

Taking a Stance on the Language in Education Policy and Planning in Ghana: Concept Paper

Gifty Edna Anani

PhD Candidate, Department of Communication Studies, University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana

Abstract: - This paper discusses the writer's experiences and position on language- in- education policy and planning in Ghana. It opens with an overview of language- in -education policy and planning in Ghana. It then looks at language-in-education policy situation in Ghana and a review of inconsistencies in the language-in-education policy in Ghana. The paper concludes with recommendations to aid policy makers to have effective implementation of language-in-education policy. The paper is based on a literature review and the author's own experience.

Key words: Language-in-education, language policy, Multilingual, Medium of instruction, indigenous languages.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language -in -education policy and planning in Ghana

Language gives expression to culture and serves as a tool that conveys identity and established ideas from person to person within a speech community. Language plays an important role in the teaching and learning process, regardless of the subject area. Students assimilate new concepts when they listen, speak, read and write; therefore, if learners' language is weak, so is their learning. Undeniably, with the public space, language is the medium of communication, business and scientific development and because of this, language is a vital factor in national development. Language, in this light, is an embodiment of a nation's beliefs, values, needs, and expectations. Nations therefore, consider their language policy very important because it touches the very fiber of their existence. And as nation's vision, needs and interests change, so do their policies. Policies are not cast in stone, so it is therefore not surprising that Ghana's language policy on education has been in a flux. What is worrying is the lack of clarity on our educational needs and what language policy we think would best serve our national interest. In my 14-years' experience in teaching at the tertiary level of education, I have observed that language issues in education in Ghana really hinder effective teaching and learning. Some of the main issues are:

- i. Policy makers find it extremely difficult to select a local language as a medium of instruction for all levels. The reason is Ghana is one of the highly multilingual countries with over seventy-nine indigenous languages spoken within its borders (Ansah, 2014). This makes the implementation of the language policy so complicated.(Quarcoo,2014) states that the language policy in a multilingual

country like Ghana has always been a major challenge for decision makers.

In my opinion, I see a great gap between the language-in-education policy document and the application of the policy in the various classrooms. The current policy is very flexible in nature, it does not have strict rules and regulations governing it. Based on this, teachers in the private and public schools choose any medium of instruction they find suitable in their classrooms. Also, there are no follow-ups to check on teachers and students to see whether the policy implemented is appropriate in the multilingual classrooms.

- ii. Currently, the policy has also failed to address the issue the mismatch between teachers' first language and pupils first language.(Owu-Ewie&Eshun 2019).Teachers are being forced to choose any common language which would be appropriate for the lessons.
- iii. Educators, such as teachers and parents of wards are not guided by any empirical research findings in their choice of languages in the process of teaching and learning.
- iv. There is no public education on the language- in-education policy and this creates a lot of tension in the country. Parents are seen moving their wards from schools where policies are being implemented. This has also been a setback in the implementation of the language- in -education policies.

In fact, this perceived problem has raised eyebrows and many researchers are trying to find lasting solutions to curb these problems. It is obvious that language plays an important role in education.

II. THE LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION SITUATION IN GHANA

Language and education are two inseparable concepts because education is spread by the use language (Owu-Ewie, 2015). Truly, language can never be separated from education because the success of the educational system of the country depends on the level of language proficiency and this, in turn depends on language competence of the teachers. Sekyere (2013:1) attests to the fact that success in education depends largely on Language. He states that success in any form of education, training and work generally depends on the ability to comprehend and use language effectively and proficiently

but in Ghana, previous studies had proved that the inconsistencies in the language- in- education policy retard the progress of the implementation of the language policy (Anyidoho, 2015; Ankrah, 2015; Owu- Ewie 2015&Ansah, 2014)

III. REVIEW OF INCONSISTENCIES OF THE LANGUAGE- IN- EDUCATION POLICIES IN GHANA(1629- 2015)

The inconsistencies of the different governments in the adoption of language-in-education policies, have been a hindrance to teaching and learning whilst some regimes preferred Ghanaian languages as a medium of instruction for the first three years of school, others rallied behind the use of Ghanaian Languages only during the first year of the primary school and English for the rest of classes in the primary school. (Ankrah 2015). To date, there have been policy changes all geared at improving education to make it relevant and appropriate for teaching and learning. The Ghanaian language and English language policies had undergone a series of reviews over the years but have lacked proper planning and effective implementation. The inconsistencies in reviews are detailed below:

According to (Wilmot, 2015), the first language policy was implemented between 1629 and 1924. When the castle schools took over education, the policy was that the languages of the merchants in the various regions were adopted as the language of instruction in schools. The indigenous languages were then introduced minimally.

In 1925, there was a need for an education committee to review the then policy, so, the Guggisberg Education Committee, was instituted to review the government's language in education policy. The committee recommended that the indigenous language should be used as a medium of instruction from class one to three, then the English language was taught as a subject. (Ankrah, as cited in AndohKumi 2002).

In 1957, after independence, the Convention Peoples' Party(CPP) government also instituted a committee to review the then language in education policy. The Committee recommended the use of the English Language as a medium of instruction in all government schools. This language-in-education policy existed for six years.

In 1963, the CPP government set another committee to review the policy because there were loop- holes so the Bannerman Committee was also instituted to review the pre-university education in the country but their recommendations were turned down. As a result, the then government set another Committee; Professor Kwapong committee. From this Committee's research, it was so glaring that many teachers in the various government schools were comfortable with the indigenous languages as a medium of instruction. This worrying issue forced the government to adopt the indigenous languages as a medium of instruction for the first three years

of education and English as a language of study. (Ankrah, 2015)

In 1970, the Dzobo Committee also approved the use of the indigenous languages as a medium of instruction. This language in education policy was used till 2002 when the language policy that had been used for many years was changed by the then New Patriotic Party(NPP) government to an English-only policy as a medium of instruction, nevertheless, it made room for a Ghanaian language to be studied as a subject up to the senior high school level (.Ankrah, 2015)

According to Wornyo(as cited in Acheampong,2004), it came as a big surprise to educational stakeholders when the Ghanaian government suddenly announced a change to English as the medium of instruction from primary one, without instituting any review process. The then Minister, Professor Ameyaw Ekumfi stated various reasons for the change from Ghanaian language to English language. Among them was the language policy was abused and this resulted in poor performance in the English languages because some teachers in the rural areas were not using the English language and this had adverse effects on the poor students. Also, some schools in the rural areas, were finding it difficult to communicate in the English language. After few years of implementation, the 2002 Policy, proposed by Prof. Ameyaw-Ekumfi was seen as not effective so in 2006, a new policy, the National Literacy Accelerated Programme (NALAP) was introduced. According to the Curriculum Research and Development Division (CRDD) of the Ghana Education Service, this is a bilingual literacy programme in which pupils learn to read in a Ghanaian language and learn to speak English at the same time but do not read until they reach Primary two. The policy- makers claimed that "NALAP's approach is based for language change on earlier research that showed that pupils learn to read and write better and faster in a language they know well, and that the skills acquired in the local language transfer to reading a second language" (Quarcoo,2014) This English in education policy was in place till National Democratic Congress (NDC) took over from NPP.

In 2015, the then Minister of Education and a Professor in the English language also gave a tall list of reasons for the change. The following were some of the reasons given:

- Ghanaian children are bright but they just end up at the basic school level without proceeding to the next level of education and the minister attributed this to the wrong medium of instruction.
- Another reason given to substantiate her point was, Koreans used the language they understood as a medium of instruction and their education picked up nevertheless, children in Ghana were being taught in a language they did not follow easily and this draws their studies backwards.

- Finally, she indicated that if the English language was stopped being used as a language across the curriculum in the lower primary, the country's education system will change drastically. (Ghanaweb, 2015)

From my discussions so far, there had been inconsistencies in the language- in -education policy in Ghana. Frankly speaking, the language-in-education policy goes with the political parties. The various governments of Ghana had different plans when it comes to the right policy. Currently, there had been a change of government, from NDC to NPP and I would not be surprised if the current government changes the existing policy. I would say that the inconsistencies are rather drawing our education back. There is a need for proper planning, which would make teaching and learning very effective .Based on the inconsistencies, in the language- in- education policy, the writer has a number of recommendations to help the policy makers have a proper policy to serve our educational needs.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

I would like to state the following recommendation that policy makers in Ghana can follow to have effective implementation of the language –in- education policy:

- Policies, over the years, had been instituted without proper planning. Educational stake holders and policy makers should embark on research that will enable them to identify the needs of learners before any policy implementation.
- For the sake of our cultural identity, indigenous languages should be used as a medium of instruction from kindergarten to primary six.
- However, when Ghanaian pupils learn in their own indigenous languages, it helps them to be confident in class. It is very sad if students cannot read and write their own languages. Ghanaian students had lost their identity. My question is what is the culture of these students? Well, the culture that shows one's identity is missing here, so, for effective implementation, Ghanaian languages should be core subjects at the senior high school and colleges of education and moreover, a requirement for entry into the universities and colleges of education.
- The politics associated with the language in education policy should be dropped for the proper implementation of language policy. Standing in for Ghanaian languages, does not mean English language can be ruled out, because of its roles in the country and beyond The English language should be studied as a subject and this will help students to pick all the rudiments of the language.
- There must be a department solely for language policy and planning in the Ministry of Education.

This department should constitute experts in language planning and policy, Also, Language teachers from the basic to the tertiary level should be trained effectively for proper implementation because without proper planning, there would not be effective implementation.

- Furthermore, the language policy should be assessed periodically and updated to improve teaching and learning in the private and public schools.
- There should not be one common policy to fit all pupils in our various schools. The language policy for urban schools should be different from the village schools. That is language policies should be implemented according to the needs of students.
- Finally, Ministry of education should codify laws to govern the implementation of the language policy so that political parties will not have power to be changing the policies.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one can say that the nature of the language problems in Ghana is such that its solution should be approached with care and an objective sense of judgement. In the light of the present needs of the students in Ghana, it is wise to maintain the current language policy as an interim arrangement while cautiously allowing one Ghanaian language, through the process of natural selection, to emerge eventually as the national language with English continuing as the official language of Ghana.

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