

IEQ II DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

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To answer the research question, “How is language policy being implemented in Ghana?” and its related sub-questions, IEQ researchers from three Universities in Ghana and the Ghana Education Service are, in a collaborative effort, using several qualitative research methods. They are observing teachers, and pupils in classrooms and schools; conducting in-depth individual interviews with pupils, teachers, head teachers, parents, school and community leaders, and district education officials; and examining relevant documents. This presentation will explore the different kinds of data being collected and the ways in which these data are informing the research questions and policy related concerns.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1953 UNESCO declaration on “The use of Vernacular in Education”, which brought about the education principle that the “best” language of instruction is the mother tongue of the learner, several attempts have been made to implement various language policies in multilingual countries in Africa and elsewhere. At the same time, several empirical researches have been conducted in multilingual countries to back up the declaration (ADEA, 1996).

One of the issues that dominates the literature on the role of language in education in multilingual countries is language and cognitive development. Experiences in Africa and many parts of the world have shown that cognitive development is achieved faster by using the mother tongue as language of instruction in primary education (Yates, 1995; Andoh-Kumi, 1992; Fafunwa, et. al, 1989; Hakuta, 1986; Bamgbose, 1984; Collison, 1972). It is not language, per se, which determines or affects development, but the level of mastery of the language in question is the issue at stake. That is, if the medium of

instruction at the early stages is the language that the learner understands very well, (s)he can understand instructions and fully participate in the educational process.

It is due to these considerations, in the light of the findings of the IEQ I study in Ghana that led the research team to focus the second IEQ study on the implementation of the Ghana Government's language policy.

This paper is divided into four sections:

- i. the IEQ II research questions and expectations
- ii. the parameters of the study; here the research design and the schools selected together with rationale for their selection are presented
- iii. types of instruments used, the procedures adopted and the kind of data being collected
- iv. ways in which data is informing research questions and policy related issues

IEQ II RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

The collaborative professional development between the international consultants and the research team began with discussions on the design and implementation of the IEQ II project. A number of professional development workshops have been planned, the first of which took place in August 1999 and lasted for ten days. It was focused on the design of the research, the production of the agenda for the entire project and the plan for the baseline data collection. During one of the brain storming sessions at this workshop the big question of this study emerged: "How is the Government's Language Policy being implemented in Primary Schools in Ghana?"

Eight related sub-questions that also emerged were:

1. What is the nature of the interaction between teacher and pupils and between pupil and pupil in the classroom when Ghanaian Language is being used as a medium of instruction?
2. What are the attitudes of teachers and pupils to using Ghanaian language or English as a medium of instruction and subject of the study? What accounts for those attitudes?
3. What are teachers' and pupils' attitudes towards the language policy in Ghana?
4. To what extent are teachers prepared to teach in the Ghanaian language? In what ways?
6. What behaviors or actions show teachers' competence in the Ghanaian Language?
7. In what ways, if any, do supervisors help with and/or ensure implementation of the language policy?
8. In what ways does the community support or encourage the use of Ghanaian Language or English as a medium of instruction in schools?

During a brainstorming session on expectations of the research it was agreed that the IEQ2 study must be able to:

1. say something to policy makers about how the language policy is being implemented and why;
2. reveal, to teacher educators, the current teacher competencies in the teaching and use of Ghanaian language;
3. say something to primary teachers about competencies necessary to teach in Ghanaian languages;
4. provide information about the attitudes of pupils, parents, teachers, and personnel charged with carrying out the GES policies towards the implementation of the language policy;

5. say whether the language policy as it stands needs to be enforced or revised and how. If the policy must be enforced what would it take to implement it successfully? If, on the other hand, a revision is necessary. what will be the basis for this revision and what should be done? Evidence is to be provided to demonstrate what works.

Finally, it was agreed that what happens in phase I of the research will inform and affect phase II.

THE PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY

This second IEQ study builds on the introduction of qualitative research methods in IEQ I, adopting the qualitative research paradigm in phase one, that is, the first fifteen months of the proposed two-year project. To gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved a multi-site case study design is being employed since data is being collected from several sites. Thereafter, quantitative methods may be combined with qualitative methods to answer the questions that will be posed in phase two.

The study is currently being carried out in six schools in different districts and regions of Ghana. The school site selection was planned to ensure that different language groups would be examined in different regions and that the researchers and research assistants would speak the Ghanaian language(s) of the school and community. This ensured that the research was conducted in a language shared by researchers and participants in the study. Three of these schools, two in rural settings and one in a semi-urban setting, were selected from the schools in the second year of the USAID-funded

Quality Improvement of Primary Schools (QUIPS) primary education reform project. In addition three non-QUIPS schools have also been selected, two of which are rural and one urban. The urban school is also a private school.

The rationale for selecting three QUIPS schools is to give IEQ II researchers access to some of the data already collected by the QUIPS teams. In this way it was hoped that the knowledge base of IEQ researchers about those sites would be expanded. At the same time information collected and ideas generated through IEQ may also provide insight into different aspects of QUIPS project. Next, selecting the three additional non-QUIPS schools has given researchers the opportunity to collect data in settings similar to the thousands of schools and communities in the country that do not have access to the training and resources available through QUIPS. The aim of the study is not to compare the QUIPS and non-QUIPS schools but rather to describe ways in which language policy is being implemented. It is conceivable however, that similarities may be found across QUIPS schools and/or non-QUIPS schools. These may be noted in the findings.

Three of these schools (two QUIPS and one non-QUIPS) were expected to be implementing the language policy, two were expected to be non-implementation sites (i.e., one QUIPS and one non-QUIPS) while one was expected to be over-implementing the policy.

Time and resources are such that the study will include only four weeks of data collection in the first phase. The original plan was to use two weeks in the first term and one week each during the second and third terms respectively. However, due to a national population census that coincides with the second term's visit and is compelling basic

schools to vacate earlier, the second term's visit cannot come off. Hence two weeks observation will be conducted in the third term.

INSTRUMENTS, PROCEDURES AND KINDS OF DATA BEING COLLECTED

As in most qualitative studies, the main instruments being used in the first phase of the IEQ II research are interviews, systematic observations, monitoring of classroom interactions, pictures and maps drawn of schools and communities.

First, observations have been conducted both inside and outside of classrooms. Lessons were observed in P1 to P4 classes. In P1 to P3 lessons were observed in English language, Ghanaian language, Mathematics, Environmental Studies and Religious and Moral Education while in P4 Integrated Science was added. In all classroom observations researchers took notes as lessons went on and audio-recorded the sessions as well. Also, two boys and two girls were selected at random from each class for special focus using the IEQ1 pupils' observation form. Any extraordinary behavior that came to notice (e.g., a child who does not talk at all during the lesson, any extrovert behavior etc.) was also noted and followed up after the lesson.

Second, in each school, in-depth individual interviews were conducted with two boys and two girls randomly selected from each of the P1 to P4 classes, their parents, teachers of these classes, the head teacher, four school and community leaders, education officials at the district level (i.e. the Circuit Supervisor and Assistant Director in charge of supervision).

Third, relevant documents of the school like registers, log books, number of textbooks and other supplementary materials were examined and noted.

Finally, maps of the schools used, classrooms observed and the entire school and community were also drawn to support profiles of the school and the community.

Data being collected include,

1. profiles of the schools, communities and all the subjects of the study,
2. nature of and language used for pupil-pupil interactions in-class and out-of-class,
3. pupils attitudes and preference of medium of instruction,
4. textbooks and other materials available and used for teaching and learning,
5. language and mode of instruction in each class,
6. observations about gender,
7. teacher preparation and competence in the use and teaching of Ghanaian language,
8. nature of and language used for teacher-pupil interactions,
9. teachers attitudes and preference of medium of instruction,
10. awareness of the language policy,
11. role of supervisory personnel charged with carrying out GES policies (i.e., head teachers, circuit supervisors and the assistant director in charge of supervision) in the implementation or otherwise of the language policy,
12. parents, school and community leaders' attitudes and preference of medium of instruction.

WAYS IN WHICH DATA IS INFORMING RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND POLICY-RELATED CONCERNS

After the first visits to the schools certain trends have started emerging that are informing our research questions and helping us to look at other areas as well. Some of these are presented and discussed in this section.

For instance, the fact that researchers observed teachers using the Environmental Studies textbook at only one school (Medofo) has raised questions about the ways in which teachers prepare to teach in any language. Do they refer to the syllabus and write their own creative lesson plans with the syllabus as a guide? Or do they create lessons “in their heads” or from other sources? We need to explore this.

Also, for the many non-implementation schools there is the need to explore other influences on English language preferences. How do the institutional practices support English over Ghanaian language? What are the teaching and learning materials necessary for effective implementation of the language policy? Answers need to be found.

Different schools have been observed to be working with different language policies; that is, some schools create their own English-only (P1-P6) language policy. Another issue worth exploring, in the face of this fact, is the question of how schools choose their language of instruction.

We need to also find what happens to the textbooks available. We need to check whether pupils are allowed to take them home or not.

There is also the need to probe further to find out what is responsible for the attitudes that have come to notice. We need to ask parents to explain the advantages and disadvantages of using Ghanaian language and what the purpose of education is.

For teachers who are “uncomfortable” with using the local language we need to find out what exactly they mean by that and whether they are comfortable in other specific domains.

One belief about proper policy implementation is that, “If we do it right,” the P4 transition will work. To follow that line of thinking, “doing it right” requires adequate

teacher preparation for a teacher who will teach in any grade from P1-6. What would this involve? As we hypothesized what would constitute adequate preparation to prepare new teachers for the bilingual /multilingual school, we agreed that at the Teacher Training College, we would expect future teachers to be studying:

- i. content and structure of the Ghanaian language
- ii. methodology of teaching Ghanaian language as a subject
- iii. methodology of using Ghanaian language as a medium of instruction
- iv. methodological preparation in using and teaching English language as a subject
- v. all content of Basic Education in order to understand and be able to teach it.

Only those teachers 25 years old and under could have received this kind of “adequate instruction”. In our study only one teacher is that young. The teachers in our study have learnt how to speak the local language of the college they attended, but not the methodology of using Ghanaian language as a medium of instruction. At two of our sites, Noto and Nantwi, none of the teachers had studied or could speak the local language. At another site, Awocha, all the teachers’ first language is the prevalent language of the community, but they are supposed to teach in a second Ghanaian language (since the prevalent language is not written down) and they are all untrained teachers. Even for those who were observed teaching and using Ghanaian language in teaching, the changes that have been made in the Ghanaian language syllabus and the previously non-compulsory nature of the subject implies that most of the teachers received a different kind of preparation than is now considered adequate. What is more, our data show that most of the teachers have not received any--or, in a few cases--limited pre-service and in-

service training in using Ghanaian language in teaching. We need to find out why this appears to be the case. We also need to find out from the teacher training colleges whether the methods of teaching various subjects except English is taught in Ghanaian language or not.

It is also necessary to interview a cross-section of policymakers to “know their minds” and to let them know about what is going on about the policy process IEQ researchers have been examining from bottom up. There is the need to find out about their attitudes toward Ghanaian language and how they ensure that the policy works. Personalities like the Minister of Education, The Director General of the Ghana Education Service and the Chief Director need to be interviewed.

Furthermore, the absence of a documentation of the language policy in all the schools and districts demand that we find from the policymakers the last time the policy was printed and distributed and why it was not distributed more widely. For teachers on site who know about the policy, there is the need to find out how they found out about it.

One thing worth mentioning is the fact that though IEQ II in Ghana is at an infant stage, it has already started influencing policy-related concerns. At a thematic group meeting held at the USAID office in Accra on Wednesday, February 9 2000, a few of the findings were shared and members present expressed appreciation for the efforts being made in the IEQ2 project. A member of Ghana’s Parliamentary Select Committee on Education who was present at the meeting hinted that the Minister of Education would soon present a paper to parliament on the ministry’s policy on education. He therefore urged the IEQ II team members to send an input to help shape the language policy and its implementation.

At an earlier meeting of the thematic group, participants had asked that the IEQ II research team should explore other language policies that have worked elsewhere and how they were implemented.

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