

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Challenges in Using English as the Medium of Instruction for French Language Teaching in Secondary Schools in Ghana: The case of some Selected Schools in Ghana

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language not only satisfies the acquisition of linguistic competence but also enable the exploration of a wide range of new cultural and professional opportunities. However, code-switching and code-mixing is one of the problems that arise in the language classroom. This research aimed to investigate the complications arising from the use of English as the main language of instruction for learning French, including the impact on language proficiency, language attitudes and language policies. In this study, we examined the impact of code-switching on the teaching and learning of French in Kumasi High School, St. Louis Senior High School, Accra Academy Senior High School, Achimota Senior High School, Notre Dame Girls' School, Fiapre, and Wesley Girls' Senior High School. The study employed the stratified sampling method where we have questionnaires playing a significant role in the aid of data gathering for the study from the different senior high schools across the country and the purposive sampling through interview and observations where some of the participants were physically

contacted and those outside of Ashanti, called on phones for an unstructured interview. The study used a qualitative approach (questionnaire, interviews and observations) for data collection, analysis and presentation. The results revealed that learners were interested in using English as a medium of instruction in learning French and code-switching did not influence their learning failure. Some recommendations have been made to eliminate the use of English as a medium of instruction in the classroom.

Introduction

Language is a system of communication that consists of a set of sounds and written symbols that are used by the people of a particular country or region to speak or write according to the Collins dictionary (2023). A language is one of mankind's principal means of expression. It plays a major role in a child's education, both informally and formally.

The language of education is crucial to a learner's success at school. Being a multilingual country, the recognition of a need for one or more languages of communication, and the need to select one or more languages for official, social and economic purposes are crucial in language planning activities.

According to Bangnia (2020, p95), "the roles of foreign languages particularly French are crucial in global communication". The teaching of the French language is of the utmost importance in Africa, particularly in West Africa. Since French is such an important language throughout the world, it is worth looking at its origin, history and roots. French is an official language in 29 countries across multiple continents, serving as the sole official language in 13 countries (e.g., Benin, Niger, Senegal) and sharing official status with other languages in 16 countries (e.g., Chad, Canada, Rwanda). Originating in modern-day France, it evolved from Celtic-Latin and Germanic roots, becoming a key diplomatic language from the 17th to mid-20th century.

Following African independence in the 1960s, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) promoted unity by encouraging linguistic integration. Conferences in Yaoundé (1961) and Addis Ababa (1963) recommended that English-speaking African nations teach French and vice versa. This led to bilingual education policies, with French now included in the curricula of English-speaking OAU members. Today, 18 West African countries incorporate French into their educational systems.

Problem statement

Olaseinde & Olaseinde (2024 P.3) in their abstract stated that "There are several issues associated with the teaching and learning of French Language in an Anglophone

environment..." The problem of using English as the medium of instruction for French in secondary schools stems from several issues. These include students' limited English proficiency, which hinders their ability to learn French, and teachers' struggles to teach French effectively in English due to language barriers. According to Thikraiat (2014), in addition to the teaching of English, the teaching of French has a significant positive influence on the development and training of an educated and open-minded generation. French teachers at Sohar Secondary School have observed some performance problems among students, as well as a low level of achievement in the French programme. The difficulties encountered by the students in learning French, which are directly related to them, are probably due to lack of interest on the part of the students in the language, or lack of understanding of the importance of the language for their future undergraduate studies, which reduces their motivation (Ogbonna, 2014).

However, the difficulty of learning French is not only due to students' lack of mastery of the language, but to the fact that some students' linguistic inventories in this subject are insufficient (Soubhi, Lima, Aitdaoud, & Talbi, 2016), which affects their linguistic competence and prevents them from understanding, analysing and composing texts, as well as becoming aware of the meaning and semantics of these texts in their mother tongue. According to Johanés (2017), code switching henceforth (CC) and code mixing henceforth (MC) is one of the problems that arise in the classroom when teachers are teaching or learners are learning a language in secondary schools.

For example, during the English lesson, the teacher may say "today's topic is English pronunciation", then switch to the mother tongue Kiswahili, the same situation applies until the end of the lesson and it is the same for the pupils when they ask questions. He concluded that the CC /MC influenced students' failure to learn the language and that teachers were the main cause, as they could have limited the situation by preventing students from using other languages apart from English. Additionally, the use of English does not align with students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and there is a lack of resources and training for teachers. Overall, the mismatch between language proficiency, teaching methods, and resources makes French language education less effective in these schools.

Also, according to Rita Yayra Nyavor (2017), code-switching (CC) is now used a lot or several times among bilinguals. CC is a contact phenomenon and that participants alternate between codes for several reasons (reasons can be; quotations, interjections, reiteration, message qualification, numbers, proper nouns and contrast). She found that bilinguals used CC to index certain social identities and as a strategy of deference. Indeed, the functions and motivations of code-switching indicate that CC is an effective tool that Ghanaian bilinguals can use to express themselves fully. All these works have raised challenges in the French language classroom. In our work we seek to find out whether the use of English language in teaching French may have some impact on the teaching and learning most especially in schools in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

The study aims to explore the challenges of using English as the medium of instruction for teaching French in secondary schools in Kumasi, Ghana. The research will try to identify

difficulties related to language proficiency in French, student comprehension, teacher preparedness, curriculum design, and cultural barriers. This will help to assess the effectiveness of using English in French classes, focusing on its impact on student engagement, language acquisition, and performance. Additionally, it will gather perspectives from both teachers and students to understand their views and suggestions for improvement. The study will propose recommendations, such as using French or bilingual approaches, and contribute to educational policy to enhance foreign language teaching in Ghanaian schools.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Our research is based on teaching theory and code switching. These theories constitute the description of teaching in French which can help us to browse through the different teaching methods. In addition, these theories will allow us to predict all the types of errors specific to learners in order to recommend ways to prevent and correct these errors. Finally, we will verify its implications for teaching and learning.

Theory of Teaching

Teaching plays a central role in the educational process and learning occurs as the result of teaching. It is very important that student and teachers understand the nature and principles of teaching. - According to Kerlinger (1965), "a theory of teaching is a set of interrelated constructs, definitions, and prepositions that present a systematic view of teaching by specifying the relationships among variables for the purpose of explanation and prediction". In this definition, the focus is on the teaching variables.

The three teaching variables are: i) independent variable - the teacher; ii) dependent variable - the student; iii) interview variable – curriculum. This theory is particularly centered on the three constructs talked about with much emphasis on the student. It offers explanations for how learners learn languages and the various factors that facilitate or hinder the teaching and learning process. The theory is also very important because, it aids in highlighting gaps between how lessons and instructions are delivered and how learners really learn. Kerlinger also considered three types of teaching theories: The formal theory of teaching- descriptive theory of teaching- and normative theory of teaching.

Theories of code-switching

Myers-Scotton's marking model (1983, 1993) is the theoretical foundation that this study uses to support its main theory. The hypothesis concerns the study of the social drivers of code-switching. The fundamental theoretical idea underlying the model is marking, which is identical to indexicality. The theory is based on the idea of "marking", according to which participants in a discourse or interactive event are aware of the sets of rights and obligations (ROs) that guide the use of language. In code switching, there is usually an alternation between two or more languages which aids the communication process. Bonyadi et al. (2021) discovered that teachers usually employ code switching to manage classroom dynamics, while maintaining solidarity with learners. The application of code switching also supports

pedagogical functions such as aiding in clarifications regarding complex concepts related to language learning. The marking model consists of three maxims: unmarked code choice, marked code choice and exploratory code choice (Myers-Scotton 1993).

i) **The maxim of unmarked choice** states, "When you want to establish or assert this set of rights and obligations henceforth (RO), make your choice of code the unwanted index of the set of unmarked RO in conversational exchanges." For example, in a conversation between two French-English bilingual friends, the unmarked choice might be to use the two languages alternately or mixed, without this signifying a change of topic or strategy.

ii) **The maxim of marked choice** states that when you want to designate a new RO set as unmarked for the current exchange, you must make a marked code choice that is not the unmarked index of the unmarked RO set in the interaction. Myers-Scotton (1993: 131). For example, when there is a French class where the learners and the teacher generally speak French, but some learners also speak English. If a learner uses English to ask the teacher a question, they are making a marked choice because they are deviating from the expected language and may want to attract attention, challenge authority or show their linguistic competence.

iii) **The maxim of exploratory choice** states that when an unmarked choice is unclear, use CC to make alternative exploratory choices as candidates for an unmarked choice and therefore as an index of a set of ORs that you favour". Myers-Scotton (1993: 143). For example, in a conversation between two people who do not know each other well, the exploratory choice may be to use a third language to establish complicity, to express cultural curiosity, or to avoid a misunderstanding.

Methodology

In this study, we exploited questionnaires in gathering data from the schools selected across the length and breadth of the country for the purpose of this study. All the schools selected are considered category A schools in Ghana, which means, in terms of quality of infrastructure and teacher facilitation as well as other academic related pursuits, such schools are rated first class. The mixed methods approach aided very much, where we did not only depend on questionnaires, but through the judgmental or purposive sampling, unstructured interviews and observations were also adopted for data collection. The selection for the interview was based on specific characteristics, especially, regarding the role played by the participants. Selected participants were largely interviewed on the teaching methods, while other unstructured questions were asked objectively.

The use of questionnaire helped to gather data simultaneously from across the country. Where teachers provided data that was critically analyzed with Microsoft Excel.

Data collection methods and research approach

In order to achieve the objectives set for this study, data was collected mainly using questionnaires. These questionnaires were of two types: the first type was addressed to teachers and the second to learners. We also used classroom observations. These

questionnaires and observations focused mainly on the question: what language should be used to teach the French language? In the various schools we selected, there were a few French classes. A clear case is for Kumasi High School, which has two French classes with a total number of seventy students learning the language. The population for this study was 300 out of which our sample size was 60 students.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire survey is the primary method of data collection for this study. There are two types of questionnaire. On the one hand there are questionnaires addressed to teachers and on the other, to learners writing in English. In the survey the learner questionnaires included both closed and open questions. The closed questions encouraged learners to choose the best answer for them, while the open questions required learners to construct their own answers.

Our interactions with teachers focused on specific answers for which we sought clarification. A total of four teachers were purposively chosen for this study, one from each school and two from precisely Kumasi Anglican SHS School. This was a session in which the teachers discussed the various reasons for using English in the classroom. The interview with the teachers also enabled them to highlight certain aspects of our questionnaires, in particular by providing details and explaining the actual scenario in the classrooms. The teachers involved were those who were available and willing to provide us with the information we needed. The initial selection regarding the learner population was made from third year students only. Third year learners were selected on the basis of their previous language course experience. In doing this, the quota sampling technique was exploited to meet the predefined quota for our student participants in all the selected institutions, ensuring that a balance exists. A total of 60 learners were selected, 20 per school. The aim was to enable learners to participate fairly in the study while ensuring that all learners understood code-switching in the process of learning French. Questionnaires were distributed to learners to gather their opinions on the code-switching phenomena used by their teachers. The aim of the student questionnaire was to find out their subjective thoughts on the phenomenon of code-switching in the classroom.

Observation

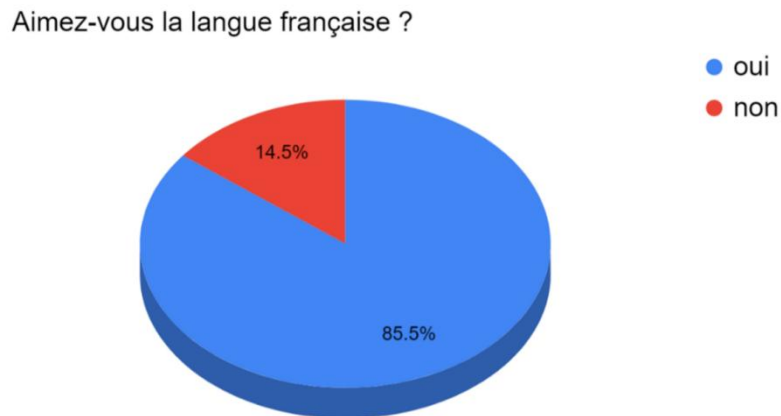
Observation is one of the methods used in this study. According to Creswell (2009), observation is the process of gathering open first-hand information by observing people and places in a research field. Observation consists of directly assessing the reactions of learners and teachers in the classroom. We carried out a non-participatory observation in which we did not play any role and we kept a respectful distance from the events that were taking place and we took notes.

Data analysis

This section focused on the presentation and analysis of the data collected. The approach was to analyze the field data using a descriptive methodology. We presented the results graphically. These results were based on the questionnaires we conducted and the notes we took which helped us reach a conclusion.

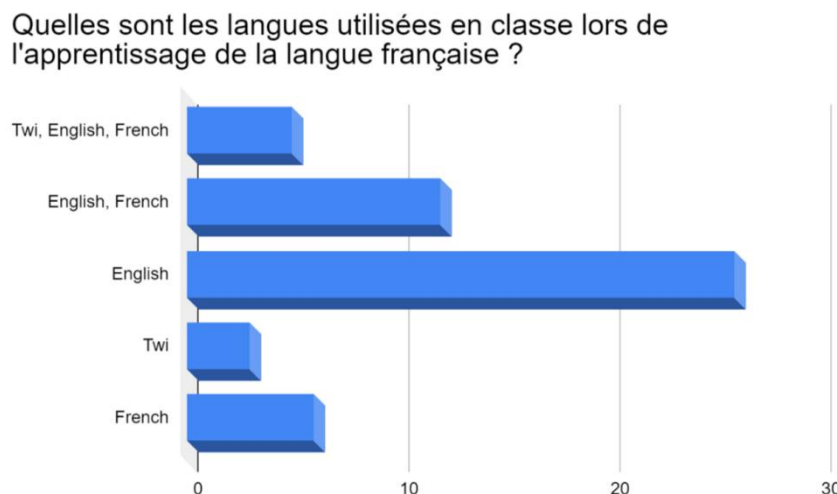
Analysis of questionnaires for learners

Graph 1: showing respondents' interest in the French language.



According to the graph, most respondents like French because it is an interesting subject to learn, it can help them in the future, it offers them many job opportunities and it will broaden their knowledge of French and the remaining 14.5 (9) do not like it because they found it difficult and they were not interested.

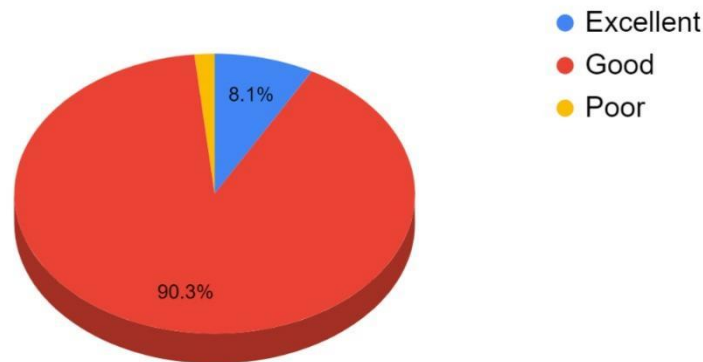
Graph 2: showing the language spoken fluently



According to the graph, we found that English was the most commonly used language in the class, followed by a mixture of English and French.

Graph 3: showing the influence of the language used on learning

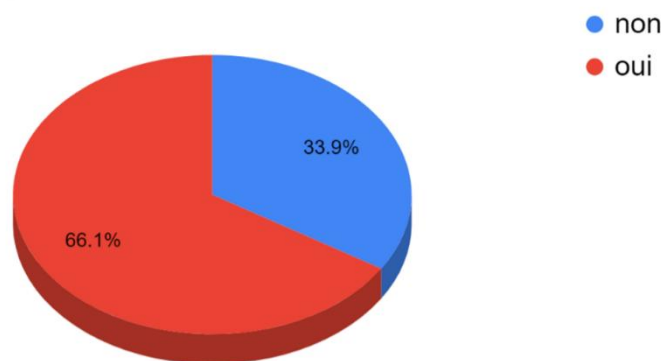
Quel est l'impact de la langue utilisée sur votre étude du français ?



The graph shows the influence that the language used in class has on respondents' study. The majority felt that the impact of the language on their studies was positive.

Graph 4: showing whether using other languages helps mastery of the language.

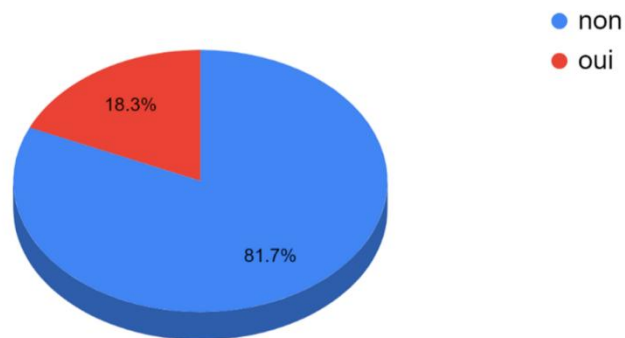
L'utilisation de cette langue vous permet-elle de maîtriser la langue française ?



The graph shows whether the use of English or French or a mixture of the two in the classroom allows learners to master French and most of them judged that it (English) allows them to master because they understand study well, it is the language they are used to speaking and it makes learning easier and the rest judged it badly because according to them teachers use French a lot and this makes it difficult to understand.

Graph 5: showing whether the use of other languages limits their ability to learn the language.

L'utilisation de cette langue limite-t-elle votre capacité à apprendre la langue française ?



The graph shows that most respondents felt that using English or French or a mixture of the two in the classroom did not limit their ability to master French because they were passionate about learning the language and the rest felt that it did because they were not interested in learning French.

Question 6: What do you think of code switching?

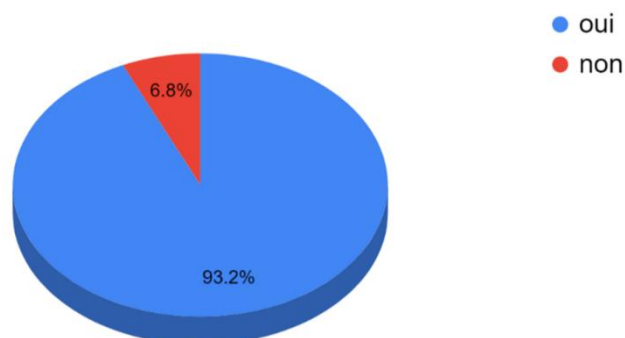
Below are the views of the learners who answered our questionnaires on code switching.

- i) It's a good idea and I think it makes it easier to understand French.
- ii) It helps me to understand certain key terms better.
- iii) It's really essential as most of us are not exposed to all aspects of the French language.
- iv) It's beneficial because the student is more familiar with English than with French.

Code-switching is not a bad thing at all. In fact, it will help students in every way possible. When students are spoken to in a language they understand, they gain a deeper understanding of what is being taught.

Graph 7: showing respondents' views on whether code switching should be encouraged.

Faut-il encourager le changement de code dans les cours de langue ?



According to the graph, most respondents suggest that code-switching should be encouraged because it facilitates language learning and helps to better understand and

follow the course, while the remainder suggest that to learn a language, you have to practice it all day long.

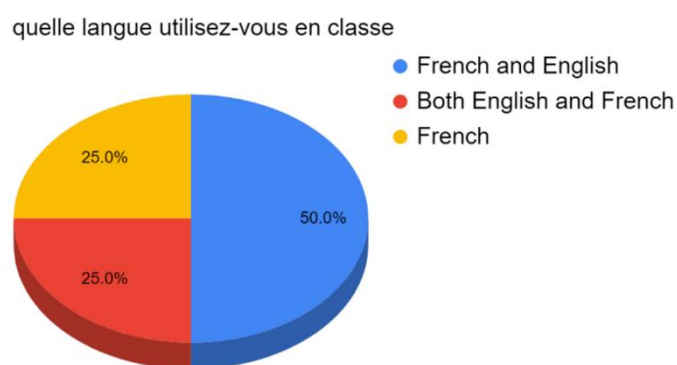
Question 8: What would you recommend to facilitate the learning of the French language in secondary schools?

Below are some recommendations on things we should do to facilitate the French language, the majority suggesting that we should have French laboratories and provide learners with dictionaries.

- i) Organize seminars, give grants and organize debates.
- ii) Provide dictionaries, there should be more practical lessons.
- iii) Gadgets should be used by students to research the language.
- iv) Watching films and songs in French to enrich vocabulary.
- v) Provision of textbooks.
- v) More qualified and trained French staff should be sent to the various schools.
- vii) Practice and speak the language consistently.
- viii) There should be a French laboratory which pupils visit regularly to learn more about French.
- ix) Provision of French language facilities in the various senior high schools.
- x) Oral learning

Analysis of questionnaires for teachers

Graph 1: showing the languages used in class



According to the graph, majority of the teachers used English and French to make teaching easier and quicker, made it easier for students to understand and also made the classroom more comfortable, while one used only French because he wanted students to understand the language subconsciously.

Question 2: Why use this language in teaching French?

Below are the views of the teachers who responded to our questionnaires on why they used these languages in teaching French.

- i) Most of the pupils responded that they didn't do it at all during their junior levels and that using French alone scared them.

- ii) I use both languages in most cases, the students complained that they don't understand when only French is used.
- iii) In most instances, you have to translate for them to understand.
- iv) I want the students to understand the language unconsciously.

Table 3: Have you ever tried to teach only in French?

Yes	No
4	0

The table shows that most teachers have tried to teach in French only.

Question 4: How do learners react?

The answers below show how learners reacted to the use of French only in the classroom.

- i. Confused
- ii. Uncomfortable
- iii. Showed their discomfort.
- iv. They found it difficult at first but with time they got used to it.

Question 5: How would you rate learner participation in the classroom?

Below are the teachers' views on how they evaluated learners' participation in the classroom.

- i. Poor
- ii. Not interactive
- iii. Average as some of them are able to communicate a minimum in French.
- iv. Full participation in class.

Question 6: At what level do you encourage the use of French in education?

Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced
4	0	0

According to the table, respondents thought that the use of French only should be started at beginner level so they also suggested that the French language should be learned at primary level because at that age, children have a greater capacity for absorption and imitation, starting early allows for prolonged exposure to the language, thus promoting better mastery and more natural pronunciation.

Table 7: Does the use of this language enable students to master the French language?

Yes / No	Justify
Yes	It helps them to familiarize themselves with French and to cope with it when they reach higher levels.
No	They complain that they don't understand the lesson
No	Students seem not to follow the lesson because they don't understand it.
Yes	They have the opportunity to learn the language as it should be.

In analyzing the teachers' responses, some of them felt that the use of English and French helped learners to learn the language as it should be and one of them also felt that the use

of French only helped learners to familiarize themselves with French and to cope with it when they reach higher levels.

Analysis of data from teachers

The data collected from five senior high school French teachers in Ghana highlights several key insights into the challenges and strategies related to teaching French using English. The respondents staff comprises five tutors with diverse backgrounds. Two teachers are from female-only schools, two from mixed-gender schools, and one from a boys-only school. In terms of teaching levels, three teach final-year students, while the other two handle first and second-year classes. Their experience levels vary, with 80% of them having over five years of teaching experience. The remaining 20% have between two to five years of experience. This distribution highlights a blend of specialized environments, varied teaching responsibilities, and a strong foundation of expertise among the teachers. The data indicates that each teacher speaks a different local language (Bono, Ewe, Fante, Kusaal, Twi). This shows that there is a minimal cultural bias in their teaching approaches.

Majority of these teachers, that is 80% of them have 5–10 contact hours per week for French, while 20% (from mixed schools) have over 10 hours. In French classes, 40% of teachers find using English frequent, 40% describe it as very common, and 20% (from girls' schools) consider it rare. Key challenges include explaining grammatical concepts, students' limited French vocabulary, maintaining engagement, and the influence of English on students' French expression. These issues highlight the complexities of teaching French in an English-influenced context.

When asked what impact this will have on the teaching and learning of French, 20% believe using English is detrimental to learning; 40% think it is sometimes harmful and 40% also feel it has no impact on learning.

To address the varying preferences and challenges in teaching French, the teachers proposed the following strategies:

For Teaching French Exclusively in French (60% of the respondent were in support)

Provide immersive French environments through activities like role-playing, French-only discussions, and multimedia resources.

Offer professional development for teachers to enhance their skills in teaching grammar and vocabulary without relying on English.

Use visual aids, gestures, and context-based learning to explain complex concepts.

For Using Both French and English (40% of the respondent were in support)

Adopt a balanced approach, using English sparingly to clarify difficult concepts while gradually increasing French usage.

Develop bilingual resources to support students' understanding and transition to French

In addition, the respondents highlight a strong consensus on the importance of immersive and engaging methods to improve French teaching and proficiency, especially in Ghana as English-speaking country. Increasing students' exposure to French outside class through clubs, activities, and additional resources is widely supported. Role-play, interactive materials,

and extended contact hours are also seen as effective ways to enhance learning. However, the lower emphasis on ongoing teacher training suggests a need for greater awareness of its potential impact. Innovative ideas like inter-school French quizzes and a focus on reading and comprehension skills further underscore the desire for creative and practical approaches to strengthen French proficiency.

Findings and discussion

From the analysis, it is deduced that teachers face significant challenges in teaching French using English, particularly with grammar, vocabulary, and student engagement. While some teachers believe using English is detrimental, others see it as neutral or context-dependent. They proposed some strategies to improve French teaching and learning as increased exposure to French outside the classroom, extracurricular activities, and teacher training. From the responses there is a divide on whether French should be taught exclusively in French or with the support of English.

This study aimed to investigate whether the practice of code-switching affects the assimilation process involved in acquiring French language skills. Based on the data collected, it was evident that a substantial majority of the respondents, 85.5 expressed a positive attitude towards learning French in their respective schools. These schools were selected because they were readily available, and in terms of proximity, they helped us. The participants were also selected based on the quota sampling technique. Conversely, 14.5% indicated a lack of interest and enjoyment in studying the French language.

The questionnaire data further revealed a preference among learners for English as the primary medium of instruction in French language lessons. This preference was attributed to its widespread use and accessibility. While many participants acknowledged the dominant use of English in their French classes, some reported that instruction is often delivered in a combination of English, French, and the local language (Twi). Both English and Twi serve as auxiliary languages to enhance comprehension of specific French terms.

With regard to the impact of language of instruction on the study of French, an overwhelming majority (90.32%) of respondents reported that the instructional language positively influenced their learning. Additionally, 8.06% perceived the impact as excellent, whereas only 1.61% considered it poor.

Participants were also asked to evaluate the fluency of their French tutors. Approximately 27.42% described their tutors' speech as "fast," while the majority (70.97%) characterized it as "moderate." One respondent indicated that the tutor spoke "too fast." Despite these variations, 66.1% of students agreed that their tutors' proficiency levels enabled them to effectively master the language.

Regarding the influence of tutor proficiency on learners' speaking abilities, 81.67% of respondents believed that their teachers' linguistic abilities did not hinder their own learning capacity. However, 18.33% disagreed, stating that the teachers' proficiency levels posed a limitation.

When asked about their instructional language preference for French classes, a dominant proportion (85.48%) advocated for a bilingual approach combining English and French. This,

they believed, would enhance comprehension and promote proficiency. Meanwhile, 3.23% preferred instruction solely in English, and 11.29% (7 respondents) favored exclusive use of French.

Finally, 93.2% of the respondents supported the use of code-switching, emphasizing its role in facilitating understanding in the teaching and learning of French in Ghanaian senior high schools. In contrast, 6.8% opposed code-switching, arguing that reliance on familiar languages could hinder full language acquisition.

Several participants recommended increased emphasis on oral proficiency at the senior high school level, improved access to French learning materials such as textbooks and dictionaries, the establishment of French language laboratories, and the organization of inter-school debates, seminars, and the screening of French films. These initiatives, they suggested, would enrich vocabulary, deepen cultural appreciation, and enhance overall French language competence.

Implications

In our work, we wanted to ascertain whether teachers can teach French using English language without any challenge. We found that the teaching and learning of French begins at basic level. Using distributed surveys, we were able to determine the implications of the study.

We saw that French lessons were taught in English with instructions given in French. In exceptional circumstances, English was used to define key words and sometimes Twi was used to ensure that learners understood what was being said or taught. However, the predominance of French in the classroom posed real problems of comprehension. Although English was used as the main language of instruction in the classroom, majority of learners surveyed, mentioned that their proficiency in French had improved. Therefore the use of English as the language of instruction benefits learners more than it harms them.

Most learners admitted to having an interest in the French language and this was evident in their responses. Some added that although they had the desire to improve in learning French, they are discouraged by the mentality that it is a difficult subject.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify the conflicts between the use of English in learning French and the selection of the language of instruction in the classroom. It is obvious that learning French is important in Ghana, so it must be given the attention it deserves.

After conducting our research, we came to the conclusion that code-switching is not a linguistic deficiency but can be used effectively in the acquisition of a target language. Code switching is very beneficial for learners and helps them to understand what is being said or taught. This is because even at elementary level, English is the main language used to teach French. They are not aware of the damage at this level, but it will affect them over time. Especially for those who want to continue their studies in French, they will not be able to understand simple French statements without translating them into English. We are of the

view that code-switching is terrible, but we do think there's a lot that can be done to stop students translating directly. From the findings of this research we propose the use of the target language "French" as the language of instruction in the language classroom.

For this reason, we suggest certain actions such as language immersion, the use of authentic documents that learners and the future of the French language in Ghanaian schools could undertake.

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Author Bio note

Mavis Antiri Kodua is an Assistant Lecturer and a researcher in the Department of Language and Communication Sciences at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), where she is currently pursuing her PhD. Holding an M.Phil. French with specialisation in the Teaching of French as a Foreign Language (Français Langue Étrangère) and in French for Specific Purposes (Français sur Objectifs Spécifiques). Antiri Kodua boasts of 18 years' experience in teaching French in Ghana. Her research interests encompass Sociolinguistics, Language and Culture, Teaching of French as a Foreign Language, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and Preservation of Minority Languages in the context of Climate Change. Mavis is dedicated to contributing to research initiatives that promote sustainable French language education in Science specific fields in today's digital age. She is passionate about collaborative research and pedagogy that adopts inclusive scientific communication.

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