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# Revisit Ghanaian Language Policy

— Dr Wiafe-Akenten

By Charles Andoh

**A**LINGUIST and the first PhD holder in Twi in the country has called on the government

to revisit the policy on Ghanaian languages and ensure that they are used as the medium of instruction in basic schools.

The Ghanaian Language Policy states that Ghanaian languages

• Continued on page 03



• The charter members of Zonta Club — Barbara Baeta (left) and Rachel Phillips

Service to women and girls

• Zonta Club of Accra celebrates 50 years

— Pages 06/27



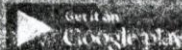
• A hat that matches with a wedding dress and a whole ensemble makes Actress Selly Galley stand out in this picture

Wedding hat rules

— Pages 16/17

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# Revisit Ghanaian Language Policy — Dr Wiafe-Akenten

## • Continued from page 01

should be used as a medium of instruction from kindergarten to Primary Three.

According to Dr Mrs Nana Anima Wiafe-Akenten, who is also the head of the Akan-Nzema Department of the College of Languages Education, Ajumako Campus of the University of Education Winneba (UEW), little attention had been given to the policy and that was undermining Ghanaian languages, thereby translating into lack of appreciation for Ghanaian values and culture.

Dr Wiafe-Akenten was speaking to *The Mirror* ahead of this year's International Mother Language Day commemorated on February 21, 2020.

## Learning mother language at an early stage

Explaining further, Dr Wiafe-Akenten said it was important for the child to be made to speak their mother language to be able to appreciate and learn as they grow, noting that once the child was able to grasp the concept of the language it could be used in every sphere of their life.

Currently, she said the Ghana Education Service and other stakeholders had almost abandoned the Ghanaian Language Policy, "the reason many schools do not pay attention to the use of local languages as the medium of instruction, especially at the basic level."

She was, however, quick to add that the colleges of education had picked the situation up and were now ensuring that teacher trainees were made to learn the local languages to be able to teach their students and that all was not lost.

"Researches have proven that when you speak the mother tongue with the child, it enables them to appreciate their inherent culture which they will imbibe and become responsible citizens.

"When you look at some developed countries such as China, they have been



• Nana Anima Wiafe-Akenten

able to ensure that their mother tongue is adopted in every sphere of contact and they are doing so well all over the world," she told *The Mirror*.

The university don also advised parents not to look down on their local language and compel their children to speak a foreign language at a tender age.

"Speak your mother language with your children and with time you will see that any other foreign language will be easy to grasp," she stated.

She also attributed the lack of appreciation for the local language to the rise in unnecessary cultural infiltration which was destroying the very fibres of the Ghanaian society.

## Importance of learning mother language

Elaborating on the importance of the

mother language, Dr Wiafe-Akenten said if one used the mother tongue to teach their children, it helped them develop their mental faculty, where speech and speaking begin, and that it also helped them develop their intelligence quotient (IQ).

"Within the language embodies our culture. In that process, the child gets to know, understand and appreciate their culture and not allow anything alien which can destroy their morals and values.

"This enables the child to know what is around them and how to use that to develop their country. The mother language gives some picturesque view about life such as through wise sayings and proverbs," she explained.

Dr Wiafe-Akenten said she believed the nation was facing many problems today because people lacked the basic cultural upbringing which frowned on social vices such as corruption, bribery, adultery, and

indecent dressing.

"Today, many marriages have fallen apart because people have poor training which can be traced to the lack of appreciation for their local language and culture," she said.

She stated that she had established a centre where she taught people to learn and appreciate the local language and their culture.

## International Mother Language Day

On November 17, 1999, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation proclaimed February 21 as International Mother Language Day, and it was first observed throughout the world on February 21, 2000.

This day was instituted to promote linguistic and cultural diversity, multilingualism and to highlight greater awareness of the importance of mother language education.

The institution of the day was also to bring to the fore strategies nations can adopt to save their various indigenous languages and tap their immense benefits to the full.

Article 39 Clause 3 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana also enjoins the state to "foster the development of Ghanaian languages and pride in Ghanaian culture."

By this constitutional provision, the state is obliged to formulate and implement policies and programmes towards the development of Ghanaian languages and cultures.

It is also incumbent on the state to ensure that its citizens feel proud of their languages and cultural heritage.

It is through the mastery of the first language or mother tongue that the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy are acquired.