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Examining ESL Learners' Motivation to Study Nzema Language in the College of Languages Education, University of Education, Winneba

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Abstract

Proficiency in one's mother tongue is crucial to achieving proficiency and academic success in the second language. Learners' attitudes toward their mother tongue and its speakers play a crucial role in their academic endeavors. Ghana is a multilingual country. Most of these languages are used solely for instruction, while a few are studied as subjects across various levels of education. A major competition exists between English and Nzema in terms of choice of study at the tertiary level. As a result, this paper investigates learners' motivation to study English as a course and the factors that hinder their learning of Nzema at the College of Languages Education, University of Education, Winneba. The study used a descriptive quantitative approach, with a 20-item questionnaire administered to 39 Nzema students at the College of Languages Education, Ajumako Campus. The analysis showed, inter alia, that although the students have good reasons for studying their mother tongue, several instrumental factors drive their study of English as a course at the tertiary level.

Keywords: Ghana, language attitude, language for instruction, motivation, Nzema

Introduction

The motivation for Ghanaian L1 learners to study a foreign language has become overwhelming. A simple reason could be that most Ghanaians see foreign languages as carrier of prospects, and an avenue to advance in life. Consequently, curriculum developers and other educational bodies put emphasis on the study of these second languages by allotting more contact hours to them, and paying less attention to the indigenous languages. This is reflected in the current curriculum for senior high school students, which makes the study of foreign languages compulsory, but Ghanaian languages optional for general arts students taking languages. Most of the students at

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the College of Languages Education, Ajumako, who are studying a Ghanaian language with either German, French, or English, see themselves better off as compared to those studying only a Ghanaian language. Students studying L1 and L2 as a program believe that it would offer them a faster opportunity and better job than if they studied L1. English is one of the most widely spoken and influential languages in the world today. As the official language of government business in Ghana, English continues to receive greater attention than any other Ghanaian language. This has a serious implication for the study of Ghanaian languages in the various colleges of education. Some individuals prefer the study of English to an indigenous language for the reason that it opens several windows of opportunity for one to explore the world and its wider job market.

Several other factors are responsible for learners who are developing an interest in the study of their L1. Key among these factors involve their attitude towards their L1. The attitude with which learners learn a particular language is believed to play an important role in learners' ability to learn or acquire another language (Owu-Ewie & Edu-Buandoh, [2014](#)). Ghana is a small country with many indigenous languages (Boadi, [1971](#); Dakubu & Dolphyne, [1988](#)). It is estimated that there are between forty-five and fifty mutually unintelligible indigenous languages in Ghana (Dakubu & Dolphyne, [1988](#)). Fourteen of these languages are being supported by the Bureau of Ghana Languages. These languages include Akuapem, Asante, Fante, Nzema, Ewe, Ga, Dangme, Dagbani, Dagaare, Gonja, Kasem, and Gurenɛ. Coulmas ([2006](#)) reports that in countries where the linguistic situation is a complex one, the government decides which language to use for official or national purposes, while the other languages receive less status. As a result, people develop negative attitude towards the less prestigious languages (Baker, [1992](#)). This is the current situation in Ghana. Since English is the language of government business and official duties, the indigenous languages are under threat. This has also led to the reduction in contexts within which the indigenous languages can function (Guerini, [2008](#)). Even though the use of an individual's L1 has many benefits, it has not received the deserved attention in terms of its formal study (Andoh-Kumi, [1994](#)). Bamgbose ([1991](#)) observes with concern that due to the negative attitude people have toward the Ghanaian languages, teachers of such languages are despised and are deemed academically feeble. This is another reason why most of the teachers trained in the Ghanaian languages who are posted to the SHSs are compelled to teach an aspect of English to

demystify the notion that Ghanaian language teachers are academically weak.

Over the years, enrolment of Nzema students at the Faculty of Ghanaian Languages Education has steadily declined. This can be attributed to the attitude the students have toward the language and its use. Since language attitude refers not only to feelings about the language in question, but also the people who speak that language, it is imperative to ascertain the Nzema L2 learners' attitude and motivation towards learning this language as a program.

Statement of the Problem

For about a decade now, counting from 2012 to 2022, the enrolment figures of Nzema students continue to decline despite several interventions through sensitisation programmes on the need to study Nzema at the tertiary level, particularly at the College of Languages Education over these years. For instance, enrolment figures from 2012 to 2022 are as follows: 5, 5, 4, 19, 17, 8, 16, 17, 10, 11, and 18. Considering the huge number of students who take Nzema as a subject at the SHSs and the very few who come to study the language as a program, would undoubtedly be due to important reasons worth investigating. L2 students learn the English language and speak it in several contexts in Ghana (Sackey, [1997](#); Sarfo, [2012](#)). This is a sign of a positive attitude towards English. However, not much is known regarding the motivation and attitude that students have for the study of Ghanaian languages in universities in Ghana. Studies conducted by Guerini ([2007](#)), Owu-Ewie and Edu-Buandoh ([2014](#)) have explored learners' attitudes toward the study of Ghanaian languages. However, these studies do not focus on Ghanaian L1 students in the university. The studies also do not analyse the students' motivation and whether or not they have positive attitudes toward the study of the Ghanaian languages. Moreover, the current study on this same subject matter by Twumasi ([2021](#)) targets students at the University of Cape Coast, where the study of Nzema as a BA program is not yet offered. It is against this backdrop that I examine Nzema L2 students' attitudes toward learning Nzema and English as a program in the College of Languages Education, Ajumako. Specifically, I examine whether these students display positive or negative attitudes toward Nzema and the motivation behind their study of English as a second language, using the College of Languages Education, Ajumako, as a case study. Consequently, the study answers these research questions:

- What is the attitude of ESL learners in their study of Nzema as a program in the College of Languages Education, Ajumako?
- What motivation drives Nzema students to study English in the College of Languages Education, Ajumako?

Conceptual Framework

This study is underpinned by ‘Motivation’. The concept can be explained as the mental disposition of a learner on why he/she should learn a second language (Crookes & Schmidt, [1991](#)). In the context of L2 learning, it is explained as the degree to which an individual makes an effort to learn a language because he/she has the zeal to do so (Kissau, [2006](#)). In this regard, motivation can be explained as the collective elements that invigorate a learner to maintain interest in a language. For Gardner and Lambert ([1972](#)), motivation, be it integrative or instrumental, is dependent on attitude. For instance, with instrumental motivation, an individual has definite and reasonable objectives for using one or more languages (Gardner, [1985](#)). Integrative motivation, on the other hand, is what drives an individual to cherish the target speech community. Therefore, he/she learns the language with the intention of becoming a member of that community. Hence, students who are moved instrumentally would learn a language for personal reasons, and those who learn a language for integration would do so since they desire to be part of the members whose language they are learning. I dwell on this framework, because it would enable me to unearth the very attitudes that Nzema students in the College of Languages Education, Ajumako, have toward the study of the Nzema language, and to ascertain the factors that motivate them.

Literature Review

Literature on language attitudes of learners is quite appreciable. Such studies include, but are not limited to the works of Baker ([1992](#)), Sarfo ([2012](#)), Yang ([2012](#)), Tahaineh and Daana ([2013](#)), Owu-Ewei and Edu-Buandoh ([2014](#)), Magwa ([2015](#)), and Adriosh and Razi ([2016](#)). Baker’s ([1992](#)) study found that learners’ attitude towards language is linked to their L1 and cultural background. It also relates to factors such as age, gender, achievement, and school.

Sarfo’s ([2012](#)) work investigates learners’ attitudes and the motivation behind their study of English at the University of Ghana, Legon, and the

University of Cape Coast, both in Ghana. The study found, among other things, that learners' motivation for studying English was purely instrumental. Yang (2012) studied L2 students' attitude and motivation for learning English using 20 postgraduate students at the University of Malaya. The study revealed that learners who regularly involved themselves in their English proficiency course developed positive attitudes and, therefore, were greatly motivated to learn English.

Tahaine and Daana (2013) also investigated the attitude and motivation with which university students in Jordan learn their target language. The study's sample population was 184 female students. The findings revealed that the learners had a positive attitude towards the target language and its learning. With respect to their motivation, the study found that it was instrumental. Another study, which examined learners' attitudes toward the use of L1 and L2, is Owu-Ewie and Edu-Buandoh's research (2014). Using semi-structured interviews and observations as data collection techniques, their study focused on the negative attitude of Ghanaian secondary school students toward the study of the Ghanaian language. The study also examined how L1 learners cope with the negative attitudes of their peers and identified strategies to address the negative attitudes towards the study of L1 in secondary schools.. Their study found, inter alia, that stakeholders in education, such as guardians, school authorities, teachers and students, have an ill attitude towards the study of the Ghanaian language in the SHS. This was evident in what the participants said, which was also reflected in their actions and their behaviours. Their study concluded with suggestions that people must be educated on the benefits of studying their L1. Resources necessary for the teaching and learning of the indigenous languages should be provided. Furthermore, the indigenous languages should be studied as core subjects in the secondary school curriculum. Unfortunately, the study of the L1 in the Ghanaian secondary schools continues to be despised. As stated in the introduction of this study, the current curriculum for secondary schools makes the study of the indigenous languages optional, with foreign languages as core subjects.

Magwa (2015) used interviews, questionnaires, documents, and observations to collect data from 1000 participants on the attitudes of Zimbabweans toward the use of their indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in schools. The study revealed that English was rated the highest as the most prestigious language. In addition, the majority of the participants

recommended that English should be used as the medium of instruction at all levels of education because it is a language that gives power and prestige. Adriosh and Razi (2016) also used interviews to elicit the views of eight Nigerian students in two universities on the status of English and the indigenous languages in the country. The findings indicated that the students preferred using English in both formal and informal contexts. As a result, their competency level in the native language had woefully decreased. The purpose of the current study is to examine the attitudes of BA Nzema students toward the Nzema language and its study, and to determine whether they have motivations for studying the language at the College of Languages Education, Ajumako.

Methodology

This section deals with how data for the study were obtained and analysed. It incorporates the design, the research site, participants, data collection instruments, data, data collection procedure, and data analysis procedure.

Research Design

This is a descriptive quantitative study. It has several advantages, including the possibility of providing the researcher with a comprehensive picture of the population or phenomenon, which can be useful in informing future research and policy decisions. Thus, the design is deemed useful in this research as it enables the researcher to ascertain students' attitudes toward the study of the Nzema language in the college.

Research Site

This research was conducted in the College of Languages Education, Ajumako. This college is currently the only satellite campus of the University of Education, Winneba, where all the government-sponsored Ghanaian languages in Ghana are studied. This college was selected because the research investigates attitudes and motivation with which Nzema students learn Nzema as a program in the college. Thus, the researcher would have comprehensive information for this research. Moreover, since the researcher is a teaching staff member in the college, accessing valid data was assured.

Participants

Due to the low number of learners studying Nzema, the population consisted of all levels, with the exception of level four hundred students

who are currently on an internship programme. Thus, the total population and sample size was thirty-nine. The study used simple random sampling technique, where every participant had an equal opportunity to be included in the study (Creswell, [2003](#)).

Data and Data Collection Instruments

The level 100-300 Nzema students were given thirty-nine questionnaires. Participants' responses were rated on a four-point Likert Scale with closed-ended statements. The questionnaires were in three sections. The first section had 5 items, which comprised the participants' details. The second section consisted of twenty items on attitudes. The third section also comprised twenty items on motivation for studying Nzema. Thus, the number of items altogether totaled forty-five (45).

Data Collection Procedure

Since the population of level 100-300 Nzema students is not large, getting access to them was not difficult. In the first place, I consulted the Reps for the various levels. I informed them about the essence of the study and also asked them to inform their colleagues. A day and time were fixed on which all the interested participants would gather in one class. Fortunately, all thirty-nine students showed up for the exercise. Thirty-nine questionnaires were then handed to them. Ample time was given to the participants to complete the questionnaires and return them the same day. When all had finished filling them, I collected all of them. This way, the thirty-nine questionnaires were secured for analysis.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was done using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics enables a researcher to present and analyse data in either graphs or tables in a manner that is systematic and comprehensible (Jaggi, [2010](#)). In order to present the responses of the participants in a systematic manner, this method of data analysis was used. The ratings on the four-point Likert Scale were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (DA) and Strongly Disagree (SDA). These are the ratings that were used to analyse the questionnaire. The following percentage system was used to analyse the results obtained from the questionnaires:

$$\text{Thus, } P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$$

P: Percentage

f: Frequency

N: Number of samples

100 %: Constant value

Results

The results of this study are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Learners' attitudes to the study of Nzema are summed up in Table 1 in frequencies and percentages. Collated views on motivation for studying the Nzema language as a program in the College of Languages Education, Ajumako, are captured in Table 2.

Table 1

Learners' Attitude towards the Study of the Nzema Language (N = 39)

Statement	SA <i>f</i> /%	A <i>f</i> /%	DA <i>f</i> /%	SDA <i>f</i> /%
Mastering your local language is important.	39/100	0	0	0
Your children should first master your local language.	30/76.9	6/15.4	3/7.7	0
Communicating in your local language is outmoded.	0	6/15.4	4/10.3	29/74.3
If someone wants to succeed in his/her profession, s/he should master the English language.	29/74.3	7/18.0	3/7.7	0
If someone wants to continue his/her study, s/he should master the English language.	11/28.2	4/10.3	4/10.3	20/51.2
If someone wants to enjoy a more advanced and successful life in the future, s/he should master English language.	12/30.7	9/23.1	3/7.7	15/38.5
If someone wants to be exposed to a more advanced and comprehensive world, s/he should master English language.	9/23.1	8/20.5	2/5.1	20/51.3
I like to watch television programs in Nzema.	22/56.4	8/20.5	7/18.0	2/5.1

Statement	SA f/%	A f/%	DA f/%	SDA f/%
It is not a core subject of study.	25/64.1	9/23.1	5/12.8	0
I will not use it at work.	19/48.7	16/41.0	4/10.3	0
It lacks prestige.	6/15.4	3/7.7	21/53.8	9/23.1
It will not make me a famous person.	8/20.5	11/28.2	16/41.0	4/10.3
I can't read well in the language.	3/7.7	7/18.0	9/23.1	20/51.3
I really dislike the speakers.	0	5/12.8	8/20.5	26/66.7
I wish it were not my L1.	1/2.6	0	17/43.6	21/53.8
It can't converse well in it.	0	0	19/48.7	20/51.3
I feel awkward and lack confidence.	0	0	18/46.2	21/53.8
I would not learn it even if it were made a core subject.	8/20.5	11/28.2	14/35.9	6/15.4
I will not convince anyone to study Nzema at tertiary level.	13/33.3	7/18.0	9/23.1	10/25.6
I was persuaded to come and study the Nzema language by my acquaintance.	18/46.1	11/28.2	7/18.0	3/7.7

From the above table, the responses and their corresponding percentages vary significantly. Table 1 shows that learners' attitude towards studying Nzema is positive. For instance, the highest score, 74.3%, is in total disagreement with the point that communicating in the Nzema language is outmoded. 66.7% of the learners are also in disagreement that they dislike the speakers of the Nzema language. This shows that the students like the Nzema language. They are, therefore, positive about the language. Table 2 below shows motivational factors for the study of the Nzema language, which answers research question 2.

Table 2

Motivations Toward the Study of the Nzema Language (N = 39)

Statement	SA f/%	A f/%	DA f/%	SDA f/%
I can read storybooks in it.	39/100	0	0	0
I listen to and understand those who speak it.	19/48.7	13/33.3	5/12.8	2/5.1
I can read textbooks, reports, and articles in it.	24/61.5	10/25.6	4/10.3	1/2.6

Statement	SA f/%	A f/%	DA f/%	SDA f/%
I can transact business with other Ghanaians	9/23.1	6/15.4	21/53.8	3/7.7
I can educate other Nzema in the diaspora	17/43.6	12/30.8	5/12.8	5/12.8
I can conveniently speak with family and friends.	18/46.2	11/28.2	6/15.4	4/10.3
I can do Bible teachings in the language.	21/53.8	12/30.8	4/10.3	2/5.1
It is part of our educational system.	25/64.1	11/28.2	2/5.1	1/2.6
It can earn me a good job.	13/33.3	9/23.1	14/35.9	3/7.7
It reminds me of my ethnicity.	19/48.7	16/41.0	4/10.3	0
It will enable me accomplish tasks easily.	7/18.0	8/20.5	21/53.8	3/7.7
To integrate with the Nzema culture.	9/23.1	13/33.3	16/41.0	1/2.6
It will bolster my knowledge in the Nzema language and culture.	16/41.0	8/20.5	7/18.0	8/20.5
I hope to further my education in the language.	0	3/7.7	2/5.1	34/87.2
It will make me a famous person.	6/15.4	4/10.3	8/46.2	11/28.2
It will guide me to do my things as Nzema	5/12.8	8/20.8	16/41.0	10/25.6
For personal advancement.	0	0	16/41.0	23/59
My family and friends will be proud of me.	5/12.8	7/18.0	14/35.9	13/33.3
I like the speakers of the language.	21/53.8	17/43.6	1/2.6	0
I can write books for sale in it.	12/30.7	17/43.6	6/15.4	4/10.3

From Table 2, it is evident that the students have varying reasons for taking up the Nzema language as a program at the tertiary level. For instance, the highest score, 100% is an indication of their basic motivation for studying the language. The second highest score, 87.2%, also shows the students' lack of motivation to pursue their studies in the language.

Discussion

The responses of the students show that they have some misconceptions about the need to study their L1 as a program, since they are already native speakers. However, they agree with greater conviction that mastery of their

L1 is paramount, and this is reflected in the first and second highest scores of 100% and 76.9%, respectively. What can be said of this finding is that, irrespective of the status of the language currently, they would not shift from using the language. From the table, it is noteworthy that 74.3% students being in disagreement with the statement that communicating in the Nzema language is outmoded, signals a positive attitude towards the language.

Comparatively, on the whole, responses in favour of 'agree' are 345, while those in favour of 'disagree' are 360. This makes the mean number for 'disagree' stand at 9.2, as compared to 'agree', which is 8.8. It can be observed that, although there is a difference of 0.4, this difference is insignificant. It can, therefore, be said that the students' attitude towards the Nzema language and its study is positive. Regarding motivation towards the study of the Nzema language in the college, it can be observed from Table 2 that the highest score for 'agree' is 100 %. This is recorded in favour of the statement 'I can read story books in it'.

In contrast to what we observe in Table 1, the highest score in the second table implies the students' pessimism about what the study of the Nzema language holds for them in the future. Thus, what could have been the least motivation is the highest. The next highest score, which is 87.2%, was recorded in disagreement with the statement 'I hope to further my education in the language'. On other hand, the least of the scores, that is 2.6%, 5.1 %, and 7.7, were recorded in response to the statements 'To integrate with the Nzema culture,' 'It is part of our educational system,' and 'It can earn me a good job,' respectively. This shows that motivations for studying the Nzema language at the college are more instrumental than integrative. It can be inferred that students are not studying the language because it can bolster their integration in the language, since they are already integrated through birth. It is neither because it is part of the educational system nor can it offer them a good job in the future. The absolute 0% score recorded in agreement with the statement 'For personal advancement' indicates no motivation for studying the language. In a nutshell, it was found from the analysis that, generally, the students studying the Nzema language have positive attitudes toward the study of Nzema in the College of Languages Education, Ajumako. However, these students need more encouragement as their motivation is more instrumental than integrative. This means that these students are interested in studying the language for the least benefits that the study of the language offers, rather than studying the language with an

integrative orientation.

Conclusion

This study has examined the attitudes and feelings, as well as motivational factors for the study of the Nzema language in the College of Languages Education, Ajumako. Employing a quantitative approach, a total of 39 questionnaires were distributed to 39 Nzema, level 100-300, students. The initial finding of the study was that, generally, the Nzema language students have a positive attitude towards the study of the Nzema language. Another finding was that the Nzema language students were more instrumental than integrative in their quest to study the Nzema language as a program. For Zanghar (2012), what usually drives students to learn and progress in learning a language is motivation. This implies that lecturers and other stakeholders have a great task to perform to enhance those kinds of motivation that increase students' desire to learn the Nzema language, and orient them to study the language. I propose that the chiefs who are the custodians of the culture of the language, teachers who are trained in the language, the government whose responsibility is to ensure that our Ghanaian languages are promoted, and the entire public help shape the attitude of the Ghanaian students towards their language and its study at the tertiary level, particularly, at the College of Languages Education, Ajumako. I also recommend that the government, as the major sponsor for the study of the Ghanaian languages, should do more to show greater commitment in promoting the Ghanaian languages, including Nzema. This includes making the study of Nzema in the Senior High Schools compulsory for students on General Arts programs. Additionally, Colleges of Education should be built in Nzema-speaking communities to priorities the study of the Nzema. In this regard, the Nzema language will be promoted to share in the prestige that English and other Ghanaian languages are currently enjoying in the country.

Author Contribution

John Nyame: sole author

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

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