

Does the Use of L1 and L2 at Home Modulate the Academic Achievement of Primary School Learners?

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Abstract

This study explored the influence of first language (L1) and second language (L2) usage at home on pupils' academic achievement. Employing a case study design and qualitative approach, the study employed a semi-structured interview guide (primary data) and secondary data from students' academic records. Ten (10) pupils from a primary school in the Sunyani Municipality, Ghana, were selected through purposive sampling. The results indicated that none of the ten children exclusively used L2 at home; three pupils used L1 and L2, while seven used only L1. The study concluded that pupils who used L1 and L2 at home performed better academically than those who used only L1 at home. Based on these findings, it is recommended that education policies promote bilingual education and parental support programs to encourage the use of both L1 and L2 at home. Additionally, teacher training should focus on practical strategies for integrating L1 and L2 in the classroom, and curriculum design should incorporate both languages to reinforce language skills and academic content.

Keywords

home language, first language, second language, mother tongue, academic achievement

Introduction

The role of language in education has long been a subject of academic inquiry, with numerous studies highlighting its critical influence on students' cognitive and academic development. The interplay between a child's first language (L1) and second language (L2) at home is particularly significant in multilingual contexts. From a sociolinguistic perspective, the home language environment can profoundly affect language proficiency and academic performance. According to Cummins (2000), proficiency in L1 can provide a strong foundation for acquiring L2, thereby enhancing overall academic achievement. Recent research suggests that bilingualism offers cognitive advantages, such as improved executive functions and problem-solving skills (Bialystok, 2011; Antoniou, 2019). Additionally, sociolinguistic theories emphasise the role of language as a social practice that shapes identity and community membership (Norton, 2013). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory underscores the importance of social interaction and language in cognitive development, suggesting that the home environment plays a crucial role in shaping academic outcomes. In Ghana, where multiple languages coexist, understanding how language use at home affects academic performance is essential for developing effective educational policies and practices.

While some studies suggest that exclusive use of L1 can limit L2 proficiency and academic success (Thomas & Collier, 1997; Hamm, 2020), others (García & Wei, 2014; Baker, 2021) advocate for the benefits of bilingualism, noting that balanced use of L1 and L2 can lead to better academic outcomes. This sociolinguistic perspective considers the cognitive and social implications of language use in multilingual settings. The study aims to contribute to this ongoing debate by examining the language practices of pupils in Sunyani and their correlation with academic achievement.

In multilingual societies like Ghana, where English is the official language but many indigenous languages are also spoken, understanding the role of L1 and L2 in the educational context is crucial. In the mid-1980s, Vygotsky emphasised the critical role of language in human development, stating that it is the most powerful tool for personal growth. He highlighted how language acquisition enables individuals to articulate their thoughts effectively. For infants, the first six years are pivotal as they not only develop their native language (L1) but also form their cultural identities. During this formative period, children construct their understanding of the world based on their experiences. For children raised in cultural and linguistic backgrounds other than English, their L1 is crucial for cultural identity and effective communication and relationship-building with adults and peers. Such interactions are essential for language acquisition and academic achievement (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). Language plays a significant role in academic success, serving as the medium through which knowledge is imparted and shared between teachers and students (Lupogo, 2014). Ntim (2016) emphasises that strong proficiency in L1 facilitates the academic use of L2 as children progress in their education, more so than those with weaker L1 proficiency. This diversity in language use can be seen as an advantage, enriching the educational experience and fostering a deeper understanding of different cultures and perspectives.

Oppong-Sekyere et al. (2013) further emphasise the importance of language in education, stating that success in schooling, training, and practice depends on the ability to learn and use language effectively. Dube and Ncube (2013) assert that education and language are deeply interconnected, highlighting the integral role of language in the educational process. These insights underscore the need for further research into the relationship between language use at home, academic achievement, and the implications for language policy and curriculum development in Ghanaian schools. Research has shown that the language environment at home can significantly impact students' academic achievement. Children who use their L1 at home may have a stronger foundation in their mother tongue, which can positively influence their cognitive development and learning abilities. On the other hand, exposure to L2 at home, especially in urban and semi-urban areas where English is increasingly becoming a home language, may give students an advantage in English language proficiency, which is essential for academic success in Ghana's education system.

The use of the English language as the official language in a highly multilingual society in Ghana, with over eighty-one (81) local languages, continues to be of great concern to language scholars (Simons & Fennig, 2018). Like other African countries that have adopted the English language as the country's second language or official language, Ghana continues to use the English language in official domains, including the education space (Amua-Sakyi, 2005). Besides, English language(L2) being used in the official space is now taking the space of unofficial domains like the home. (Afrifa, et al. 2019).

Studies (Anderson et al., 2009; Agyekum, 2009; Akpango-Nartey & Akpanglo-Nartey, 2012; Ansah, 2014; Anderson & Ansah, 2015) have also observed that English is speedily becoming a home language among many Ghanaians, particularly in urban and semi-urban areas. Research has shown that young people can learn multiple languages simultaneously with ease if they are exposed to good language models and have extensive exposure to both L1 and L2 (Clarke, Milne, & Milne, 1996).

Similarly, studies have instead indicated that knowing one's native language facilitates children's understanding of how other languages work for three reasons: a) it enhances the positive self-concept and well-being of children; b) children who maintain first language are likely to transfer cognitive development when learning another second language; c) children's level of competence in the second language is likely to be related to the level of competence already acquired in the first language, helping them to transfer skills from one language to another (Cummins, 1984).

The benefits of bilingualism have consequently been identified as crucial to providing a solid impetus for learning a second language (Cummins, 1984; Clarke & Milne. 1996). Local language policy with respect to the medium of instruction in Ghana now is that from kindergarten one up to primary three, teachers are required to teach pupils in the local languages. Thus, mother/native language (L1) as the required medium for instruction in Ghana was given impetus by the 1925 Education Ordinance during the British Colonial rule. When Ghana attained independence on March 6th, 1957, the government reversed the use of the local language as a medium of instruction, but it was later restored. Ghanaian languages as a medium of instruction became compulsory from

primary one to three and as the subject of study in primary four. Many Ghanaians, especially those within the high socio-economic strata with much higher education in too many instances, continue to use L2 in the homes with their children as a means to boost their proficiency in L2 at the expense of proficiency in L1 to enhance their academic performance as they progress through the education ladder (Ntim, 2016).

Studies (Anderson et al., 2009; Agyekum, 2009; Akpango-Nartey & Akpanglo-Nartey, 2012; Ansah, 2014; Anderson & Ansah, 2015) have shown that there is a notable trend of Ghanaians, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, rapidly adopting English as a home language. This shift has raised concerns regarding its implications for language use and education in Ghana, prompting a call for further research to understand its impact better. This trend has significant implications for language use and education in Ghana, highlighting the need for further investigation into its impact. It, therefore, becomes imperative to unearth the potential reasons behind this trend, especially the influence of globalisation, education policies, or socio-economic factors.

Statement of Problem

Previous studies (Ntim, 2016; Macdonald, 1993; Rubagumya, 2003) have consistently shown that learners with below-average proficiency in English as a second language tend to experience more learning difficulties than those with average ability. This underscores the importance of language proficiency in academic achievement. Using the mother tongue (L1) as a medium of instruction is beneficial for teachers and students, particularly at the elementary level of education, as it enhances effective teaching and facilitates a better understanding of concepts (Heugh, 2006). Despite these benefits, reports from UNESCO highlight a significant learning deficiency among school-aged children in Africa, with an estimated 250 million children facing challenges in reading, writing, and language. In Ghana, reports from the Ministry of Education and the Chief Examiner's Report on the Basic Certificate Examination (BECE) since 2008 have consistently highlighted reading deficiency in English as a second language. Approximately 50% of Ghanaian pupils struggle to read a sentence in English, indicating a significant language acquisition and proficiency challenge. While research in Ghana and other areas has explored the use of L1 and L2 in relation to academic achievement, much of the focus has been on text comprehension and the role of L1 in promoting language proficiency. For instance, Ntim (2016) examined how L1 and L2 influence reading comprehension, emphasising the psychological transfer from L1 to L2 for academic language use. While some studies have acknowledged the trend of English becoming a home language among Ghanaians, particularly in urban areas, there is a need for more focused research to explore how this linguistic environment influences students' academic performance. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific impact of L1 and L2 usage at home on pupils' academic achievement in Ghanaian basic schools. This study addresses this gap by exploring how the use of L1 and L2 at home, in any way, modulates primary school pupils' academic achievement.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this paper:

1. What impact does using only L2 at home, without L1, have on children's academic performance?
2. How does using L1 affect children's academic outcomes without L2?
3. What factors drive parents to choose L2 as the primary language for raising their children?

Theoretical Review

Two prominent theories—Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Cummins' linguistic interdependence hypothesis—offer valuable insights into the complex interplay between language use at home and academic performance. These theories not only provide a framework for examining how language influences cognitive development but also shed light on the practical implications for educational practices in multilingual contexts like Ghana, equipping educators, researchers, and policymakers with valuable knowledge.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, rooted in the belief that social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development, emphasises the importance of language as a tool for thought. Vygotsky (1978) argued that language is not merely a medium of communication but a powerful instrument for learning and development. He posited that social interactions initially mediate cognitive functions and are then internalised by the individual, a process he referred to as the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD).

In the context of language use at home, Vygotsky's theory highlights the critical role of the home environment in shaping a child's cognitive and linguistic abilities. When children engage in conversations with more knowledgeable others, such as parents or siblings, they are exposed to new language forms and concepts that scaffold their learning. For instance, a child learning English (L2) at home while maintaining their native language (L1) benefits from the rich linguistic interactions that foster cognitive growth. This dual-language environment aligns with Vygotsky's view that social interaction is crucial for developing higher mental functions, such as problem-solving and critical thinking.

Vygotsky's theory also underscores the importance of cultural tools, including language, in shaping cognitive development. In a multilingual society like Ghana, where children are often exposed to multiple languages from a young age, using both L1 and L2 at home can provide a broader range of cognitive and cultural tools. This exposure allows children to navigate different linguistic and cultural contexts more effectively, enhancing their cognitive flexibility and academic performance. Vygotsky's insights suggest that rather than focusing exclusively on one language, a balanced approach that values both L1 and L2 can create a more supportive cognitive and academic development environment.

Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis

Jim Cummins's linguistic independence hypothesis offers another lens through which to understand the relationship between L1 and L2 use at home and academic achievement. Cummins (2000) proposed that proficiency in a first language (L1) provides a foundation for acquiring a second language (L2). This theory posits that the skills developed in L1 can transfer to L2, facilitating learning and academic success in the second language.

Cummins argued that when children develop strong literacy skills in their native language, they are not isolated but instead form a cognitive base that supports learning an additional language. For instance, a child with a robust vocabulary and understanding of grammatical structures in their native language can apply these skills when learning English. This transfer of skills is particularly relevant in educational contexts where L2 is the medium of instruction, as is the case in many Ghanaian schools. According to Cummins, the stronger the foundation in L1, the more effectively a child can acquire L2, leading to better academic outcomes.

The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis also addresses the potential risks of neglecting L1 in favour of exclusive L2 use. Cummins cautioned that children who do not receive sufficient support in their native language may struggle with L2 acquisition, as the cognitive and linguistic base needed for transfer is weakened. This insight is crucial in understanding why some children in the study performed poorly when L1 was the sole language used at home. While L1 is vital for cultural identity and communication within the family, an exclusive focus on L1 without sufficient exposure to L2 can limit a child's ability to succeed academically in a context where L2 is dominant.

Both Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis underscore the value of a bilingual or multilingual environment in supporting cognitive and academic development. These theories suggest that a balanced approach to language use at home, where both L1 and L2 are actively nurtured, can provide the cognitive and linguistic advantages necessary for academic success. They advocate for educational policies and practices that recognise and support students' linguistic diversity, ensuring that both L1 and L2 are seen as valuable resources in the educational journey.

Conceptual Review

The concept of language use at home, particularly the exclusive use of either a first language (L1) or a second language (L2), is pivotal in understanding its effects on academic performance. In examining these constructs, it is essential to consider the intricate relationship between home language practices and academic success in various subjects, particularly in language acquisition.

Language Exposure and Cognitive Development

Research has shown that language exposure at home significantly influences cognitive development and academic performance. The use of L1 at home serves as a foundation for cognitive and linguistic skills, which are essential for learning additional languages.

For instance, the cognitive skills developed through L1 are transferable to L2 learning, enhancing the learner's ability to acquire new vocabulary and grammar in L2. This transfer of skills, known as cross-linguistic transfer, highlights the importance of maintaining a strong L1 foundation while learning L2 (Omarbekova, 2023).

Bilingualism and Academic Success

The construct of bilingualism, where both L1 and L2 are used at home, is often associated with enhanced cognitive abilities and better academic outcomes. Bilingual individuals tend to have improved metalinguistic awareness, which allows them to think about and manipulate language structures more effectively. This metalinguistic advantage contributes to better performance in language-related tasks, such as reading comprehension and writing (Martínez-Soto & Prendes-Espinosa, 2023).

Furthermore, the balanced use of L1 and L2 at home supports the development of both languages, leading to better overall academic performance. This balanced bilingualism ensures that students are proficient in both their native and second languages, which is crucial for subjects taught in L2 (Montoya, 2022).

Use of L1 or L2

However, the exclusive use of either L1 or L2 at home can affect academic achievement. For example, students who use only L1 at home may struggle with L2 proficiency, which can negatively impact their academic performance in subjects taught in L2. Conversely, students who use only L2 at home may lack the cognitive benefits of strong L1 development, such as the ability to transfer linguistic and cognitive skills across languages (Mustafa & Ahamed, 2022).

The relationship between these constructs—L1 and L2 use, cognitive development, and academic performance—suggests that a balanced approach, where both languages are actively used and supported at home, is most beneficial. This approach enhances linguistic proficiency in both languages and supports overall cognitive development and academic success (Palacios-Hidalgo et al., 2021).

Understanding these constructs and their interactions can help tailor educational strategies to support multilingual students and promote academic success across diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Empirical Review

A study by Hanson (1989) found that increased use of L2 in both home and classroom settings was positively correlated with higher academic performance in English. However, Hanson's research did not specifically explore the outcomes associated with the exclusive use of L2 at home, leaving a gap in understanding the potential drawbacks of such an approach. In contrast, studies by Akowuah et al. (2018) have indicated that heavy reliance on L1 at home can negatively impact performance in English language subjects. Their findings suggest that while L1 is crucial for cultural and familial

communication, its exclusive use may hinder the development of L2 proficiency, which is essential for academic success in contexts where L2 is the medium of instruction.

Research by Ahadzie et al. (2015) provides further insights into the benefits of a bilingual approach. Their study found that students who engaged with both their native language and English at home performed better academically than those who used only one language. This finding aligns with Cummins' (2000) linguistic interdependence hypothesis, which suggests that maintaining and developing L1 supports the acquisition of L2 and overall academic achievement. The study by Ahadzie et al. underscores the advantages of a balanced linguistic environment where both L1 and L2 are used and valued, leading to enhanced academic performance.

Another significant contribution comes from Afrifa et al. (2019), who explored the socioeconomic factors influencing parents' choice of language use at home. Their research found that parents often promote using L2 at home to enhance their children's English proficiency, driven by the belief that English skills are crucial for academic and professional success. This finding reflects a broader trend in urban and semi-urban areas in Ghana, where English is increasingly becoming the dominant home language. The study highlights the socio-economic dimensions of language use, suggesting that parents' language choices are influenced by their educational background, economic status, and aspirations for their children's future.

These empirical findings suggest that while both L1 and L2 play essential roles in a child's development, a balanced approach that nurtures proficiency in both languages is likely to yield the best academic outcomes. The evidence supports the idea that exclusive reliance on either L1 or L2 can have limitations, and that bilingualism offers cognitive and academic advantages that are particularly valuable in multilingual societies like Ghana. This review underscores the need for educational policies and practices that support the development of both L1 and L2, recognising the importance of a child's home language environment in shaping their academic success.

Method

This study employed a case study research design, precisely a qualitative approach. As Stake (1995) notes, case studies are particularly valuable for deeply understanding individual experiences and the meanings people attach to them. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for gaining a comprehensive view of how language use at home affects academic performance, aligning with Creswell's (2013) assertion that qualitative methods are well-suited for exploring the "how" and "why" of complex issues. Focusing on detailed, context-specific data, the study aims to provide insights into participants' lived experiences and social contexts. This methodology was considered appropriate for capturing the depth of participants' perspectives, which would be challenging to achieve through quantitative methods alone.

Population and Sampling

South Ridge Model School was purposefully selected. The study population was the Primary three (3) pupils of South Ridge Model School, Baakoniaba, Bono region. Ten pupils, five of whom performed best and five of whom performed worst, were purposively sampled for the study. South Ridge Model School in Baakoniaba, Bono Region, was chosen for some reasons, making it a unique and interesting setting for this study. First, the school is in a community where multiple languages are spoken, including local indigenous languages and English. This makes it a perfect place to explore how different language environments at home might impact students' academic performance. The demographic details of the students, such as their family backgrounds and language skills, provide extra layers of insight into the study. All these factors together make South Ridge Model School a particularly fitting choice for exploring the impact of language use on academic success.

Ten pupils from Primary Three were purposively selected for this study. The selection was based on their academic performance to ensure diverse experiences and outcomes. Specifically, five pupils who performed the best in their class assessments and five who performed the worst were chosen. This criterion allowed for a comprehensive analysis of how language use at home might influence high-achieving and low-achieving students.

The decision to focus on Primary Three (3) pupils and limit the study to ten respondents was driven by the need for a detailed and manageable exploration of language use and academic achievement within a specific developmental stage. Primary Three pupils are at a crucial age where foundational language skills are solidifying, and their home language environment can significantly influence their academic performance. By concentrating on this grade level, the study aimed to capture the impact of L1 and L2 use at a critical juncture in their educational journey. Additionally, the selection of ten respondents, divided into those with high and low academic performance, provided a focused sample size that allowed for in-depth qualitative analysis. This approach ensured that the study could explore individual experiences and perspectives in detail while maintaining the practicality of data collection and analysis. Smaller, purposefully selected samples are often used in qualitative research to gain rich, contextual insights, which can be more challenging to achieve with larger groups (Creswell, 2014). In qualitative research, the number of participants is typically small because the focus is on obtaining rich, detailed, and contextual data from a few participants rather than generalising findings to a larger population. As Patton (2015) notes, a case study may focus on a single case or a small number of cases, depending on the research question and the specific circumstances. Qualitative research aims not to generalise but to provide a detailed understanding of a phenomenon from those experiencing it. In order to ensure data saturation, ten (10) participants were purposively sampled. A small sample allows for in-depth exploration and analysis of individual experiences, which is crucial for uncovering nuanced insights in qualitative studies. Thus, this sampling strategy was chosen to balance depth of understanding with feasibility.

Data Collection Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were a primary tool for collecting qualitative data from parents and guardians. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the languages spoken at home and their impact on the child's academic performance. The semi-structured format allowed respondents to elaborate on their answers, offering rich, nuanced insights. A set of predetermined questions guided the interviews, but spontaneous follow-up questions were also allowed based on the participants' responses. This method is beneficial for capturing detailed and contextual information.

The study utilised secondary data from students' academic records to complement the data. These records provided objective measures of academic performance, which were essential for comparing the impact of different language use scenarios. By analysing students' grades and overall positions in class, the study determined the relationship between academic achievement and the language environment at home. This data offered a benchmark for assessing the practical implications of language use on academic success (Creswell, 2014).

Trustworthiness

Our study, guided by the criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), uniquely focused on four key elements of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. We addressed credibility through prolonged engagement and persistent observation, ensuring a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences. Transferability was enhanced by providing rich, contextual descriptions that allow readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail, documenting the research process and decisions made. Confirmability was achieved by maintaining objectivity and transparency in data analysis, with findings grounded in the data rather than researcher bias. By adhering to these principles, our study aimed to produce reliable and meaningful insights into the impact of language use at home on academic performance.

Data Collection Procedure

Our data collection process was comprehensive and meticulous. Interview guides were prepared for the pupils, teachers, and children's parents. The researcher called the children's parents by phone. The class teacher also assessed the students to guide the selection process and aid the researcher in the study. The pupils' performance in the core subjects of English, Math, and Science was recorded. The pupils and their class teacher were interviewed in the classroom, and later, the parents were interviewed over the phone.

Data Analysis Techniques

To ensure the anonymity of pupils, the participants were assigned pseudonyms. The first five pupils who performed well in class in the previous term were assigned A1-A5, and

the pupils the five pupils who performed abysmally were assigned B1-B5. Additionally, an "M" or "F" was used to indicate the pupil's gender, resulting in codes such as MA1 for a male top performer and FB2 for a female low performer.

Results

This section examines the study findings presented and interpreted in relation to the research questions and existing literature. It details the study's results and explores their significance and implications.

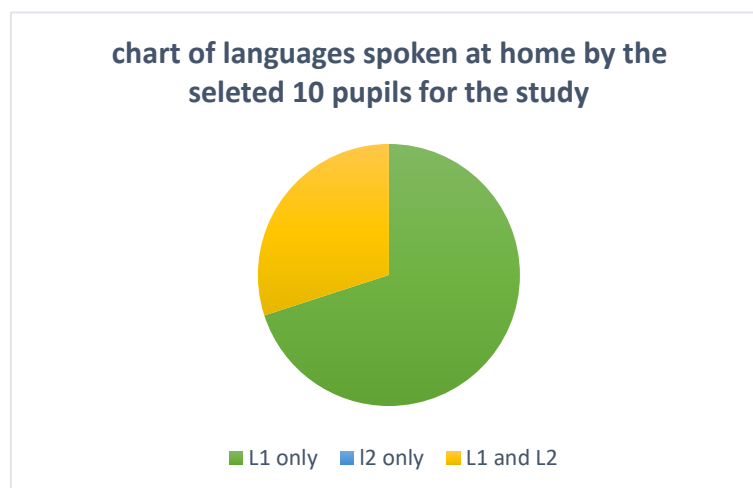


Figure 1. *Chart of Languages Spoken*

From Figure 1, it can be deduced that none of the pupils spoke the L2 exclusively at home. This means that the direct impact of using only L2 at home on academic performance could not be determined. However, this absence of L2-only households highlights the importance of L1 in the home environment, suggesting its role in providing emotional security and cultural identity, which are crucial for cognitive and social development. The common practice of code-switching indicates that pupils benefit from cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness, potentially enhancing academic performance.

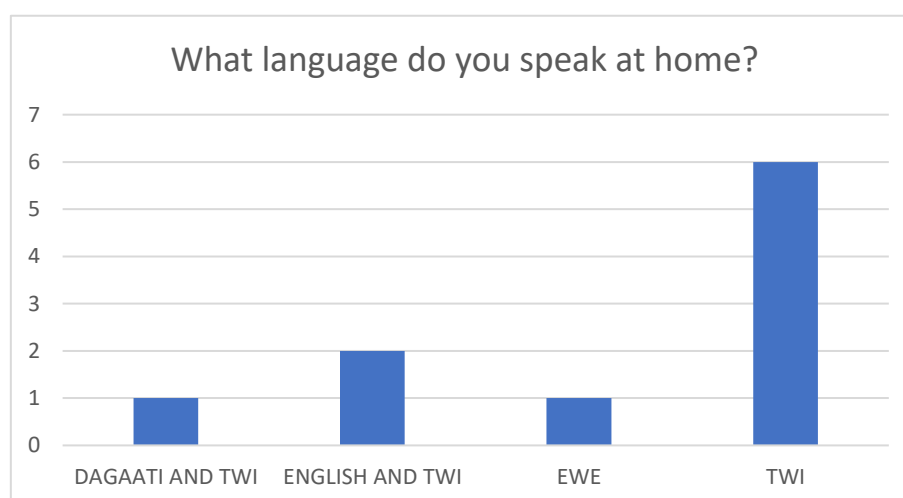


Figure 2. *What language do you speak at home?*

The responses collected from the ten pupils selected for this study identified a variety of languages spoken at home. The languages that emerged from the data included Twi, Ewe, Dagaati, and English. Each pupil's language use at home provides insight into their linguistic environment, potentially impacting their academic performance. Among these languages, Twi was notably the most frequently spoken language in the pupils' homes, often used exclusively. This contrasts with the use of other local languages, such as Ewe and Dagaati, which were also present but not as predominantly spoken at home. English was another language mentioned, but it was less commonly used as the sole language of communication.

To illustrate the relationship between language use at home and academic performance, the study provides a detailed distribution of languages spoken by each pupil, paired with their academic positions from the previous term. From the responses from all ten pupils chosen for the study, the languages that emerged as languages the pupils speak at home were Twi, Ewe, Dagaati, and English. It was found that Twi was the language that was mostly spoken exclusively at home, as opposed to the other local languages, which are the L1 of the pupils. Below is a distribution of the languages spoken at home by the individual pupils, "MA1-MB5," against the overall positions of the pupils for the previous term.

Table 1. *Language Spoken at Home and Pupils' Class Position*

Pupil	Language spoken at home	Overall position in the school
MA1	Twi	1 st
FA2	Ewe	2 nd
FA3	English and Twi	3 rd
MA4	Dagaati and English	4 th
FA5	English and Twi	5 th
MB1	Twi	59 th
FB2	Twi	58 th
MB3	Twi	56 th
MB4	Twi	55 th
MB5	Twi	54 th

Source: Field data (2022)

The above table shows that none of the five pupils who performed best speak English exclusively, but two speak only Twi (L1) and only Ewe (L1), respectively. Of the three other pupils who performed well, two said they spoke English and Twi at home, and the other said they spoke Dagaati and English at home.

All five pupils were reported to speak Twi at home, for the other category of pupils who performed worst. Drawing from the responses of both the best-performing pupils and the worst-performing pupils, a majority of the pupils speak only Twi at home, though some performed best and some performed worst. Drawing from this, the L1(Twi) spoken at home by these pupils cannot be directly related to how well or poorly they performed since some spoke their L1. Notably, pupils who spoke English and their native language at home, such as FA3 and FA5, achieved high positions, securing the third and fifth spots, respectively. This suggests that a bilingual environment may offer an advantage,

allowing pupils to navigate and excel in both languages, potentially boosting their academic performance. Additionally, MA1, who spoke only Twi at home, managed to secure the first position, indicating that while bilingualism can be beneficial, it is not the sole determinant of academic success. Other factors, such as personal aptitude and the quality of educational support, also play critical roles. On the other hand, pupils who spoke only Twi at home, including MB1, FB2, MB3, MB4, and MB5, were among the lower performers, ranking between 54th and 59th positions. This trend might suggest that limited exposure to English, the primary language of instruction, could impact academic achievement. However, it is essential to note that this observation does not necessarily imply a direct cause-and-effect relationship but points to a potential correlation. While the data indicates that bilingualism might support better academic performance, individual performance can vary widely based on additional factors. The presence of high achievers among native language speakers highlights the complexity of academic success, which depends on a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and contextual elements. Table 2 below shows the responses of some of the parents during the interview to ascertain their perceptions of their word's usage of L1 and L2.

Table 2. Some Interview Responses from Parents

Question	Response (Parent of MA1)	Parent of MB1	Parent of FB2	Parent of FA2	Parent of FA3
1. What language do you speak at home with your child?	Twi	Asante twi	Asante twi	Ewe	Twi and English
2. At what age did the child start speaking the language you speak at home?	Age 3	Two years	Two years	3years	3years
3. What language do you prefer to speak with your child?	Twi	Twi	Twi	Ewe	English
4. If you speak English with your child, why do you do so?	N/A	N/A	N/A	NA	So that she will be fluent in English
5. Do you think the English language helps your child to do well at school?	I think my child speaks English at school because it will help them to do well	I think that they should speak English at school to help them	I think that they should speak English at school to help them do well	Any language will help her to do well	Yes, she will do well at school when she speaks English

Source: Field data (2022)

The responses of parents like;

“she will do well at school when she speaks English” (**Parent of FA3**)

“I think that they should speak English at school to help them” (**Parent of MB1**)

“Any language will help her to do well” (**Parent of FA2**)

can be categorized into three. The parents who thought speaking the English language at school will help their children do well at school, regardless of them speaking their L1 at home; speaking English in general both at home and at school would help their children to do well and those that thought any language at all will help their children to excel. Majority of the responses however showed that parents would want their wards to speak English so that they can do well at school.

The General Outcome of L1 and L2 Use at Home

The table below reveals distinct patterns in the languages spoken at home by the ten children in the study.

Table 3. *The general outcome of L1 and L2 use at home*

L1 only	L1 and L2	L2 only
Seven children	Three children	Zero children

The data reveals distinct patterns in the languages spoken at home by the ten children in the study. According to Table 2, seven out of ten children speak only their first language (L1) at home. This indicates a strong preference for native language use within the household environment. In contrast, three children are exposed to their first language (L1) and a second language (L2) at home, reflecting a bilingual or multilingual environment. Notably, none of the children exclusively use the second language (L2) at home. This distribution implies that a majority of the participants predominantly use L1 in the home. The absence of any child speaking only L2 at home suggests that L2 is not the primary language of communication within the households surveyed. This could imply that while L2 is valued for educational purposes, it does not replace the dominant use of L1 in daily life. The data highlights the potential challenges and opportunities in balancing native and additional language use at home, with implications for understanding how these language dynamics might influence academic performance.

Discussion

The Effect of L2-Only Use at Home on Academic Performance

The findings from this study underscore the significant role that first languages (L1) play in facilitating the successful acquisition of a second language (L2) within educational contexts. The fact that none of the children in this study used L2 exclusively at home highlights a notable gap in understanding the impact of such an approach. Previous research, such as that conducted by Hanson (1989), has established a positive correlation

between increased use of L2 in both home and classroom settings and higher academic performance in English. However, Hanson's study did not specifically address outcomes associated with the exclusive use of L2 at home. This absence suggests that while exposure to L2 is beneficial, it is likely that a balance between L1 and L2 is essential for achieving optimal academic results. The lack of exclusive L2 use in our study suggests that while integrating L2 at home is valuable, it cannot wholly replace the role of L1 in supporting academic success.

The Effect of L1-Only Use at Home on Academic Performance

Our study found that seven children used only L1 at home. Only two demonstrated strong academic performance, while the other five had poorer results. This distribution is consistent with the findings of Akowuah et al. (2018), who reported that heavy reliance on L1 can negatively affect performance in English language subjects. The data suggests that while L1 remains crucial for cultural and familial communication, its exclusive use may impede the development of L2 proficiency. This impediment can contribute to lower academic achievement in subjects requiring L2 skills. These findings highlight the need for an integrated approach that incorporates both L1 and L2, enabling students to benefit from the strengths of both languages and improving overall academic outcomes.

The Effect of Using Both L1 and L2 at Home on Academic Performance

In contrast, the three children who used L1 and L2 at home performed notably well, ranking among the top five students in their class. This outcome is aligned with the research conducted by Ahadzie et al. (2015), which found that students who engaged with their native language and English at home exhibited superior academic performance compared to those using only one language. The success of these bilingual children in our study underscores the advantages of a dual-language environment where L1 and L2 are used and valued. Maintaining proficiency in both languages enhances students' academic performance by supporting L2 acquisition while preserving L1 skills. This finding highlights the potential benefits of bilingualism and the importance of fostering a balanced linguistic environment at home.

Reasons for Parents' Choice of L2 Use at Home

Parents' decisions to promote the use of L2 at home are primarily driven by their desire to enhance their children's English proficiency and academic performance. This aligns with the study by Afriafa et al. (2019), which identified factors such as economic status, age, and educational background influencing the choice to use English as a home language. In our study, parents emphasised the importance of English for their children's academic success, reflecting a strategic approach to supporting educational achievements through language use. This focus on L2 highlights the prevailing belief in the value of English for academic and professional opportunities, reinforcing the need for educational policies and practices that support bilingual or multilingual development. The findings reveal a complex interplay between language use at home and academic performance. While exposure to L2 is beneficial, exclusive use of either L1 or L2 can have

varied impacts. The findings suggest that a balanced bilingual approach yields the most positive academic outcomes—where both L1 and L2 are actively used and supported. These results advocate for educational strategies that consider students' linguistic and cultural contexts, promoting policies that support the use of multiple languages to enhance academic achievement and student success.

Conclusion

This study sought to explore how the language(s) spoken at home by the selected pupils impact their academic performance and to understand why parents choose to use L2 at home. From the findings, it has been drawn that out of the ten children, none of the children used their L2 exclusively at home; three of the children used both L1 and L2 at home, and seven of the children used only their L1 at home. The findings showed that all the children who used their L1 and L2 at home performed well, while the majority (five) of the seven who used their L1 exclusively at home performed poorly. The responses given by most of the parents suggested that they preferred that their wards speak the English language at home so that they could do well at school. Though most of the parents had this view, the findings have shown that most of the children who performed well used both their L1 and L2 at home, so these parents should be encouraged to include speaking their L1 with their wards and not the English language alone.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Educators should be mindful of students' linguistic backgrounds and tailor their teaching approaches to leverage students' L1 strengths while supporting L2 development. Classroom activities can be designed to use students' L1 as a bridge to understanding L2 content.
2. Schools should implement regular language development assessments in both L1 and L2. This will help identify students who might need additional support and allow for timely interventions to address any language-related academic challenges.
3. Educational policies should incorporate strategies that recognize and support the use of students' first languages (L1) alongside the second language (L2). Policies should encourage bilingual or multilingual education models that value and incorporate L1, facilitating smoother transitions for students learning L2. This could include funding for bilingual education programs and resources that promote both L1 and L2 development.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study faces several methodological limitations that impact the interpretation and generalizability of its findings. First, the case study design limits the generalization of results beyond the context. The small sample size of only ten pupils further compounds this issue, as it may not adequately represent the diversity of experiences and language

practices among a larger population. Additionally, while rich in detail, the qualitative approach relies on subjective interpretations of data, which could introduce researcher bias and affect the consistency of the findings. The use of purposive sampling, though aimed at selecting specific groups for detailed examination, could result in bias, as it does not capture the full spectrum of language use at home. Moreover, the study's reliance on parental reports of language use could be influenced by social desirability or memory inaccuracies, affecting the data's reliability. Finally, the study did not incorporate longitudinal data to track changes over time, which could have provided a deeper understanding of the long-term effects of L1 and L2 use on academic performance. Another significant limitation is the small sample size of only ten pupils, which may not represent the broader population and limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study focused exclusively on a single school and a specific grade level, potentially narrowing the context and applicability of the results. The reliance on self-reported data from parents about language use at home introduces the possibility of response bias, which could affect the accuracy of the findings. Furthermore, the study did not account for other sociocultural factors that influence academic performance, such as parental education levels or socioeconomic status. These limitations suggest further research with larger, more diverse samples and comprehensive data collection methods to validate and extend the findings. Future research could benefit from cross-cultural comparisons to understand how different sociolinguistic environments influence the relationship between L1 and L2 use and academic achievement. This would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of bilingualism in diverse educational settings.

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