical ethnography of a multilingual school in Nepal. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 14(1), 127-143.
- Ricento, T. (2000). Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and planning. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 4(2), 196-213.
- Samuelson, B. L., & Freedman, S. W. (2010). Language policy, multilingual education, and power in Rwanda. *Language Policy*, 9(3), 191-215.
- Spolsky, B. (2002). Globalization, language policy, and a philosophy of English language education for the 21st century. *English Teaching*, 57(4), 3-26.



- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Spolsky, B. (2012). What is language policy? In Benard Spolsky (Ed.). *The Cambridge handbook of language policy* (pp. 3-16). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Walter, S., & Benson, C. (2012). Language policy and medium of instruction in formal education. In Benard Spolsky (Ed.). *The Cambridge handbook of language policy*, 278-300.
- Yevudey, E., & Agbozo, G. E. (2019). Teacher trainee sociolinguistic backgrounds and attitudes to language-in-education policy in Ghana: a preliminary survey. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 20(4), 338-364.