In Conversation: Mother Tongue Education and Civic Engagement amongst Ga Youth

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The role of language in education policies and the importance of civic engagement are well documented. What is less clear is how they converse with one another to inform how to develop active citizens who are empowered in their mother tongues. Building on a conceptual framework of civic engagement and linguistic injustice, this article asks: After the implementation of the 1971–1994 and 2004 medium of instruction education policies in Ghana, what language did Ga youth learn in, in practice? What are the intersections between Ga youths' relationship to language and civic engagement participation? Together, these questions inform understanding of youth educational experiences, Ga people's perception of the vitality of their language, and their responsibility to the community. In interviewing 22 Ga people in Ghana during the summer of 2022, I find that despite policy encouraging mother tongue instruction, most participants learned in English during primary school. Additionally, contrary to the notion that there is a disinterest in civic engagement amongst Ghanaian youth, findings show Ga youth find part of their civic responsibility to lie in passing on the Ga language to preserve their culture, land, identity, and the future of their community.

Keywords: language in education policy, Ga youth, civic responsibility, language injustice, social mobility

Introduction

As the longest-lasting contemporary democracy that has avoided major violent conflict in West Africa, Ghana provides an interesting case for understanding youth civic engagement. On the eve of Ghana's independence, the first Prime Minister, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, stated, "Ghana will be a pacesetter for all to know that the Blackman is capable of managing his own affairs." Following independence in 1957, Dr. Nkrumah was committed to utilizing the education system to "instill a sense of loyalty to Ghana" (Harber, 1989, p.154). However, post-colonial thinkers argue that in reshaping the education system, there needed to be a "decolonization of the [Ghanaian] mind" to support nation-building (Dei, 2005). A consequence of not following this advice is seen through the rejection of local languages as the medium of instruction (MOI) in lower primary schools (Arnot et al., 2018). As a multilingual nation-state, Ghana has seen a constant fluctuation in the language of instruction policy from 1952-2004. The Ghana Ministry of Education (MOE) released a report in 2002 that emphasized the importance of cultivating "attitudes of good citizenship and patriotism and […] the nation's cultural heritage by promoting national languages" as a national education objective (Government of Ghana, 2002, p.15). In practice, there has been a disconnect.

In 1971 and 2004, the government developed MOI policies that encouraged students to learn in their local language. However, English is used more widely across the education system (Adika, 2012), with roughly 80% of the country being literate in English (World Bank, 2020). Still, there is concern that many people lack the English proficiency needed for meaningful participation in national discussions (Anyidoho, 2018). In the context of education, Piller (2020) notes that where language barriers exist, they are an injustice. If extended to the context of civic engagement, a lack of English proficiency may serve as a barrier, too. While studies discuss potential barriers to Ghanaian civic engagement, such as young people not being regarded as having enough life experience to contribute politically (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014) and Ghanaians having a lack of trust in and willingness to confront the government (Asante, 2020; Sam et al., 2019), they neglect to consider the role that language may play.

A critical component to understanding civic participation lies in understanding the role of culture and by extension—language. When a high linguistic proficiency in both a home and school language is not acquired, minority youths can miss out on economic opportunities (Piller, 2016). While Ghana's capital city, Accra, is the center of economic growth (Accra Metropolitan Assembly, 2020), poverty is still prevalent, and the region's highest poverty rates are in predominately Ga communities (Sewidan, 2015). Children who attend school in a different language face the challenge of learning in a new language while also trying to acquire the language. For minority language children, this challenge may be exacerbated by living in a low-income family and can result in school dropout (Ball, 2010). Given that linguistic marginalization is both a cause and consequence of political and socio-economic marginalization (Stroud, 2002), using one's home language in schools can effectively increase social mobility for minorities facing social and economic disadvantages (Ball, 2010). When students can learn in their home language, they are better able to grasp the curriculum and, in turn, utilize their linguistic diversity to stimulate economic growth in the future (Arcand & Grin, 2013). Since there are fewer opportunities for poor youth to participate civically and increase their civic knowledge (Atkins & Hart, 2003), it is critical for the language of instruction (LOI) to be the learners' home language. This can allow students to effectively use school as an avenue for social mobility (Bunch, 1990) and remove barriers to equal community participation (Piller, 2016).

Current research analyzes civic engagement and language in education policy in silos. Yet, there exists a research gap in understanding the intersections between youth civic engagement and language in education policy. This study seeks to investigate the role, if any, that language plays in the civic responsibility of Ga youth. Two research questions guide this work: (1) After the implementation of the 1971–1994 and 2004 medium of instruction education policies, what language did Ga youth learn in, in practice? (2) What are the intersections between Ga youths' relationship to language and civic engagement participation? Following the country context, I present an overview of Ghanaian civic engagement and the language of instruction. Building on a conceptual framework of civic engagement and linguistic injustice, I explore youth educational experiences, Ga people's perception of the vitality of their language, and their responsibility to the community. Contrary to the notion that there is a disinterest in civic engagement amongst Ghanaian

youth (Abudu & Fuseini, 2014), findings show that the Ga youth interviewed find part of their civic responsibility lies in passing on the Ga language.

Country Context
Ghanaian Language in Education Policy
Presently, there are 73 living Indigenous languages in Ghana (Eberhard et al., 2022) and the government produces educational materials for 11 main languages: Akuapem Twi, Asante Twi, Dagaare, Dagbani, Dangme, Ewe, Fante, Ga, Gonja, Kasem, and Nzema. From 1971-1974, for the first three years of primary school, the MOI was to be the students' mother tongue (abbreviated as L1). Schools had the option to choose which Ghanaian language was used based on the linguistic composition of the class starting in 1972 (Klu & Ansre, 2018). In 1974, the policy was modified, and students were given the opportunity to learn in one of nine Indigenous government-sponsored languages for the first three years of schooling (Ansah, 2014). The options were Akan (Fante and Twi), Nzema, Ga, Ga-Adangbe, Ewe, Gonja, Kasem, Dagbani, and Dagaare. Where possible, these languages would serve as the MOI until the sixth grade (Owu-Ewie, 2006). With this policy, even if the linguistic composition of the class favored one language, they could be taught in another if their L1 was not one of the nine government-sponsored languages or if they lacked materials and teacher capacity.

Between 1974 and 2002, no substantial modifications were made to the policy. However, in 2002, the government moved to an English-only policy. The change was motivated by the feeling that some rural schools had taken advantage of the previous policy, with teachers choosing not to use English as the MOI throughout primary education, resulting in English literacy levels being deemed unsatisfactory (Ansah, 2014). Once again, in 2004, the policy was changed to state, "where teachers and learning materials are available and linguistic composition of classes is fairly uniform, the children's first language must be utilized as the dominant medium of instruction in kindergarten and lower primary" (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2004, pp. 27–28). In addition, the policy advocated for Ghanaian languages to become subjects of study from fourth grade onwards, leaving English as the MOI. While materials have been created to support this policy in 11 Ghanaian languages for the literacy and language class, teachers bear the responsibility of translating the textbooks of all other subjects into the local language of the learners for course instruction (USAID, 2020). With a lack of adequate materials, the implementation of the L1 policy is relatively low (Adika, 2012).

Accra and the Ga Ethnic Group
Since Accra functions as the country's political hub, this article centers on the Indigenes of Accra whose land serves as the seat of government. Ga people, whose name, language, and land bear the same name, are an ethnolinguistic minority group asserting Accra to be their ancestral land. As a participant noted, Ga communities are divided by socioeconomic status, social desires, beliefs, etc. and therefore, I use the terms "Ga people," "Ga youth," and "Ga community" not to generalize but to facilitate description.

As the Greater Accra Region (GAR) is socially recognized as Ga territory, it is important to note that land is "of basic importance in the identity, integrity, solidarity and culture of

any group of African life" (Quarcoopome, 1992, p. 40). Overtime, the Ga people participated in the urbanization process of the capital willingly and unwillingly (Quarcoopome, 1992). Oral tradition relays that Labadi, a Ga township, donated part of its territory when the colonial administration wished to build a university. The land called "Nilee Gɔŋ" can be broken down into two parts: Nilee meaning "knowledge" and Gɔŋ meaning "hill." The gift of this "Hill of Knowledge" would later become the University of Ghana—the country's premier university. Despite being a minority group, the Ga people have led efforts to rename streets and districts in Ga. Given their political and academic contributions to the capital, the case of the Gas provides valuable insight into the intersections of language, education, identity, and civic engagement. Understanding the nuances between these topics may shed light on more effective practices that may be undertaken in and outside the classroom to create active citizens who are empowered in their mother tongues.

Civic Learning, Language and Injustice
The Ghanaian youth population stands at 34%, its highest yet, which has created a unique opportunity for civic engagement (Ulti-Leaf Foundation, 2020) since youth are integral members of communities and tend to lead activism (CIRCLE, n.d.). However, scholars assert there is low interest in and a growing ineptitude towards civic engagement in Ghana (Abudu & Fuseini, 2014). This does not mean young people are disinterested in politics (Sam et al., 2019). Rather, this lack of motivation signals that stakeholders must implement barrier-free systems that encourage the civic interests of youth (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014).

Prior to the colonial era, Ghanaian families emphasized teaching children their civic responsibilities informally (Boadu, 2015), but this changed with the introduction of formal education by colonists and a shift towards formal pedagogy (Boadu, 2016). Ghana created its formal schooling system to cultivate citizens with the knowledge and critical thinking skills essential to building the nation (Mhlauli, 2012). Therefore, to achieve this goal, pupils must gain the skills needed to be active citizens. In line with traditional African thought, an active citizen is defined as one who considers how their priorities simultaneously promote the community's vitality (Avoseh, 2001).

What is Civic Engagement and Civic Education?
Civic engagement is a process by which citizens participate in creating better conditions for themselves to help the future of their respective communities (Adler & Goggin, 2005). In an African context, traditional African ways of life and civic engagement lend themselves to be collectivist rather than individualistic (Kwenin, 2020; Patel & Wilson, 2004). According to Boadu (2016), three elements make African Indigenous citizenship unique. He asserts that (1) familial relationships, political ties, and ethnicity were all interrelated, (2) prior to the colonial era, the responsibility of a "citizen" was to the family and larger community, and (3) families took part in teaching children about their civic responsibilities. However, scholars believe that the arbitrary division of nation-states at the 1884 Berlin Conference destroyed aspects of African citizenship (Busia, 1967; Thomson, 2000). This presented challenges as the rites to prepare citizens varied by ethnic

groups, which led to the adaptation of national citizenship education via formal education introduced by colonists (Boadu, 2015).

Scholars assert that civic education—defined as, "the type of education or instructions which equip the learner with relevant knowledge, right attitudes, and requisite skills to enable [them] to perform [their] role as a credible member of society" (Adams et al., 2013, p. 19)—informs a sense of identity and place in society (Kwenin, 2020). Therefore, it must be contextual and take place in and outside of the formal schooling environment for students to deeply understand their role and responsibilities to their society (Adjei & Dei, 2008; Quaynor, 2015). Literature suggests that there are positive correlations between civic education and levels of civic engagement. Galston (2004) notes that people with a greater understanding of civic issues are more likely to participate in civic life, and Adu-Gyamfi (2014) finds that if youth are not interested in current issues, their civic participation is unlikely. The ability to grasp and apply concepts is heavily impacted by current teaching practices that deny pupils the opportunity to critically engage with material outside of the classroom by utilizing community resources (Ayaaba et al., 2014). When pupils are not given the space to deeply understand civic education, civic knowledge and skills are not acquired and they cannot support social change activities (Owusu-Agyeman & Fourie-Malherbe, 2019). Still, one element civic education scholars have not considered in depth is the role of the L1 in teaching and learning.

Language of Instruction and Social Mobility
In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "If you know all the languages of the world and you don't know your mother tongue or the language of your culture, that is enslavement" (Miringu Kiarie, 2020). In 1998, the MOE stated that all citizens were to be equipped with "the fundamental knowledge and skills that will enable them to become full stakeholders in and beneficiaries of development" (Tuwor, 2005, p. 21). As civic education serves to develop skills learners need to perform their roles in society, it is important to teach in a language that people understand deeply for civic education to be most effective. Many of the LOI policies from 1952-2004 utilize an early-exit transitional model that encourages Ga to be taught for only the first few years of primary schooling, followed by English instruction. This model sees language as a problem (Ruíz, 1984), devalues Ga in favor of English, and furthers the notion that Ghanaian languages are not welcomed in the classroom (Adjetey-Nii Owoo, 2022). However, to address issues of equity within a country, it is best to implement an additive policy that encourages multilingual education based on the L1's utilization as the MOI (Benson, 2019). Neglecting to do so further denies educational access to students from poor backgrounds (Opoku-Amankwa et al., 2015) and contributes to the mismatch between the LOI and the language(s) spoken at home, which is known to be a cause of school dropouts, repetition, and failure (Benson, 2014; Heugh, 2011; Walter & Benson, 2012).

Schooling in Ghana is characterized as a "form of internal colonialism" (Agyemang-Mensah, 1998, p. 34). This internal colonialism can be seen in the 2002 MOE report which used Western agendas and encouraged civic rights and virtues to be promoted through the education system (Ministry of Education, 2002). Since Ghanaian schooling and civic education have been implemented through a Western lens, in part because of the

country's colonial subjugation, they must be reimagined and contextualized, so that *all* citizens may benefit. While there are studies focused on Ghanaian youth civic engagement/education, they do not directly focus on the role of language. However, this lens is important because local languages give students the opportunity to learn information more deeply as opposed to learning passively and remaining confused (Opoku-Amankwa et al., 2015).

Given the number of languages in Ghana, the country offers a unique and informative case study to better understand the role of language in civic interests. It is recommended that learners be taught global citizenship education in their formative early childhood years (UNESCO, 2013) and if the goal is for learners to understand the material and be civically engaged, it should be done in a meaningful way that is comprehendible for learners. Therefore, to be truly inclusive of all citizens, schooling and global citizenship education must be done in the L1 of learners. Since it is critical that stakeholders implement systems that accurately measure the civic interests of all youth without barriers (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014), scholars must consider language's role in youth civic identity development and the potential barrier that a MOI may pose to civic engagement.

Civic Engagement, Civic Nationalism, and Language Policy

Given the existing research gap, a deeper understanding of how language policy impacts civic participation is needed. While there are minimal studies that explore this intersection, an ethnographic study in Tanzania found that language in education policy was a challenge to civic engagement because language policy promoted the use of English as the MOI in schooling, even though Tanzanians have more comfortability with and command of Swahili (Thomas, 2020).

In nation-building, language planning must be taken into consideration for a civic state. With regards to civic nationhood which is defined as a "political identity built around shared citizenship in a liberal-democratic state" (Stilz, 2009), Stilz proposes her least cost model to language policy which calls for promoting "citizens' fundamental interests in economic opportunity and political participation by imposing rationalization policies at the least cost to individuals invested in other languages" (p. 272) with the aim of better reflecting the interests of more citizens. Stilz further explains that this can be approached procedurally through voting to enable minority citizens to voice whether they wish to invest in the public good of their language. This system of language policy pushes for the state or regional polity to make language decisions that directly impact economic opportunity and democratic participation while allowing decisions on minority languages to be made at the local level. However, it is clarified that for this to be successful, local decisions cannot be allowed to undermine the policies mandated at the federal level and that "local minorities not be dominated by oppressive local majorities" (pp. 278–288). This is critical in several African countries where multilingualism in dominant local languages tends to crowd out non-dominant local languages and limit access to education and political power (Heugh et al., 2016). Amongst the Ga people, this phenomenon appears to be taking root. Such situations highlight broader issues of linguistic injustice that may be at play when examining the specific case of Gas.

Linguistic Injustice
The Ga people make up 7.1% of the population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021), and as a non-dominant ethnolinguistic group, they believe "their language is dying" (Anyidoho & Dakubu, 2008, p.154) because of Accra's cosmopolitan nature. In Ghana, 80% of Ghanaians speak Twi as a lingua franca. The "language death" that some Ga people believe to be occurring may be a byproduct of linguistic injustice in and out of the classroom. Asymmetric bilingualism is where members of one linguistic group (A) learn the language of another (B) without reciprocation (Van Parijs, 2002). When this occurs, the cost of learning is borne by one group (A) even though both groups (A and B) receive great benefits. In situations like these where free riding is evident, defined as two people (A and B) receiving the benefit of the work of one person (A), linguistic injustice occurs. Through the lens of this framework and with the understanding that linguistic justice serves as a "form of intercommunity cooperative justice" (Van Parijs, 2002), this study examines how language gives way to identity development, group formation, and understanding of self.

Researcher Positionality
As a U.S.-born Ga who unfortunately does not speak Ga, I view myself as an insider-outsider of the Ga community. As an outsider, I feared that my inability to speak Ga was a disservice to this work. Yet, as an insider, my hope is that this work uplifts a group that is often not centered in academia. That is not to say that there must be recognition from the academy to be valid but is to say that research has the potential to propel us forward—even in ways unexpected. Unlike participants, I did not attend school in Ghana, and I speak English with an American accent. Despite my Ghanaian-Haitian-American upbringing, there are dynamics of privilege at play for me to advocate for mother tongue education when I was raised fluently in a colonial tongue. Still, I argue to let the Ga language stay and live on. Nyɛhaani wɔha Ga ywiemɔ lɛ ahishi!

Methods
This study uses a qualitative approach to gain an understanding of the intersections between language, educational experiences, identity, and civic engagement in a Ga context. Since my family is Ga and I studied abroad at the University of Ghana, I connected with my network to find participants. I conducted 22 semi-structured interviews with Ga people ages 22-58 in Ghana. Eighteen interviewees were between the ages of 18-35 since this is the official categorization of youth in Ghana.[1] All collaborators attended lower primary school in Accra between 1970-2002 and 2004-onwards. While all participants spoke Ga and English, 21 interviews were conducted in English, and one was conducted in Ga with a volunteer interpreter[2] who verbally translated the consent form and questions to the participant. Age and gender diversity were considered in the sample. Snowball sampling was used with an initial convenience sampling method as collaborators who identified as Ga were chosen by the researcher and each of those

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[1] The four collaborators above 35 provided context to understand if there were differences in policy and practice between generations.
[2] As recommended by Gawlewicz (2019), the interpreter was engaged as a key informant and interviewed on aspects of their life and opinions on the research topic to make them visible and accountable in the translation process.

participants was encouraged to recommend someone to interview. Interviews lasted between 25 minutes to two hours and participants were given the option to participate in person or via Zoom.

After transcribing the audio recordings, I reached out to participants if I needed clarification on something they stated. I conducted inductive, open coding and wrote memos for each interview based on my initial impressions. I then relied on axial coding followed by selective coding, resulting in a codebook. Inductive codes like "actual Ga person" and "typical Ga" fell under the category of "Community - Others" to denote when an interviewee expressed a difference between Gas. Coding was followed up with intercoder and intracoder consistency testing by colleagues to gauge the accuracy and consistency of the codebook and promote researcher reflexivity (Joffe & Yardley, 2003). The high coder reliability, demonstrated by the agreement between coders on the same data, confirmed that the codebook was applied consistently and accurately. With this consistency, I used the codebook to classify and interpret the patterns in the data, which led to the identification and organization of the key themes and findings. Given that Ga names serve as addresses, pseudonyms are used for all participants.

Limitations
There are several limitations to the study. First, interviews were conducted primarily in English. As education levels divide the Ga community, the necessary perspectives of youth who learned in Ga as their MOI and/or youth who might have been disadvantaged by a "no vernacular" policy in their school were not captured. Second, the sampling method may have contributed to the lack of socioeconomic diversity among participants. Amongst low-, middle-, and high-income neighborhoods in Accra, most Gas populate low-income Indigenous Ga neighborhoods (Owusu & Agyei-Mensah, 2011). While questions regarding socioeconomic status were not asked explicitly, participants self-identified primarily as middle-income and were interviewed almost exclusively in English. Since social and economic mobility can be closely tied to the language that one uses to connect with their community, recruiting a more reflective range of the society's socio-economic diversity could have generated greater insights. Third, while some people knew I was Ga because of the name I was introduced to them with, others did not. This could have skewed the ways in which people felt they were and were not able to relate to me and answer the interview questions.

If You Don't Have Your Land, You Don't Have Your Heritage
Collaborators interviewed demonstrated that there is a connection between language and civic engagement. Despite policy, most participants did not learn in Ga, but rather English. Additionally, they found the Ga language, culture, and identity to be in an unstable state. They credit this to the asymmetric bilingualism they experience and the loss of heritage via land. Still, participants note that while they may be a minority group, they find great importance in community, giving back, and supporting Ga people. For a few participants, their ideas of civic activities are directly related to the promotion of the Ga people and language. Nonetheless, they speak of the roadblocks to civic engagement and their desires for change in the country.

The Status of Language
In Policy and Practice
Of the 22 participants interviewed, three started lower primary school (grade 1) between 1969–1971, 17 started between 1985–2002, and two started in 2004 or later. Whether they attended private or public institutions, 21 participants confirmed that the MOI was English, and Ga was taught as a subject, if offered at their school. Therefore, despite policy, in practice, 95% (21) of them did not use their L1, or any Ghanaian Indigenous language, as the MOI during their first three years of schooling.

Overall, 68.2% (15) of respondents noted that they could be physically punished for speaking Ga, publicly humiliated in the school compound, and/or told not to "speak vernacular" which is the term used for Indigenous languages in academic settings. For Adoley and Edith, who grew up in a predominantly Ga town called Osu and began lower primary school between 1969 and 1971, they were not permitted to speak Ga in class even though everyone in their class spoke Ga. If they did, they would have been told to speak English by the teacher. Adoley said that discipline could look like having to sweep the corridor or classroom or standing and raising one's hands. These punishments carried on three decades later as Ashitey, a dancer who began school in 2000, noted that one could receive lashes for speaking Ga in class. In Tetteh's classroom in Big Ada, 80% of his classmates were Ga, and Ga was used to explain concepts when it was clear that students were not understanding the lesson in English. He noted that this caused confusion because if one was to speak in Ga outside of Ga subject class, they would be caned. Yet, with a resistant spirit, participants noted that while punishment was possible, they did not shy away from speaking. Some were cautious but still spoke in class with other Ga speakers.

Even though Adoley expressed that initially, she did not like that she had to speak English in class because it "wasn't [her] language," she developed an appreciation for English. She noted that "it was good" because people need to learn to speak more than one language. Sowah, an undergraduate student, described learning in English as an initiation in which teachers wanted "to initiate the English language into us to be like a part of us." He described this process as "good" because it enabled him to be fluent in the language. Though some participants held differing sentiments on the effectiveness of utilizing English as the MOI, they had similar understandings of why teachers taught in English. Ashitey spoke to the impact of English in the classroom:

> So I think the teachers believed the better you're able to understand and communicate in English, the better your understanding will be for the various subjects that are being taught. So, their own idea was to push everyone to understand the language, […] it was a bit reflexive because those who really understood the language then were doing better in class than those who had a challenge understanding—not necessarily understanding English, but basically grasping everything that was being taught—were not doing so well according to the grading system. So that was a reason. So, the idea was to push everyone to speak English. Understand it. Get your tenses right. All of that.

The hierarchy of language in the classroom privileges those who are able to speak English. This promotes a power imbalance and pushes teachers to prioritize students who perform well in English over those who do not (Opoku-Amankwa, 2009). While teachers were not interviewed to gain their perspective, collaborators expressed that they would have appreciated learning in Ga. Nii, a bank employee in his early 30s, shared his disappointment in his inability to explain monetary policy in layperson's terms in Ga. I asked him if he wished he would have been able to learn core subjects in Ga to which he responded:

> Yes, why not! I think it'd be a good thing.… My language is my identity and so I should be able to understand it to the level that I can explain even the most complicated things in that language…. Imagine if we can understand things in our native languages. I'd definitely subscribe to that.

While some participants expressed that they recognized that some of their peers struggled in the classroom because of the language barrier, they also expressed that if they could do it again, they would choose to learn in Ga.

Ga Proficiency and Vitality
Since Accra is a multilingual city, I asked participants to rank their level of proficiency in all the languages they speak on a scale of one to four. One meant that they find themselves searching for words to hold a conversation, two meant that they can hold conversation and understand when others speak, three meant that they can read, write, and speak the languages, and four meant that they can talk about what they are learning or have learned in school or life.

Of the 22 participants, 21 provided a ranking for their level of proficiency in the languages they speak. Nine participants gave English the highest ranking of four and only six gave Ga the same ranking. While 21 of the interviews took place in English, eight of the participants did not include English as a language that they speak and neglected to give it a ranking. This could be attributed to the tendency for individuals to undervalue their language skills (Fisher et al., 2018). On average, participants ranked their proficiency in English a 3.75 and Ga a 3.15 out of 4, respectively. This demonstrates that even though participants see Ga to be their L1, their proficiency in the language lags behind English.

Major, a traditional leader from the Ga township Jamestown, did not provide a ranking but noted he is "very fluent" in Ga. When asked if he reads, writes, and speaks Ga well he said, "you know the Ga language when you are not used to it, when you are not doing it all the time, it becomes a problem but well, I can read […] to a certain level." Additionally, a participant who gave their Ga a rating of two also emphasized that they speak 100% fluently. This is important to note since many participants who gave themselves a ranking of three in Ga also noted that they did not know how to say words like "mango" and "tomatoes" in Ga. Akweley, an entrepreneur in her 20s, noted that when her father passed away she was unable to understand part of the funeral rites because "the Ga sounded funny in [her] ear" leading her to ask her older sibling for

translation even though Ga is their home language. Still yet, at least four participants noted that they can express themselves better in Ga than in English.

While research shows that Ga is a stable, institutional, mid-sized language (Eberhard et al., 2022), there lies a disconnect with the sentiments of Gas. In addition to expressing that Ga is "fading away" and "disappearing," a participant expressed that "we are losing our identity." One person stated that Ga is "dying" which is consistent with Anyidoho and Dakubu's (2008) overview on the relationship between language and identity, which highlighted the perception that the Ga language is dying. Four participants noted that schools are no longer teaching Ga thus barring students from learning the language in a formal setting. Since there is a perceived decline in the teaching of Ga in schools, there is a concern that there will be a new generation who does not speak the Ga language well. And considering that 81.81% (18) of participants stated that the ability to speak Ga is a central part of being a member of the Ga community, the language plays a vital community role. Due to these reasons, there are advocates for Ga to be taught in Accra schools and some participants are pushing for the vitality of the Ga language through their civic efforts.

Asymmetric Bilingualism and Land Responsibility
While 81.81% (18) of participants agreed that Ga people are united in the country, many participants found great concern with the minority status of Ga people, and the Ga language. Roughly 72.7% (16) of participants expressed concern over the loss of language and land specifically. As Addo, a participant who grew up in a historical house a few steps away from Osu Castle, said, "If you don't have your land, you don't have your heritage." His statement echoes that of anthropologist Herskovits (1962) who observed that, "some of the most widespread patterns of aboriginal culture in Sub-Saharan Africa, […] are found in the complex of beliefs and behavior involving the relationships between man and the land that nourishes him" (p.143). Major noted that the Ga language is "dicey" in Accra. He stated one main issue is that other people pretend not to speak and/or understand Ga. To him, the Ga people are the custodians of the land. As such, Major sees that they have a responsibility to promote the Ga language. In particular, he shed light on the impact of Accra's cosmopolitan nature on Ga.

From 2010-2021 the Ghanaian population of the GAR increased by 39.08% (Ghana Statistical Service 2010, 2021). While other ethnic groups saw an increase of at least 33% over the decade, Ga-Dangme people had the second lowest growth of 24.6%. Major asserted that there were more foreigners in Accra than Ga people, emphasizing the need for Gas to take a stand and endorse the Ga language. Otherwise, "their [Asantes and Northerners] language will take over ours." In the GAR, 43.7% of the population is literate in Asante Twi and 29.3% in Ga (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Given that 80% of Ghanaians country-wide speak Twi as a lingua franca, Major's fear is not uncommon. Rather, it demonstrates how Ga people experience asymmetric bilingualism, where they learn the language of another group (i.e., Asante Twi) without reciprocation from the latter group (Van Parijs, 2002). Nii explained this further when discussing interacting with street hawkers who come to Accra from other regions for economic opportunities. He noted that Ga is fading away as people refuse to speak Ga and start conversations in Twi

rather than Ga. When asked why this is the case, Nii elaborated that he believes Ga people "don't mind too much." He further explained Twi's "free riding" (Van Parijs, 2002) nature, in the sense that Ga speakers and Twi speakers can communicate because Ga speakers make an effort to speak Twi, though he feels the reverse does not happen enough.

Akweley expressed that while she does not feel a responsibility to speak Ga with others, she finds it mandatory to speak the language as a Ga and it saddens her that others initiate conversations in Twi or English. As a student at the University of Ghana, she found herself surrounded by Asante friends, none of whom spoke Ga. When she made a friend who spoke Ga and joined her friend group, she recalled that her friends would become upset and "feel threatened" by the fact that they could not understand what was being said in Ga between the two of them. This is not surprising as Akans were found to be the ethnic group least likely to tolerate diversity while Gas were found to be the ethnic group most likely to tolerate diversity at the University of Ghana (Biney et al., 2021).

Despite the asymmetric bilingualism that participants face, they expressed a sense of ownership over the land. Some expressed deep pride in the seat of government being on their land while also recognizing that parts of Accra being designated for government use and people selling their land to non-Gas, has contributed to a sentiment that Accra is not economically owned by the Ga people. This sentiment has pushed participants to care about the vitality of Ga culture, heritage, and language. Amongst participants, 68.2% (15) believe they have a responsibility to pass on the Ga language. For some, this looks like speaking the language with their kids. To participants, this is a matter of civic engagement. It is how they create a better condition to preserve themselves—their language, culture, identity—and the future of their community.

Promoting Community Engagement
Civic Engagement Acted Out
All participants deemed it important to give back to community, whether they spoke about community in an abstract way or related it directly to their family and friends—which aligns with Indigenous African citizenship (Boadu, 2016). Some participants shared that they have given back to the community by creating non-formal education programs that primarily serve vulnerable, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and/or out-of-school children—many of whom are Ga or Ga speakers. When asked about civic initiatives to improve the Ga language's vitality, participants shared numerous opportunities. Moreover, they expressed a desire to engage civically in their language on a larger scale. Adoley mentioned that she had recently heard discussions about opening a Ga library and stated she would do what she could to support the library. Edith noted that her personal contribution is in raising kids in the church. For the past 30 years, she has served as a children's service teacher. She instills "good morals" in the children in the hopes that they turn out to be "good people in their communities." Perhaps, subconsciously, she seems to adhere to a traditional African sense of social obligation and responsibility to teach youth the values and responsibilities of active participation (Busia, 1967). She teaches the children in Ga 90% of the time and teaches in English 10% of the time since all the children who attend cannot speak Ga. Nii shared his prior involvement with a non-governmental organization striving to make education more accessible to children in

coastal Ga communities. Major and Mirabelle noted that they would use television and radio to spread knowledge about the Ga community and language. It is critical to note that the civic activities put forth by participants are altruistic in nature. This builds upon the notion that if a young person is not motivated by civic initiatives, they are less likely to participate civically (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative that stakeholders implement systems that can accurately measure the civic interests of all youth without barriers (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014).

Roadblocks to Engagement
When addressing the roadblocks to civic engagement, the external efficacy of Ga youth must be considered. Participants were asked if they felt their opinions mattered to elected officials, and 63.63% (14) either expressed that they were unsure or emphatically responded, "Hell no!" At least four slightly chuckled when asked. Only 36.36% (8) stated "yes." Amongst them, one served as a traditional leader, another as a local political party chairman, one had received multiple encouragements to run for office, and one actively participates in their political party.

When asked, "if you could change one thing, what would it be?" participants listed 12 different social and political matters. Of the 22 participants, 36.36% (8) noted that they would change the mindsets and accountability of elected officials, 22.72% (5) would focus on education, and 13.63% (3) chose the mindset of citizens.

Table 1
Social and Political Change Aspirations

Desired Change	Number of Participants
Mindsets and Accountability of Officials	8
Education	5
Mindset of Citizens	3
Loss of Ga Identity	1
Awareness and Training on Ghanaian Identity	1
Economic Mobility	1
Ga Widows' Rights	1
Country of Birth	1
Political Elitism	1
Public Sanitation and Air Pollution	1
Value of Material over People	1
Taxes on Menstrual Products	1
Not sure	1

Asante (2020) notes that Ghanaians have an "attached-detachment" to the state whereby they tend to discuss national issues informally and shy away from bringing issues to state officials. These responses are critical to understanding people's confidence in the government and their willingness to participate. As demonstrated by the initiatives participants wish to be involved in and their aspiration to give back, it is evident that youth are not disinterested in civic engagement, rather they require the opportunity to fully participate as desired.

While the basics of civic participation can start in the classroom, Kotei, a secondary school teacher, noted that the current educational practices limit students. He expressed his desire to make educational institutions more practical rather than theoretical. He confirmed that the education system focuses on memorization and regurgitation and does not develop nor polish the skills students need to identify and solve societal problems. Nii shared a similar sentiment and stated that the current Ghanaian classroom does not provide students with the skills to "compete on any level in the world." He urged the government to:

> Make people feel needed, wanted, for the skills you've given them, but here's the situation where our own leaders do not even trust our own medical institutions, so they'll fall ill and travel comfortably on the taxpayers. When are we going to do something to help ourselves? And I really think it comes from the mindset. The education. We should stop teaching the kids the wrong things. It is not okay.

In response to this critique, when asked to elaborate on what he believes students should learn, he advocated for a refinement in current teaching practices so that Ghanaians can meet international standards. Similarly, when it comes to civic education specifically, scholars assert that the content delivered ought to utilize a student-centered approach to encourage meaningful engagement and critical thinking (Bajaj, 2011; Tibbitts, 2008). While students may have the ability to recall, identify, and summarize material—which aligns with the definition of "knowledge and understanding" metric given by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports' 2007 teaching syllabus for primary level citizenship education (Adams et al., 2013)—this pedagogy hinders learners from becoming active problem solvers for their communities because they are not encouraged to have conversations in and out of Ghanaian classrooms around civic engagement (Ayaaba et al., 2014). Without change and opportunities to understand citizenship education well, pupils cannot support social change activities (Owusu-Agyeman & Fourie-Malherbe, 2019). Like scholars who suggest a reintegration of "informal" civic education curricula, where teachers, principals, policymakers, and parents strengthen the civic disposition of children (Odusanya & Oni, 2019), Ashitey asserted that while the first point of contact for civic training should be at home, most of it must take place in school since learners spend much of their time there.

Discussion & Conclusion
Nkrumah wanted the world to know that the "Blackman is capable of managing his own affairs," but how is this possible when the Black person, the Ghanaian, the Ga is not using their language in school to advance in society? Previous research has explored Ghanaian language policy and civic engagement in silos. This research contributes empirical evidence on how Ga youth believe their language, culture, and heritage are dying because of migration and asymmetric bilingualism. Due to this, part of their civic responsibility lies in passing on the Ga language and engaging in civic activities that enhance the survival of the language.

As government administrations have created policies that give weight to local languages, it is a disservice for schools to not teach in a language that encourages literacy, societal participation, and breaks social barriers. Schooling serves as an avenue to raise new generations in conformity with modern forms of citizenship that are compatible with a globalizing economy (Boadu, 2015). Unfortunately, in a Ghanaian context, this is one of the reasons the hegemony of English is oftentimes supported, and there is a false discourse of "educational disutility" of Ghanaian languages (Adjetey-Nii Owoo, 2022). The labeling of Indigenous languages as "vernacular" and the punitive measures taken to ensure that students do not speak their native tongues in the classroom, begs one to consider the impacts on the development of a sense of self and on community participation. To echo Vieira (2019), English within itself is not valuable. Rather, the language's importance continues to be reinforced because of the very institutions that promote it. This is not to argue that English lacks great economic power. Rather, the belief and promotion that English is the only way to attain social and economic mobility negates the very intention behind what Ghana was meant to be.

Giving students a foundation in their L1 allows them to undergo a liberatory experience. Language is intrinsically tied to the way one sees themselves, understands their community, and moves through the world. Participants like Nii, who see their language as their identity, wish to be active citizens. His desire to explain financial policy in Ga shows he wishes to promote and serve his community. Several participants wished they had the opportunity to learn in Ga as their MOI. If, as suggested by Stilz (2009), a critical mass of people were given the opportunity to vote on such a matter and demonstrated a willingness to bear the cost of maintaining their language as a public good, it could create new opportunities for economic advancement and development. Moreover, it could remove English proficiency as a barrier to democratic participation (Anyidoho, 2018) and further promote youth's civic engagement.

While participants found their community to be their friends and families, which aligns with traditional African views of citizenship (Boadu, 2016), they expressed the challenges that exist in gaining the skills to be civically engaged. Ghanaians' "attached-detachment" style of civic engagement is seen through most of the participants' belief that their opinion does not matter to elected officials. Their wish to change the mindsets and accountability of elected officials demonstrates that the lack of trust that citizens have in the government is a barrier to civic engagement. Since Ghanaian schooling faces a reputation of being "internal colonialism," it must be revamped to give all citizens a chance at social mobility and civic participation. In turn, this will give them the skills needed to be active citizens. In understanding that, in theory, the holders of languages, and in this case, guardians of the land, have ultimate authority over what they wish to happen to an aspect of their culture, the practical implications for the lack of use of Ga and how it impacts youth engagement must be considered and examined.

In the future, it is recommended to conduct interviews in Ga to ensure that important voices are not excluded. There must be an acknowledgment that the sentiments of the Ga people have merit, especially when considered against the backdrop of the 2010 and 2021 census data. The realization of language death in the academy often comes far too late. In

the case of the Ga language, perhaps there is an opportunity to ensure that the sentiments of the people, lived realities, and educational experiences align in a manner that promotes and maintains their linguistic heritage. To enact effective change, students must have the opportunity to learn in their L1. To reach the intended goals of citizenship education, civic engagement must be barrier-free. Where possible, schools must revisit and reimagine how Indigenous ways of thinking and doing may inform movement forward. If this is neglected, then the status quo remains unchanged, and the routes that could provide education and knowledge in new ways are left untraversed.

When it comes to the field of comparative and international education, civic engagement and mother tongue education must be brought into conversation together as they inform one another. How can one deeply understand concepts of civic education when they are not permitted to the site of schooling as their full self—inclusive of their language, which participants find to be deeply intertwined with their identity? If there is truly a desire for the Black person to be capable of managing their own affairs, it must be done in a contextual manner that sees the value in utilizing the mother tongue in policy *and,* more importantly, practice.

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