Challenges Experienced in the Teaching and Learning of English in Multilingual Classrooms: A Case of a College in Ashanti, Ghana

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Abstract: This study examined challenges experienced in the teaching and learning of English in a multilingual classrooms atmosphere, using the descriptive design. It took place at the Akrokeri College of Education in the Ashanti Region, Ghana. The study used a sample of 297 teachers and 67 teachers, using some sampling procedures. Data analysis took place through descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies and percentages. The study affirmed the existence of various challenges in the multilingual classroom, including weak linguistic background and learner anxiety. Others were communication-related issues and writing issues. While a good number of teachers demonstrated high proficiency in English, most of the students struggled. Based on these conclusions, the study recommended that teachers and students' use of English language, both in and outside the classrooms, be maximized since frequent use of the language increases its mastery, which is beneficial in the process of teaching and learning in the multilingual classrooms.

Keywords: Multilingual environment; prospect; interethnic communication; competence.

Introduction

Learning the English language is crucial for non-native speakers, especially in multilingual countries like Ghana, where English is used as an official language and also as the language of instruction across the curriculum in every educational institution. English is necessary for learners to continue with studies, for work, for social affairs, for recreational activities and for business (Amua-Sekyi, 2010).

There is little doubt that English has become resilient throughout the genres of writing, particularly formal writing in Ghana and in some other West African countries. Adika (2012) supports this line of argument by holding that English has displayed an impressive endurance as the language of formal education and a means of interethnic communication in multilingual settings. Therefore, one's competence in English becomes a must regardless of the subject or area of specialization.

Despite the crucial role that the English language plays in multilingual societies, where it promotes socioeconomic mobility and serves as the official language for interethnic communication among various ethnolinguistic groups, most students find it difficult to use it correctly. Despite the crucial role that the English language plays in multilingual societies, where it promotes socioeconomic mobility and serves as the official language for inter-ethnic communication among various ethnolinguistic groups, most students find it difficult to use it correctly (Ahmad et al., 2021), which according to Putra (2020) is an international issue, particularly in nations where English is spoken as a second or foreign language. As a result, English language learners, who frequently come from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds and who typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language and in their academic courses are unable to communicate effectively or learn in English (Kim cited in Taluah, 2016). According to Al-Seyabi and Tuzlukova (2014), college and university students have trouble with lexical and content components of writing. Arab pupils have a lot of difficulty in paraphrasing (Abdulkareem, 2013). The author bemoans the fact that the students are unable to use their own words to reframe sentences in light of their critical thinking and rearrange sentences in a way that is more conducive for academic success. In Nigeria, Lawoyi and Adeyanju (2013) established students' inability to effectively employ punctuations to convey their ideas in writing.

According to Msanjila (2005), there are several writing challenges that Kiswahili pupils in Tanzania consistently face. These are capitalization and punctuation mistakes, fuzziness or lack of clarity, poor organization or illogical sequence, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Amua-Sekyi (2010) noted that many students find themselves struggling to express concepts that are only vaguely understood in a language that is inadequate for their needs; the result is logically incoherent discourse. Ghana, where the study is situated, is no exception.

Given what has been said thus far, it is important to note that students' difficulties in using the English language are as a result of difficulties they face in learning a second language. Khan (2011) acknowledged that learning English as a second or foreign language is always difficult because it is laborious to teach and learn in a multilingual context. According to Khan (2016), students learning English as a second or foreign language may encounter a variety of obstacles. The obstacles to learning English might be institutional or administrative, personal, socioeconomic or psychological. Altitudinal, linguistic, personal, physiological and pedagogic impediments are additional possible challenges that can be added to this list (Elibariki, 2017). According to Soner et al. cited by Erden and Tutkun (2016), factors like teaching strategies, students' interests and attitude towards foreign languages, the relationship between the native language and foreign languages, the contribution of parents in foreign language teaching, the number and quality of teachers, class size, the density of other courses, the connection between social, environment and English use, lack of English proficiency and lack of access to foreign language instruction influence the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language.

Taluah (2016) noted that because English proficiency standards and performance levels in formal educational settings have declined, teachers must teach the language in a way that will increase students' enthusiasm. Amua-Sekyi (2010) shares the opinion that it is the school's responsibility to give students learning opportunities that will facilitate the use of English for all purposes.

Because English is the primary language of instruction in the majority of Ghanaian schools, the success or failure of the educational system depends on the efficient teaching, learning and usage of English as a language (Amua-Sekyi, 2010). Therefore, it is important to consider alternative strategies and approaches such as contextualized language learning, identifying and prioritizing the specific language skills required for effective classroom communication and providing targeted professional development workshops or courses specifically focused on improving English language skills for classroom communication. For every subject on the curriculum taught in English, the proficiency in English Language is a must for students to succeed.

Multilingual Approach
In the context of applied linguistics, the term multilingualism appears to have a variety of connotations. According to Kelly (2015), multilingualism can be described as the quality of someone fluent in at least two languages on an active or passive basis. Additionally, it can be viewed

as the coexistence of multiple languages that are in close contact. As consideration will be given to the coexistence of two or more indigenous languages, the latter term "coexistence of multiple languages in close contact" will be taken into account for this study. In this sense, pluralistic, ethnolinguistic and multilingual nations are those that have more than one indigenous language (Erling et al., 2017; Afful, 2007; Adika, 2012). The argument that multilingualism is the situation where various language varieties coexist in a particular country may therefore be acceptable.

The term "multilingualism" has a historical connotation. In the past, local towns or villages had their means of communication. However, this means of communication was poor due to no mass education or technology, and resulted in limited support for patriotic emotions (Wong, 1969). It is obvious that these historical events strengthened multilingualism and made it more prevalent, which in turn gave rise to pluralistic societies. The rise of mass education and technology as well as the necessity for nationalistic sentiments to pursue a shared and uniform objective in a particular nation have contributed to the impression that we now live in a globalized world. In recent years, various nations such as India, South Africa, Israel, amongst others, have been searching for an official language that will unite citizens (Ghazali, 2012). Once chosen, the language serves as the medium of communication for media and for parliamentary processes as well as for teaching and learning in schools. According to Erling et al. (2017), some nations (Canada, Wales, Switzerland) have a liberal attitude towards allowing other languages to co-exist as official languages.

Despite the argument by Erling et al. (2017), we agree with Afful (2007), Adika (2012) and Amua-Sekyi (2010) that English language is the universal language and a language of unification because of the development of technology, the spread of mass education and the globalization of the world. This explains why countries that are at the "Expanding Circle" of Kachru's (1992) concentric circle model of English Language (countries that introduced English as a foreign language in schools and universities, mostly for communicating in English) (Jenkins, 2003) are progressively constructing their educational institutions around the English Language (Al-Mutairi, 2020).

Even though English is becoming more and more of an international language, making it necessary for all nations to adopt it, some nations (Ghana, Nigeria, China) have already done so due to contact with either the British or the Americans. These nations use English in addition to their native tongues to conduct business or perform other institutionalized tasks (Kirkpatrick, 2007). The majority of these nations, including Ghana, India and Nigeria, were multilingual or pluralistic nations when they were colonized (Kachru & Nelson, 2000). These nations made English their official language during that time. However, as noted by Erling et al. (2017), these nations have diverse ethnolinguistic populations with high rates of both social and individual multilingualism. Therefore, it has been argued that a person from these pluralistic countries is predisposed and conditioned in the oratory of the native language or languages and may thus present a variety of challenges in the classroom (such as inability to understand what is read and said, difficulty in socializing in the classroom, difficulty in expressing one's opinion and ideas etc.) where English forms the basis of teaching and learning (Adeyanju & Egwuogu, 2003).

Language Policy and Multilingual Classroom in Ghana
The language policy of Ghana has undergone numerous revisions since it was first created in 1529 (Owu-Ewie, 2006). Adika (2012) documented four centuries of changes Ghana's language policy has endured. These include the educational laws enacted in 1822 and 1887, the Phelps-Stokes report from the 1920s, the attempts made to establish a post-independence government in 1957 and the eventual adoption of a policy favoring English-language education in 2002. Various scholars fervently argued for the use of Ghanaian languages at the fundamental levels of education during the 19th and early 20th centuries (Saah & Baku, 2011).

There has been a mixed record regarding the use of Ghanaian Language as the language of teaching in lower elementary schools. To be specific, as Owu-Ewie (2006) recounted, from 1925 to 1951 Ghanaian languages were employed as primary school medium of instruction during the first three years of education (as per the Phelps-Stokes report). Nevertheless, between 1951 and 1956, the policy was reviewed for Ghanaian Languages to be used only for the first year of lower primary education. From 1957 to 1966, however, Ghanaian languages were not used at all. In contrast to the directive

from 1967 to 1969, which wanted the Ghanaian languages to be used only for the first year, the directive from 1970 to 2002 demanded that Ghanaian languages should be used for the first three years

The policy now (2008 to 2023) dictates that Ghanaian languages should be used as medium of instruction at the lower primary level (classes 1-3) while English should be taught as a subject and from class 4 forward, English and the local language should be taught as subjects while the English language becomes the medium of instruction (Anyidoho, 2018). This policy was implemented in response to the Anamua-Mensah's Educational Reform Committee in 2007 (Adika, 2012).

There are high levels of societal multilingualism and individual multilingualism in Ghana (Anyidoho, 2018), a nation with a very diverse ethnolinguistic population with more than fifty regional languages (Appiah & Ardila, 2021). Accordingly, depending on the student's level of education, the composition of the classroom in Ghana tends to be either homogenous or heterogeneous (Gaana, 2022). Because most children who attend these schools are natives of the area where the school is located, the majority of them are more likely to speak the same local language when receiving basic education. Therefore, linguistic backgrounds in these classes are more likely to be homogeneous. However, senior high school and higher learning institutions are likely to have a diverse class makeup because the students at that level appear to be from various ethnic backgrounds and linguistic proficiency levels. Therefore, it is acceptable to argue that educators and learners may encounter a wide range of difficulties in classrooms. As a result, it is necessary to unveil the difficulties educators and learners encounter in the teaching and learning process.

Challenges and Solutions in Multilingual Classrooms
Researchers around the world (Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013; Freedom et al., 2020; Hsieh et al., 2017; Rasheed et al., 2017) have recognized the need to present evidence about difficulties teachers and learners face in multilingual classrooms in the process of teaching and learning. In response, Dash and Das (2019) examined a linguistically responsive teaching framework for multilingual contexts by concentrating on challenges and prospect relating to multilingual education in inclusive education at the primary level of education. The study used an exploratory approach, focusing on research findings carried out by academics throughout the world in the areas of inclusive education and multilingual context. Additionally, the observation guide was used as a quick way to gather data. The study was situated in the context of India. The findings showed, among others, that inadequate language backgrounds of teachers hindered pupils' communication during classroom lessons. It was also revealed that to provide solutions to this challenge, teachers adopted the strategy of scaffolding instruction to promote students' learning, identifying the language demands, applying key principles of second language learning and learning about diverse students' linguistic backgrounds, experiences and proficiencies.

Additionally, Erling et al. (2017) thought about difficulties faced in multilingual classrooms in low- and middle-income countries such as Ghana and India at the basic school level. The study included review of literature, observation and interviews. The study established that learners had just a limited command of the English language, whereas teachers were fairly proficient in it. Furthermore, the study found that teachers correct students' language use (exclusively in English) and connect the lesson material to the student's history and experiences as part of their strategies for addressing the difficulties they face in the multilingual classroom. Kelly (2015) further emphasized on professional identity, professional development and the monolingual teaching ethos while focusing on the difficulties associated with teaching multilingual languages. Thus, Kelly advocated for fostering multilingualism through professional advancement and the creation of intercultural perspectives.

Rasheed et al. (2017) took into account the difficulties that multilingual classrooms in government secondary schools in Pakistan face. The study showed that pupils in multilingual classes lack the confidence to utilize the English language because they are afraid to make mistakes, and teachers frequently jump between languages to instruct the students. Additionally, Nalunga (2013) concentrated on teaching in a multilingual classroom in Sweden through interviews and observation. The author found that code-switching was one of the main issues in a multilingual class and suggested that vocabulary and concept development, the need for clarification, and teaching students how to use a strategy for L2

acquisition, were some possible solutions to address the challenges.

It is evident from the aforementioned studies that authors in different areas have conducted different types of studies on the issue of multilingualism. These studies are all centered on the difficulties that multilingual classrooms present. However, while some (Dash & Das, 2019; Erling et al., 2017; Kelly, 2015; Nalunga, 2013) concentrated on the methods used to address these problems, others (Rasheed et al., 2017; Kelly, 2015; Nalunga, 2013) placed a heavy emphasis on the issues and mde recommendations for methods to address the phenomenon. It is important to note that the strategies discovered and suggested in these studies appear to have the same goal. Furthermore, even though some of these studies are conducted in a second language context (Dash & Das, 2019; Erling et al., 2017; Kelly, 2015; Nalunga, 2013) and the others (Rasheed et al., 2017) within English as a foreign language context, the problems identified in the studies seem to be common, as in poor command of the use of English language, language hesitancy, code-switching and others. Examining these studies shows that basic and pre-tertiary education has received the majority of the researchers' attention. Therefore, higher education must be emphasized, which is why the current study is necessary

Methodology
Design
The study used the descriptive design to provide an account of challenges that teachers and students faced in multilingual classrooms.

Population and Sampling
The study took place at the Akrokeri College of Education in the Ashanti Region, Ghana. The school had a student population of 1,350 and a tutor population of 67. The sample of 297 students was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) criteria. Additionally, due to small population of

teachers, the researchers utilized the census sampling technique to include every teacher. Kothari (2004) stated that the census approach works best when the study participants are small and accessible.

Research Tools
Questionnaire served as a tool for data gathering from students and teachers. The questionnaire incorporated closed-ended items, placed on a four-point Likert scale.

Validity and Reliability
To determine the validity of the questionnaire, four experts in the field of English Language were requested to determine the appropriateness of the individual items in the questionnaire. The instrument was then pilot-tested with a sample of 54 students and 10 teachers from the same population who did not take part in the main study. The scores from the pilot test were then used to determine the reliability of the instrument whereby the Cronbach's Alpha of 0.78 was obtained.

Treatment of Data
Data treatment took place in descriptive statistics, particularly through frequencies and percentages.

Ethical Considerations
Research subjects were assured of confidentiality of any data provided. Consequently, confidentiality was ensured before, during and after the investigation.

Results and Discussion
Research question 1: What are challenges that confront teachers in the teaching and learning of English Language in the multilingual classroom of Akrokeri College of Education in Ghana?

As observed in Table 1, the mean scores of various challenges encountered by teachers in the teaching and learning of English Language ranged between 2.67 and 3.95.

Table 1: Challenges in the Teaching and Learning of English in the Multilingual Classroom

Challenges of a multilingual class	Mean	Rank
Comprehension related problems	3.95	1st
Writing issues	3.78	2nd
Weak linguistic background	3.50	3rd
Lengthy syllabus	3.15	4th
Communication-related problems	3.10	5th
Anxiety among students	3.10	5th
Interaction related problem	3.00	7th
Lack of teacher training	2.93	8th
Content delivery problem	2.67	9th

The most serious challenge was comprehension (mean=3.95, SD=1.89) while the least common challenge was content delivery (mean=2.67, SD=1.56).

The rest of challenges include writing problems, weak linguistic background, lengthy syllabus, communication related problems, anxiety among learners, interaction related issues and limited teacher training. This finding agrees with the finding of Rasheed et al. (2017) who reported communication related challenges in a multilingual classroom in Pakistan as well as Shoaib (2021) who also found weak linguistic background as one of the challenges teachers face in multilingual classrooms.

Research question 2: What is the English language proficiency of teachers and learners in the multilingual classroom?
This research question sought to establish the English language proficiency of teachers. To answer this question, frequencies and percentages emerged from teachers and learners' responses in the questionnaire as it appears in Figure 1 and 2.
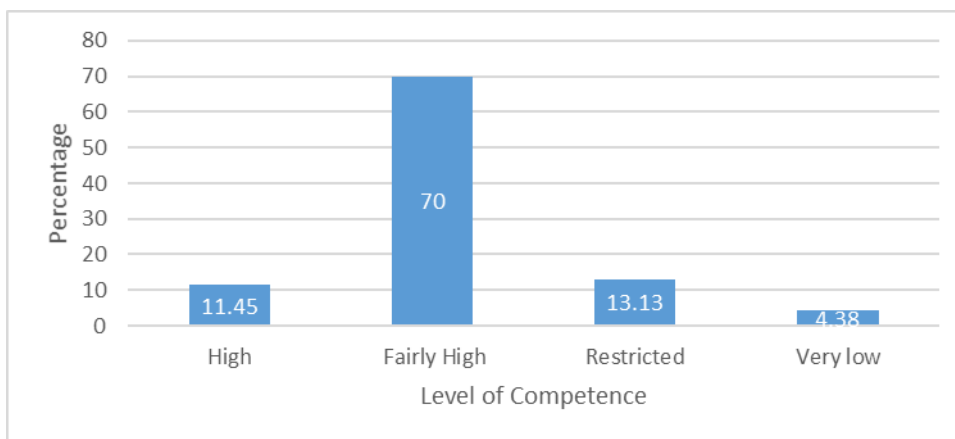

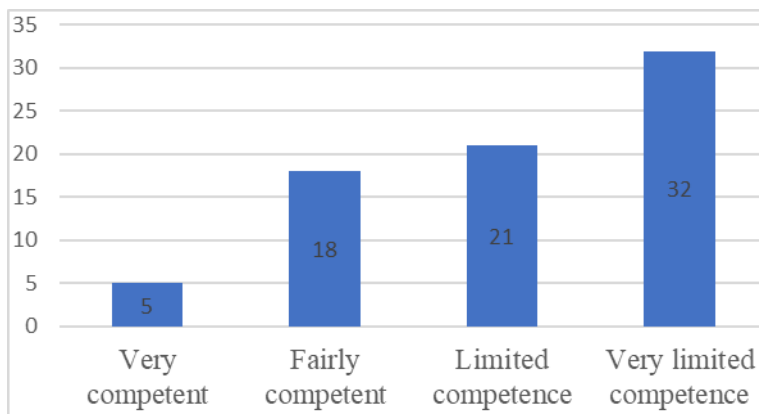**Figure 1: Teachers' English Competence**

Figure 2: Students' English language competence

As shown in Figure 1, only 11.45% of teachers considered their competency of English language as high. Furthermore, 70% considered their competency as fairly high, 13.3% were restricted and 4.38%) considered their competence as very low. Although these findings are for college education, they relate with the findings of Erling et al. (2017), who found that among elementary school teachers, 54.5% were fairly competent in spoken English while 36% had limited ability in English speaking

Students' English language proficiency was also determined and the results are shown in Figure 2.

Results from Figure 2 show that teachers perceived the English proficiency of 32 (42.1%) students as very limited, of 21 (27.6%) as limited, of 18 (23.7%) as fairly limited and of 5 (6.8%) as very high. The result appears to somewhat support that of Erling et al. (2017) in low- and middle-income context that 20% of pupils had extremely weak English proficiency and 60% had limited proficiency. Therefore it is encouraging to see at least a few students in the present study were very competent in English.

Research question 3: How frequent do teachers and learners use English language in and outside the classroom in a multilingual context?

Teachers' Use of English
This research question sought to establish how frequent teachers and learners used English language in and outside the classroom in a multilingual context. The question was answered using teachers and students' responses from the questionnaire. The results are shown in Figures 3 and 4.
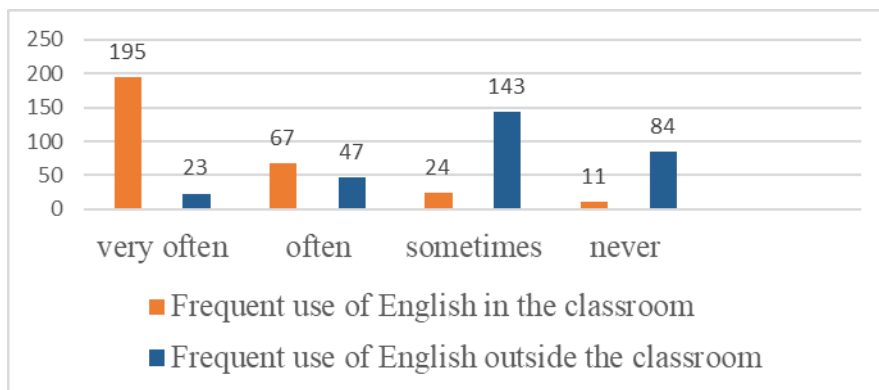

Figure 3: Teachers' Use of the English language in and outside the class
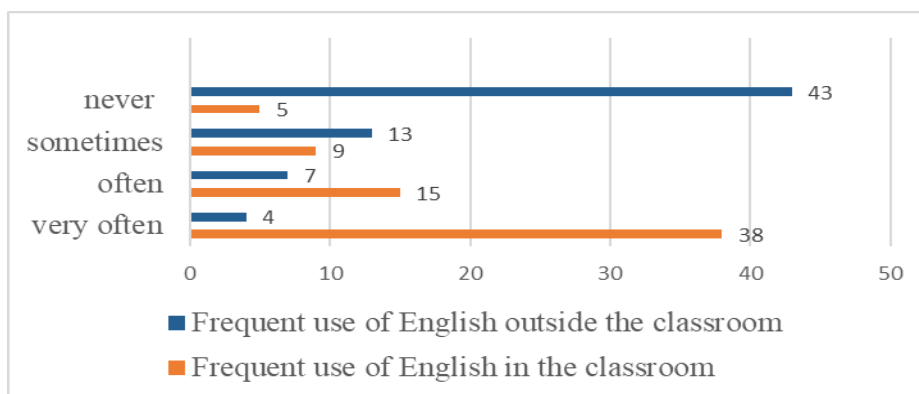

Figure 4: Students' Use of the English Language in and Outside the Classroom

While Figure 3 demonstrates that 195 (65.6%) of the teachers very often utilized English language in the classroom, 67 (22.5%) often, 24 (8%) sometime and 11 (3.7%) never used English in the classroom. It is encouraging that the majority of the teachers used English in the classroom at various rates, a bigger portion of them using it very often. The Figure further shows that only 23 (7.7%) used English very often, 47 (15.7%) used it often and 143 (48.1) used it sometimes outside the classroom. This trend shows that very limited number of teachers used English frequently outside the classroom. This findings show that teachers preferred the usage of the English language in classrooms rather than out of the classroom contexts.

Students' Use of English
It was important establish how frequently students used the English language both within and outside of the classroom. Results appear in Figure 4.

The Figure shows that 38 (56.7%) very often, 15 (22.4) often, 9(13.4) sometimes and 5 (7.5%) never used English in classrooms. On the other hand, only 4 (6.7%) very often, 7 (11.7%) often, 13 (21.7) sometimes and 5 (8.3) never used English outside the classroom. These findings show that the use of English for students dominated in classrooms, a trend which is similar to that of teachers. Therefore, the use of English, especially outside the classroom was limited, a factor which could explain reasons for multiple English language challenges experienced in the teaching and learning process in the first research question and limited proficiency of some of the teachers and students in the second research question. Strunk and White (1959) opined that mastery of English requires consistent and deliberate practice as the saying goes 'The only way to learn language is to use it. If you don't use it, you will forget'. This quote underscores the necessity of

regular practice to improve and maintain proficiency in any language, including English. Kolb and Whishaw (2009) also discussed the concept of neuroplasticity, which explains the brain's ability to recognize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. This ability is crucial for learning and adaptation. While Kolb and Whishaw specifically focused on 'frequent practice' in the context of enhancing mastery in English, their work supports the idea that consistent and repeated practice can enhance learning in various skills, including language acquisition.

Conclusions and Recommendations
Conclusions
Based on the results, the study affirmed the existence of various challenges in the multilingual classroom, including weak linguistic background and learner anxiety. Others were communication-related issues and writing issues. The study further concludes that while a good number of teachers demonstrated high proficiency in English, most of the students struggled. Teachers and students' use of English dominated in the classrooms rather than outside the classroom atmospheres. Therefore, the challenges experiences in the use of English could be explained by limited practices, especially outside the classroom.

Recommendations
Based on these conclusions, the study recommends that the teachers and students' use of English language both in and outside the classrooms be maximized since frequent use of the language increases its mastery, which is beneficial in the process of teaching and learning in the multilingual classrooms.

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