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Triglossia in Transition: Language Choice, Identity, and Educational Mobility in Selected Ghanaian Senior High Schools

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Abstract

This study examines how Senior High School (SHS) students in Ghana move between three linguistic codes: the mother tongue, Ghanaian Pidgin English, and Standard English, in relation to language choice, identity, and their perceptions on educational mobility. Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, questionnaire and interview data were collected from 80 students in two Senior High Schools in the Ashanti Region. Findings show a broadly domain-based pattern of language choice: the mother tongue dominated home use (77.5%), English dominated formal domains (83.5–86.2%), and mixed code dominated peer domains (57.5%), while Pidgin remained a minority choice (≤17.5%). Even so, mixed code was notable in the classroom (41.2%) and at assembly (23.8%), which complicates a strictly discrete triglossic account. Respondents rated their mother tongue as central to their identity (M = 4.65) while expressing pride in English proficiency (M = 4.56), and several reported institutional sanctions for using the mother tongue or Pidgin at school. Respondents moderately linked English fluency to exam performance (M = 3.64). The study concludes that language choice among this cohort reflects a flexible, triglossic-in-tendency rather than strictly compartmentalised repertoire, with implications for classroom practice and school language policy.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Communication is a dynamic process of conveying information, ideas, attitudes, views, and opinions from one individual to another using language and other communicative resources (Owusu & Mardani, 2020). In a linguistically diverse nation such as Ghana, this process is shaped by the synchronicity of English, Akan, Ewe, Ga, and several other indigenous languages depending on the locality of the individual concerned. Therefore, many senior high school (SHS) students in Ghana are likely to use three or more different codes: a mother tongue (MT), which anchors home and community life; a Ghanaian Pidgin English (GPE), which serves as an informal peer-solidarity code; and Standard English (ENG), which is the medium of instruction and examination.

Ferguson's (1959) and Fishman's (1967) accounts of functionally distributed High and Low varieties, extended by Batibo's (2005) model of a triglossic structure for societies where three codes are functionally stratified, offer a starting vocabulary for this situation. Bokamba (1990) cautions, however, that mainstream sociolinguistic theory, developed largely from Western, two-tier bilingual contexts, does not automatically transfer to Africa's societal

multilingualism; this study adapts triglossic theory accordingly, relocating it from the heritage-language communities where it has mainly been applied (Agbetsoamedo et al., 2024) to the SHS context. This three-way patterning is bound up with how students see themselves and how they are seen: language in Ghana carries strong associations with ethnic and cultural identity (Anyidoho & Kropp Dakubu, 2008; Owusu et al., 2015), and English fluency functions as the primary gatekeeper to academic credentialing and, by extension, to social and economic mobility. Students who move across mother tongue, Pidgin, and English are therefore not simply switching codes for convenience but continually managing questions of belonging, pride, and aspiration.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Ghana's language-in-education policy centres exclusively on English as the tool of instruction from the upper-primary level upwards (Anyidoho & Kropp Dakubu, 2008). Ghanaian Pidgin English, despite its important role as the informal lingua franca of secondary school life, has no recognised place in the policy architecture; where it appears in school discourse, it is typically presented as a disciplinary problem rather than a linguistic resource (Owusu et al., 2016). Students are therefore expected to exhibit academic success through a single code even though their lived linguistic repertoire is distributed across three codes with distinct functions. Existing scholarship has examined heritage-language triglossia (Agbetsoamedo et al., 2024; Akrobotu, 2025) and national- or tertiary-level language identity (Anyidoho & Kropp Dakubu, 2008; Nyamekye et al., 2023) separately, but not how SHS students themselves move across all three codes in the ordinary course of a school day, nor how they understand that movement to relate to their identity and their chances of academic success. In addition, studies on Ghanaian Pidgin English (Huber, 1999; Dako, 2002; Hampel, 2020) have mainly examined its structure, history, and the attitudes surrounding it as a single code, rather than its place alongside the mother tongue and English in students' everyday choices, while studies of language choice and identity among secondary-school students (e.g., Nyamekye & Nketsiah, 2024) have relied on a two-code (mother tongue–English) model that excludes Pidgin as an analytic category. The research gap, therefore, is the limited attention given to studies that examine all three codes together within the same SHS population and connect students' domain-based choices among them to their perceptions of educational mobility as well as their sense of identity in the Ghanaian setting. This study contributes to filling this gap by (a) treating Ghanaian Pidgin English and mixed-code use as separate analytic categories alongside the mother tongue and Standard English, (b) relocating triglossic theory from heritage-language communities to the SHS setting, and (c) examining students' perceived, rather than measured, educational mobility. This is the problem the present study seeks to address.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. describe the language choice patterns SHS students display across the mother tongue, Ghanaian Pidgin English, and Standard English in various school and social domains,
2. examine how students' use of these three linguistic codes relates to their sense of identity, and
3. explore students' perceptions of the relationship between their triglossic language practices and their educational success and future mobility.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. What language choice patterns do SHS students display across the mother tongue, Ghanaian Pidgin English, and Standard English in different domains of school and social life?

2. How does students' use of these three codes relate to their sense of identity?
3. How do students perceive the relationship between their triglossic language practices and their educational success and future mobility?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

This study is grounded in two theoretical frameworks. The first is a structural approach that draws on Ferguson (1959), Fishman (1967), and Batibo's (2005) triglossic structure model. This model shows how societies can organize an in-group or heritage code, an intergroup lingua franca, and an official code, each serving a distinct purpose. In Ghana, recent studies (Agbetsoamedo et al., 2024; Akrobotu, 2025) have validated this model, but they focus solely on contexts of heritage-language maintenance. Here, we apply this three- tiered framework to a senior high school (SHS) context, identifying the mother tongue as the in-group code, Pidgin as the intergroup or informal code, and English as the formal or institutional code. However, we do not take Batibo's (2005) assumption of discrete codes for granted. Rather, we consider insights from translanguaging and superdiversity research (García & Li Wei, 2014; Blommaert & Backus, 2011), which suggest that multilingual individuals often utilize a cohesive linguistic repertoire rather than switching between separate systems. Our own data on domain choice lends support to this position.

The second theoretical framework we explored is rooted in Bourdieu's (1991) idea of linguistic capital, which identifies different language varieties as having unequal value in a social "market." We also drew on Norton's (2000, 2013) concept of investment, which connects a learner's engagement with a language to their aspirations for future identity. Together, these frameworks help us understand why English holds such significant institutional power in the Ghanaian SHS context, while the mother tongue still carries considerable emotional weight. However, as our discussion unveils, none of the frameworks fully captures the mixed feelings students have about the enforcement of English-only policies.

2.2 Literature Review

The related studies can be grouped into several interconnected discussions that, so far, have not been fully integrated. About Ghanaian Pidgin English, Huber (1999) and Dako (2002) adopt a structural and historical approach, proposing that its spread in schools is tied to a sense of covert prestige among "the educated male elite." By contrast, Owusu et al. (2016) offer a broader sociolinguistic perspective on West African Pidgin Englishes, arguing that pidginisation is not merely a deviation but an authentic response to multilingual interactions that deserves recognition in language use rather than being pushed aside by academic disciplines. Hampel (2020) complicates the prestige narrative by highlighting significant regional differences in attitudes towards and use of GPE across various school communities in Ghana. Taken together, these ideologies reveal a divergence over whether the spread of Pidgin is best understood as a phenomenon of identity performance or as shaped by local attitudes. However, to the best of our knowledge, few published studies, if any, have directly addressed how individual SHS students (especially in the Ghanaian context) view Pidgin in relation to their mother tongue and English in their normal lives, which is precisely the gap this study aims to fill.

In relation to mother-tongue education, Owu-Ewie and Edu-Buandoh (2014) highlight the widespread institutional stigma surrounding the study of Ghanaian languages in SHS. They trace this stigma to the 1994 decision to remove Ghanaian languages as a core subject in SHS, along with a common belief that studying one's own language depicts academic weakness. This focus is narrower than the present study's interest in the informal use of the mother tongue across various school contexts, and this distinction is important: a student might resist formal study of their language while still appreciating its informal use for building peer connections or aiding classroom understanding. The issue is that in the Ghanaian context, little has been

done in terms of examining whether these two attitudes—towards formal education and informal use align or operate independently within the same student experience.

When it comes to language, domain, and identity, Anyidoho and Kropp Dakubu (2008), Nyamekye et al. (2023), and Owusu et al. (2022) have pointed out a clear two-code pattern among Ghanaian university students: English is used in formal occasions, while the mother tongue or a mix of codes is preferred informally. Nyamekye et al. (2023) take it a step further by highlighting that students link English with an "intellectual" identity, whereas their first language (L1) resonates more with familiarity and ethnic ties. A particularly relevant study by Nyamekye and Nketsiah (2024) involving 560 SHS students in Cape Coast reveals that language attitudes, parental expectations, and anxiety about English performance all play a role in pushing students towards using English in formal contexts. This study closely mirrors the current research in terms of its population, much like the university-level studies that came before it. It operates on a two-code model, notably excluding Pidgin as an analytic category, which is a significant oversight considering Pidgin's active use among this age group (Owusu et al., 2016).

Looking at multilingual classroom practices more broadly, Owusu et al. (2022) explore language-contact processes across five West African countries. They argue that localisation and code-mixing in classrooms meet genuine communicative needs and shouldn't just be dismissed as errors. This perspective aligns with (yet independently develops from) the translanguaging critique of discrete-code models (García & Li Wei, 2014), which is the theoretical framework this study adopts. On the topic of language and educational mobility, Azubuike et al. (2023) apply Bourdieu's (1991) cultural reproduction theory to analyse English-learning outcomes in three low- and middle-income countries. They find that linguistic capital significantly predicts achievement, even when family background is taken into account. This provides a strong precedent for viewing linguistic capital as a key factor in mobility, although it differs materially from the perceived mobility that this study's own instruments aim to examine. This study focuses on what students think about how their language choices might impact their future instead of what they have actually accomplished. This important distinction is maintained throughout the analysis.

Taken together, the existing literature reviewed show that previous Ghanaian studies have treated Pidgin, language choice, and identity separately or within a two-code frame and not as a three-way repertoire (mother tongue/Pidgin/English) at the SHS level. Considering the evidence available, the distinct contribution of the present study lies in bringing all three codes, mixed-code use, and students' perception of educational mobility into a single analysis within the SHS context.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. That is to say that quantitative (closed-ended questionnaire items) and qualitative data (open-ended responses and semi-structured interviews) were collected within the same period. Data were analysed separately and combined during interpretation. This design was selected over a sequential approach because the study's timeline was unable to accommodate a two-phase sequencing design, and both instruments were generated from the same theoretical framework, thus minimising the requirement for one strand to inform the other's design.

3.2 Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

The target population consisted of students from two senior high schools (SHSs). A stratified random sample of 80 respondents (i.e., 46 from school A and 34 from school B) was proposed, distributed across the two study sites and the courses offered, with form or year group and sex serving as the stratification variables. This sample size was considered appropriate and feasible, given the time available for digitisation, data processing and analysis

to an acceptable standard. For the qualitative component, between 20 and 40 students were to be purposively selected from among the questionnaire respondents to ensure representation of a range of participant profiles.

This was consistent with recommended practice in convergent mixed-methods research, where qualitative depth and logistical feasibility, rather than statistical power alone, are treated as legitimate criteria for setting sample size in a single study (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.3 Data Collection Tools

Two instruments were used: a student questionnaire covering background information, language repertoire, domain-based language choice, identity, perceived educational success, and open-ended questions; and a semi-structured interview protocol addressing language repertoire, language choice, identity, educational success, and the school environment and policy. Educational mobility was operationalised as perceived mobility, focusing on students' beliefs about the relationship between language choices and academic success rather than measured outcomes, in line with Norton's (2000, 2013) concept of investment, which emphasises imagined futures. The term mixed code referred to the use of more than one of the three language codes within a single interaction, encompassing respondents' accounts of code-switching and code-mixing rather than a distinct language variety, consistent with the translanguaging perspective adopted (García & Li Wei, 2014).

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

We analysed closed-ended data using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and cross-tabulated them by demographic variables. Open-ended responses and interview transcripts were digitised and analysed thematically, following familiarisation, open coding, focused coding, and theming into higher-order themes. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated at the interpretation stage. Each major quantitative pattern was read against the corresponding qualitative theme to assess whether the qualitative data confirmed, complicated, or explained it.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed before the commencement of data collection. Given that the study involved human participants, ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Directorate of Grants, Research, and Development, of Sunyani Technical University under ethical clearance reference number EC-DGRD/08/01/26-AA. The study was conducted in accordance with the relevant ethical principles governing research involving human participants. Again, we sought permission from the headteachers of both participating schools before students were approached. The researchers obtained informed consent from the relevant institutions and, for minors, from their parents or guardians. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were assured that declining to participate or withdrawing from the study would attract no penalty. Confidentiality was also observed throughout the research process. The names of the two SHS schools were also concealed. Questionnaire responses were collected without personal identifiers, whilst interview data were anonymised through the use of pseudonyms in the presentation of the findings.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

The content validity of the questionnaire and interview protocol was established through expert review and a pilot study involving students outside the main sample. Feedback informed revisions to improve clarity and ensure alignment with the study's three constructs: domain-based language choice, identity, and perceived educational success. Several Likert-scale items were simplified following the pilot. The internal consistency of the two ten-item Likert scales was also assessed using Cronbach's alpha, alongside item-level analysis, to evaluate their reliability.

4. Analysis of Results

4.1 Introduction

This section presents and analyses data from the study's completed sample. Eighty (80) questionnaires and a semi-structured interview protocol were fully digitised and coded: forty-six (46) from School A and thirty-four (34) from School B, representing 100% of the target sample of 80.

4.2 Summary of Findings from Research Questions

4.2.1 RQ1 – Language Choice Patterns That SHS Students Display Across the Mother Tongue, Ghanaian Pidgin English, and Standard English in Different Domains

The study revealed that language choice followed a broadly domain-based pattern (see Table 3): the mother tongue dominated the most intimate domain, speaking with parents/guardians (77.5%), while English dominated formal domains such as writing/exam answers (83.5%) and speaking with a teacher outside class (77.5%). Mixed code use was most common in peer interactions (57.5% with friends outside class), whereas Ghanaian Pidgin English remained a minority choice in every domain (at most 17.5%, on social media); the two are therefore reported separately. However, the relatively high occurrence of mixed code in the classroom (41.2%) and at school assemblies (23.8%) suggests that language use across these settings is not strictly compartmentalised.

4.2.2 RQ2 – How Students' Use of the Three Codes Shapes Their Sense of Identity

The study revealed that respondents hold their mother tongue as central to identity (M = 4.65) while also expressing pride in English proficiency (M = 4.56). Embarrassment about the mother tongue is rare (M = 1.91). These read as parallel rather than competing investments. This revelation aligns with Owusu et al. (2015). Qualitatively, several respondents described being sanctioned or laughed at for using the mother tongue or Pidgin, though the data also surfaced ridicule directed at English mistakes, so sanction here is not confined to non-English codes.

4.2.3 RQ3 – Students' Views on How Their Use of Three Language Codes Relates to Perceived Educational Success and Future Mobility

Respondents moderately agreed that English fluency is linked to exam performance (M = 3.64) and teacher responsiveness (M = 3.98) and, qualitatively, described their multilingual repertoire as an asset for their future, tempered by an awareness that Pidgin carries some risk in formal contexts. This study examined respondent's perceptions only and did not focus on measuring grades or later outcomes. This is not universal, though: a minority gave dismissive or fatalistic answers, so perceived educational mobility through language varies across the sample rather than following one pattern.

4.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarises the demographic composition of the completed sample. Male respondents (65.0%) outnumbered female respondents (35.0%); this imbalance is a limitation, and readers should treat sex-based comparisons with caution. Respondents' ages ranged from 13 to 19 years (M = 16.1, SD = 1.29), consistent with the expected age range for SHS 1 and 2 students.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 80)

Variable	Category	*n*	%
Sex	Male	52	65.0
	Female	28	35.0
School	School A	46	57.5
	School B	34	42.5
Home Region	Ashanti	36	45.0
	Other regions	44	55.0

Source: Field Data (2026)

The self-assessed proficiency results presented in Table 2 indicate that respondents felt more confident using their mother tongue and English than Ghanaian Pidgin English. Notably, 22.5% of respondents reported that they do not speak Ghanaian Pidgin English at all, whereas 72.5% and 90.0% of respondents expressed great confidence in their ability to speak well in the mother tongue and English, respectively.

Table 2. Self-Reported Language Proficiency (N = 80)

Code	"Speak well" (%)	"Do not speak at all" (%)
Mother tongue	72.5	0.0
Standard English	90.0	0.0
Ghanaian Pidgin English	12.5	22.5

Source: Field Data (2026)

4.4 Domain-Based Language Choice (RQ1)

Table 3 reports which code respondents use most often across nine everyday situations.

Table 3. Language Used Most Often, by Situation (% of Respondents, N = 80)

Situation	MT	GPE	ENG	Mixed
Parents/guardians at home	77.5	0.0	5.0	17.5
Friends outside class	12.5	12.5	17.5	57.5
Friends inside classroom (informal)	2.5	8.8	47.5	41.2
Answering a teacher's question	5.0	2.5	86.2	6.2
Writing notes/exam answers	1.3	2.5	83.5	12.7
WhatsApp/social media with friends	0.0	17.5	32.5	50.0
Speaking with a teacher outside class	16.2	2.5	77.5	3.8
School assembly/formal events	10.0	1.2	65.0	23.8
A stranger or elder in the community	28.7	5.0	25.0	41.2

Source: Field Data (2026)

From Table 3, it is obvious that the mother tongue dominates the most intimate domain (parents/guardians, 77.5%), while English dominates formal, institutional domains (answering a teacher's questions, 86.2%; writing/exam answers, 83.5%; speaking with a teacher outside class, 77.5%), a pattern broadly consistent with Batibo's (2005) triglossic model. However, mixed code accounts for nearly a quarter of responses even at school assembly and over two-fifths among classmates inside the classroom, considerably more "leakage" into formal domains than a strictly discrete model predicts, and consistent instead with the translanguaging critique. Mixed code was the most reported option with friends outside class (57.5%), whereas Ghanaian Pidgin English was reported by 12.5% of respondents in that situation. These figures do not convey a single peer-solidarity code function between Pidgin and mixed code. They demonstrate that peer interaction was mainly characterised by mixed code with Pidgin as the minority choice.

While the reported percentages are proportions of a modest sample, 95% confidence intervals are reported for the headline figures to convey their precision: mother-tongue use with parents/guardians, 77.5% [68.3, 86.7]; English use in writing/exam answers, 83.5% [75.4, 91.6]; mixed code among classmates inside the classroom, 41.2% [30.4, 52.0]; and mixed code at school assembly, 23.8% [14.5, 33.1]. The intervals are moderately wide at this sample size, so these estimates should be treated as indicative of the present sample rather than as precise population parameters. As one inferential check on the domain-based pattern, a chi-square goodness-of-fit test was run on the classroom-informal situation, comparing the observed distribution across the four response categories (MT, GPE, ENG, mixed) against a null of equal use, $\chi^2(3, N = 80) = 49.30$, $p < .001$, confirming that code choice in this domain is not evenly distributed and lends statistical support to the domain-based pattern reported above.

Comparative inferential tests of gender differences were not attempted, given the 52 male vs. 28 female split. School-level comparisons are clearly defensible given the 46/34 split, and are noted qualitatively where relevant; formal gender comparisons remain a limitation of the present analysis.

4.5 Language, Identity, and Educational Success (RQ2 and RQ3)

Table 4. Selected Mean Scores for Identity and Educational Success Items (N = 80)

Item	*M*
My mother tongue is an important part of who I am	4.65
I feel most like myself when I speak my mother tongue	4.80
Speaking good English makes me feel proud	4.56
I feel embarrassed about my mother tongue	1.91
Teachers/students look down on those who speak only MT or Pidgin	3.06
English fluency leads to positive teacher responses	3.98
English fluency is linked to exam performance	3.64
MT/Pidgin use helps me express ideas before translating to English	3.79
School rules against MT/Pidgin help my learning	3.23

Source: Field Data (2026)

Table 4 reports mean scores for selected Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). From the results, *mother-tongue identity* and *English pride* were both rated highly and did not trade off against one another, while *embarrassment about the mother tongue* was rare. Notably, the item on *restrictive school-language rules* recorded a comparatively ambivalent, near-midpoint mean ($M = 3.23$) despite a qualitative record (Section 4.6) full of concrete sanction experiences, while the item on whether *teachers/students looked down on MT/Pidgin speakers* was just above the midpoint ($M = 3.06$).

4.6 Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses identified four recurring themes. First, about code-switching as a comprehension strategy, respondents described switching to the mother tongue to understand lessons or exam questions, consistent with the moderately strong agreement that MT/Pidgin use helps respondents express ideas before translating to English ($M = 3.79$); responses also included concrete classroom examples, such as one respondent who credited a proverb in their mother tongue with helping them answer an exam question, and several who described a teacher switching mid-lesson from English to a shared local language.

The second issue is sanctions and embarrassment. Several respondents reported being punished, corrected, or laughed at for using the mother tongue or Pidgin, with one explicitly describing this as “discrimination.” The data also broadened the theme in an unexpected direction: several respondents were laughed at for mistakes in English rather than for using the mother tongue or Pidgin, while one respondent gave the clearest statement of the theme’s

original sense, observing that students from northern Ghana in particular "feel embarrassed when speaking their language because people look down on them."

The third issue is competing rationales for a preferred medium of instruction. Here, respondents split fairly evenly between English (valued for its official, universal status) and the mother tongue (valued for depth of understanding and identity). One respondent, whose mother tongue is Dagbani, added a linguistic-minority perspective by choosing English precisely because the majority around them speak Twi, which they do not understand. The split could also be shaped by which mother tongue a student has relative to the local majority.

The fourth issue is language and the future. Most respondents linked their multilingual repertoire positively to future studies and careers, tempered by an awareness that Pidgin carries some risk in formal contexts. Vividly, one respondent argued a doctor should understand their mother tongue because "not every patient understands English." A handful of dismissive or fatalistic responses (for example, career would not be affected "in any way"; the future left to "God's hands") showed this future-orientation was not uniformly held. Two respondents left the open-ended section blank and were therefore excluded from this thematic analysis, though their closed-ended answers remain in Tables 1–4.

5. Discussion of Findings

The co-occurrence of strong mother-tongue identity scores with equally strong English-pride scores (Table 4) is, on the surface, puzzling: if the mother tongue is this central to respondents' sense of self, why does English so thoroughly dominate the domains that matter most for their institutional futures? In terms of Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital, respondents' reports indicate that they consider English to be the code that most readily converts into value on the academic "market." What that framework explains less well is why this instrumental calculation costs respondents so little in mother-tongue attachment. Norton's (2000, 2013) concept of investment offers a partial repair: because investment is tied to imagined future identities, a student can invest in English as a route to an imagined academic future while separately investing in the mother tongue as a route to an imagined identity of belonging. For respondents in this sample, the two do not appear to be in zero-sum competition because they answer different questions.

A second puzzle concerns Ghanaian Pidgin English, whose proficiency levels (Table 2) fall well below either the mother tongue or English, despite literature framing Pidgin's spread through schools as covert prestige (Dako, 2002). The qualitative theme of sanction and embarrassment suggests that, for respondents in this sample, Pidgin may carry a double disadvantage: it lacks the mother tongue's protective association with heritage and family, and it lacks English's institutional capital. Although the sample was drawn from only two schools with students from varying regional backgrounds, all in one region, these data cannot show whether attachment to Pidgin differs across regions; given the regional variation reported by Hampel (2020), comparison with SHS students in other regions is needed before any such claim can be made.

The data from this sample suggest a possible limit in Batibo's (2005) triglossic model, though a sample of 80 respondents from two schools in a single region cannot by itself establish a limit in an established theoretical model, and the claim should be read accordingly as a hypothesis for further testing rather than a settled finding. That model assumes reasonably clean functional separation between codes, yet mixed code accounts for nearly a quarter of responses even at school assembly and over two-fifths (41.2%) among classmates inside the classroom, domains the discrete model would predict should cluster around a single code. This is consistent with the translanguaging critique (García & Li Wei, 2014) rather than with Batibo's discrete categories, and with Owusu et al.'s (2016, 2022) argument that code-mixing in West African classrooms reflects genuine communicative practice rather than deviation. This "leakage" reflects mixed-code use rather than Ghanaian Pidgin English, which was the most frequent code in no domain; the two are therefore kept distinct in this interpretation.

Similarly, the near-midpoint mean for the item on restrictive language rules, sitting alongside a qualitative record full of concrete punishment and ridicule, suggests that respondents in this sample may endorse English-medium instruction in principle while resenting its specific enforcement, an ambivalence neither Bourdieu's (1991) nor Norton's (2013) framework, built around directional movement toward or away from a dominant code, fully anticipates.

6. Recommendations

We recommend that for classroom practice, teachers should consider deliberate, brief use of students' mother tongue or Pidgin for clarification during lessons, given students' own reports that this practice aids comprehension.

Again, school administrators should reconsider punitive sanctions for informal mother-tongue or Pidgin use outside formal instruction time, and consider a structured, translanguaging-informed language policy rather than a strict prohibition-based approach.

Having achieved its target sample of 80 respondents, this study should now be extended by broadening representation beyond the two Ashanti Region schools sampled here and by correcting the gender imbalance, so school- and region-level comparisons can be made with greater confidence. Future research could also complement self-report data with classroom observation, report item-level reliability statistics in full, and examine whether the domain-based choice patterns identified here relate to measured, rather than only perceived, academic outcomes.

7. Conclusion

Students in this sample operate within a linguistic ecology that is triglossic in tendency but not in strict practice: the mother tongue anchors identity and intimate relationships, English carries academic and institutional authority, mixed-code use dominates peer interaction, and Ghanaian Pidgin English is used by a minority of respondents mainly as an informal peer code, but all three are drawn on flexibly rather than allocated to fully discrete domains. Identity and instrumentality operate as parallel, non-competing investments rather than a single hierarchy, and students' relationship to institutional language policy is more ambivalent (endorsing the principle while resisting aspects of its enforcement) than existing theory fully captures. These conclusions rest on 80 respondents from two schools and should be read as characteristic of students there rather than as generalisable to SHS students in Ghana as a whole. Likewise, the conclusions about educational success and mobility reflect students' reported perceptions, not measured achievement or socioeconomic outcomes.

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