

## **Comparative Language and Education for Development Policies Between The Gambia and Ghana: Advocacy for Change**

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### **Abstract**

*This study adds to the scholarship of Achebe (1965) and Ngugi (1992) on the use of the English language in early childhood education. Secondly, it explores the use of education for development in the Gambia and Ghana. This is significant because both countries share a similar political history and education systems. The purpose of the review is to analyze the similarities and differences between the Gambia's and Ghana's educational systems with respect to language and education as a roadmap to socio-economic development. The study's conceptual framework is House (2004) GLOBE dimensions of culture, which was used to analyze these countries language and education for development policies. On its data collection, the inquiry uses secondary data and policy documents. The findings show that Ghana is more assertive than the Gambia in its policies on language in early childhood education and education for national development. Furthermore, Ghana's policymakers are more willing to roll out policies geared towards language and education for development. Consequently, the study enables policy borrowing since it identifies and offers recommendations for language policies and education for development in both countries.*

**Keywords:** language, language policy, comparative education, language and development

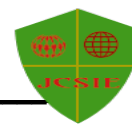
### **Introduction**

The Gambia and Ghana are both former British colonies and gain their independence in 1965 and 1957, respectively. Both countries inherited the British educational system and are members of the West African Examination Council. Additionally, both countries use the English language as the official language as well as the language of instruction in their educational system. The objective of the review is to identify each of these countries' strengths and weaknesses in their educational systems with a view of learning the best practices for adaptation wherever deem fit in any of these countries. The paper starts with a brief overview of the profiles of The Gambia and Ghana, then discusses the conceptual framework and methodology, presents the findings and

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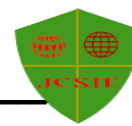
critically analyzes both countries' education systems with respect to language and education for development policies.

According to The Gambia Country Watch (2018), the country's population in 2017 was 2,091,000 inhabitants with a projected annual growth rate of 2.77%. On the country's economic indicators or outlook, The Gambia is typically considered as a developing country with an annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 3.31% in 2017 coupled with an inflation and unemployment rates of 8.02% and 6.84% respectively in 2016. In a similar pattern in 2016, The Gambia Gross Domestic Product (US \$Billions) was 0.886000 while it suffered a Trade balance to GDP (US\$ Billion) which was -8.010062. Because of these economic performances in The Gambia, the country was ranked 151 out of 155 countries using the Human Development Index of 2018.

Comparatively, according to Ghana Country Watch Report (2018), the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate as of 2016 was 4.98%, which is higher than The Gambia's rate within the same year under consideration. In 2016, Ghana's annual inflation rate was 14.23%, which conversely was higher than The Gambia rate, implying that the cost of living is much higher in Ghana when compared to The Gambia. However, the Ghana unemployment rate was 5.4%, which manifests that Ghana is doing fairly well in availing its citizens employment opportunities in its public and private economic sectors when compared to The Gambia.

Ghana's GDP for 2017 stood at 58.92 billion USD. Thus, Ghana's size of its GDP showcases the huge size of its economic activities whereas in The Gambia net GDP was under a billion US Dollars. Ghana registered a net surplus on its trade balance surplus indicator in 2017, which was 0.9 Billion US Dollars whereas in The Gambia, it registered a trade surplus deficit in 2016, which to a great extent could be attributed to the country's political crises when the former dictator Yahya Jammeh refused to accept the election results that he lost. Lastly, Ghana was ranked higher in the Human Development Index than The Gambia in 2017 as it was ranked 140 out of 155 countries globally.

Overall, both countries' economies show great room for improvement especially in the area of inflation, which are significantly high, thus warranting the need for serious fiscal measures and sound economic policies to redress the trend. Without such measures, the average citizen's quality of life for citizens of Ghana and The Gambia will decrease as a result of rising cost of living, which could be detrimental for the long-term peace and stability of these countries as it could ignite agitation and political unrest. Similarly, both countries should initiate sound policies so that their productive base can be improved. These measures will revamp the economy for growth in all its sectors, which ultimately will increase the growth rate of the countries' GDPs. Ghana is remarkably doing well with respect to trade surplus indicators. Therefore, the country needs to solidify its gains in its export and external market penetration. The Gambia is netting a deficit, which signifies that the country needs to improve its production of goods and services as well embark on a massive export initiative so that it can improve its trade surplus for the years ahead. The purpose of this comparative paper is to analyze the similarities and differences between The Gambia's and Ghana's educational systems with respect to language



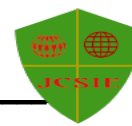
and education as a roadmap to socio-economic development. Thus, the study's research question is what are the language and education for development policies of The Gambia and Ghana?

## Conceptual Framework

For this inquiry, I will use House's (2004) globe dimensions of national cultures as a conceptual framework to analyze the language and education for development similarities and differences between Ghana and The Gambia. The House (2004) framework is suitable for the study because three of its characteristics appears to holistically address the themes that emerges in the review. According to House (2004), the framework has the following nine axioms or dimensions: power distance, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, uncertainty avoidance, institutional collectivism, assertiveness, performance orientation, humane orientation, and future orientation.

Holistically, the nine scope of House (2004) are explained as follows. Firstly, *power distance* assesses the degree of equal or unequal distribution of power between the elites or the masses of a society. This dimension is important because it demonstrates the manifestation of power and the way power is wielded in a society. The second axiom of the framework is about *in-group collectivism*. By this analogy, the author assesses the extent of selfhood or group association of members of a society. This segment of the framework is relevant in contemporary times where some people believe in individual or capitalist ideology or group or social orientation to the order of business. Thus, the framework can be used as a yardstick to measure how a society is organized with respect to individual or group sense of belonging. The third axiom of the conceptual framework is *gender egalitarianism*. This refers to the appeal of material success or concerns for others. Therefore, the conceptual framework evaluates the degree to which a society cares for material success or concerns for others as values and virtues of a society. The fourth aspect of the framework is *uncertainty avoidance*. This segment of the framework measures the extent to which a society affirms formal or informal order of business or in their daily life styles.

According to House (2004), the fifth section of the framework is about *institutional collectivism*. This segment of the framework examines the dichotomies of individual goal or societal driven. Similarly, as discussed under axiom two, this can be linked to capitalism or social ideology shaping how societies operate. The sixth axiom of the conceptual framework deals with the extent of *assertiveness* in the choices and decisions people make in a society. Therefore, two yardsticks are being considered in a society, whether people are assertive or submissive in their dealings and all walks of life. The seventh axiom relates to *performance orientation*. Essentially, this indicator test whether a society is adaptive to rewarding for meeting goals or otherwise. Therefore, the axiom is useful to gauge why people in a society care about meeting goals or not. The eight aspect of the conceptual framework is *human orientation* and that is being sensitive to others. This aspect of the framework is important since it concerns the urge and willingness to work as a team for collective success of all or collaborate, thereby enabling every team player to succeed and vice versa. The nine or the last aspect of the



framework's axiom is about *future orientation*. This is regarding being cognizant of long-term or short-term vision related to all people's activity in a society. This deals with beliefs, attitudes, and expectations. Some may invest and are patient for long term benefits, whereas other do not care about the future. Essentially, all what these categories of people do is for immediate results, benefits, and consumption.

Power distance, degree of assertiveness, and performance orientation will be applied to analyze the similarities and differences between the culture of The Gambia and Ghana, in relation to language and education for development.

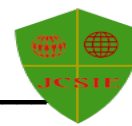
## **Methodology**

The study used secondary sources of data and policy documents from The Gambia and Ghana. The data gathered were organized using a thematic approach. The criteria for selection of articles involved the extent to which documents were related to language and education for development in Ghana or The Gambia. The identification of document was done using keyword such as language policy, language policy and development, language policy and education, education for development, Gambia language policy, and Ghana language policy, through the Ohio University's Alden library search engine and google scholar. The websites of relevant education institutions were also reviewed to inform the study. The study used House (2004) globe dimensions of national cultures to analyze language and education for development policies.

## **Findings**

### ***Gambia Language Policy***

Content analysis of the language policies of The Gambia's educational system revealed that policy consideration for local languages in the country's education system were implemented in the lower basic education system in 2015. However, according to Daly, Mbenga and Camara (2016), there is a limited number of materials available for teaching and learning in Sub-Saharan Africa, including The Gambia. Further, Daly Mbenga and Camara (2016) and Molloy (2014) noted that resource constraints in the country's educational system were considered as a principal factor for the disappointments of results in its performances in the West African Examination Council exams at all levels. Molloy (2014) explained that The Gambia has nine languages, which indicates that its elites and policy makers needed to be conscious of this fact and incorporate them into the country's education system well before 2015. Thus, policy makers initiatives are significant for policy appropriation and consideration since language is considered as a career of culture and research has demonstrated that teaching in the mother tongue of children generate better cognitive learning and comprehension. Unfortunately, English language is still the



medium and subject of instruction in The Gambia's public education system for all stages except grades 1-3.

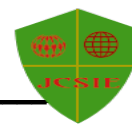
Similarly, using a stakeholder analysis helps understand The Gambia's late implementation of language policy in the country. Overall, the stakeholders in The Gambia public educational system includes the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, teachers, parents, students, and other community associations, such as parent teacher association. Some policy and governance issues in the educational system in the Gambia are addressed through a centralized system or top-bottom approach and a decentralized system or participatory approach. A common observation for both centralized and decentralized systems is the prevalence of *power distance* in decision making in all circumstances. According to Juffermans and Van Camp (2013), stakeholders, such as school children, teachers, parents, and other community stakeholders, make their concerns heard regarding education language policies.

Juffermans and Van Camp's (2013) findings indicate that stakeholders such as chief (District Head), parents, Alkalolu (Village Head), teachers, and interpreter, hold different perceptions and positions on education institutional and societal issues. This assertion is in conformity with the argument of a cross-cutting theme of educational institutions in society related to power distance that is observed in such gatherings. Precisely, Juffermans and Van Camp (2013) observed the following: first, some participants in this forum do not enjoy equal speaking rights at the community meeting when a meeting is hosted in the chief's compound because of the little role that women play in such meeting. Second, ethnic dimension and indigenous language dominance surface in such gathering. For example, as indicated in the study, one of the respondents mentioned that in their school, which is in the predominantly Jola region of the Jola ethnic group, the language of wider communication in and around the school is not Jola but Mandinka. But the participant's or respondent's preference infers that when forced to make a choice, they decide to speak in their own language as it denotes pride and ethnic identity.

### ***Cultural Orientation: Education for Development***

In The Gambia, the infusion of education as a cultural vehicle for change in its development agenda has little evidence. However, recently, it has been noted that authorities and policy makers have given it a higher priority. According to The Gambia's National Development Plan 2018-2020, education consideration is made to address its educational needs. Precisely, this policy document has education goals as a strategy to overcome inadequate skills and capacity in the entire public service. The goals include the following:

- Increase percentage of graduates as a proportion of total gross enrollment by post-secondary levels at the higher education level from 14% to 30% (national).
- Increase the number of master's and PhDs graduated in STEM, aggregated by gender from 0% to 140 (masters) and from 0% to 32% (PhD)
- Increase the number of master's and PhDs graduated in agriculture, aggregated by gender from 0% to 50 (masters) and from 0% to 10% (PhD)

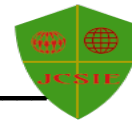


- Increase the number of master's and PhDs graduated in Health, aggregated by
- Gender from 0% to 40 (master's) and from 0% to 10% (PhD)
- Increase percentages of accredited post-secondary institutions from 0% to 100% (The Gambia Government, 2018, p.34).

### ***Ghana's Language Policy***

According to Opoku-Amankwaa et al. (2015), Ghana has over thirty languages and eighty-one dialects. The author claimed that the country's political leaders and policymakers had not been consistent in their policy decisions regarding educational policy for languages. The author further asserts that this pattern could be traced back to precolonial Ghana. For example, Opoku-Amankwaa et al. (2015) state that during the precolonial period between 1859 and 1871, German missionaries were involved in education and the propagation of religion in the country, using the indigenous languages as medium of instructions in their schools and church systems. Similarly, the author explained that during the precolonial era, the British missionaries and, in particular, the "British Sir Guggisberg's vision in 1920 was to preserve the people of Ghana's national characteristics so that the education system did not disaffect the Ghanaian people. This implies the importance that the German and British missionaries placed on local languages as mediums of instruction while also maintaining their language as the subject of instruction in all disciplines of study.

However, during the post-colonial era in Ghana, inconsistencies in the policy choices regarding language were observed throughout the various government bodies that controlled the seat of power in the country. According to Opoku-Amankwaa et al. (2015), during 1957, at the dawn of Ghana's independence, its first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, advocated for a unitary government in which English was adopted as the official language and became the language used in the educational system at all stages. As a manifestation of the shift to independence, the second government that succeeded Nkrumah in 1966 recognized and sponsored some local languages in its education system as mediums of instruction during students' first years of education. Specifically, Quaicoe, Adams, Bersah and Baah (2015) identified these local languages as Akan, Dagaare-Alim Dagbani, Dangwe, Ewe, Ga, Gonja, Kasem and Nzema. Another shift in Ghana's language policies was observed in 1971-2002. Similar to Nkrumah's policies, there was a restoration of English as the language of instruction in all of Ghana's education and school systems. Despite these oscillations, Opoku-Amankwaa et al. (2015) indicate that, since 2009, the country has appeared to be on a stable path regarding language policy for subject and medium of instruction purposes. This is because its policymakers have adopted a bilingual literary program for school-going children at the Kindergarten level up to power primary. This policy adaptation was considered successful because of its quality materials and its effective instructional strategies. Opoku-Amankwaa et al. (2015) underscored the benefits of this policy in gaining the public's trust and support since it avails Ghanaian citizens to read and write in their mother tongue and in the English language as well. These policy changes signify that Ghana's policymakers maintain a significant power distance from their citizens



because these policymakers are able to implement policies based on their own conceptions alone. The evolution of language policies show that Ghana's policymakers alternate between both Ngugi's and Achebe's advocacy for the abandonment and retention of the English language as a medium of instruction.

A major observation that can be made is that Ghanaian leaders' intentions was to use education as a means of economic expansion as evidenced by language policies since the attainment of independence. According to Ntim (2014), in 1957, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah launched the Accelerated Development Plan, which sought to transform Ghana through the development of its education system, ultimately developing the country's human capital. This policy's initiatives were essential in that they aimed to endow the Ghanaian people with the knowledge and skills necessary to actualize the country's development plan. In addition, this transformative policy was critical to Ghana at that time because the country needed to steer its own affairs and build on its capacity for development through human resources. In contemporary discourses, McCarthy (2014) noted that this cultural assertiveness can be linked to appreciation theory because it showed that the country wanted to utilize its people and capacities as capital to transform its development.

Higher education plays a key role in a nation's development. According to Ntim (2014) and Bawa (2016), Ghana has used higher education as an instrument of public policy for development. These policy decisions exemplified the need to situate Ghana's development within a local context and in the knowledge within its higher education system, which led to the polarization of Ghana's higher education system in all regions of the country. One of the most profound examples of this is the Kwame Nkrumah's University of Science and Technology; the incorporation of this policy consideration into the policy stream signifies the political philosophy and ideology of development. This University has contributed immensely to the training of Ghanaians in technical skills and knowledge in the area of engineering, medicine, and other disciplines. Thus, the cultural orientation of the Ghanaians is seemingly shaping the policy choices towards using education as a vehicle for developmental change. Fagerlind and Saha (2016), Thompson (1981), Jean-Francois (2015) and Bloom, Canning and Chan (2006) all contend that education is a leading tool for the promotion of economic growth and sustainability within developing countries.

Education for development requires ensuring that quality standards are met. According to Ntim (2014), in 1993, the Ghanaian government instituted its National Accreditation Board with a view toward assuring that quality culture becomes rooted and embedded in Ghana's higher education system. The government deemed it necessary to implement this as a roadmap to reverse the deterioration trend in its educational outcomes. Additionally, the policy was initiated by the Ghana government in order to increase access in its higher education system; as such, the accreditation body aimed to ensure that people with the right qualification are enrolled and admitted into the higher education establishments and to prevent the compromising of standards at the point of departure in the higher education journey. Furthermore, another objective behind this policy was to increase the country's capacity to respond to its development needs and aspirations via education (Ntim, 2014). The quality of training was considered indispensable in



meetings that laid out procedures and standards for the deliverance of public service to the Ghanaian people. Lastly, the policy gained the attention of political leaders and policymakers because it was a means to bridge the gap between limited resources and returns on investment experienced in the 1960s within Ghana’s higher education system.

According to Ntim (2014), these developments were implemented through the granting of institutional autonomy and the responsibility of quality assurance. This is significant because it empowered institutions with the legislation and authority to oversee quality assurance in the entire higher education system of Ghana. Thus, the approach prevented the possibility of interference in the accountability and internal operations of these entities.

### ***Similarities of The Gambia and Ghana’s Educational Systems***

As Table 1 and 2 illustrate, information from both The Gambia’s and Ghana’s ministry of education websites, reveal similarities between the educational systems of the two countries.

**Table 1: Gambia’s Education System**

| Level                   | From Grade | To Grade | Age | From Age to | No. of Years |
|-------------------------|------------|----------|-----|-------------|--------------|
| • Primary               | 1          | 6        | 7   | 13          | 6            |
| • Middle                | 7          | 9        | 13  | 16          | 3            |
| • Secondary             | 10         | 12       | 16  | 19          | 3            |
| • Tertiary (University) |            |          |     |             |              |

Source: Gambia Education System (2020)

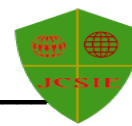
**Table 2: Ghana’s Education System**

| Level                    | From Grade | To Grade | Age | From Age to | No. of Years |
|--------------------------|------------|----------|-----|-------------|--------------|
| • Primary                | 1          | 6        | 7   | 13          | 6            |
| • Middle                 | 7          | 9        | 13  | 16          | 3            |
| • Secondary              | 10         | 13       | 16  | 20          | 4            |
| • Tertiary (University)  |            |          |     |             |              |
| • Exams: WAEC WASCE Exam |            |          |     |             |              |

Source: Ghana Education System (2020)

Tables 1 and 2 above indicate that both countries’ citizens and school-going children spent the same number of years at the primary education level. Similarly, both the Gambia and Ghana have the same educational structures and school-going ages at the middle school education level. The only difference between the countries was observed at the secondary school level in terms of structures and ages for school-going boys and girls: for Ghana, this period lasts





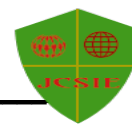
four years whereas, in the Gambia, it lasts three years. With respect to University education, both countries' bachelor's degree programs last four years.

### **Discussion: Critical Analysis of Ghana's and the Gambia Educational Systems through Language Policy**

Through the lens of language policies and with respect to the arguments made by Achebe (1965) and Ngugi (1992), as well as with the utilization of the House (2004) conceptual framework, the review demonstrated that Ghana is more proactive than the Gambia in its drive to incorporate local languages into the educational system. Achebe (1965) advocates for the adaptation of the English language as the official language in the former British colonies since it will unify the various ethnic groups in these countries. On the contrary, Ngugi (1992) argues that former British colonies need to use their indigenous languages in their educational system because language is a carrier of culture and identity. Ngugi (1992) posited that writing in non-native languages enriches that language. For example, native Akan and Wolof speakers writing in English language enriches the English language. Therefore, in his view, Africans need to write in their native languages in order to preserve their cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the positions of both sides of this argument denote Pennycook's (2017) postulation that "with English Language taking up such an important position in many educational systems around the world, it has become one of the most powerful means of inclusion or exclusion from further education, employment, or social positions." (p. 9).

Comparatively, from the language policies of the Gambia and Ghana, one can deduce that the Gambia is far behind when it comes to using education to facilitate the development aspirations of the country. In fact, based on a content review of education reports, the Gambia has had University education in the country after 1995 when the University of Nova Scotia in Canada launched a University Extension Programme in the Gambia, which gave birth to the University of the Gambia in 1999. Overall, a major takeaway from the Gambia's education policies for development is that it demonstrates the power distance that exists between its citizens and those in authoritative positions to make policy choices anchored on education as a machinery to propel development. Similarly, this behavioral pattern denotes the lack of cultural assertiveness, future, and performance orientation within the country's leadership.

One important conclusion that can be derived from Juffermans and Van Camp's (2013) analysis regarding stakeholder dynamics is the need to provide equal representation of voices, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity and region, regarding education matters. This is crucial because challenges still exist within both the central and decentralized education systems in the Gambia. Therefore, the Gambian government should enact and enforce policies that ensure stakeholders are not discriminated against in local school meetings and gatherings. Overall, the present conditions indicate the power distance that exists in both formal and informal settings when dealing with issues regarding language in the Gambia. Specifically, drawing from House et al. (2004), this review demonstrates that the Gambia's policymakers maintain a power distance

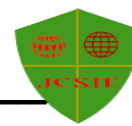


regarding language policy because people's perspectives are not involved in their decisions regarding language policy. This also signifies that the policymakers are not assertive, but rather submissive with respect to the English language inherited from their colonizers.

This study suggests that Ghana is far ahead of the Gambia when it comes to the realization of the importance of including its local languages within its education system. This is a manifestation of power because it shows that the political leaders of the Ghana believe in certain ideologies recognizing their cultural orientation and its preservation. To a larger extent, this is in line with the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) policy advocacy. The Gambian authorities have not taken any step toward the inclusion of local languages within its educational system. This pattern of non-action clearly demonstrates the lack of will and interest on the part of the country's authorities with respect to the preservation of its cultural heritage. Indeed, the inclusion of these languages within the educational system would facilitate the preservation of the Gambia's culture and prevent its dilution or evasion within the educational system, which is currently copied from the British. For example, the present education system includes the lyrics of "A for Apple" when children are learning phonetic pronunciation, while this could be culturally contextualized by transforming the lyrics to a more culturally relevant example, such as "A for Aunt."

## **Conclusion**

The review shows that there are significant differences in terms of cultural orientation in the education policies of Ghana and the Gambia. For instance, Ghana has recently become cognizant of embracing the teaching of its indigenous languages in its educational system, whereas the Gambia is still behind in its incorporation of local languages into the policy stream due to limited priorities. This difference manifests the axiom of power by the political leaders and policymakers in the choices they make regarding education policy. This is culturally significant because it exemplifies the tendency of domination and privilege they have over the masses. Similarly, this trend denotes the differential level of assertiveness that both the Gambia and Ghana have in incorporating education into their development agendas. Ghana has proven to be more proactive than the Gambia because, since its attainment of independence, it has recognized the important role education can play to facilitate its development agenda. Education is important because it influences the culture of the people, which is their way of life. Therefore, in both Ghana and in the Gambia, at different moments, education was used by policymakers and political leaders to transform the lives and livelihoods of its citizens. Lastly, this analysis indicates that the Gambia's has many opportunities to learn from Ghana in reforming its education system, especially with respect to language policy, the establishment of quality assurance and accreditation agency, the development of higher education and crafting a national development plan. This is because Ghana is far ahead of the Gambia in these areas and its socio-economic indicators are stronger compared to The Gambia.



In conclusion, the review offers a set of recommendations to scholars, policy makers and practice. The study recommends that scholars engage in further research to ascertain a better understanding of the rationales behind the Gambia's and Ghana's policy choices with respect to language and education for development. The review adds to the conversation on language policy and education for development in West Africa. Further studies of this nature are needed for the sub-region in order to provide a better understanding of language and education for development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The comparative analysis and findings with regard to both The Gambia and Ghana fills in some of missing information regarding language and education for development policies in Africa. Policy makers should roll out language and education for development policies in their national plans because it signifies a departure from colonial legacy and its impact in the African continent. The review highlights the high stakes involved in the implementation of language and education policies for development in Africa. Therefore, the adoption of language and education policies for development would ensure that all policy actors on the spectrum take into account the improvement of outcomes in language and education for national development.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

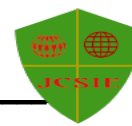
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