

Early Graders' Learning in Mother Tongue: Parents and Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: *Comprehending the learning process in bilingual situations mostly depends on how the general public perceives the status of local and national languages. As such, considering the Ghanaian language policy which requires that both the English language and learner's mother tongue (MT) be taught as subjects in the classroom and employed as medium of teaching at various levels of the educational ladder, this study explored the perceptions of parents and teachers on the use of MT medium of instruction (MOI) in early childhood education (ECE). Using pragmatist paradigm, the mixed method approach and concurrent embedded design were employed. Questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were used to seek data from 492 respondents in multilingual Ho in the Ho municipality of Volta Region of Ghana. Data was analysed using means and standard deviation, and themes. Findings revealed that notwithstanding their acknowledgement of MT in ECE, both keyholders disapproved MT MOI and commended the use of English or a blend of English and MT as MOI in Primary 1-3. The study therefore recommends that cultural and linguistic diversities of pupils should be considered in determining the language of instruction and communication in ECE. Broader and more engaging conversation is also recommended to inform more inclusive and effective language policy in ECE.*

KEYWORDS: mother tongue, linguistic diversity, English language, early childhood education, settings.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is considered as the beginning of a child's formal educational experience; a stage during which a child's potential can be nurtured (Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MWCA), 2004). Early childhood education (ECE) is crucial to a child's development, which is why there has been a new global emphasis on how desirable it is. It offers services for children between the ages of 0 and 8 (early graders), a time period that is characterized as being of utmost importance to a person's intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development (Osanyin 2002). Since they set the stage for personality development, these periods are the most formative years. Similarly, Osanyin (2002) and Evans et al. (2000) assert that ECE refers to all forms of assistance required for a child's survival, protection, and care in order to guarantee optimum development from birth to age eight. It covers any arrangement, independent of location, financing, operating

hours, or programme content, that provide care and education for children under the age of eight. One such arrangement is the medium of instruction (MOI) in ECE.

Ghana, like many other African nations, is multilingual, which makes it difficult to choose a language for education and ensure its effective implementation. With around 83 different languages spoken, Ghana is linguistically and ethnically diverse (Owu-Ewie, 2013). Despite having a multilingual population, Ghana lacks a clear official language policy. It appears the education department's language policy which mandates that L1, a Ghanaian language, be utilised as the MOI from Kindergarten through Grade 3, with English being studied as a subject is the only language policy in place in Ghana. The second phase of this language policy states that Ghanaian language education should be a fundamental subject up through junior high school and that English should be the language of instruction beginning in Primary 4. The present language policy further stipulates that in kindergarten and lower primary school, the child's first language must be utilised as the principal medium of teaching when instructors and instructional materials are readily available and linguistic diversity in classrooms is generally uniform. Under the National Accelerated Literacy Programme, Ghana's language policy now mandates that ECE include mostly of the L1 (90 percent) and little L2 (10 percent) instruction (Education Strategic Plan, 2003-2015).

The introduction of the current language policy of education has generated further debate among stakeholders on the exact language to be used for instruction in Ghanaian schools. Governments and policy experts, implementors, end users among others have contributed to the debate using various settings and backgrounds.

Investigating perceptions of parents and teachers on MT use and their preferred medium of communication and instruction for preschool children at home and in school, Tackie-Ofosu et al, (2015), found that both parents and teachers recognize the value of MT, citing factors such as the promotion of cultural identity, the simplicity of conceptual comprehension, and successful communication. The study revealed that parents and teachers of early graders in the Dansoman community in the Ablekuma South Constituency of the Ga South District in the Greater Accra Region approve the use of MTs in addition to English as MOI in schools. The study was conducted using a cross-sectional study design.

Abdulai and Abrompah (2017) adopted a quantitative research approach using a survey-type design to investigate early childhood educators' perceptions of the use of Dagbani (L1) as a tool of instruction at the early childhood level in the Tamale municipality of Northern Ghana. Findings revealed vast difference between educators from private and public schools relative to whether L1 should be used as MOI at the early childhood level. While there was support on the part of early childhood educators at public schools in L1 pedagogical use, the opposite is the case with private schools. Reilly et al. (2022:88) compared the language policy in Ghana and Malawi by examining the differing approaches to multilingualism in education and found among other things '... that teachers view English as a key language for their pupils to learn, and this has a significant influence on their reported attitudes towards policy'.

Inferring from the above literature, very little may have been done in relation to perspectives from varied stakeholders using mixed method design. This constitutes a significant methodological gap in knowledge considering its implications in terms of policy and practice and this, the current study hopes to fill. The study, in adding to existing literature, focuses on multilingual factors and the provision of consistency in the opinions of educational stakeholders on the MOI in ECE. It hopes to promote the need to engage parents and teachers effectively in rolling out educational policies and also the need to incorporate the expertise and skills required of teachers to enable them implement educational policies effectively. The study also unveils the need to sensitize and regularly organize in-service training for parents and teachers respectively. It focuses on the choice of MT in the face of diverse cultural and linguistic differences in a dynamic and developing setting. Thus, this study sought to investigate the perspectives of parents and teachers on the use of MT as MOI in ECE in Ho, in the Ho Municipality of the Volta Region of Ghana.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1. What do parents and teachers of Ho know about the use of Ewe as medium of instruction in Primary 1-3?
2. What are the perspectives of parents of early graders on the use of Ewe as medium of instruction in Ho?
3. How do teachers in Ho support the use of Ewe as medium of instruction in ECE?
4. What are parents and teachers of early graders' preferred medium of instruction in Ho?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the additive model of bilingualism, which supports the argument for using indigenous languages in early level of education. This conceptual framework for bilingualism includes the additive and subtractive models as well as associated models like transitional and immersion. Literature demonstrates that bilingual education makes the assumption that early graders would linguistically advance when bilingualism is additive rather than subtractive, as well as transitional and immersed in engagement during language teaching (Baker, 2011). The additive model of bilingualism enables society to appreciate the child's MT as well as their second language. Children can therefore acquire a second language while maintaining their first language (Borich & Tombari, 1997). According to this theory, children's academic, linguistic, or intellectual development is not adversely affected by the development of additive bilingualism. According to Baker (2011), a more additive approach to bilingualism allows for the nurturing and support of the child's first language and related culture before introducing the second language later. Baker asserts that transitional bilingual programmes leverage the learner's first language to promote rapid L2 growth so that learners can go on to an English-only programme more rapidly. The argument is to exclusively utilise the learner's first language to make up for their English language ability in order to get them ready for English immersion.

Empirical Review

The phrase "mother tongue" has no universally accepted meaning. According to Alabi et al. (2008), the word refers to a monolingual person's first or native language. They explain that such language is naturally present in a person's native context and is utilized to satisfy all of the person's linguistic demands. Nyariti and Ambiyó (2014) view it as the first language of a child which is usually learnt from the home through interactions with older family members. To this end, MT is learned at birth and from the very few persons a child interacts with after birth to accomplish all linguistic needs. Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) uses the definition of MT on four parameters namely origin, identification (internal or external), competence and function. By origin, the author explained MT as the language one learned first. In other words, it is the tongue in which one has made the first persistent linguistic connections. By identification, MT is seen as the language one identifies with as a native speaker (internal) or the language one is identified with as a native speaker by others (external). The competence criterion for defining MT is about the language one is most proficient in while the language one uses best becomes the functional aspect of the definition. MT and primary or first language are synonyms, according to UNESCO (2008). In summary, MT refers to the language(s) persons learn first, are associated with as native speakers, are comfortable with and proficient in, and use most frequently. L1, vernacular, local language, first language, native language, tribal language, indigenous languages are usually used in reference to MT.

Klaus (2003) states that utilizing language that learners can connect to or comprehend boosts their engagement in class, has a positive impact, and raises their self-esteem and learners find it simpler to transfer their literacy abilities to other languages, such as English, if they learned them in their MT (Patricia (2004). In support of this claim, Schwartz et al. (2012) contend that L1 proficiency actually speeds up the acquisition of L2 and children who learn in their MT, particularly in their early years, do perform better than their peers who did not (Larson-Freeman, 2001). The benefits of the use of L1 as tool for teaching are enormous as again, MT education is seen as a medium for teachers and students to organically engage while negotiating meanings in participatory learning, which is beneficial for both cognitive and linguistic development (Heugh, 2006). Ekinci-Vural, and Doğan-Altun (2021) confirm that the use of L1 is advantageous for language acquisition because it facilitates task completion and offers social and cognitive environments where students may support one another throughout an activity's duration. This will ensure improved academic achievement and confidence in students. Many linguists, along with seasoned and successful bilinguals, share this opinion and contend that it is extremely desirable for multi-cultural communities to foster the use of a first language in the education of young bilinguals (Lartec & Anastacia, 2014).

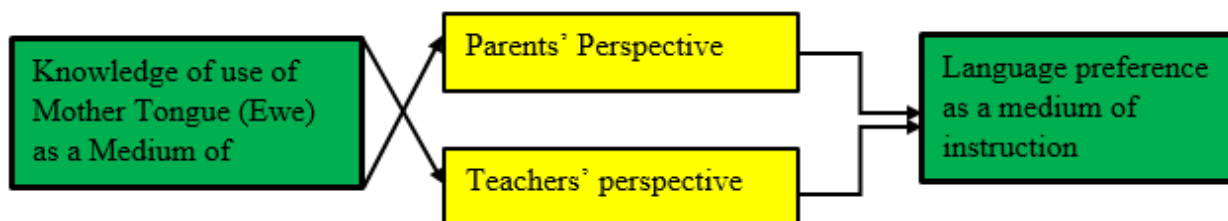
The preference for English as the medium of teaching over the native tongue may have anything to do with linguistic cultures. Ball (2010), for instance, mentions a widespread notion that schooling in the MT may prevent students from acquiring additional languages and potentially hinder their academic progress. Additionally, it is frequently thought that implementing MT education will cost money as it requires the recognition of additional indigenous languages and the creation of textbooks and instructional materials in them. The capacity of learners to transfer their linguistic and cognitive abilities may suggest that mastery of the MT helps the learning of

new languages. To the aforementioned comes the idea that knowing English will have economic advantages (Sallabank, 2010) but it hinders learning by denying children access to a strong cultural and linguistic basis (Obanya, 2004).

Additionally, employing MT in education would help indigenous languages stay relevant and maintain their survival as language erosion is a global threat to their existence. Numerous research on MT in education have been conducted in order to address the issues with language in education and determine the preferred languages of parents, instructors, and students. Adesina and Okewole (2014) found evidence of favorable attitude whereas Nyariti and Ambiyio (2014) identified conflicting views among teachers and parents towards MT use in schools. Although English was the primary language of instruction, Ezeokoli and Ugwu (2019) found that teachers also used the MT to effectively teach other topics. There is evidence for preference for use of both English and the MT instruction (Amadi, 2012) and disapproval of MT instruction (Khejeri, 2014).

According to Ezeokoli and Ugwu (2019), parents, instructors, and students all have strong opinions regarding the MT's pedagogical value. The authors contend that MT-based instruction might improve students' learning, involvement in class, sense of self-confidence, general academic success, and acquisition of English as a second language. Speaking one's MT does not, in the opinion of teachers and parents, have a detrimental impact on a student's academic success. Additionally, while the majority of teachers favor teaching all courses in the MT, majority of parents disagree. Parents would rather their children study all subjects in English than in their MT (Ezeokoli & Ugwu, 2019). Kinyaduka and Kiwara (2013) reported that both parents and teachers appreciate the advantages of MT in education, yet, preferred English as the language of instruction. Besides, policy makers and government lack enough political will to enforce MT education or convince people of its advantages. This is coupled with the fact that English is predominantly used in key sectors of the society such as politics, judiciary and higher education. The belief that English is the language of modernisation and the government's eagerness to develop might be one of the reasons for overreliance on English. Most parents are eager to adopt modernity like their counterparts in industrialized nations, especially in the fields of science and technology and hence, favor bilingual education where English and the indigenous languages are utilized in classrooms (Amadi, 2012) and early exposure to English enhances academic performance (Darko & Quarcoo, 2017).

Conceptual Framework



Source: Researcher's Constructed Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study was Ho. Ho is the designated capital of Volta Region, one of Ghana's administrative regions. The main profession of the indigenes is farming and trading. As the administrative capital of the Volta Region, Ho is cosmopolitan with the influx of professionals of various pedigrees into the Municipality and hence the multilingual nature of the setting. According to the Municipal Education Management Information System Officer and the 2020/2021 Annual School Census, there were a total of ninety-six (96) basic schools and early childhood centers in Ho.

The study employed the mixed method approach (Creswell, 2014) anchored on pragmatist paradigm which focuses on a worldview that supports the methods of research to understand the research problem under study (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) and does not belong to any one philosophical school or nature of reality (Diwakar, 2019). The research adopted the concurrent embedded design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). In this, qualitative data is nested in the larger quantitative data but both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently.

The target population was all P1-3 parents (3164 pupils) and teachers (385) in Ho with the accessible population being parents and teachers in ten selected private and public schools in the town (for anonymity, the names of the selected schools are concealed). A total of 418 parents and 74 teachers constituted the sample for the study. This represents 13.2% parents and 19.2% teachers (Cohen et al., 2019). All 492 respondents were selected using simple random sampling technique (quantitative phase) out of which ten (10) participants comprising two head teachers, four teachers and four parents from both private and public schools were purposively sampled for the qualitative phase. This satisfies the willingness and availability of participants (Creswell, 2015).

Primary data was collected through the use of survey questionnaires and semi-structured interview guide. Open-ended questions were used to help easy administration of questionnaires. The questionnaire was made up of four (4) sections: demographic information, knowledge on the use of Ewe as medium of instruction, perspectives of parents and teachers on the use of Ewe as MOI in ECE, and MOI preference of respondents in ECE. A three-point likert scale was used.

800 questionnaires were distributed to 400 teachers and parents each of private and public early childhood centers out of which 516 were retrieved. All data collected were first grouped and edited for consistency and clarity of expression and 492 found appropriate for analysis. Afterwards, a coding format was adopted and used to make the variable view input into Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS) version 20. All items were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The qualitative data was presented under themes (thematic analysis). To conceal the identities of the respondents, no names/references were made. The analysis was based on the four (4) research questions.

Analysis of Demographic Data of Respondents

Table 1: Gender of Respondent

Gender of Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Female	305	62
Male	187	38
Total	492	100.0

Table 1 presents results of gender distribution of the respondents. The results show that 305 (62%) respondents were females and 187 (38%) were males. This implies that majority of respondents were females.

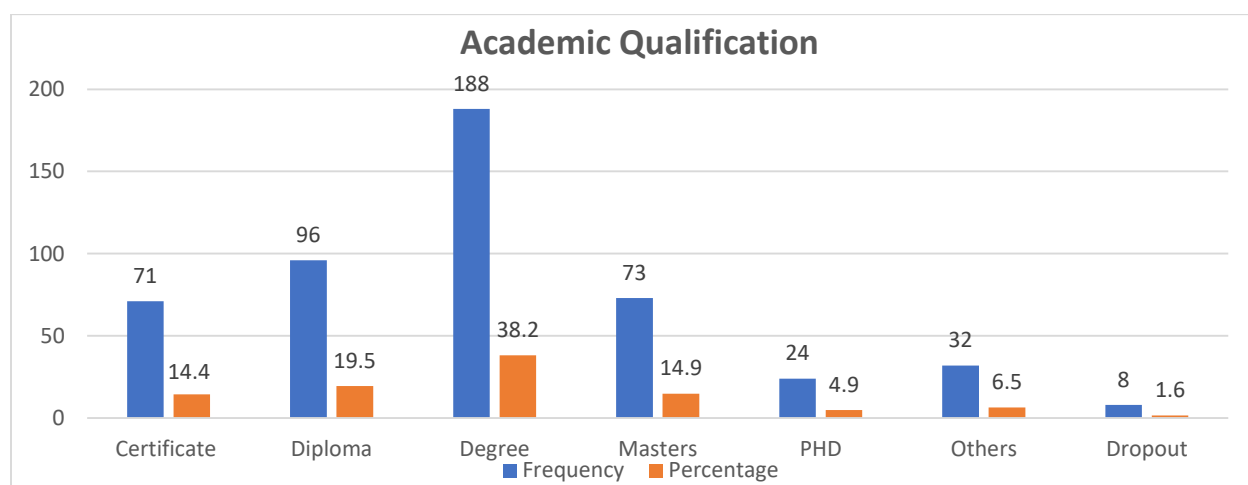


Figure 1: Academic Qualifications of Respondents

Figure 1 shows that, 71 (14.4%) of respondents held certificate, 96 (19.5%) diploma, 188 (38.2%) Bachelor's degree and 73 (14.8%) were master's degree holders. The number of respondents who held PHD, 24 (4.9%), 32 (6.5%) had other forms of qualifications. 8 (1.6%) respondents were school dropouts. The results indicate that majority of parents were educated with 452 (77.5%) being graduates. Their preference of language choice for teaching in early grade children is therefore likely to be influenced by their educational background and expectations.

Table 2: School Type of Early Graders

School	Frequency	Percentage
Public	121	24.6
Private	371	75.4
Total	492	100.0

The above table shows that 121 (24.6%) of respondents had their children at the public school while 371 (75.4%) of the parents had their children at the public school. The results suggest that

majority of the respondents prefer private ECE in the Ho Municipality. It also shows that more parents and teachers of private school early graders were willing to, completed and returned the questionnaires for the analysis.

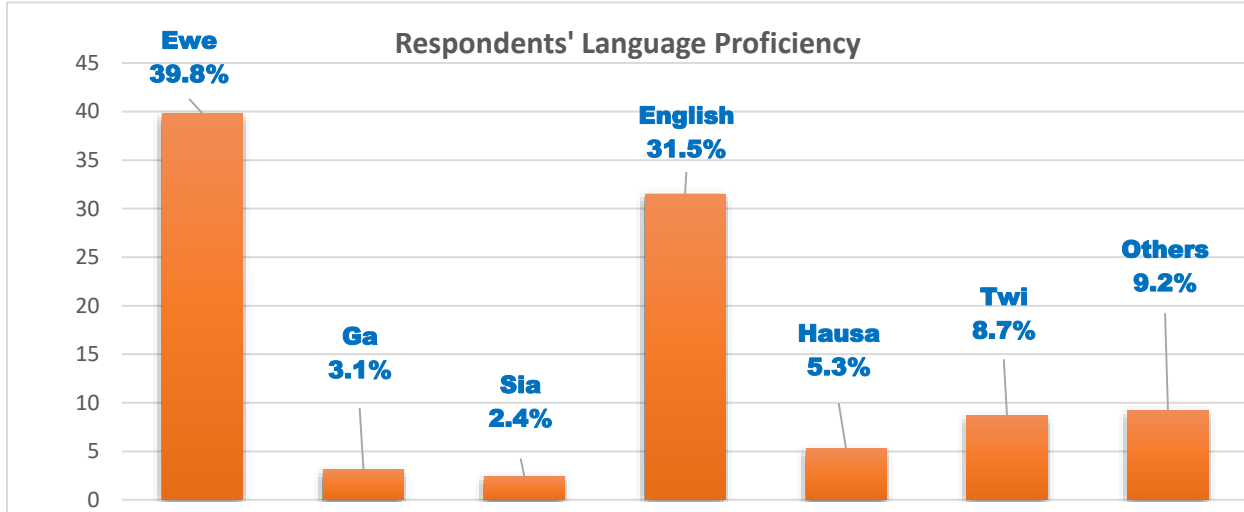


Figure 2: Language Proficiency of Respondents

Figure 2 presents respondents' language proficiency. The results show that 196 (39.8%) of respondents were proficient in Ewe, 15 (3.1%) in Ga, 12 (2.4%) in Sia, 155 (31.5%) in English, 26 (5.3%) in Hausa, 43 (8.7%) in Twi while 45 (9.2%) in other languages not captured. The results imply that majority of the respondents were proficient in Ewe and English. In summary, 296 (60.2%) of respondents were proficient in other languages other than Ewe.

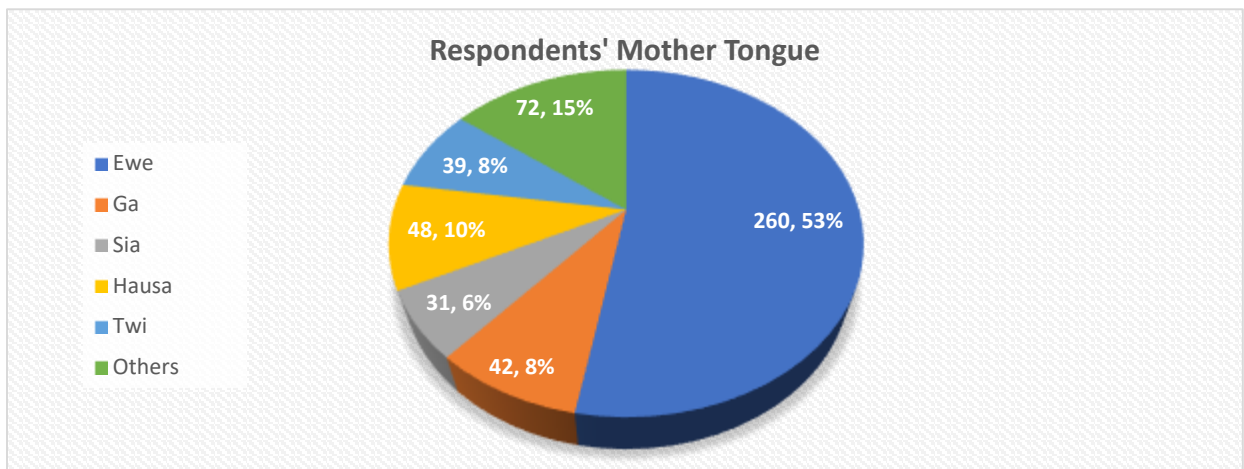


Figure 3: Respondents' Mother Tongues

The figure above shows respondents' MT. The result indicates that the MT of 260 (53%) respondents is Ewe, 42 (8%) Ga, 31 (6%) Sia, 48 (10%) Hausa, 39 (8%) Twi and 72 (15%) representing unidentified languages. The result implies that the native language of majority of respondents is Ewe. This is not surprising as the study was conducted in the Ho municipality of the Volta region where Ewe is the predominant language. The results also reveal that with strict implementation of the of the current language policy of the use of Ewe MOI in ECE, 232 (47.9%) of respondents' children in the Ho Municipality would be disadvantaged.

Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Main Results

The analysis was based on the research questions raised to guide the study. The results in this section were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The scoring rubric and the interpretation of the results with regards to the mean and standard deviations are presented below.

Table 3: Scoring Rubrics

Mean (M)	Interpretation
2.6-3.0	Strongly Agree
2.1-2.5	Agree
1.6-2.0	Disagree
0.1-1.5	Strongly Disagree
Standard Deviation (SD)	
1 or greater than 1	Difference
Less than 1	Similarity

Research Question 1: What do parents and teachers know about the use of Ewe as medium of instruction in Primary 1-3?

Results from the questionnaire indicate that majority of respondents (M=2.82, SD=0.67) were aware of the language policy of ECE with similarity in responses. Similarly, majority of the respondents (M=2.12, SD=0.71) were aware that Ewe was not used in instructing/communicating outside the classroom in their P 1-3 children's schools and again, the responses were similar. Finally, majority of respondents (M=1.34, SD=0.33) were not informed that P1-3 pupils communicate among themselves in Ewe in their schools. The standard deviation score of 0.33 shows that the responses were similar. The mean of mean score of 2.09 shows that parents strongly agreed that they have knowledge of Ewe MOI and the mean of standard deviation of 0.57 indicates that the responses are much similar. The results imply that majority of the respondents have knowledge of the language policy in ECE.

To better understand the findings of the quantitative analysis, participants were interviewed on their knowledge on the language policy of MT (Ewe) MOI. The analysis is presented under themes and presented below with excerpts of views of participants.

Theme 1: Knowledge of existing language policy in ECE

“Yes”

“I do ...”

“Oh yes! I am very much aware of it”

“Yes”

“Yes”

“Not really”

“Yes”

“Yes.”

“A current policy, no”

“I don’t know about their policy o. Today this, tomorrow that...”

The above excerpts confirm findings of the quantitative data that proves respondents’ awareness of existing language policy as majority of respondents answered in the affirmative.

Theme 2: What the policy states

“It is the use of English and the local language during teaching and learning”

“I can’t get it exactly but I know there is a policy”

“Don’t speak vernacular. Hahaha!?”

“I think it is the use of local language in lower classes? Yes. That’s it”

“Ewe is used for teaching up to P3 and English is used from P4 onwards”

“Truthfully, I don’t know.”

“I know there is a policy about local languages and Ewe but my dear, I cannot quote”

“The use of the local language for teaching up to P3 and English used from P4”

The above excerpts suggest respondents’ knowledge of the existing language policy for education. A number of respondents could not state the policy or were not sure of what the policy states. This suggests the need for more education on the policy. Teacher training institutions, Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), Education directorates and all stakeholders in education should be encouraged to engage in sensitization programmes to educate the populace on the policy.

Theme 3: MT use in and outside the classroom

“My children tell me they use English only for all communications within the school?”

“Pupils use Ewe most of the time”

“They use Ewe unless forced by a teacher and even that would be just for the moment.”

“We are very strict with the use of English here.”

“You know that for private schools, we are strict with English use. Parents will withdraw their wards if they find out any local language is used here.”

“Our pupils speak Ewe except one or two English vocabularies”

Responses indicate that whereas English only MOI is used in private schools, MT MOI is often used in public schools in and outside the classroom.

Theme 4: Knowledge of the implementation of the policy

“...several years back but I do not know of its use at the moment because in my daughter’s school, it is not used. They use English throughout.

“Okay. It is not used in my son’s school”

“Yes. I use Ewe mostly in teaching.”

“My dear, we are to use it paaa especially when teaching new and difficult concepts. It helps”

“We use it here but not strictly.”

“We use English for everything because we are very strict with English here.”

“Sometimes.”

“The truth is my teachers use it but I know they also use English”

“I don’t know but I believe the teachers use English if not why are they teachers?”

The above responses indicate that majority of respondents were aware of the use of MT as MOI but the policy is not strictly adhered to in teaching Primary 1-3 especially in private schools. The results confirm the mean and standard deviation score in the quantitative analysis.

Research Question 2: What are the perspectives of parents of early graders on the use of Ewe as medium of instruction in Ho

Results indicate that respondents strongly agreed ($M=2.84$, $SD=1.04$) that the use of Ewe MOI in Primary 1-3 promotes better understanding of concepts. The standard deviation of 1.04 indicates responses differ much from each other. Similarly, respondents strongly agreed ($M=2.51$, $SD=0.93$) that the use of Ewe in Primary 1-3 prepares learners well for other learning. The standard deviation of 0.93 shows that responses did not differ. Majority of the respondents strongly disagreed ($M=1.43$, $SD=0.83$) that children taught in Primary 1-3 using Ewe perform better than those taught using English language. The standard deviation of 0.83 shows that the responses were similar.

Also, majority of respondents ($M=2.84$, $SD=0.86$) strongly agreed that the use of Ewe in Primary 1-3 negatively affects learning in/of English language. The standard deviation of 0.86 shows that the responses were homogeneous. Responding to the statement “Use of Ewe as MOI in Primary 1-3 negatively affects national unity later in life”, majority of the parents agreed ($M=2.47$, $SD=0.86$) with similarity in responses. This finding does not confirm the assertion that disuse of MT hinders learning by denying children access to a strong cultural and linguistic basis (Obanya, 2004).

Similarly, majority of parents strongly agreed ($M=2.84$, $SD=1.05$) that, the use of Ewe MOI in Primary 1-3 affects learning in upper classes. The standard deviation of 1.05 shows that the responses differ. The statement, “The use of Ewe as medium of instruction in Primary 1-3 promotes better understanding of concepts” had a mean and standard score of 2.63 and 1.04 respectively which indicate respondents’ agreement with differences in responses. Furthermore,

majority of parents disagreed ($M=1.54$, $SD=0.93$) that the use of Ewe in Primary 1-3 prepares learners well for learning in English with similarity in responses. The opinion of parents on the statement, “Children taught in Primary 1-3 using Ewe perform better than those taught using English language” had a mean and standard deviation score of 1.77 and 0.86 respectively. This indicates parents’ disagreement and homogeneity in the responses. Again, majority of parents agreed ($M=2.84$, $SD=0.45$) that the use of Ewe in Primary 1-3 negatively affects learning in/of English language with similarity in responses.

Also, majority of parents strongly disagreed (1.24 , $SD=0.42$) that the use of Ewe MOI in Primary 1-3 positively affects cooperation with peers with different L1 backgrounds in later years and the responses were similar. The mean of mean score of 2.53 shows that parents have positive perspective on the use of MT MOI in primary 1-3. The mean standard deviation of 0.68 shows the similarity in the responses of parents. Excerpts of responses from the interview conducted are presented as follows

Theme 5: Benefits of MT use

“I believe that when learners are taught in a language they understand, they get to understand lessons better ...”

“Using Ewe can help the children now but I am not sure of the after...”

“It may help understanding because the children speak the language in their homes and in their communities.”

These responses indicate that the use of Ewe as medium of instruction in Primary 1-3 promotes better understanding of concepts at their levels but there is no guarantee of what happens when they have to do without the Ewe.

Theme 6: Performance of pupils taught in MT

“I don’t believe that. My children are taught in English and they perform better than public-school pupils who are taught in Ewe.”

“Pupils who do not understand Ewe turn to be disadvantaged”

“If I have money, I will send my child to private school. No one can say children taught using Ewe perform better than those taught using English language.”

“I cannot say for a fact but I believe pupils taught in Ewe-only may have serious difficulties in upper classes especially when they relocate.”

Responses above suggest parents’ poor perception of MT MOI in educating early graders.

Theme 7: Effects of MT use in ECE

“My child cannot cope in the classroom here because we moved from Kumasi to join the father who was transferred to Ho.”

“... but how do we identify each learner’s native language and how do we use all the various languages during teaching?”

“It is not true. Consider a child who is taught in Ewe but suddenly transferred to an all-English school when he reaches P4. How do you think the child will cope? If you’re not lucky, the child will stop school!”

“... but the future gets tough for them especially when they move to a different school.”

The analysis of findings reveals parents' strong disapproval for MT pedagogy and that although parents have knowledge of ECE language policy, they do not support its pedagogical value. To them, the use of Ewe in Primary 1-3 negatively affects learning in/of English language and also affects learning in upper classes. This confirms findings that parents have strong opinions on MT MOI and would rather prefer their children study all subjects in English than in their MT (Ezeokoli & Ugwu, 2019). Again, the results confirm findings that most parents believe early exposure to English enhances academic performance (Darko & Quarcoo, 2017) so they impatiently want their children to communicate in English and at worse, favor bilingual education in which English and MT are both utilized in classrooms (Amadi, 2012). Parents were concerned with the multilingual nature of classrooms in Ho.

Question 3: How do teachers in Ho support the use of Ewe as medium of instruction in ECE?

Results on the perspective of teachers on Ewe MOI use show that majority of teachers disagreed (M=1.63, SD=0.33) to the statement, “Many pupils in my class do not speak/understand Ewe”. The standard deviation of 0.33 shows that the responses were similar. This justifies the fact that the study was conducted in Ho where Ewe is the native language. The teachers strongly agreed (M=2.11, SD=0.73) that the use of Ewe MOI promotes better understanding of concepts. Again, a standard deviation score of 0.73 shows that the responses were similar. The teachers disagreed (M=2.56, SD=0.63) that the use of Ewe in Primary 1-3 prepares learners well for other learning. The standard deviation score of 1.13 shows that the responses were dissimilar. Responding to the statement, “Early grade teachers teach well in Ewe than they do in English”, the teachers disagreed (M=1.89, SD=0.77). The similarity in the responses is shown in the standard deviation score of 0.77.

Also, the statement, “Children taught in Primary 1-3 using Ewe perform better than those taught using English language had a mean and standard deviation score of 1.47 and 0.68 respectively indicating teachers' strong disagreement with similarity in responses. Furthermore, the teachers disagreed (M=1.64, SD=0.64) that the use of Ewe as MOI affects learning in upper classes and responses were similar. Responding to the statement “The use of Ewe in Primary 1-3 negatively affects learning in/of English language”, the teachers agreed (M=2.03, SD=0.93). The standard deviation of 0.93 indicates that the responses to this statement just as the others, were homogeneous. With a mean and standard deviation of 1.24 and 0.86, majority of the teachers strongly disagreed with similarity in responses to the statement, “The use of Ewe in Primary 1-3 prepares learners well for learning in English”. Finally, majority of the teachers strongly agreed (M=2.84, SD=0.72) that the use of Ewe MOI negatively affects cooperation with others with different background in later years with similar responses.

In order to get deeper understanding of the findings of the quantitative analysis, the following excerpts are the views of some participants were on the use of Ewe MOI in Primary 1-3. The excerpts below represent their views:

Theme 8: Language used in P1-3 classrooms

Discussions on the theme suggest the application of policy, use of discretion by teachers resulting in codemixing and codeswitching. Some of the responses are presented below;

“This is a public school so I use Ewe in teaching.”

“We teach in English in this school and all the children understand. We help those who do not and they grasp concepts well.”

“English”

“I use Ewe and a little of English”

“We do not use Ewe or any other Ghanaian language in this school.”

Theme 9: Teachers’ competence in MT use

Discussions around this theme produced various comments suggesting that promoting MT use has several dynamics associated with it. Some typical comments included;

“I speak and understand Ewe so teaching in it is not a problem”

“I am a born and bred Voltarian and I speak Ewe well so I can teach effectively using Ewe”

“I am very good with the use of Ewe but some of my colleagues do not speak or understand Ewe so I can’t tell how they will teach with this policy”

“I teach BS2. I can teach using Ewe but we are not allowed to use the local language here.”

“My P2 teacher is learning to speak Ewe so she is not fluent to use it effectively in teaching. She will require assistance.”

The comments suggest that the teachers have competence in the MT. However, there are climatic conditions in some schools that prohibit the use of MT. At the same time there are tensions where it is noted that some teachers had little competence and linguistic capital for MT use in teaching. Thus, if the policy were to be followed, some teachers would have difficulty using the MT for instruction. This speaks to how teacher posting policy may have to be streamlined if Mt use were to be strictly enforced.

Theme 10: Positive effects of MT use in the classroom

One area of discussion concentrated around the effects of MT use. Some comments regarding the positive effects of MT use were;

“When Ewe is used in teaching, the learners understand the concept very well and very fast. It provides assurance for learners.”

“Ewe use breaches the gap between school and home and makes learning easier for the pupils. It makes a home of the school.”

“It encourages communication and cooperation among pupils of the same native language background.”

“Teaching in Ewe may help pupils who understand Ewe a lot but the teacher may have to explain using English for those who do not understand Ewe.”

It may be argued that MT use promotes understanding, participation and ensure that students engage more in the teaching and learning process. However, the cosmopolitan nature of the Ho

Municipality meant that students who are not indigenes may be disadvantaged although they may be fewer than those who may suffer the disadvantages of the non-use of MT.

Theme 11: Negative effects of MT use in the classroom

In terms of negative effects, the discussions produced several comments that bespeak the point. Typical comments included the following:

“The policy is making our public schools unattractive thereby causing fall in enrolment at early grade because non-Ewe speakers don’t adjust. Even our public-school teachers send their wards to private schools?”

“I know a lot of my colleagues who use Ewe and little English in teaching in upper classes because the pupils seem used to the Ewe teaching. Only little English is used at JHS. They speak Ewe among themselves both in and outside the classroom.”

“The policy is not helping. Even local illiterate market women send their children to private schools because of this language thing”

“That will be very difficult. In this school, we have a lot of children who speak Twi or Ga or English only so the use of Ewe won’t help”

The main disadvantages identified as negative effects are two: 1) there were teachers who may not be able to use the Ewe to teach; 2) there were students whose MT is not the local language of the Ho community. An additional point was that there were some parents who take interest in ensuring that their children acquire as much English linguistic capital as much as possible to the extent that the use of MT makes them transfer their children to private schools.

Theme 12: Promoting MT use in P1-3

Teachers’ views were specifically sought on whether they will advocate for the use of MT use in schools. The comments implied that teachers had differing opinions on the matter. Some of the main comments included that;

“I shall advocate for a review of the policy to improve its use in all schools.”

“We need to promote our local languages”

“It could be reviewed to make it more attractive”

“I will go for the disuse of this policy

“They can refine it to cater for every child.”

It is evident from discussions that the use of MT MOI helps pupils to better understand concepts taught but its use in a multilingual setting disadvantages sections of learners who are not proficient in the particular MT. The findings confirm findings of Reilly et al. (2022) and Abdulai and Abrompa (2017) that teachers view English as a key language for their pupils to learn but do not have what it takes to implement the policy to its best. It also refutes Ekinici-Vural, and Doğan-Altun (2021) since the use of English or the blend of English and MT equally facilitates task completion and offers social and cognitive environments where students may support one another throughout an activity's duration.

Research Question 4: What are parents and teachers of early graders' preferred medium of instruction in Ho?

Results on parents and teachers' preferences of the MOI in ECE indicate that majority of respondents disagreed ($M=1.82$, $SD=0.04$) with Ewe MOI with similarity in their responses. Majority of respondents strongly disagreed ($M=1.24$, $SD=0.45$) that their Primary 1-3 children should not be taught and communicated with in English only and the responses were similar. Responding to the statement, "A blend of English and Ewe should be used as medium of instruction in Primary 1-3", majority of the respondent strongly agreed ($M=2.66$, $SD=0.63$) and again with similarity in responses. The mean of mean score of 2.12 shows that respondents agreed prefer a blend of MT and English as medium of instruction in Primary 1-3.

Excerpts from the interview on views of participants on their preferred language for teaching in Primary 1-3 are presented as follows;

Theme 13: English-only MOI

Majority of respondents (6 out of 10) proposed the use of an English-only MOI in teaching and communication in P1-3. Excerpts are;

"I prefer the use of English to Ewe"

"Only English"

"English"

"Madam, English should be used for teaching and learning. Always."

"English"

"I prefer the use of English"

Theme 14: Blend of MT and English MOI

"English but the Ewe and other Ghanaian languages can be used ...

"... but English should be key"

"Fifty-fifty."

"Both Ewe and English so as to satisfy the demands of the policy"

4 out of the 10 respondents representing 40% of respondents opted for a blend of English and MT as MOI in teaching early graders. It is worth noting that not a single respondent agreed to or proposed the use of MT-only MOI in ECE in Ho.

Theme 15: Reasons English only MOI

Respondents assigned varying reasons for English-only MOI. These include the function of English in education, need for early exposure, uniformity in ECE, satisfaction in multilingual situations, modernization and civilization among other. Respondents' explanations are presented below;

"When we use English, no child is disadvantaged. The teachers need to employ strategies to help weak children"

"Early exposure to the language of education is paramount. English use will ensure healthy competition among children. When children start using English early like 1yr, it helps them perform well in class. Which parent won't be happy

and proud seeing his/her child rattle English? Even children struggle to pick their native language.”

“My children speak English at home, church and in the community so why won't they understand when they are taught in English in school? I expect the school to use English to ensure good improvement.”

“Why Ewe? Why not Hausa or any other Ghanaian language? What happens to children who do not speak or understand Ewe in the class? You see, when children are introduced to language early, they pick fast.”

“The use of English in the classroom serves as a unifying tool and also ensures that children from all other local language backgrounds feel comfortable in any school especially our public schools.”

Theme 16: Reasons for a blend of MT and English MOI

Reasons for the choice of English-MT MOI focuses on the promotion of learning. Excerpts are presented below

“... to explain key concepts and help those who understand Ewe as and when needed”

“This will make all pupils feel at home and promote good learning.”

“The combination will satisfy demands of the policy as well as needs of the child.”

Theme 17: Concerns

According to respondents, the language background of each child must be considered in the choice of an MT to ensure effective communication and comprehension. Respondents also provided the following concerns in the implementation and application of language policies in ECE.

“For me, the most important thing is that my child should understand what her teachers teach. They should use the language that can achieve that. For my children, English is the language they understand and speak so ...”

” As teachers, we should have the right to determine the language to use depending on the class.”

“Teachers should be mindful of the language background of each child when deciding to blend the local language and English.”

“These are some of the reasons why public education especially at the lower level is unattractive. They should stop such policies and use English. Why then do private school children outperform public school children. Brilliant children speak good English. That's why I brought my child to a private school because they teach well using English only”

It is evident from the foregoing extracts that both parents and teachers prefer the use of English MOI in teaching their P1-3 children. They reject or disapprove MT MOI. This result confirms that the use of MT in addition to English as the medium of teaching in schools is supported few teachers and parents (Tackie-Ofosu et al., 2015; Ezeokoli &Ugwu, 2019) and strongly agrees with

Kinyaduka and Kiwara (2013) that both parents and teachers appreciate the advantages of MT in education, yet, preferred English as the language of instruction.

This study therefore establishes that though respondents acknowledge the role of MT in ECE pedagogy, they strongly disagree with the use of MT MOI and advocate for the use of English in teaching and learning in ECE. The pedagogical value of English in ECE is therefore highly appreciated by both parents and teachers in the Ho Municipality, perhaps due to the diversity of languages and the educational background of respondents.

CONCLUSION

In contributing to knowledge, this research has projected the need for cultural and linguistic diversity considerations in the implementation of language policies. Instead of closing debate on the discussions around the use of MT for instruction in ECE, the findings take the debate in a different direction. There are two reasons for this. First, the findings show parents and teachers' immense knowledge of the current language policy which prescribes the use of MT MOI in ECE. Second, the participants acknowledged that MT medium in ECE promotes better understanding of concepts and serves as means of preparing learners well for other learnings but were not supportive of its use in ECE. Thus, acknowledgement of the value of MT did not translate into support for its use as MOI in ECE because of the perception that it negatively affects learning in/of English language, affects national unity and learning in upper classes.

The central thesis put forward is that language policy making should account for nuances in cosmopolitan environments given the ethnically diverse nature of such environments. Therefore, in terms of policy, this study puts forward the argument for a functional language policy that (1) uses an English-only MOI in linguistic and culturally diverse settings and (2) blends MT and English in same/similar linguistic and cultural settings as MOI in ECE. This speaks to the need for a critical language policy that is grounded in careful analysis of the practical exigencies that inform the views stakeholders in education service provide. Given the multilingual, cosmopolitan nature of many Ghanaian communities, this study suggests that a pragmatic approach to MOI discussion is preferable. This will ensure no learner is dis/advantaged over another. To ensure educational goals are achieved the role of continuous in-service training and professional development sessions for teachers should not be underrated.

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