Language use at home and performance in English composition in multilingual Ghana

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Abstract

Ghana has witnessed a recurrent debate on the usefulness of indigenous Ghanaian languages in childhood education. It is assumed that using the mother tongue as a Medium of Instruction (MOI) during the early years improves children's ability to acquire knowledge and other languages. Not everybody subscribes to this view though. There are those who feel that a solid start in English offers children a better chance of succeeding in school and in their careers. Presently, some parents who subscribe to the latter view have taken the extra step of stopping the use of indigenous Ghanaian languages at home. This paper presents the results of our investigation into whether the home language practices of Ghanaian students have any impact on their performance in English written argumentative discourse. The results are based on an analysis of an assigned essay of 92 students from one of Ghana's best senior high schools. We then correlated their performance with responses they gave to a questionnaire interrogating their background and language use at home. While some speak the native language at home, others grew up speaking exclusively English. We show that students who combine English and native Ghanaian languages at home performed better than those who used only English or only Ghanaian languages.

Abstract (Ewe)

Nya vevi ɖeka si amewo dzrona zi geɖe le Ghanae nye Ghana gbegbɔgblɔwo zazã le gɔmedzesukuwo me. Amewo bui be ne wotsɔ ɖeviwo ƒe Ghanagbe si wozãna le aƒe me tsɔ dze nufiafia gɔme na wo la, viɖe dona le eme. Le kpɔɖeŋu me, ɖeviawo sea nuawo gɔme nyuie eye wotea ŋu srɔ̃na nu kaba. Gawu la, ekpena ɖe ɖe wo ŋu le gbe bubuwo sɔsrɔ̃ me. Gake menye ame sia amee lɔ̃ ɖe nya sia dzi o. Ame siwo melɔ̃ ɖe edzi o la buna be ne wotsɔ yevugbe boŋ tsɔ dze nufiafia ɖeviawo gɔme la, woade ŋgɔgbe le suku eye ne wowu suku nu hã la, woakpɔ dɔ bɔbɔe. Ðe susu sia ta la, yevugbe ko dzila aɖewo dona na wo viwo le aƒeme. Le pepa sia me la, miaƒo nu tso nugɔmekuku si miewɔ be miakpɔ be gbe si sukuviwo zãna le aƒeme la kpena ɖe wo ŋu le woƒe yevugbe ŋɔŋlɔ me le suku mahã. Miewɔ nugɔmekuku sia le Senior High School nyuitɔwo dometɔ ɖeka le Gɛ̃. Miebia gbe sukuviwo 92 siwo nɔ woƒe ƒe gbãtɔ nu wum eye miena susununyaɖoɖo dɔdeasi wo le yevugbe me. Sukuvi siawo dometɔ aɖewo zãna Ghanagbe ɖeɖe le aƒeme eye ɖewo zãna yevugbe ɖeɖe. Ðewo hã zãna Ghanagbe kpakple yevugbe. Miaƒe nugɔmekukua ƒe numetsotsoe nye be ɖevi siwo zãna Ghanagbe kple yevugbe la wɔ susununyaɖoɖo dɔdeasia nyuie wu mamleawo katã.

Zusammenfassung

Ghana hat erlebt wiederholt Debatten über den Vorteil des Gebrauchs einheimischer Ghanaischer Sprachen für die kindliche Früherziehung erlebt. Dabei wurde angenommen, dass der Gebrauch der Muttersprache als Unterrichtsmedium (*Medium of Instruction = MOI*) bei kleinen Kindern deren Lernfähigkeit allgemein und auch in Bezug auf den Erwerb anderer Sprachen fördert. Diese Ansicht ist jedoch nicht unangefochten. Es gibt auch Vertreter der Ansicht, dass ein solider Anfang in Englisch den Kindern bessere Chancen in ihrer schulischen und beruflichen Karriere bietet. Derzeit verzichten einige Eltern, die auf Früherziehung in Englisch setzen, auf den Gebrauch einheimischer ghanaischer Sprachen im häuslichen Umfeld. Dieser

Artikel präsentiert die Ergebnisse einer Untersuchung darüber, ob und welche Auswirkungen der Gebrauch heimischer Sprachen darauf hat, wie gut die Schüler im schriftlichen Englisch argumentieren können. Die Ergebnisse basieren auf der Auswertung der Aufsätze von 92 Schülern aus Ghanas besten Sekundarschulen. Die Leistungen im Aufsatz wurden mit Angaben über das Sprachverhalten daheim korreliert. Einige der Schüler nutzen daheim die Muttersprachen, während andere rein englischsprachig aufwachsen. Es wird gezeigt, dass diejenigen Schüler, die daheim sowohl Englisch als auch ghanaische Sprachen benutzen, im Aufsatz besser abschnitten als diejenigen, die ausschließlich in Englisch oder in einheimischen sprachen kommunizieren.

1. Introduction

<1> One of the most highly contested areas of language policy in many African countries is that relating to language in education because it is perceived to be a major source of educational failure. In Ghana, the issue is a propos because of recent evidence which suggests a steep decline in the standard of education, and which has created a lot of angst among Ghanaians. For instance, a 2013 National Education Assessment (NEA) report published by a national newspaper, the Daily Graphic, on 14 February 2014 with the caption "Majority of basic school pupils can't read" noted that at least 50 percent of pupils could not pronounce a single English or Ghanaian word correctly. Language of instruction (LOI) has been identified as one of the major factors that affect the academic performance of students. For Ghana, the choice of the said language has vacillated over the years (see e.g. Ansah 2014).[1] As Owu-Ewie (2006: 77) puts it:

> [The] use of a Ghanaian language as the [LOI] at the lower primary level has had a checkered history. From 1925 to 1951, a Ghanaian language was used as [LOI] for the first three years. Between 1951 and 1956, it was used only for the first year. From 1957 to 1966 a Ghanaian language was not used at all, from 1967 to 1969 it was used only for the first year, and between 1970 and 1974 a Ghanaian language was used for the first three years and where possible beyond (to the sixth year). From 1974 to 2002 a Ghanaian language was used for the first three years.

<2> When the L1 in the first three years of the lower primary school was sanctioned (as in the years from 1925-1951), it was used as the LOI while English was taught as the subject. This was switched from primary 4 onwards (cf. Andoh-Kumi 1999). The vacillation in policy discussed by Owu-Ewie depends on which camp of the divide – L1 in early primary school versus English as LOI from primary class 1 – holds sway with the government of the day. It also depends on the perceptions and attitudes of the stakeholders in primary education, especially the parents and the teachers.

<3> There is a lot of study and discussion in the literature on the merits and demerits of both policies. These studies have mostly focused on the LOI in the classroom. One area that has not been widely investigated is the language use practice at home. In this paper, we introduce this dimension to the debate: that is to say we investigate the role home language use practices play in the written English of students from Senior High School (SHS). We show that language choice at home influences students' production of written argumentative discourse. The rest of the paper is organised as

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[1] In the discourses on language in education, a distinction is made between the so-called ex-colonial language, English, which is presumed to be a second or foreign language and the indigenous Ghanaian languages, presumed to be the first languages in the country. We adopt this opposition for convenience, although we would assert that English is no longer a foreign language in Ghana. It has become indigenised as many studies have demonstrated and it is the first language of a small minority.

follows: the rest of section 1 provides an overview of the reasons given in support of the choice of L1 as LOI in the early years in primary school, and the results of some experiments that focused on the use of the L1 in (early) primary school education. Section 2 discusses our methodology and section 3 provides background information on the students whom we studied. Section 4 discusses our evaluation criteria and section 5 presents our findings and conclusions.

1.1. Making the case for language in early primary education

<4> A major claim of the L1 as LOI in early primary education is that the child would find it easier to understand things in the L1 and that this would facilitate the learning of other languages and subjects. In short, it has advantages for the cognitive development of the children. For instance, Susan Malone, a SIL Consultant on multilingual education is quoted in a 2008 Conference report to have asserted that by starting with what they already know, children find it easier to transition to things which they do not know. Such a policy is also based on the assumption that these children use their L1 at home and, therefore, its use in a new setting, i.e., the school, is a continuation of that practice. The use of the L1 therefore promotes a smooth transition from home to school, psychologically and emotionally (see e.g. Ellis 1970 & Anyidoho 2012 for several arguments for the use of Ghanaian indigenous languages in early primary education). In connection with this Bamgbose (2000: 12) remarks that using a language different from the child's L1, "as the [LOI] particularly in early primary education is a case of language exclusion."

<5> Another argument that is proffered for the use of the child's L1 as LOI in early primary is that by the school going age, the child is ready for literacy acquisition in the L1. If the child has L1 literacy, this would facilitate literacy in L2. It is asserted that once the child has developed literacy skills using the L1 involving comprehension, reflection, evaluation and classification of meaning, these can be seamlessly applied in L2 contexts. It is also easier for the child to develop skills for the genres of discussion, argumentation, negotiation, persuasion and learning to ask in school context in the first language before transitioning to L2 or English.

<6> Despite the advantages of using the L1 as the LOI in lower primary, there are those who believe that the use of the indigenous Ghanaian language is responsible for poor educational achievement. One reason relates to the variety of the local language that is used as LOI in school. This tends to be more or less a standard language which may be alien to the child as it is artificially created (Cook 2009). In some cases, such as Ewe in the Volta Region of Ghana, this standard variety is not the spoken variety of any ethnic group but is only encountered in places like classrooms and churches. The use of such a language variety is therefore said to erode the advantage of using a language that is familiar to the child. Proponents of the English as LOI in lower primary argue that it would be easier for children to understand English than such alien varieties of their L1s. Moreover, the children have not gone through the pre-literate, pre-school skills acquisition in such languages. Hence, it is argued, the languages are equally unfamiliar to them.

<7> One important factor that we sidestep is the unequal access to quality education for students. For instance, Early and Norton (2014) discuss extensive literature as well as their research which show that the use of English as LOI does not always benefit students in rural areas, among others, because "teachers do not possess the advanced language proficiency in English required to make their subject matter clear" (Early & Norton 2014: 676). Boadi (1994: 59) makes this point most forcefully for the Ghana situation thus:

I daresay many of the causes of examination and educational failure can be traced to defective teaching of English as a medium of expression and comprehension in our schools and colleges.

<8> Other reasons are that schools in these places lack also adequate instructional materials and have a high student-teacher ratio. It is important to stress that we are aware of these causes as well. For the present study, we sought to avoid the shortcomings by choosing one of the top-notched schools in Accra, the capital city of Ghana.

1.2. Language attitudes

<9> The varying views on the preferences for the choice of language in education relate to attitudes which different stakeholders have for the languages on offer. Adegbidja (2000:91) points out that language attitude patterns in West Africa "are diverse, complex and multifarious". In the matter of language use in education in Ghana, attitudes are influenced by factors such as the place of the languages in the linguistic ecology and their domains of use, as well as socio-historical and cultural factors that account for the language situation. Also playing a role are the status and linguistic life history of the individuals that have the attitudes. As argued, for example, by Baker (1992), education plays a crucial role in shaping language attitudes just as it also guides the outcomes and course of language maintenance and shift processes.

<10> The latest edition of the Ethnologue (Lewis, Simons & Fenning 2014) lists 81 languages for Ghana including Ghanaian English. There is a three-tier configuration of these languages in terms of their use. The place of a language on the rang influences the language attitudes towards it. The topmost tier is occupied by English only. The second or middle tier is occupied by nine (9) regional languages of wider communication (e.g. Akan, Ewe, Ga) that have received official recognition for use in education under the National Literacy Acceleration Programme (NALAP) (see e.g. Leherr 2009). All the languages also belong to the third tier as the L1.

<11> The position of English in the trilingual sociolinguistic configuration of the country ensures that it "is without doubt the most prestigious language in Ghana today" (Dako 2002: 53). It is the official and national language, and competence in it provides access to power, authority as well as socio-economic status. For this reason, several stakeholders, teachers, parents, pupils have a positive attitude towards its use in education. Guerini (2007) reports on a survey of language attitudes of 90 students of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ghana. She finds that the respondents were opposed to the introduction of a language other than English (say Akan) as LOI at all levels of education, including tertiary. Akan native speakers as well as second language speakers of Akan expressed this view. They saw Akan, and for that matter other local languages other than English, as unfit for use in formal and specialised domains. These languages, in their view, are well suited for expressing one's feelings in informal interactions. The students who expressed this view constitute a segment of the elite stakeholders in the debate who have a negative attitude towards the use of languages other than English in education (see Sarfo 2012, for similar attitudes expressed by students at the University of Cape Coast). Similar sentiments have been reported outside of the walls of the universities. In a survey of language use in Winneba in the Central region of Ghana, Agyeman (2013) notes that because Efutu, the local language is not an examinable subject in school, both pupils and teachers have a negative attitude towards it. In Winneba, English and the regional lingua franca Fante (a dialect of Akan) are used, but English enjoys a privileged position and hence is positively valued.

<12> It is important to point out here that there is a cross-section of people for whom the reverse attitude holds. These are cultural and political activists who take Ghanaian English to be a foreign language inherited from the ex-colonial master and, therefore, not suitable for the articulation of local and traditional cultural themes. These people advocate for the use of the other local languages in education, at least in the beginning years. The attitudes of parents are equally complex. Some wish to transmit their heritage ethnic languages to their children and insist on the use of the local languages at home. They proscribe the use of English at home, saying students can speak English when they go to school.

<13> Note however that the people who prefer the use of Ghana languages are in the minority. Mfum-Mensah (2005) investigated the attitudes of community members, parents, school authority, and school children towards the use of the local indigenous language as LOI in an alternative primary education programme in Bawku West in the northern district of Upper East Region of Ghana. He reports that a perception among these stakeholders is that in Ghana one's level of proficiency in English is equated with level of intelligence. They wanted the students to also be counted among the intelligentsia, hence they wanted English rather than the indigenous local languages as the LOI. The stakeholders further argued that "the use of the vernacular only perpetuates the existing in-equalities in the society and in the educational system." (Mfun-Mensah 2005: 80)

<14> Attitudes such as the one reported by Mfun-Mensah persist even though there have been more reports of success of the use of the child's L1 as LOI in the literature. For example, an alternative educational system practiced in northern Ghana, the School for Life programme, provided instruct-tion in the local languages and the students transitioned to English joining the public school system pupils. Comparing the two sets of students, Casely-Hayford and Ghartey (2007) wrote in a report:

> Given that the LOI in Ghanaian public schools is English, School for Life students who are taught in local languages and move on to fourth grade might be predicted to perform poorly in public school. However, Ministry of Education and GES [Ghana Education Service] Performance Monitoring Tests show that School for Life graduates perform in the upper 50 percentile in English and mathematics. This reflects the School for Life assertion that functional literacy in the mother tongue provides a strong platform for acquiring literacy in a second language.

<15> An equally successful program is the popularly known "Ile-Ife Project". This project compared the performances of pupils who were taught in Yoruba during their six-year primary education with another group for whom Yoruba was used for the first three years after which a switch was made to English. Thus, the first group of pupils were taught in Yoruba from the first to the sixth year of their primary education and English was only taught as a subject. As reported by Fafuna (1989) and Bamgbose (1991) the students who received the six-year instruction performed better than those who had three years not only in Yoruba, the language in which they were taught, but also in such content courses like Mathematics, English, Social Sciences and Science.

<16> We should point out here that there are mixed results in the L1 in education policies. For instance, in the Iganga district of Uganda, an experiment was conducted in which one class was taught Geography in English while the other was taught the same subject in the local language. Results showed that those who were taught in English performed better than their companions who were taught in the local language (Mazrui 2004: 41). Results such as the Iganga one can only strengthen the attitudes of those who prefer the use of English only.

1.3. Language and educational achievement

<17> Protagonists for or against the choice of English vs. Ghanaian languages as LOI have all appealed to the language that the child is exposed to at home. For instance, one of the arguments for the use of English at all levels, especially in the urban centres is that "[many] middle-class families are now bringing up children in European languages, and many from the masses also seek to become, or have their children become, proficient in the same languages, having all come to the conclusion that the uplifting of their socio-economic status lies in these European languages" (Djite 2008: 22). These people argue that many children are growing up using English so that it is their primary language. As we pointed out in the previous section, those who argue for the indigenous Ghanaian languages claim that the child has been socialised into these languages at home already and so the transition to school and to other languages will be easier.

<18> Significantly, both camps have a monolingual ideology even though the practice in urban centres as well as many rural areas is of children growing up in multilingual environments, and being exposed to multiple languages, if not being socialised multilingually. Yet one issue that has not received much empirical study is language use practices at home. We therefore sought to undertake a pilot study to investigate whether the linguistic repertoires and the language which students of Senior High Schools use at home has any influence on their performance in English and, specifically, written English.

2. Methodology

<19> Based on the attitude of parents at home, we decided to test the hypothesis that language use at home influences performance in English. From the perspective of our study, language use at home can be placed in three broad categories. These are (i) use of native Ghanaian language(s) only, (ii) use of (Ghanaian) English only, and (iii) use of a mixture of English and native Ghanaian languages. For performance in English, we restricted ourselves to written English argumentative discourse. To measure the correlation between languages which students use at home and their performance in composition, we set an essay for students of a senior high school (SHS) which we rated using macro and micro-level criteria. For the macro level we looked at discourse patterns, organisation and reasoning, and articulation of content. The micro level involved the mechanical elements of composition writing such as 'expression' and 'literacy' i.e. grammar, diction and sentence features.

<20> In all we administered the questionnaire to 92 students from one of the top-notch senior high schools (SHS) in Ghana. We decided to use students from the first year because they were the most recent to have made the transition from staying at home, while they attended the Junior High School (JHS), to the boarding school, when they moved to the SHS. It is fair to say that of all SHS students, those in the first years are the most likely to show (latent) effects of home language use. The number of students we tested was based on circumstances. We had originally planned on testing 100 students but some of them could not make it on the day we conducted the test for various reasons. As a result we tested all the students who showed up.

<21> We administered a questionnaire which sought to obtain information about the people in the students' households, their linguistic repertoire, and a self-report on their language use practices at home. We also sought to establish the level of education of members of the students' household. The students were given an hour within which to complete the questionnaire and one of the co-authors was on hand to clarify any confusions that may arise. The pit-falls of self-reporting cannot

be gainsaid. For instance when we asked students how many Ghanaian languages they speak, some could have understated the number while others could have exaggerated by including languages in which they may not be able to do more than simply greet. Note however that there was a built-in control to minimize problems of self-report. The responses to the questions about number of languages that the students speak and the number that they used at home were consistent. In other words nobody mentioned a language used at home which was not mentioned in the response to the languages one speaks. In fact some of the respondents were very astute as they made a fine distinction between languages they understood and languages they spoke. This suggests that they were conscious of the distinction between the two levels of competence in a language. We revisit this issue in section 3 below.

<22> A related, and potentially more serious problem, involves a question which sought to determine which language the students used most at home. Question 9 on the questionnaire is:

> Let us assume that you spend an average of 4 hours a day talking. How would you divide the hours among the languages you speak (e.g. 1 hour for Hausa, 1 hour for Twi and 2 hours for English, or 3 hours for Ewe and 1 hour for English)?

<23> One might wonder here how realistic it is for us to expect students to be able to quantify the amount of time they spend speaking various languages. The answer is we don't. We used the specific hours in order to force the students to reflect before giving us information about the average number of languages they use at home and the ones they used most often. Most importantly, we are able to tell from the responses given here whether students speak Ghanaian languages or English exclusively at home or whether they combine them. We are also able to tell, where they combine Ghanaian languages with English, whether they spend about the same time on each of the languages or whether one dominates the others. We chose this strategy based on our own experiences as Ghanaians who have also had to navigate multilingual communicative situations while growing up.

<24> After the students had spent an hour on the questionnaire, they were given another hour to write an essay entitled "as a young person, do you think technology has been helpful or detrimental to society?" Braddock et al (1963) recommend that the abstractness of a topic and its familiarity to students be considered since they are likely to come from different socioeconomic backgrounds and possess different intellectual maturity and knowledge levels. Our choice of technology as a topic was influenced by the fact that mobile telephone and internet technology were becoming increasingly widespread in Ghana and the Ministry of Education has sought to make Information and Communications Technology (ICT) a required course for students at the Junior High School (JHS) level. Where the government is not able to provide computers for schools, communities and civil organizations have struggled to fill the void. For instance, Plan Ghana reports:

> The USAID-funded Transition and Persistence (TAP) Project, implemented by Plan Ghana, recognized one school in each of the project's 13 districts with a School Excellence Award. As an award recipient, the TAP education project outfitted the school with a brand new classroom, 21 new desktop computers, furniture, reliable electrical and internet connections, a library, and additional hardware and software.

<25> Safo & Ansong-Gyima (2011) also report that all 300 SHS students whom they studied owned mobile phones and had been using computer and internet. They noted also that their study showed that most students use their mobile phones for social communication. It was therefore safe to

assume that the students in our study would have some familiarity not only with technology as a topic to be discussed but also with its uses.

We rated the essays for the following:

1) The student's ability to recognise the appropriate discourse type demanded by the essay question.
2) The organizational structure and content of the essay
3) The expressions used by the students; these include the use of a variety of sentences structure, diction and grammatical acuity.

\<26\> Different types of discourse are usually better suited for different circumstances, and there are usually distinguishable features of each. There are traditionally four different types, namely, argumentative, narrative, descriptive, and exposition. Argumentative discourse is employed in writing or speaking when the composer is attempting to convince an audience that his or her opinion is correct, typically by using logic and appealing to the audience's sense of reason. In an argument, the writer or speaker begins with a thesis. Evidence must then be presented in a clear and orderly way. For this study we investigated the argumentative discourse type because students would be compelled to scrutinize each part of their ideas. To help them recognise this discourse pattern and look at the two sides of the issue, we used the disjunctive word "or" as a prompt in the essay question (Tanko & Tamasi 2008).

\<27\> In awarding marks for the second criterion – the organizational structure of the essay – we looked for the logical development of the paragraphs, either in a 'block' or point-by-point pattern. We also investigated the use of transitions between and within paragraphs, and the amount and type of content that a student used as evidence to support their position. Finally, under the third criterion (i.e., expression), we examined variety in sentence structure, grammatical acuity, interesting and appropriate figures of speech, originality in language use for effect and general fluency. These criteria are described in further detail in section 4 below.

\<28\> To protect the anonymity of the students we assigned them index numbers throughout the process. This was to ensure that they felt comfortable about taking part in the study. We also assured the head of the school that we shall keep the name of the school out of print, and this we have done.

3. Information on respondents

\<29\> We recruited 54 female students and 38 males yielding a total of 92 students in the last term of the first year of the Senior High School. 30 of them had ages ranging from $12 - 15^2$ while the remaining 62 were between 16 and 19 years. In Ghana, pupils begin primary school at the age of six and spend six years at the primary school and three years at the JHS. This means that they spend nine years in total by the time they begin the SHS. This section provides information about the level of education of members of their household and their language use practices at home.

3.1. Education of household members

\<30\> For the majority of the students, boarding school education began in the SHS. As stated in the section on methodology, this means that they had spent most of their school-going age at home with their parents or guardians and other members of their household. We therefore sought to

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2   Although most pupils begin primary school at age 6, some start earlier and the some may skip a grade.

determine the people with whom they interacted at home before beginning the SHS. 87 of them lived with their mothers while 80 also had their fathers among their household. 73 of them lived with at least one brother, sister, or cousin, or more. 25 of them had an aunt or uncle in their household while 12 had a grandparent, and 3 had a live-in housemaid. In this section we present data on the level of education of members of students' household.

<31> Of the 87 mothers, 50 had tertiary education, 30 had secondary education, 4 had primary education while 3 had no education at all. Of the 80 fathers, 65 had tertiary education while 13 had secondary education and 2 had no education. There was no one with primary education only among them. We can conclude from this that the majority of the students all come from upper middle class homes. A total of 193 siblings was reported by 75 students. Of these 73 had tertiary education, 63 had secondary education, 51 had primary education while 6 had no education (presumably because they were too young). Of the 12 grandparents in the households, 7 had tertiary education while 4 had secondary education and 1 had primary education. There was no one without formal education. Of the 25 aunts and uncles, 17 had tertiary education while 6 had secondary education and 2 had no formal education. There was no one with a primary education. Finally, all of the 3 housemaids in the households of the students had secondary education.

<32> The discussion shows that there were 400 people in the households of the students. Of these, 212 had tertiary education, 119 had secondary education, 56 had primary education while 13 had no formal education. This is provided in Table 1:

Table 1: Education of members of students' household

	Education level							
Member of household	**Tertiary**		**Secondary**		**Primary**		**None**	**Total**
Mother	50	(57%)	30	(35%)	4	(5%)	3 (3%)	87
Father	65	(81%)	13	(16%)	0		2 (3%)	80
Sibling	73	(38%)	63	(33%)	51	(26%)	6 (3%)	193
Grandparents	7	(58%)	4	(33%)	1	(9%)	0 (0%)	12
Uncles/Aunts	17	(68%)	6	(24%)	0		2 (8%)	25
House helps	0		3	(100%)	0		0	3
Total	212	(53%)	119	(30%)	56	(14%)	13 (3%)	400

Table 1 shows that as much as 53% of the people in the students' household had tertiary education while almost 30% had a secondary education and 14% had primary education. This means there is ample opportunity for the students to speak English at home if they chose. Only 3% did not have formal education. In the next section we turn to competence in Ghanaian languages other than English and language use at home.

3.2. Language use at home

<33> We asked the students how many Ghanaian languages they could speak. 9 of them said they could not speak any Ghanaian language other than English, 44 could speak 1 other, 32 could speak 2 others, and 7 could speak 3 in addition to English. The information is provided in Table 2:

This shows that while 10% of the students could not speak any Ghanaian language, 7% could speak as many as 3. Most importantly, over 80% of them could speak some Ghanaian language with 48% speaking 1 and 35% speaking 2.

Table 2: Knowledge of Ghanaian languages

Number of languages	Number	Percentage
0	9	10
1	44	48
2	32	35
3	7	7
Total	92	100

<34> Responses to a question that we used to establish the type of competence which the students felt they had in at least one Ghanaian language show that some of them took the question about "speaking a Ghanaian language" literally. This is shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Domain of competence

Domain	Number	Percentage
Understand	85	92
Speak	83	90
Read	73	79
Write	68	74

<35> Recall from Table 2 that 9, or 10%, of the students said that they don't speak any Ghanaian language. Yet we see here that 83 of them, that is, 90% went on to say they have speaking competence in the language. This number is less than the number that said they understand a Ghanaian language (i.e. 92%). This should not be surprising since it is possible to understand a language without speaking it. As expected, fewer students could read a Ghanaian language and even fewer could write it. It is important to grasp this situation in order to understand the responses we got to our next question.

<36> We asked the students to assume that the total number of hours they found themselves using a language at home each day is 4 hours. We then asked whether based on this scenario they would say that they use 25%, 50%, 75% or 100% of the time for English or Ghanaian languages. Note that we opposed English to Ghanaian languages. For the purposes of this study, we were not as interested in the number of Ghanaian languages they spoke during the time as in the issue of whether they used it (or them) together with English. Table 4 table below represents the results:

Table 4: Percentage of time spent using Ghanaian language(s) versus English at home per day

Percentage of time spent	Number	Percentage
Nil	5	5
Up to 25%	35	38
Up to 50%	23	25
Up to 75%	21	23
Up to 100%	8	9

5 students, constituting 5%, said they do not use any Ghanaian language at all at home. That means these 5 students spoke English only at home. This might appear surprising considering that 9 declared that they do not speak any Ghanaian language. Note however, as we explained above, that 83 students declared that they could understand a Ghanaian language. This resolves therefore the potential puzzle created by Table 2; it is most likely that some of the students who said they could understand the language but did not accept that they could speak it, in reality, were able to construct some sentences. These students would find themselves involved in situations in which the said languages are used and which they would feel the need to account for. 35 of the students said they used (a) Ghanaian language(s) 25% of the time while 23 said they used it 50% of the time. 21 of them used it 75% of the time while 8 used (a) Ghanaian language(s) exclusively. Note that the converse is true, meaning that 8 students did not use any English at all at home, 21 of them used it 25% of the time, 23 of them used it 50% of the time, 35 of them used it 75% of the time, and, finally, 5 of them used it exclusively at home.[3]

4. Analysis

<37> Let us now take a look at how students performed in the essay. Section 4.1 discusses the discourse types, 4.2 discusses organizational structure and content while 4.3 discusses expression.

4.1. Discourse types

<38> We discovered three main types of writing which we categorized into sub types, namely: 'balanced' or 'two-sided', 'implied' and 'one-sided'. Because of the ability of an introductory paragraph to give an indication of the discourse type, we scrutinized the students' essays to discover the qualities of an effective introductory paragraph to an argumentative essay. These are the background to the topic, an explanation of the topic, a thesis statement, an acknowledgment of the opposing side, the plan of the essay, and the scope of discussions to be covered (Oshima & Hogue 2006; Buscemi 1996). Furthermore we examined the concluding paragraph to see if the student had reiterated the thesis statement, summarised it, or made a prediction as would be expected of a concluding para-graph in a balanced argumentative discourse.

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[3] We should stress here that we do not consider these percentages to be absolutes. For our purposes all we needed was an idea of whether the students spoke a Ghanaian language or English alone at home or whether they combined the two and, if they did the latter, whether they spent more time on one or spent about an average time on both.

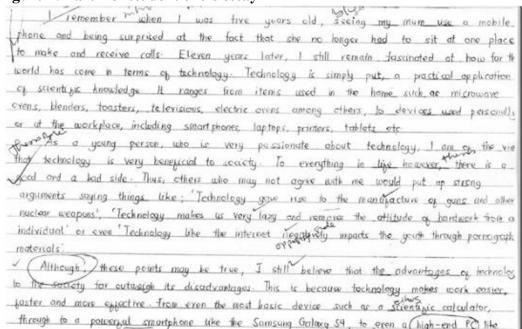#### 4.1.1. Balanced argumentative discourse type

<39> In the balanced argumentative discourse type, (designated as 2+), the writers discussed both sides of the question. They often produced an opening paragraph in which they gave a background to the topic, explained the topic and took a position in a thesis statement, and acknowledged the opposite side of the argument. In the developmental paragraphs, they adequately developed the two sides, using evidence and examples to support the points raised in those paragraphs. They also proceeded to write in a clear organisational structure of either a 'block' or 'point by point' pattern (Oshima & Hogue 2006). In a block pattern the writer discusses all the positive points first before the negative ones; and in a point by point pattern, they try to match each positive point with a negative point. In doing this they rebutted or conceded the arguments of the opposition and reaffirmed the superiority of their own positions. There was often a concluding paragraph that summarised, restated or gave the implications of their position and predictions for the future. Students who produced this discourse type satisfied the requirements of an argumentative essay and thus were adjudged the best performers in the writing assignment component of the survey. They were awarded a full 5 points for using this discourse type. The results are provided in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Discourse types

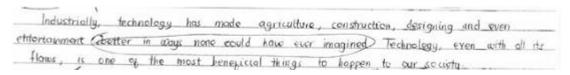| Discourse Type	Number of scripts	Percentage
Balanced (2+)	10	11
Implied (2)	33	36
One-sided (1)	49	53
TOTAL	92	100

<40> Let us now examine a live script (ID number 070) for an example of an introductory paragraph produced in the balanced discourse type category. This example demonstrates the essential elements required in a balanced approach to an argumentative essay as stated above.

Figure 1: Part 1 of student 070's essay

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<41> This student sets the tone of the essay with a captivating narration of his/her personal experience with technology in the past and the present. Then as a form of preview of the opposing arguments he/she mentions the typical arguments that an opponent is likely to give, using quotation marks and direct speech to capture vividly the opponent's view. Before stating his/her position, the student defines technology and proceeds with its advantages and then declares his/her perspective. This is followed by the thesis statement and then the opponent's views ("As a young person passionate about technology, I am of the view that technology is very beneficial to society. To everything in life however, there is a good and a bad side"). The student states the position clearly, but also acknowledges in the following sentence that there could be another position by pointing out that everything in life has a good and bad side. This introduction is balanced, effective, engaging, and original, and well-constructed.

<42> By defining terms, recognizing generalizations and providing evidence, the student shows evidence of critical thinking and a holistic approach to the question. He/she identifies the requirement of the essay question as argumentative, and employs a balanced discourse. For the conclusion, the student adopts the strategy of restating the thesis statement in other words. This is shown below.

Figure 2: Student 070's concluding paragraph

A majority of the students used rhetorical questions while others clearly stated the side on which they stood. This was not the case with the implied or one-sided essays as the discussions below illustrate.

4.1.2. Implied argumentative discourse type

<43> In the implied discourse type, (designated as 2), the writers recognized that the topic could be an argumentative one, but failed to develop the opposing sides. They sometimes produced a thesis statement, but oftentimes did not take a position. The argumentative aspect of these essays could be discerned by the rater, because it was "implied" by the student throughout the essay or in certain parts of it. However, the implication was usually done haphazardly. Often, there was no concluding paragraph. Those in this category were awarded 3 points out of 5. The following extract is the introductory part of an implied argumentative discourse type:

1. Technology is the use of practical scientific knowledge to make machines to make man's work easier and faster. But even though technology may be detrimental to the society, I think that technology is beneficial to society. (024)

<44> In this introduction the student recognized the argumentative nature of the topic but did not develop the opposing side of the argument. Furthermore, although he/she stated his/her positions, he/she did not satisfy the required structure of thesis statements as done in the balanced argumentative discourse type. The second paragraph of the essay is reproduced below:

2. I approve on this statement because technology had made man's work and effort easier. With the help of vehicles, which is used to make movement easier and faster and also with the help of machines it has improved on the development of society since machines used

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for constructing roads, bridges etc. It has made movement of man easier and faster and also it help traders to transport their items easier and faster. (024)

This shows that the student provides evidence for only the positive side of technology, especially for road transport. But in the conclusion he/she says that technology is both beneficial and detrimental to society. This is shown below:

3. With this conclusion I think that technology has been beneficial to the society than detrimental to the society. (024)

The concluding paragraph also shows that the student is aware of the two sides of the topic but fails to develop the other side in the developmental paragraphs of the essay as the writers in the balanced discourse have done.

4.1.3. One-sided discourse types (designated as 1)

<45> The writers in this category failed to recognize the essay as an argumentative one. Throughout the essay they emphasised only one side of the topic, usually the benefits of technology. Some of them appeared not to understand the meaning of 'detrimental' with some thinking it was synonymous with 'beneficial'. Others misread the question and equated technology to the internet only. Essays in this category were awarded 1 point out of 5. The following example illustrates the typical introduction to the one-sided discourse type essays produced by students.

4. 'Technology is said to be the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes. Usually, when technology is mentioned, the idea of machinery comes to mind. As a young person of 16, I think technology is beneficial, better yet, highly beneficial to society. (026)

The conclusion of this one-sided discourse summarized the issues raised in the essay, as shown below:

5. To end, technology has made work easier and faster, helped improve various sectors of the economy (health education) and helped in the development of the society and the nation. Technology therefore has a bigger impact on our lives than we think, making it beneficial to society. (026)

4.2. Organizational structure and content

<46> For the purposes of this paper we looked at inter-paragraph transitions with two objectives in mind. Firstly we examined the type of coherence devices used to achieve the smooth flow of the paragraphs and secondly how the transitions were used to reflect the argumentative nature of the question or the discourse type pursued by the students. Finally we sought to determine if the students predominantly used formal transition signals or expressions that showed transition and coherence.

Students performed creditably in this task, especially in the use of formal transition signals to show the beginning of new paragraphs and to introduce new ideas adequately and appropriately. The predominant devices used were those in the additive class that helped to build on their points. Although a majority of the students did not use the appropriate discourse type, when the need arose, they used the correct transitions. On the whole more students used a combination of conventional transitional words and phrases than expressions of transition. There were a minority of cases where

students only tabulated their points, and numbered them, others also just introduced new paragraphs to mark the transition in their essays. The most common transition phrases were the ones used to mark the number of points raised such as 'first(ly)', 'secondly', 'thirdly', etc. Other phrases include 'furthermore', and contrastive ones such as 'but', 'however', 'although' etc. The students also used nonconventional expressions such as 'even better' (012) 'comparing' (029), 'to begin with' (010),'turning our attention to' (053), and 'another benefit worth mentioning' (079).

<47> Turning to logical structuring, this is exemplified by the script of student 070 part of which we provided as figs 1 and 2. In that essay, the student starts with the introductory paragraph. And then in the first paragraph of the developmental paragraph, he/she starts with a transitional word of contrast 'although', juxtaposing the advantages with the disadvantages of technology and thus discussing the opposite side of the topic, in the same paragraph, the student sets up a hierarchy of technological devices from the simple basic and tangible ones to the complex and intangible ones. Specifically, he/she compares simple ordinary tangible devices such as calculators, phones and computers to the intangibles like internet and then proceeds to outline heavy end technological inventions like robots performing human-based tasks such as sweeping. He/she also mentions high end movie watching in three dimensions as well as technological objects like remote sensory control. The logical sequence of this essay can therefore be characterized as from the ordinary to the extraordinary, the least important to most important.

<48> We also rated the content of the essay, variously referred to as points, ideas, and reasons that students gave in their essays to support their claims or positions. We categorized content into 'tangible' or 'intangible' benefits or demerits, while noting the interrelationship and overlap between these two. We also examined how content was supported in the paragraphs. And finally, we examined the type of evidence and appeal that went with it. Almost all students scored very high marks on content with some enumerating as many as seven or more benefits of technology to society from the perspective of a young person. This shows that they were very quick to recall or think on their feet in the limited time given for the task. We awarded 0.5 (half) point for each idea mentioned, and the maximum points of 3 were exhausted after a student mentioned six different ideas.

<49> The tangible points included computers, labour saving devices, agriculture and food preservation, construction industry, transportation and travel, healthcare banking and commerce, and social media. The overlap of the tangibles and intangibles covered the internet, scientific advances such as meteorology, medicine, and intangible things such as crime detection, politics and civic education, learning and research. The intangibles also included such issues as efficiency and safety, reliability, better quality of life, and economic advancement. Those students who produced a balanced essay mentioned the negative aspects of technology as internet fraud, identity theft, pornography, moral decadence, laziness, isolation, and weapons of mass destruction. The total mark awarded for this criterion was three points 3; 1 for organisational structure and 2 for content.

4.3. Expression

<50> For this criterion we examined students' use of a variety of sentence structures, diction and grammatical acuity. The total points awarded was 2. For simple and average use, writers were awarded 1 point, and 1.5 was awarded for outstanding performance. An average performance on expression covered simple and well punctuated sentences, with accurate grammar and spelling. Those students who scored 1.5 in expression used a combination of simple and complex sentences. They also used
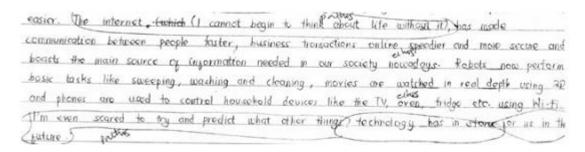
figurative language, innovative diction and employed evocative imagery. Those who performed below average in expression often used basic sentence structure, sometimes accompanied by minor instances of inaccurate grammar and spelling mistakes and these were awarded 0.5. Table 6 shows the performance on levels of expression.

Table 6: Level of expression

Level of expression	Number of scripts	Percentage
Outstanding (1.5)	18	20
Average (1)	62	67
Below average (0.5)	12	13
Total	92	100

Part of the script of a student which illustrates expressive language is provided below:

Figure 3: Student's 070's expressive language

We also looked at figurative language, including metaphors and similes which are exemplified below:

    6.a. Apart from that communication has been affected by the 'midas touch of technology' (022)

    6.b. 'from grace to grass' (080)

    6.c. 'under the mercy of the sun' (021)

    6.d. 'The wonderful fruit of technology disguised as automobiles transport man with ease'. (053)

    6.e. 'the internet is like a global library' (063)

<51>We observed that there was a low incidence of grammatical problems in the essays, and the few that we happened to find were in the one-sided discourse scripts. In addition to spelling mistakes, the grammatical errors were mostly the agreement problems. Examples are:

    7.a. There are checkpoints on various roads which ensures the safety of prisoners (076).

    7.b. Today many changes has been made in every part of the world because of technological tools and devices' (001)

    7.c. I, for one, thinks technology has a lot of benefits to society some of which are: (064)

7.d. Technology have also help in the living standard of some society example is the health matters.

It is notable that a large proportion of the students, up to two thirds, did not have problems with organisational structure, content, expression, spelling or grammar.

5. Findings and conclusion

\<52\> In the earlier sections of this paper, we noted that the main explanation offered for the poor performance of pupils in schools is their LOI in the early primary school. We pointed out that although such proponents do not state it explicitly, they often imply a connection between the said language and the L1 of pupils. In the case of Ghana, as the Government White paper on language policy (2004) or NALAP put it, it is the language of the community, hence the language used at home. In this study therefore we set out to investigate the language use practices in the homes of students in order to determine whether this impacted their performance in argumentative English written discourse. The main finding is that language use at home does have an impact on a student's written English production. The most telling part of our findings is that 10 students produced a balanced essay and, of this group, only one came from the group of students who used English only at home. The rest were students who used both English and one or more other Ghanaian languages at home. This is shown in Table 7 below where we use the expression "mixture" to represent those who combine English with other Ghanaian languages at home:

Table 7: Correlation between balanced discourse and language use

Discourse type 'Balanced', 5 pts (two-sided)	Content 3 pts	Expression 2 pts	Word count	Total 10 pts	Language use at home
5	3	1	432	9	Mixture
5	2	1	240	8	Mixture
5	2	1.5	522	8.5	Mixture
5	2	1.5	451	8.5	English only
5	2.5	1	410	8.5	Mixture
5	2.5	1	248	8.5	Mixture
5	3	1	264	9	Mixture
5	2	1	330	8	Mixture
5	3	1	382	9	Mixture
5	3	1	341	9	Mixture

Table 7 shows that a whopping 90% of students who performed excellently used both English and another Ghanaian language at home and 10% used English only. Even more telling is the general performance of students who used one language only at home. Consider table 8 below:

\<53\> Table 8 shows the results of students who used only one language at home and wrote a one-sided discourse-type essay. They were 9 in all. Of this, 6 used only Ghanaian language(s) at home while the remaining 3 used only English. Recall that the total number of students who used Ghanaian languages only at home were 8. As many as 75% produced a one-sided essay while the remaining 25% (i.e. 2) produced an implied discourse type of argumentative essay. None produced a balanced essay. We should point out here too that the student whose essay had the least number of words

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spoke only Ghanaian languages at home. However, we wouldn't want to read too much into this because the one with the most words (i.e. 528) also spoke Ghanaian languages only at home. The most important finding is the fact that none of the students who used Ghanaian languages only at home produced a two-sided discourse. Of the 5 students who used English only at home, 1 (i.e. 20%) produced a balanced essay, 1 produced an implied essay, and 3 (i.e. 60%) produced a one-sided essay.

<54> We therefore conclude that a monolingual approach to language use at home is not advantageous in multilingual Ghana. Parents wherever possible should be encouraged to raise their children multilingually in the languages on offer in the environment –English and other indigenous Ghanaian languages. As for LOI in school, while our investigation did not touch on this issue specifically, we do share the view reported by Ellis (1970:19) to be prevalent among linguists at the University of Ghana, Legon, that "an *integrated approach* to the teaching of Ghanaian languages and English should be the use of *both* as media of instruction." In other words a multilingual approach should be adopted there too. In general a "more than one language" perspective should be adopted in our literacy and education policies.

Table 8: Correlation between one-sided discourse and single-language use

Discourse type 5 pts, (one-sided)	Content 3 pts	Expression 2 pts	Word count	Total 10 pts	Language use at home
1	0.5	0.5	132	3.0	English only
1	1	0.5	126	2.5	Ghanaian language only
1	1.5	0.5	210	3.0	Ghanaian language only
1	2.5	1	360	3.5	English only
1	1.5	1	320	3.5	Ghanaian language only
1	2.5	1	267	4.5	Ghanaian language only
1	1.5	1	224	3.5	Ghanaian language only
1	2	0.5	175	3.5	English only
1	1.5	1	288	3.5	Ghanaian language only

We cannot conclude without acknowledging the fact that the type of instruction which students receive is crucial to their written English production. As we indicated in our introduction and in the methodology section, the students in our study come from one of the best schools in the nation where they receive very good instruction. This was evident in the fact that all the students did very well in content as well as structure of their essays. The only place where they differed was the ability to argue things from the two sides. It would appear that this requires more exposure and early preliterate (or pre-school) practices in many more languages than one.

<55> We suggest that the debate about language in education and consequently about what languages parents should raise their children in should move away from an either /or approach and embrace an inclusive approach. Multilingualism is the norm in Ghana and it permeates all facets of our life.

It is only by integrating it in our policies and practices that we can maintain and sustain our cultures and our Ghanaian national identity and aspirations. As Romaine (2013: 2) argues "Multilingualism is essential in the interests of maintaining cultural diversity, creating inclusive knowledge societies, not only for meeting the MDGs [Millenium Development Goals], but also for key targets of other global agendas like Education for All (EFA) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)."

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