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Assessing Students' Attitudes toward the Study of Ghanaian Language in Private Basic Schools in the Western North Region of Ghana

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Abstract

The study assessed students' attitudes toward the study of a Ghanaian language in private basic schools. The population consists of students, a Ghanaian language teachers, the head teacher, and the proprietor of Saviour Academy in Bibiani, Western North Region of Ghana. The study sought to accomplish two primary objectives: to ascertain students' attitudes toward learning a Ghanaian language and to ascertain the factors that contribute to this attitude. Semi-structured interview guide was used for the data collection. The collected data were transcribed and coded manually, using descriptive coding method. The analysis of the data was guided by Grounded Theory. The study's findings indicated that upper primary students have a negative attitude toward the study of a Ghanaian language. However, students at the Junior High School level do not have a negative attitude toward the study of a Ghanaian language, but they devote less attention to it than they do to other subjects. School culture, a lack of recommended textbooks, a shortage of or a limited supply of professional Ghanaian Language teachers, parents' attitudes and perceptions of the society, and non-Ghanaian Language teachers' perceptions of a Ghanaian language studies contribute to students' low or negative attitudes toward the study of a Ghanaian languages. Ghanaian Language teachers should adopt student-centered teaching method with fun for teaching Ghanaian Language. Parents and the schools should encourage speaking of Ghanaian Language at homes and in schools respectively, since it is a recommended written and spoken Language in Ghana.

Keywords: Attitudes, Ghanaian Language, Private Basic Schools and Grounded Theory

Introduction

Pursuing Ghanaian languages as a course of study at all levels of education has become a psychological barrier for students over the years. This situation could be explained by the high regard in which English and other foreign languages are held. Because of the prestige of the English language in Ghana's educational system, it has always been regarded as the only language suitable for use as a medium of instruction and the only language worth investing in (Harmer, 1991). The stigma attached to the study of Ghanaian languages in schools have hampered the study of Ghanaian

languages resulting in a significantly low enrolment of Ghanaian language students (Edu-Boandoh & Owu-Ewie, 2014).

When it comes to language planning and policy formulation, language attitudes cannot be overlooked. Language attitudes are crucial in determining the level of success in learning and mastering a second language (Owu-ewie & Edu-buandoh, 2014). Language attitudes are important part of learning and should be a key component of second language learning pedagogy (Saracaloglu, 2010), because they have an impact on second

language and foreign language learning. Students' attitudes toward a target language and its speakers are related to their proficiency level in the language (Siti, 2008). According to Gok and Silay (2010), attitude is a mental concept that depicts a positive or negative feeling toward an object. Individuals are not born with attitudes, according to the behaviorist and mentalist approaches to studying attitude. Attitudes are learned over the course of socialization. In the view of Baker (1988), attitudes are cognitive (ability of being thought about something and affective (feeling that a person have for something), dimensional but not bipolar, and predisposes a person to behave in a particular manner. Based on the Gardner's (1985) socio-Educational Model, attitudes is indirectly linked to motivation and motivation for L2 is three-dimensional. Firstly, effort for setting goals, the desire to learn a language and satisfaction with learning the language. Thus, based on this model, attitude towards Ghanaian Language is imperative for learning the language. The desire and satisfaction to learn Ghanaian Language is hampered by stereotype and misconception, resulting in a significantly low enrolment of students studying Ghanaian language (Edu-Boandoh and Owu-Ewie, 2014; Nyamekye and Baffour-Koduah, 2021). Attitudes can be positive, negative, or neutral (Kadodo, Mavies, Timothy & Cordial, 2012) and "both the language learning process and the learning outcome" are influenced by learners' attitudes (Tódor & Dégi 2016)

According to Setati (2005), Africans continue to reject mother tongue education in favor of English, which they regard as a language of knowledge. Addo (2020) said that attitudes of both parents and students toward learning the Ghanaian language in schools have resulted in students lacking a solid foundation in the language, which has a negative impact on students at the college level. The most common misunderstanding among Ghanaians regarding the study of Ghanaian languages is that it merely entails learning to speak the language. It is important to note that language learning encompasses more than just speaking. Many Ghanaians are able to communicate in their native language but are unable to write or discuss academic matters in it. It should be recognized that one's attitude is crucial to becoming a successful language learner (Owu-ewie & Edu-buandoh, 2014). The implication is that students perform better in a language if they have a positive attitude toward it.

Kwofie (2001) found that University of Cape Coast students have positive attitudes toward English and unfavorable (negative) attitudes toward Ghanaian languages in a study comparing their attitudes toward English, Pidgin, and Ghanaian languages. The negative attitude toward learning Ghanaian language is not solely due to the subject, but also to the teachers who teach it and even look down on it (Guerini, 2008). Students who study their Ghanaian language as a course at the tertiary level, according to Bamgbose (1991), are classified as academically weak. Similarly, in Senior High School, (SHS) Owu-Ewie and Edu-Buandoh (2014) conducted a study to determine students' attitudes toward learning the Ghanaian language. The study discovered that negative attitudes toward Ghanaian language study at the secondary school level exist among parents, school officials, other language teachers and students, and the general public.

Magwa (2015) looked at Zimbabweans' attitudes toward using indigenous African languages as a medium of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities. The study found that English remained the most prestigious language, while indigenous languages had a low status. Furthermore, the majority of

participants preferred English as the medium of instruction in primary, secondary, and tertiary education because it was a language associated with power and prestige. The attitudes of student teachers majoring in an indigenous language, Akan, in Ghanaian colleges of education were investigated. The findings revealed that the majority of participants have a positive attitude toward studying Akan in general at the college level (Akuamah & Asamoah, 2022). Individual attitudes toward bilingualism in English and a Ghanaian language were also investigated by Dako and Quarcoo (2017). The study of Ghanaian languages is not highly favored, according to Owu-Ewei and Edu-Buandoh (2014), alluding to the perception that Ghanaians in general, and students in particular, have negative attitudes toward the study of Ghanaian languages in our schools. Parents and teachers have positive attitudes toward the use of English as a medium of instruction in schools, but negative attitudes toward the use of Ghanaian language as a medium of instruction, according to Amissah et al. (2001). The study also discovered that students prefer their teachers to teach in English so that they can become fluent in the language, despite the fact that they understood courses taught in Ghanaian language better than when they were taught in English. Some language teachers who taught languages other than Ghanaian languages had positive attitudes toward the use of English rather than Ghanaian languages, according to the same study. They believed that using the Ghanaian language as a medium of instruction hindered progress in English and that using the Ghanaian language as a medium of instruction hampered academic excellence. Parents, school officials, other language teachers and students, as well as the general public, have negative feelings about Ghanaian language study in secondary schools (Owu-ewie & Edu-Buandoh, 2014). What they say, as well as their actions and behaviors, reflect their negative attitudes. These people's negative attitudes have had a negative impact on enrolment in Ghanaian language classes, as well as on the morale of Ghanaian language teachers and students. Students cope with negative attitudes toward them (Owu-ewie & Edu-buandoh, 2014).

However, Quaicoe, Adams, Bersah, and Appiah Baah (2015) looked at how 280 students and 32 tutors from two colleges of education in Ghana's Western and Central regions felt about learning Ghanaian languages. The study discovered that Ghanaian languages were not taught in a practical manner. Furthermore, the majority of students and tutors had a positive impression of Ghanaian Languages students, and students and tutors did not dismiss students who offered Ghanaian Languages. At the University of Cape Coast, Twumasi (2021) investigated Ghanaian students' attitudes toward the study of Ghanaian indigenous languages, as well as the factors that motivate them to do so. The findings show that students are enthusiastic about learning Ghanaian indigenous languages.

Negative attitudes, a lack of qualified Ghanaian Language teachers, a lack of governmental support, and a lack of resources in the Ghanaian Language, in the view Owu-Ewie (2003), all contribute to learners' low participation in the subject. Other studies have looked into students' attitudes toward learning the Ghanaian language at various levels of education.

The review of students' attitudes toward the study of Ghanaian language revealed that while some students have a positive attitude toward the subject, others have a negative attitude toward it, leading to inclusive studies on attitude towards Ghanaian Language. More importantly, the majority of research was

conducted at the senior high school and tertiary levels, with only a few studies conducted at the elementary level, particularly, in public school with total neglect for private basic schools. It is important to note that public and private basic schools have different characteristics and mode of instructions; hence outcomes of studies in public basic schools cannot be applied in private basic schools; hence the need for study on the subject matter in private basic schools. All the studies conducted, either at the secondary school level, tertiary level and public basic school level were not grounded in theory. This study therefore investigated the attitudes of private basic school students towards Ghanaian Language using Grounded Theory. The study specifically investigated general attitude of Private School Students towards the study of Ghanaian Language (Asanti Twi) and factors accounting for their attitudes.

Methods and Materials

The study relied on qualitative research approach where a case study research design was used to investigate the attitudes of students at Savior Preparatory School in Bibiani, Western North Region. More importantly, the study employed Grounded Theory for the entire analysis. According to Moh'd Yehia and Mohammad (2016), Grounded Theory uses systematic procedure to conduct qualitative research to help in the development of theory. This study used Ground Theory because, it helps to sequentially conduct qualitative research on topics such as attitudes. Through the application of Grounded Theory, the researchers were able to discover the private school students' attitudes and factors accounting for their attitudes towards learning Ghanaian Language

All of the pupils/students, Ghanaian language teachers, and the proprietor of Saviour Academy in Bibiani, Ghana's Western North Region, make up the population. Savior Academy was chosen because it is one of the oldest private schools in the municipality, employs professional teachers, and has a reputation for being one of the best private schools in the area. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 100 students/pupils, the Ghanaian Language teacher, the head teacher, and the proprietor, yielding a sample size of 103. Purposive sampling was used because it offers the opportunity to sample individuals with in-depth information and knowledge about the subject matter (Creswell, 2018). The head teacher has been at the school for 18 years, and Ghanaian language teacher has only been there for 10 years, thus they have more knowledge about past and present students' attitudes towards the study Ghanaian Language.

A formal letter was written to the school's proprietor requesting permission to conduct the study there. The researchers returned to the school to familiarize themselves with the principal, teachers, and students. The semi-structured interview guide was designed based on the Bryman's (2004, pg. 38) advice for the data collection. The interview was done over a period of one month and consent of each participant was sought; hence participation in the study was voluntary. Each participant was informed the purpose of the study and extent of their engagement. Each interview for students and teachers lasted between 35 and 45 minutes. The interview for the pupils/students was conducted in English because the school administration insists on using English as the primary means of communication. All the interviews were conducted by the researchers. The interviews were recorded with tape recorder through the consent of the participants.

Data analysis and presentation

The researchers transcribed the interview data and coded transcribed data manually, using descriptive coding method. Themes were generated out of the codes for synthesis. Based on the themes, the researchers through Grounded Theory developed linkages or conceptual framework to explain the attitudes towards studying of Ghanaian Language and factors accounting for the attitudes. Also direct quotations approach was employed to explain the attitudes of the respondents and factors accounting the attitudes. The findings were discussed based on previous studies and theories.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the current study were presented and discussed in line with the research questions as follows;

Research Question One: What is the general attitude of Private school students towards the study of Ghanaian Language (Asanti Twi)?

These evident were revealed during the interview

The proprietors said that:

This is indeed a very big problem. Generally, pupils at the primary school have negative attitude towards the study of the Ghanaian Language. The teachers especially at the upper class always complain for pupils' refusal to do assignments in Asanti Twi. However, when it get to the study of the other aspect of Ghanaian Language that involves the cultural aspect, the learners dominate the class. When teachers give them orall questions, learners respond actively but when it comes to written exercises and quizzes, which is where the problems comes. However, when it comes to the junior high school, the students' attitude change a bit as they know that, it is one of the subject they are to pass in order to get their first choice. Even with this change in attitude, they intend to spend more time studying the other subjects than the Asante Twi.

A Basic four (4) learner also stated that

Me I don't like Ghanaian Language because my parents do not permit me to speak it with them. In addition, I want to become doctor and my parents have advise me that science and mathematics are the subjects that can lead to my profession, so I like studying that and other subject than my own language.

A Basic Eight (8) students also confirm this

Ghanaian Language is not my favourite subject as compare to the other subjects, however, I enjoy some aspects like culture, marriage, customs, proverbs, poems and storytelling.

A Basic nine (9) student also affirmed this by stating that

I used not to like the study of Ghanaian Language (Asante Twi) but I want to attend my first choice school which demands that I get 9 ones in all the subjects. As a results of that I decided to like the subject, after all after the basic Education certificate Examination I will not do general art at the secondary school level.

Research Question Two. What factors account for the Private Basic school students' current attitude towards the study of Ghanaian Language?

These were some of the evidence from the interview,

A Basic four (4) teacher confirmed that

Speaking of Asanti Twi or any Ghanaian language is prohibited in the school. The only language that students

are allow to use as a medium of communication are French and English. However, learners can speak Asante Twi when it is time for Ghanaian Language.

An interviewee at Junior High School also confirmed this

In this school, every study is expected to speak English and French even at the lower level. That has been the norm. And the speaking of English is not limited to only in the classroom but in school compounds and even in the school bus.

The head teacher confirmed this

The speaking of English is the only secrete between the private schools and the public schools in this Municipality. Here everyone is expected to speak English as required by the parents. This in effect discourages learners from speaking Ghanaian Language and effect may develop negative attitude towards it.

An interviewee (Proprietor) indicated that,

Lack of recommended textbooks are the major course of pupils and students dislike of the subjects. Unlike the other subjects like languages like English and French which are readily available, the Asante Twi books are scarce. The few that are in the system do not cover all the aspect of the curriculum hence making it teaching and learning difficult. When textbooks are available, learners can enjoy reading those books or at least develop love for its reading and intend to develop positive attitude towards it and vice versa.

A Basic four (4) learner confirm this,

Sir, we do not have reading books for Ghanaian language. When it is reading time, our teacher always give us photocopied materials in groups of five. Unlike French, English and other subjects that have reading books, Asante Twi have not getting such reading books so even if you want to read some at the house it become problem.

This situation is not different from Basic 7 student of the interviewee who indicated that,

There are different books for Ghanaian language with each covering some aspect of the subject. Unlike science English and other subjects which are compiled in a single book. Asante Twi have different aspect in different books making it study difficult. Sometimes getting the book is very difficult. For example in my class we only got eleven copies of the books recommended by the school and the rest have to make photocopy of that. Finally, the Asante Twi books that we use are different from the books other school use meanwhile we are writing the same exams.

The Ghanaian Language teacher also confirmed this,

Getting recommended books to teach Asante Twi is very difficult. So I have to combine four or five books and sometimes use my senior high school note to teach the students. This make teaching and learning difficult. As a result of that I don't even fell happy of teaching the Asante Twi.

One of the head teachers confirmed this by saying that,

My brother, the problem of getting a professional Ghanaian Language specifically Twi teacher is very

difficult. In most at times, you may only find two or three teachers that offered Ghanaian Language as elective course as the senior high school to employ to mined the primary and the junior high school level. In this school, we only rely on the service of the senior high school graduates to teach at the primary level. As I speak, they is only one graduate teacher who is engaged to do his service here. Most at times, we engage the service of the professional teachers at the nearby public schools to teach the form three students.

In addition, one of the primary school teachers confirm this,

Ghanaian Language teachers are scarce here, they few trained ones are easily absorbed by the government. I remember when I first apply to teach Ghanaian Language (Asante Twi) in this school, I also apply to another private school. I was employed by both schools so I was left to choose my choice. I decided to choose this school because I completed here. Now I handle from Basic 8 to primary one. The proprietor has made a lot of effort to get more Ghanaian language teachers to teach in this school has been in vain.

This was also affirmed by one of the pupils in Basic six (6).

The whole school has one Ghanaian Language teacher, so we meet him two times every week. Even if you don't understand anything and you go to him, he doesn't get time to explain to you. Because of that I don't like the subject at all.

The Proprietor indicated that,

Parents hardly buy Ghanaian Language books for their wards when school reopen especially during the first term. In every term, most parents pay money for all the books even if the books are not ready, they intend to pay in advance before the books are delivered later. One noticeable thing is that most parents decide not to buy Ghanaian language books for their wards especially at the primary level. Some make excuses that their wards will not do languages at the tertiary level whiles other think it is irrelevant to study Ghanaian Language as part of the curriculum. A parent asked whether Ghanaian language is still included in the curriculum for basic schools in one of his visit.

This was also confirmed by a Basic 5 child,

Sir, I have all the other books except Ghanaian Language book. When I tell my parents to buy one for me, they tell me I should concentrate on the other important subjects like science, English and Mathematics. As a results of that, I don't like studying Ghanaian language and when I need book to study, I have to borrow one from a friend.

A Junior High School Student also affirm this,

My parents do not want to see me studying Ghanaian language. They always ask me to study other subjects especially the core subjects (mathematics, Science, English and Social studies). During the first term I had 90% in Ghanaian Language and my father got angry because I had below 90% in other subjects. He promised not to continue to pay my fees if I shift my attention to "useless" subject and since then, I have not like the subject.

This assertion was also confirmed by the Ghanaian Language teacher that,

Parents do not motivate the learners to study Ghanaian Language. They often resist in providing Ghanaian Language books to their wards. Last term, I asked all the students to get their Ghanaian language books within a specific time. Unexpectedly, one of the parents got angry and storm my class only to tell me that, Ghanaian Language is not a subject that is to be studied in schools. She added that her ward is going to be a doctor and hence will need Ghanaian Language for nothing.

In the area where I stay if you close from school and speak vernacular, people will look down upon you. They will tell you that you don't know how to speak English.

The Ghanaian Language teacher also confirmed that:

The others teachers do not respect the subject. Whenever there is argument going on at staff and I try to air my voice, most of the teachers will look down upon me and call me all sort of names. Sometimes they will tell you that Ghanaian language is for the weak and lazy people that is why you decided to offer it as elective course at the senior high school level.

A Basic 6 student said that:

Emerging Concept

Based on the themes, the researcher developed conceptual framework to explain the private school students' attitudes towards learning of Ghanaian Language in the study area. The framework is shown in Figure 1.

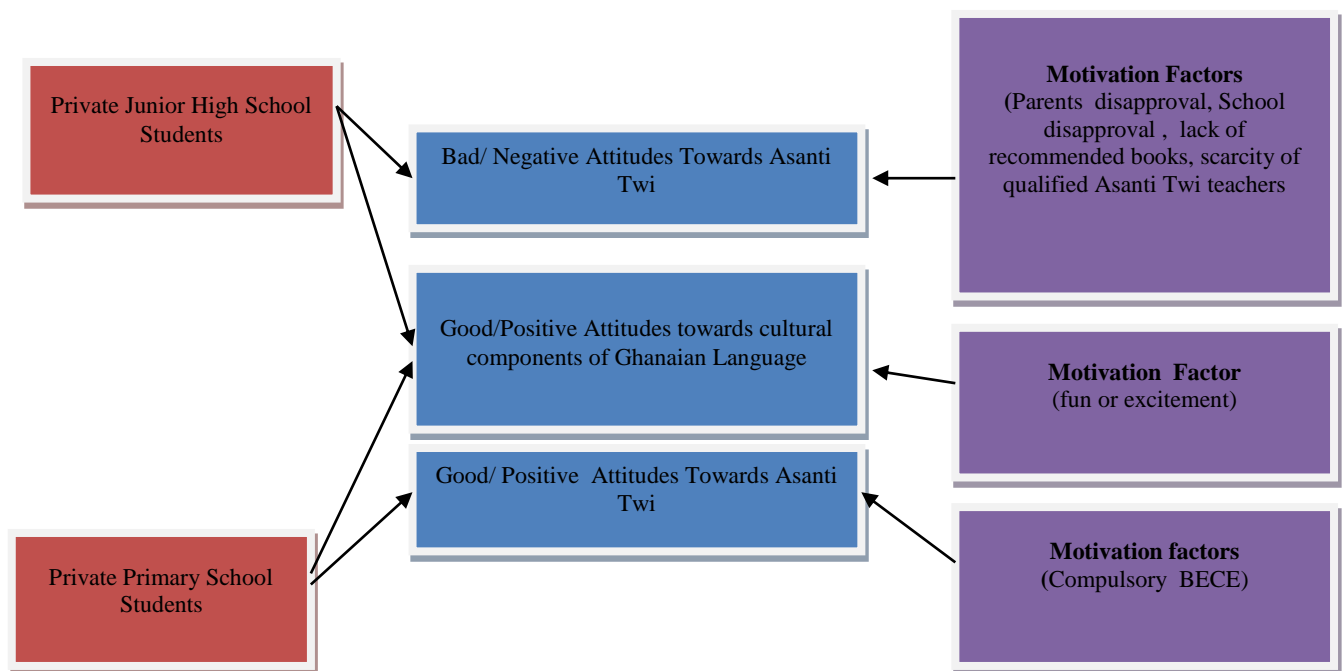


Figure 1: Attitudes of Private School Students Towards the Learning of Ghanaian Language

Source: Authors' Construct (2022)

Figure clearly shows that attitude of primary schools students slightly differs from Junior High School Students and the factors accounting for respective attitudes are different.

Discussions

The first research question aims to assess students' attitudes toward Ghanaian language in private junior high schools in Bibiani Municipality. According to the findings, students in upper primary school have a negative attitude toward learning Ghanaian Language. This finding is consistent with the findings of Kwofie (2001), who compared University of Cape Coast students' attitudes toward English, Pidgin, and Ghanaian languages and discovered that participants have positive attitudes toward English and unfavorable (negative) attitudes toward Ghanaian languages. However, the findings contradict the finding that have a positive attitude toward the study of Akan in general at the College of Education level (Akuamah & Asamoah, 2022). At the Junior High level, students strive to have a moderate attitude toward the study of Ghanaian language. Their attitude shift from primary to junior

high school could be due to the requirement to get all ones in order to get into their first choice school. Most private school parents expect their children to excel in all nine subjects in order for their children to be admitted to their first choice school. Furthermore, in Bibiani Municipality, parents are more interested in schools for students in grades 10 and 12, so every school has a responsibility to work harder to meet the needs of the community. In addition, it was stated that the learners enjoy other aspects of the Ghanaian language such as culture, marriage, poems, and proverbs. As a result, students contribute effectively in class when it comes to the cultural aspect of the Ghanaian language.

The second research question aims to determine the factors that influence students' attitudes toward learning Ghanaian. The study discovered that a variety of factors contribute to learners' negative attitudes toward learning the Ghanaian language. For starters, the culture of private schools discourages students from speaking Ghanaian inside and outside the school grounds (Agbozo, 2015). In and out of the classroom, students are required to communicate solely in English (Evans & Morrison, 2011; Chou, 2018). Students who speak languages other than French and English are penalized.

Secondly, there are insufficient materials for teaching and learning Ghanaian. There are no readily available teaching materials for Ghanaian language, particularly reading books (Edu-Boandoh and Owu-Ewie, 2014; Opoku-Amankwa, Edu-Buandoh & Brew-Hammond, 2015). According to the findings, this has posed a significant challenge for private school owners and administrators. Even if the school is prepared to provide for effective teaching and learning, the study found that getting access to the recommended books is a major issue. Lack of or inadequate textbooks make teaching and learning very difficult. This problem has a greater impact on students in junior high schools because if they do not have access to good books, they may receive poor grades in the subject (Asante Twi). This was confirmed during the interview.

Thirdly, the results from the interview also indicated, qualify and experience teachers in Ghanaian Language, particularly are difficult to come by (Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu, & Oduru, 2005; Ampiah, 2008; Cobbold, 2015). Most of the teachers that teach Ghanaian Language are not trained teachers from either the colleges of Education or from the Universities due to the scarcity of the Ghanaian Language teachers. The results also indicated that the private schools rely on the senior high school graduates who offered Asanti Twi as elective to teach at the Junior High school, Primary school and preschool level. However, the private schools depend on the few teachers that teach at the government schools (either the senior high school level or the Basic school level) to handle the Junior High School students three to prepare them for their BECE. The following assertions back the results.

The fourth factor that accounts for students' negative attitude towards is the attitude of the parents toward the study of Ghanaian Language. The study revealed that most parents have negative attitude towards the study of Ghanaian language in school (Owu-Ewie, 2006; Owu-Ewie & Edu-Buandoh, 2014). Some Parents seek admission for their wards in school that the medium of communications and instruction are primary English Language. Parents supply books of all other courses to their wards at all level but Ghanaian Language book becomes a very big problem. In addition, well to do parents engage the service of teachers in mathematics, Science, English Language, Social studies etc but not in Ghanaian Language. The study also confirmed that some parents do not even speak their native language to their wards when they are home (Dako, 2017). This findings was confirmed by the following.

Finally, the study indicated that, the perception of society and other non-Ghanaian Language teachers also contribute to the learners negative attitude towards the study of Ghanaian Language (Owu-ewie & Edu-buandoh, 2014). Attitude, whether positive or negative, depends on the degree of socio-economic value attached to each language (Omoniyi, 2014). It was noted from the study that, in Ghanaian society people that study Ghanaian Language are considered to be academically weak (Owu-ewie & Edu-buandoh, 2014) and hence do not get the necessary respect from the society. In addition, it was also confirmed that the education system in Ghana is such that it only train a lot of people to seek white collar jobs. And the requirement of these jobs are people ability to communicate in English Language and not the local language. The study also indicated that teachers that teach other subject other than Ghanaian Language look down upon the Ghanaian Language teachers and often speak ill about the subject and this discourages learners from developing positive attitude towards the subject (Owu-ewie & Edu-buandoh, 2014). This also contradicts the

finding that teachers of other subjects other than Ghanaian language respect teachers and learners to teach and learn Ghanaian language respectively (Quaicoe, Adams, Bersah, and AppiahBaah, 2015).

However, JHS students seems to have positive attitudes towards learning of Ghanaian Language, including the Asanti Twi. This was so because, Asanti Twi is examinable for those who study Asanti Twi in school and failure in the subject can be a standing block for pursuing further education in Ghana. Also, both the primary and JHS students seem to have interest for cultural aspect of Ghanaian Language, possibly because of fun associated with it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The current study discovered that not only public school students, but also students in private schools, have a negative attitude toward the study of Ghanaian language, particularly, the Asanti Twi. However, due to the BECE requirement, the majority of junior high school students attempt to change their attitude in order to pass and ensure or gain admission to their first choice schools. Additionally, the study found that the school culture, a lack of recommended textbooks, a scarcity of professional Ghanaian language teachers, parents' attitudes and perceptions of the society, and non-Ghanaian language teachers' perceptions of Ghanaian language studies all contribute to students' low or negative attitudes toward the study of Ghanaian languages in private schools in Bibiani Municipality.

Based on the findings, we recommend that Ghanaian Language teachers should adopt interactive or student-centered teaching method with fun for teaching Ghanaian Language. Parents and the schools should encourage speaking of Ghanaian Language in homes and schools respectively, since it is a recommended written and spoken Language. Further research should adopt inferential statistics to investigate linkages shown in Figure 1 to ascertain their statistical relationship or impact.

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Contributions of Authors

¹PKA wrote the entire study, took part in the data collection and transcription of the interview data and analyzed the interview data. PKA also responded to all reviewers comments.

²MA took part in the data collection and transcription of the interview data, assisted in the data analysis and proofed the entire work.

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