Na Nga Def, Sumole or How are You?

– A Field Study Regarding Language of Instruction in the Gambia

Written by: Famata Sey
Supervisor: Ann Werner

**södertörns
högskola**

SÖDERTÖRN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

A field study was conducted in order to enquire which languages the teachers and the students were using, both during lessons and on breaks, and if and how several languages were used to instruct. Since colonialism, the Gambia has experienced many European influences, which has led to English as the official language and also the language of instruction. This means that the teachers have to teach in a language which is not their own, nor their students' native language. The phenomenon is called submersion, which has been proved to be a less successive practice. Hence, the government of today is struggling against many obstacles in order to meet the Education for All-policy, and ensure high quality education in the Gambia. However, the low achievements among the students, should not be considered solely an effect of the language of instruction, but also the methods used for teaching.

Key words:

Language of instruction, bilingual education, learning process, communication, interaction, and the Gambia.

PREFACE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABBREVATIONS

MoBSE – Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education

DoBSE – Department of Basic and Secondary Education

UNESCO – United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Mother tongue – The first language of an individual, often spoken within the family

Second language – Any language except the first language, refers not only to the second, but to any number of language in order

Local language – The language spoken in a specific geographical area, here the multiple languages spoken in the Gambia

Language of instruction – The language used for teaching in the educational system

Multicultural – A society with a variety of ethnic identities

Monolingual – Proficiency in one language only

Bilingual – Proficiency in two languages

Multilingual – Proficiency in more than two languages

Oustas – Means 'teacher' in Arabic, in this report refers to Islamic teachers

Assessment – Different methods to monitor a learner's development

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

Post-colonialism is a field within the critical theory and sociology. The term is explained as follows;

> The term 'post-colonial' can be slightly misleading. In general, it refers not, as might be expected, to the period following the independence of former colonies, but to the period that began with colonialization itself (Macey 2000, p. 304).

As many European countries have had interest in the Gambia in the past, many events since then, could be regarded as an effect of colonialism. Post-colonialism does not refer to a limited period of time, but rather an everlasting consequence, or state of mind, which should not be ignored. It is, therefore, impossible to discuss the situation in the Gambia without taking post-colonialism under consideration. The Gambia, also known as "The Smiling Coast of Africa", is an African post-colonial country where English is the official language. Yet the most frequent spoken languages are African tribal languages such as Mandingo, Fula, Wolof, and Jola (Kantorek 2006, p. 3). Consequently, English is being taught to the children at school while another language is spoken at home.

This is a bachelors' essay about language of instruction in the Gambia. It has been commissioned within the teacher training programme with an inter-cultural profile, which has contributed to the awareness of the difficulties both teachers and students might face when acting within a multicultural context. There are two main reasons why this study is relevant not only to me, but to all teachers. First, second language acquisition can be put in a Swedish context since it is currently an important topic of discussion, not only politically, but also within the profession of teaching. How should the second language acquisition and the teaching of the pupils' mother tongue be organised? Which is the most effective pedagogical practice? These questions are often discussed, hence, every input and perspective should be considered a great contribution by everyone who has experiences from multicultural and multilingual environments. Second, a teacher must always know which level of development and knowledge is current for their students. Knowing this, the teacher must plan and conduct every lesson, so that each and every student could actually learn, regardless of their individual differences. Given this opportunity I have gained an understanding about how teachers in another country, and in another context, deal with the same problems as I will most certainly come to face within my profession. It has been a great opportunity to develop my own competence.

AIMS AND OBBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to enquire if and how the local languages are being used as a complement to English, the official language, and the language of instruction in primary schools in the Gambia. In order to gather materials I have observed one school, which includes the classrooms, the school yard, and the teachers' offices. Furthermore, I have observed how the pedagogical activities were conducted during lessons. The following questions have served as my main objectives;

- How are language(s) being used to instruct during lessons and throughout the school-days?
- Which methods are used to teach subjects?
- Which are the attitudes among the teachers regarding the language(s) of instruction?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through the activities in school, every society aims to accomplish certain intentions. A teacher's professional practice, hence, become independent actions within the guidelines given (Maltén 1995, p. 16). The competence required for professional teachers includes subject knowledge, methodological teaching competence, knowledge about the students' level of development, and basic knowledge for communication and how to avert conflicts (Maltén 1995, p. 118). With this said, I will present the theoretical framework which have been used for my analysis. The topics of this presentation take under consideration language of instruction, teaching methods and the historical background of the Gambia. Language is important as it enables communication. Hence, both theories regarding language acquisition and researches on language of instruction are given account of. Thus, language, per se, does not automatically embody communication. As referred to above, Maltén, claims that the teacher needs to possess a teaching competence. The activities within each classroom should, hence, be regarded as a result of the competence of the teacher, although it must not be forgotten within which context the teacher is acting. Therefore, I will end this presentation by summarising both the educational history of the Gambia, and the curriculum frameworks which controls the action of each individual teacher.

Second Language Acquisition

The theoretical perspectives regarding second language acquisition during the 20th century has either accepted or rejected theories about language transfer. Language transfer refers to the role of the native language when learning a new language (Abrahamsson 2009, p. 236; Gass & Selinker 1994, p. 53). The thoughts which have affected the field of second language acquisition are from the fields of psychology and linguistic and their interest is how fast and how well a second language can be learnt (Gass & Selinker 1994, p. 54). Behaviourists argue that language is speech, not writing, as "normal children learn how to speak before they learn to write" and, further, that "many societies have no written language, although all societies have oral languages" (Gass & Selinker 1994, pp. 56ff.). By making a contrastive analysis, by comparing the languages, there have been attempts made to predict which areas of the new language might be difficult for the learner (Abrahamsson 2009, p. 236; Gass & Selinker 1994, p. 59). The emphasis was placed on how and when the native language were being used in the process of learning a new language (Gass & Selinker 1994, p. 89). The Monitor Model has had great influence on the field of second language acquisition. There are five hypotheses within this model; the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter (Gass & Selinker 1994, p. 144). To summarise the hypotheses they all try to determine the process of learning; whether or not the process of learning the native and the second languages are similar and if the languages, once learned, are used in the same ways and for the same purposes and which factors affect the success or failure when learning a new language (Gass & Selinker 1994, pp. 144ff.). The critique for the research on second language acquisition is that the theories do not take into consideration all the non-language influences, such as age, motivation, attitude and sociolinguistic influences, which are important factors in the learning process (Gass & Selinker 1994, p. 232). It is time consuming to learn a new language, as it is estimated to take several years to become fluent in a new language (Ball 2010, p. 14). The next section will discuss how the language of instruction affects the learning and teaching of the school curriculum.

Language of Instruction

Language is the key to communication, but in order to deliver qualitative education, there are several factors involved (Benson 2004, p. 2). There are different ways of organizing the teaching of a second language in a classroom. Immersion programs, for an example, means that the education might be monolingual and the language used in school differs from the students' mother tongue(s) (Abrahamsson 2009, pp. 188ff; Benson 2004, p. 2). Teaching through submersion, which is also a monolingual schooling, means that the childrens' mother tongues are being completely ignored

(Ball 2010, p. 17). The teacher might, therefore, be the most important, or maybe the only, source for exposure of the language of instruction within both immersion and submersion, which demands a high competence of the teacher. The teacher talk is, however, rarely adjusted to the students' level of understanding through grammatically incorrect structures and sentences, nor is it sufficiently varied to promote the development of their linguistic skills (Abrahamsson 2009, pp. 222ff). Consequently, it might take several years before the students actually understand what they are "reading". Research on language of instruction has concluded that there are several advantages of bilingual education, in contrast to monolingual teaching (Benson 2004, pp. 2ff). Hence, bilingual practices uses a language which is familiar to the students, which allow the teacher and the students to interact and create learning environments within which everyone can participate naturally. This method allows a process whereby the students can transfer their literacy skills from their first language to the second. Observational data, according to Benson (2004, p. 13), reveals differences between bilingual and non-bilingual classrooms. Whilst students in submersion programs are passive learners, bilingual students demonstrate greater self-confidence and higher motivation as they participate more often in the classroom (ibid). There are several bilingual teaching practices, but it is impossible to highlight one as better than the other as they require time, resources and commitment to be implemented. This fact has resulted in a large gap between well-intentioned policies and the actual practice (Benson 2004, p. 16). The language of instruction is not the only factor that affects the students' results in school. Therefore, it is important to adjust the teaching methods to the individual situation. An account of the teacher competence required, both in general and in multilingual contexts will be given in the next section.

Teacher Competence

According to the National Commission on Teaching and Americas Future (Menken and Holmes 2000, p. 2), the teacher is identified as the "single most important factor" for students' achievement. This statement places a large proportion of responsibility on every individual teacher. Further, multicultural classrooms offers pedagogical challenges, which adds to the requirement of high competence among teachers' (Persson 2007, pp. 131ff). The success in any education system, hence, relies on the presence of high-quality teachers (Menken and Holmes 2000, p. 1). If the teacher shares the students' linguistic and cultural background, then (s)he is better able to serve the students' needs (ibid). However, the methods used needs to be accurately adjusted to address a specific group of students. The weakness of a teaching method might be evident if the teaching is mainly based on textbooks, whereby students with reading and writing disabilities, among other learning difficulties, are unable to keep the same pace as their fellow students (Persson 2007, pp. 94ff). However, not

only children in need of special needs education could be negatively affected by a textbook-based teaching method as there are students who demands different, perhaps more practical, activities in order to learn. Further, the language of instruction affects the learning process remarkably. Therefore, it demands a great deal of courage for a teacher to claim that the educational practice might be the actual reason for a student's low achievement A teacher competent on children's special needs has the general function to offer his or her students support, stimulus, and an individually adapted teaching (Persson 2007, p. 93). However, every teacher should be offered competence to handle a variety of students during their teacher training programme. When receiving the teachers' certificate one should already know how to face the diverse reality in school (Persson 2007, p. 101). The basic competence each teacher need possess could be described as an immersed pedagogical competence to encounter all students (Persson 2007, p. 103).

The British pedagogue Mc Gregor is practically oriented within the field of teaching English as a second language and presents his experiences and ideas in *English for Life?* (2002). All English teachers should, according to him, be asking themselves the following questions: "Am I teaching my students the English they will need in the future and am I teaching them thoroughly and enjoyable?" (Mc Gregor 2002, p. 1). This could be understood as an attempt to encourage teachers to actually reflect upon which content they convey and methods they use to teach. Additionally, it will bring insight of how the students reflect upon their learning process.

Mc Gregor (ibid) claims, that most experts would agree that it is a good idea to try to make use of the processes by which the first language was being taught. Researches on language acquisition show that children learn eagerly because they are willing to communicate, and speech comes far ahead of reading and writing. Thus, in order to actually learn the child has to be exposed to the spoken form of the language. When conducting classroom teaching, the four skills of learning have to be practised during every lesson. Those are listening, speaking, reading and writing (Mc Gregor 2002, p. 3). Unfortunately teachers tend to talk too much without letting the students respond (ibid). The interaction in the classroom is, hence, made impossible since the teachers will not allow the students to participate actively during lessons. An important aim is, however, to create learning situations where students use English to talk about subjects which interests them. To teach 'English for Life', the students' skills and enjoyment in conversation has to be improved, but in most African secondary schools there are not nearly enough conversation in the classrooms (ibid). This fact is probably a general reality within the primary schools as well Confidence among the students will only be gained through constant practice and by enquiring which teaching methods the students

prefer (Mc Gregor 2002, pp. 3, 20). Hence, the space within the classroom has to be shared by the teacher in order for the students to feel encouraged to interact, and therefore, learn. The importance of students helping each other should not me underestimated. To encourage the students work together may be difficult, but can be most effective and uniting (Mc Gregor 2002, p. 9). Working in couples, or smaller groups, is one way to have the students to interact and simultaneously help each other. It does not necessarily include large tasks, but rather for them to simply communicate could be of great help for those who do not feel comfortable to address the whole class at once.

The Importance of Interactive Education

In the previous sections I have presented researches on language acquisition, language of instruction, and the impacts of an ineffective implementation of otherwise accepted teaching models. After revealing the negative outcomes of those implementations, I will hereby present a number of theories, which has been referred to worldwide. Those theories all regard communication and interaction as important cornerstone in the learning process. However, the focus is on the teacher and the need to encourage the students in order to create the ultimate learning environments.

Dewey attempted to make communication the centre of his philosophy, as he claimed that thinking, intelligence, and language can only exist through, and as a result of, communication (Biesta 2007, p. 34). Hence, individual and collective intelligence can only emerge from communication. His theory in *The child and the Curriculum regards* communication as an interaction between the child, and the curriculum (Biesta 2007, p. 41). Communication in education should, therefore, not be regarded as a transfer from teacher to student, but preferably, as a process which require participation and which result in mutual understanding (ibid). Dewey tried to enlighten the importance of allowing the students' interests into the education (Wahlström 2007, pp. 53ff). Furthermore, he was not satisfied by the fact that the childrens' experiences never came to use in school, and the experiences from school never reached the rest of the society. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the hidden curriculum, as it is more effective than the official ditto (Biesta 2007, p. 44). It is therefore important to make difference between the theoretical, and the practical realities. The theoretical frameworks are not always effectively implemented in the learning process, in spite theoretical knowledge among the teachers.

Experience-based education is considered a qualification for active learning as every human being should be regarded as a minor researcher who needs to be given the opportunity to be active and independent in order to acquire knowledge (Maltén 1995, pp. 136ff). Researches made both in

Sweden and USA show a tendency for teachers to talk almost 30 percent of the time available, further, they are likely to ask questions whose answers are obvious (Maltén 1995, p. 141). Further, the teaching methods are very traditional as they follow the curriculum and use the textbooks. The students learn by listening, reading the textbooks and doing exercises. The fact that they do their assignments and get rewarded individually inhibits interaction. If the students are able to repeat given facts during oral or written examinations, then learning is considered successful and the grade given is the reward (Maltén 1995, pp. 142, 144ff). The traditional teaching methods have been criticised for making the students passive and competitive towards each other (Maltén 1995, p. 166). Several teachers of today, however, affiliate to a more progressive approach, which considers the student as active, curious, and highly motivated to seek and create knowledge themselves (Maltén 1995, p. 167). Piaget was one of the predecessors of the debate regarding childrens' learning. He claimed (ibid) that the child have to actively meet the knowledge in order to acquire it, and it is done by using the child's interest and curiosity as an obvious starting point. As development is regarded as stimulated by external activities, the communication and interaction between teacher and student becomes very important (Maltén 1995, p. 197). The ability to communicate should be regarded both as a demand within the profession and as a virtue of empathy as there are few professions who are as dependent of communication as the teaching profession (Maltén 1995, p. 201ff).

Freire (1993, p. 53) has a similar approach as Maltén and Piaget as he claims that without inquiry and practical activities, individuals cannot be truly human. According to him (ibid), by analysing the relationship between the teacher and the students, one could discover a narrative character of it. This narrative relationship means that the teacher regards his task as one to "fill" the students with the content of his or her own narration, which is not a pedagogical approach as promoted by Freire. The learning process is in those situations becomes a one way communication, whereby only the teacher is active. Teaching by monologue, consequently, become an act of depositing as the students receive, memorize, and repeat (Dysthe 1996, p. 222). Freire comments on the "banking" system as follows;

> Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects (Freire 1993, p. 66).

The quote could be understood as a strong critique of a teaching method which is keeping the learner passive. The learners, the students, have to be active in deciding what and how to learn.

Only through invention and re-invention can knowledge emerge. This "banking" concept of education is misguiding as its characteristic is lack of creativity and the learners are regarded as ignorant (Dysthe 1996, Freire 1993). In his critique of this concept, Freire (1993, p. 57) claims, that "everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking". He further argues that "the teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her though on them (Frerie 1993, p. 58). Hence, the education has to encourage the students to take active part of their own learning processes. What the teachers know, could also be known by the students, but they have to use their own previous knowledges to find motivation to learn more.

All teaching situations involve some kind of interaction. The main difference between the dialogic and monological education, however, lies in *how* communication is used. By allowing the students to do assignments and have discussion after each lecture, the education turns from monological to dialogical (Dysthe 1996, p. 227). Freire (1993, pp. 60ff) promotes a "problem-posing" education, which, according to him, embodies communication. Through dialogue, arguments based on authority are no longer valid and students become critical investigators. It is important to offer the students challenges which are closely related to themselves and their interests in order to make them feel committed throughout the learning process.

> Only dialogue which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education (Freire 1993, pp. 73ff.).

Communication should not be underestimated. The only way to actually educate, is by allowing the object of the learning process to reflect and discuss subjects which are interesting to them as motivation is an important factor for learning. Freire can see similarities between politicians and educators. He (Freire 1993, p. 75) claims, that the reason many political and educational plans have failed is because they have all failed, or rather not bothered, to take into consideration those whom the programs have been directed to benefit. Further, he argues that the people addressed do not understand because the language used is not attuned to their situation (ibid). Once again, it is the importance of communication that is revealed. The educational plans could be curricula, whose contents and meanings are not clear and obvious for those who are supposed to learn about it. It is, therefore, important to communicate, not only the content of each subject, but also the subject of the framework within which both teachers and students are acting.

Educational History of The Gambia

In order to understand the relevance of the referrals above, one need to understand the context within which the field study was conducted. I will therefore present some general facts about, and societal understandings within, the Gambia. During colonialism, several European countries were in control over other countries worldwide. The British gained power of the Gambia during the 17th century (Goba 2007, p. 53). The trans-Atlantic slave trade, was one of the characteristic activities of colonialism in the Gambia. A consequence was the presence of different missionary groups and their aims to spread Christianity, Western education and civilization (Iliffe 1997, p. 254 . They were helped by the Akus, who were the liberated and resettled slaves, who, therefore, became the pioneers of Western education (Goba 2007, pp. 60ff;). Hence, the missionary societies produced African elites which came to play a very important role for the overall development of the colony (ibid).

It was within the field of education that the missionary work did its most outstanding achievements (Goba 2007, p. 76). The language of the colonial power, became the colonised nations' official language, and hence, education was conducted in that colonial language (Richmond 1980, p. 416). Since there were a great awareness of the different tribal languages in the Gambia, which served to prevent unity, the schools, in which they were taught reading and writing in English, and arithmetic, enabled communication across the diverse tribes (Barkindo et. al. 2006, p. 127). The Western education was, therefore, proved to be useful and therefore appreciated. Hence, "whether given by the French or the British missionaries, the education became a vehicle of communication across tribe and furthermore a pride of the recipients" (Barkindo et. al. 2006, p. 128). All over West Africa, the ex-slaves and their offspring became symbols of education as they had previously lost their various mother tongues and therefore acquired the knowledge of English (ibid). English has ever since been an important priority as it enables Gambians to further their studies overseas (Richmond 1980, p. 418).

When the Gambia became independent, in 1965, only four High Schools existed in the Gambia. The government has, however, held education as their main priority ever since by, expanding the educational vision of basic education to include the Dakar Framework for Action on EFA (DoBSE 2006, p. 2). The introduction of free basic education and feeding programs was an attempt to encourage children to attend regularly (Goba 2007, p. 147).

Basic Education in The Gambia

The basic education cycle, starting from grade 1, has been expanded from 6 to 9 years and is principally financed by the government. There is presently some development projects proceeding in an attempt to attach the Early Childhood Care to existing lower basic schools. The project is a long term strategy in order to enable children from poorer households to afford this service, which is mainly provided by the private sector (DoBSE 2006, p. 3). The problem of affordability becomes more pronounced in rural areas where poverty is more acute. Consequently children are left in the care of siblings or grandparents (ibid). This strategy also includes the provision of food to these schools by the World Food Programme. The extension of the Basic Education is challenging since it increases "the demand for quality teachers and learning materials to enhance learning achievements and outcomes" (DoBSE 2006, p. 5). The School Leaving Examinations show a low mastery of both English and Mathematics among the students (DoBSE 2006, p. 8). UNESCO's Monitoring Learning Achievements demonstrate that only 46 percent of the students in grades 3, 5 and 9 reached the minimum mark of 40 percent in the core subjects (ibid). The quality is disappointingly low in public education and some of the reasons are; the low content knowledge among the teacher trainees; that the absenteeism among both students and teachers are high; high drop-out rates and inadequate number of textbooks and other learning materials (DoBSE 2006, pp. 8ff.). Therefore, the government is striving to improve the education. The limited financial and human resources available in the education system is, however one of the biggest challenges in the attainment of the sector's objectives as the low salaries makes it difficult to attract personnel, and nonetheless, to keep them motivated within the teaching profession (DoBSE 2006, p. 12).

Curriculum Framework for Basic Education

A curriculum has many dimensions, but the curriculum framework for basic education in the Gambia should be considered as both a curriculum framework, and as practical instructions (MoBSE 2010, p. 10). The report should, therefore, be regarded as a handbook with directions on what and how to teach. The current education policy in the Gambia, advocates a provision of education whereby all students are not just attending, but participating on equal basis, and is given the opportunity to develop (MoBSE 2010, p. 15). Furthermore, the Gambia, as a multicultural society, has made it a priority not to accept discriminating actions in school, hence, multilingualism should be promoted (MoBSE 2010, pp. 15, 23). There are, however, different ways of making a school into a multilingual learning arena. How multilingualism should be implemented will be presented below.

The National Assessment Test (NAT), for grades 3 and 5, is one out of several formative assessments in order to track the progress of the students. Unfortunately these assessments have shown constant poor achievements, especially in Mathematics, Science and English (ibid). There are several aims of the education in the Gambia. Generally, the students are expected to begin the process of life-long learning in school and they should be encouraged to become creative and develop critical and analytical minds (MoBSE 2010, p. 19). At upper primary-level, grades 4 to 6, the suggested learning areas are many. Those are; English, French, Mathematics, Science, Social and Environmental Studies, Physical Education, Life Skills, National Languages, Religious Knowledge, Arabic, Creative Arts and Handicraft, Music, Home Economics and Technology and Engineering (MoBSE 2010, p. 24).

The following paragraphs will only take the suggested multilingualism under consideration, by focusing on which and how language use are suggested at upper primary level, and how the teachers are encouraged, and expected, to teach. A little space, however, will be given to the guidelines regarding religious education.

It is stated that mother tongue proficiency contributes to self-esteem and life-long achievement (MoBSE 2010, pp. 25ff). Therefore, the language of instruction should be national languages at lower primary, grades 1-3, and English at upper primary, where national languages should be taught as a subject. There has been considerations made to the students' development process as the younger students are regarded as more depending on their mother tongues in their learning processes. The students are not only expected to be able to communicate orally in their mother tongues, but also to have the writing competence (MoBSE 2010, p. 42). Both French and Arabic should be taught as foreign languages in order for the students to gain understandings about other societies. The students are expected to learn their grammar, and develop communicative skills in both languages (MoBSE 2010, p. 28). By using English and local languages to instruct during lessons, and by teaching both French and Arabic as foreign languages, the students are expected to be rather proficient in a number of languages, which is one way of implementing the guidelines of the Gambia as not only a multicultural, but additionally, a multilingual society.

Regarding teaching methods, emphasis is placed on the Learner-centered method, to meet the need of the learner, although lecture-led teaching is still regarded as a significant way of teaching (MoBSE 2010, p. 48). There are different teaching methods which should be used by the teachers in order to provide the students with alternative ways to learn. Teachers should not act as experts, but

rather encourage the students to be more active in, and responsible for, the learning process (MoBSE 2010, p. 49). Not only should the students set high standards for themselves, they need to be given opportunities, through a variety of activities, to engage and discuss school work, in order to actually reach those goals (ibid). Therefore, there are high expectations regarding the competence of the teachers. A teacher need to have several strategies, by which (s)he feels comfortable, in order to achieve understanding by the students, as they are most likely have various learning needs (MoBSE 2010, p. 50). Hence, the individual differences makes it less effective, or perhaps impossible, to use only one teaching method, one strategy, in order to teach a group of students.

There are only two sentences written about religious education in the curriculum framework. Those sentences are; "Gambia, being a secular state, religious education in school is not compulsory. Each child is allowed to attend religious lessons of their own choice in school" (MoBSE 2010, p. 37). One interpretation could be that the school is not obliged to offer religious education to their students. On the other hand, it could also mean that the students', if possible, could choose between different religions educations, for an example Islamic or Christian. The consequence if there are no alternatives could be that the students, despite the fact that religion is not compulsory, are obliged to attend the religious education offered at the specific school, no consideration taken to the religious belief of the individual student. Whether it is possible not to attend at all is not clear.

The curriculum refers to the Gambia as a multicultural society. There are, in fact, several ethnic groups in the Gambia today whom have originated from different parts of Africa. Each ethnic group have their own language and those often referred to are; Mandingo, Wolof, Jola, Fula, Serere, Serahule, Manjago and Aku (Kantorek 2006, p. 3). It is important to understand, that a general opinion, which has been confirmed through conversations in the Gambia, is that the local languages of the Gambia, those mentioned above, are regarded as lacking of a writing tradition. Hence, the curriculum framework encourages a practice which is not mastered by the teachers. However, there are presently a project in the Gambia, a co-operation between the non-governmental organisation Future in Our Hands and the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, whereby the main goal is to produce an alphabet and a nationally accepted writing policy, in order for the inhabitants of the Gambia to access their languages both orally and literary. Thus, the opinions differ regarding the writing traditions of the local languages and if they exist or not.. Some would claim that it is, already, possible to write in the local languages of the Gambia, but that dialectical varieties affect the spelling of the words.

METHOD

The methodological frameworks used during the field study will be presented in this section. I will explain the reasons for the chosen methods, how they have been implemented, and the problems and limitations I have encountered.

There are two types of methods available for academic researches, either a quantitative method whereby the researcher aim to make objective observations on a large amount of samples, or the qualitative method used within the humanistic disciplines where the hermeneutic approach claims to observe through a larger perspective (Stukát 2010, pp. 31ff).

Teachers today have to assume that one or more of their students' mother tongues differ from their own. The method used during this research is an ethnographic qualitative method as ethnography refers to all sorts of cultural studies and means descriptions of people and cultures (Arvastson & Ehn 2009, p. 19). According to Stukát (2010, p. 37) one of the most important methods within science of education is conducting interviews. However, in order to investigate the practical realities, the participant observations are more suitable, as there might be an obvious difference between what people do and what they say they do (Stukát 2010, p. 49). Social anthropology, which is an ethnographic method, produces knowledge about cultural varieties and offers methods and theoretical perspectives for exploration and understanding (Hylland Eriksen 2005, p. 17). The production of knowledge within anthropology has two steps; the field study, which yields the main data, and the analysis (Hylland Eriksen 2005, p. 66). Participant observations, which includes a wide range of approaches, is the most important method (Hylland Eriksen 2005, p. 70).

To observe in detail and to have a critical approach while analysing helps to gain more knowledge about human behaviour and increases the possibilities to formulate problems and find their solutions (Arvastson & Ehn 2009, p. 19). Alasuutari (1995, p. 13) claims that the material is always observed from a particular theoretical and methodological point of view and the analysis is only on what is 'essential' in view of the theoretical framework and particular questions asked. Therefore, the observations, or findings, should not be considered as 'results', but rather 'clues' as we try to interpret them (Alasuutari 1995, p. 39). Further, field studies conducted in complex societies demands different kinds of data than what can be gathered through observations. Those data are for an example statistics and studies of historical events (Arvastson & Ehn 2009, p. 35, Hylland

Eriksen 2005, p. 74). Before I give an account of my methods and the implementations of them, I will present my material and the school where the field study was conducted.

The School – A General Impression

Many schools in the Gambia are identical by appearance. At the school of my oservations, there were no glass-windows, but barred windows, which prevents the classrooms from getting too hot. However, it makes it impossible to isolate the sounds from the surrounding area. During lessons, for an example, we could hear the younger students singing. This fact could indeed be considered as a possible influence on the students' ability to concentrate during lessons.

The total enrolment on the school of my observations amounted up to almost 3000 students. Half of them attend in the morning, and half in the afternoon. The classes were rather big and consisted of approximately 50 students. Each classroom had a teachers' desk, a blackboard, and several tables and benches for the students, which were placed in groups of 8 or 10. One important and interesting difference between the school system in the Gambia and those in the Western parts of the world, is that the grades are not automatically connected to specific ages, but rather on previous schooling. Hence, older students will enter upper grades upon completion of their education in the lower grades.

The school yard is spacious and mainly covered with sand. A small area, however, is covered in long green grass where some students enjoyed their lunch and used to play during break. "The crocodile pool", is an area made out of stone, where the main aims within the Gambia, regarding health and education are manifested. Further, the walls of the school are carefully painted.

There were several minor buildings on the school yard, whereby one served as a kitchen. This is where the students' lunches were cooked daily and they could eat for an amount of 3 GMD per day, which is equivalent to approximately 0.75 SEK.

Each morning, and after lunch, the students have to sweep their classrooms and fetch water in a big bucket for drinking purpose, which is assumed to prevent students from leaving the classrooms if and when they need to drink.

Observations

As mentioned above, the field study is the only way to produce actual knowledge about cultural varieties. In order to carry out a field study there is a demand for physical attendance in the same context as the objects which are being observed. Further, there is always a series of decisions made in advance regarding thoroughness and details, width of perspective, time and frames for

interpretations among others (Arvastson & Ehn 2009, p. 35).

The main interest for this study has been the language(s) used and how they were used to teach. In short, I have been focusing on the the interactions during lessons, but also the use of languages in other situations in the school area. Further, I was taking into consideration which methods were used to intermediate the content of each lesson. The duration of the field study was 8 weeks, between March to May 2011. I was observing daily, Monday to Friday, during the first two weeks, and chose to observe sporadically, but not less than twice a week, the rest of the field study. Each day meant the opportunity to observe 5 lessons, and I was attending all of them those days I was present. The rest of the time was used to summarise experiences and gather complementary information needed for the enquiry. Since the very first day at the school I was moving around freely to observe, and I chose to do so during the morning shift, between 8.30 and 1.30. I was participating during lessons, where I was observing the teachers and their students. During breaks I observed the students and their interactions with each other. Additionally, the teachers' offices offered great opportunities for observations and discussions. As Arvartsson and Ehn (2009, p. 21) claims, it is not possible to merely observe. Despite the fact that I was most often passive both during lessons and in other situations which I observed, I was nevertheless, participating as my physical presence might have been affecting the people around me.

During the lesson observations I was seated by the teacher's desk in the front of the classrooms. My intention was not to interrupt the lessons, but rather observe the students and the teachers in their ordinary element. As the lessons proceeded and the objects for observation were interacting I was sporadically making notes. I was focusing on which language was used and by whom, but also in which extent the teachers and the students were interacting. The notes I made during the observations were complemented by summarised drafts made later the same day.

Conversations

During my observations several questions arose and, in order to get answers, I had to do the obvious; enquire. Accordingly to Hylland Eriksen (2005, p. 71), it is advisable to avoid formal interviews and instead try to keep lengthy conversations on the premises of the object of the conversation. Consequently, a majority of the information I gathered regarding the situation in the primary schools in the Gambia today, except from my personal observations and curricula analyse, has derived from these informal sources. However, I made an appointment for one interview as it might have been my only opportunity to meet her otherwise. The interview was not structured by using questions. As I had prepared notes necessary for the assignment, and informed my informant about my research, we could discuss the subject, only using the topics of language and teaching methods as guidelines for our conversation. I will refer to all of my personal interactions as conversations, including this interview, and furthermore, guided by the ethical principles, no personal information is revealed in this report.

Subsequent to the conversations, whether they were scheduled or informal, during which I reached new understandings of interest for my examination, I made notes whereby I summarised the most important characteristics of the conversations. These notes were later used as aids to understand the phenomena I had observed and enquired about. In order to come to certain conclusions I had to summarise each week of experiences and compare them to the previous week. This was the process where all of my experiences, from observations and conversations, were analysed through a larger perspective.

Document Analysis

Analysing the content of different documents is also a way of gathering information and seeking knowledge, and one way to process the documents is by asking oneself how much is written about the specific topic, which is the description and which parts are left unsaid (Stukát 2010, p. 53).

In order to make reliable analysis of my observations I have studied the national curriculum which sets the guidelines for the teachers in the basic education cycle. The main focus of my analysis has been how the importance of languages, both the official and the national languages, are emphasised, and which methodological frameworks they request from the teachers. My general impression of the curriculum have been summarised and presented within the *Background*. These facts serve me as a tool for analysing and to come to certain conclusions.

Material and Delimitations

Due to the ethnological methods, the material for analysis is mainly my own experiences from my observations within grade 5 at one lower basic school in the Gambia. The reason I chose grade 5 for observation depended on a number of criterion This age group is just within the qualifications of my education, at the time of my observations they were about to take their national assessment tests, but they were not about to leave lower basic for upper basic as grade 6, which adds to the students possible stress and discomfort. In consultation with the headmaster, I therefore, chose grade 5. My observations are mainly made within, 5 different classes, all in the fifth grade, at one particular school. I have, however, made a few observations both in grades 1 and 6. Additionally I have visited

other primary schools in order to get a general impression of the school situation in the Gambia. Additionally, literature about the history of the Gambia, a number of conversations held with teachers or external educators, and the national curriculum for the basic education cycle are also a part of the material I have analysed.

Furthermore I would like to clarify a few things. During my observations there was one group of teachers who stood out from the rest. Those teachers are teaching religion and Arabic as one subject combined. To name those , I will use the term 'oustas'. Oustas means 'teacher' in Arabic and is the name used specifically for these teachers in the Gambia. To clarify, oustas is not used to refer to teachers who teach Christianity or other religions.

Second, there will be no distinction made between the local languages, with an exception for Wolof. There are two main reasons for that. To begin with, Wolof is the only local language I understand, which makes it easy for me to register when and how it is being used for communication among those whom I observe. This cannot be done with the other languages, whereby I have to generalise them into a category which I will call 'local languages'. The second reason for making a distinction between Wolof and the other languages is that Wolof is the language which the staff at the school uses to communicate, when not using English. Only a few times did I observe the use of other local languages than Wolof by the teachers and in those cases they had first spoken in English, whereby they had repeated the same words in Wolof before communicating in a third language. These situations, where three languages were used to interact, only occurred during lessons or assemble,

when the information was considered of great importance by the teachers. But as I mentioned, it did not happen more than a few times throughout my weeks of observations.

As Hylland Eriksen (2005, p. 84) mentions, it is important to understand the language spoken where the field study is carried out. This has therefore, been a slight problem for me. As mentioned above, I only understand Wolof, which means that I have not been able to understand which language is spoken when not English, nor Wolof was used to communicate. During conversations between teacher-student or student-student I was unable to understand which languages were spoken. In spite that the students mainly spoke Wolof, there were occasions where other languages were used. Thus, the importance of the researcher's linguistic skills depends on the focus of the study (Hylland Eriksen 2005, p. 83). After the observations I can clearly see advantages had I chosen to have a translator. The aim of the study, however, does not make it relevant what was being said, but rather which languages, official or national, were used to communicate and teach.

Ethical Aspects

There are generally four ethical principles which need to be considered when conducting a research. Those were set up by the Research Council for Humanism and Social Science in Sweden (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002) and consist of the demands for information, consent, confidentiality, and use. These principles were followed in this study.

Prior to my arrival in the Gambia, the headmaster was informed about my study and my proposal was accepted. On arrival I visited the school personally to inform further, and verify my upcoming presence at their school. In a meeting with the headmaster, the deputy headmaster and the teachers whom I was about to observe, we agreed to the scheme by which I would accompany the different teachers.

During my observations I made my presence well known among the other teachers, and further asked for their consent when I wished to observe them during lessons. As the main focus of the study was based on the teachers, there were no need for consent by the students and their parents.

Reliability and Validity

There are certain demands for those who wish to conduct a scientific research. Within the humanistic and social sciences it is difficult, not to say impossible, for a researcher to get the same results as previous researchers have as the main aim is to understand, and if possible, chart individual or collective behaviours. There are, further, several approaches to researchers' ability to stay objective. While some regard personal values as unacceptable, some claim that it is impossible not to take them into account, and therefore, exhort for a thorough presentation and discussion about the personal influences. As long as a scientific report is liable for critique, control, and communication it could be considered scientifically acceptable (Stukát 2010, pp. 8ff).

The advantage of observing is the opportunity to gather information from "the inside", hence the researcher is given the opportunity to observe what is actually taking place (Stukát 2010, p. 51). This is important as there are often differences between theoretical guidelines and the actual practices.

The observation is, however, not merely a visual experience, but consist of a mixture of active senses, not the least the active thinking (Alasuutari 1995, p. 39). Therefore, there is a risk of getting to personally involved when conducting this method (Stukát 2010, p. 51). The observations can also change the phenomenon being studied (Alasuutari 1995, p. 39, Stukát 2010, p. 51). What have been observed during my field study can therefore only speak for that school, those teachers, and that certain period of time. The respondents might have acted differently had I not been present.

It is impossible to tell how my presence affected the outcome of the study, nevertheless is it important to reflect upon certain factors which might have affected the actions of the respondents. My Gambian heritage, in combination with my cultural values, which might easier be connected to Sweden and the Western parts of the world than to Africa and the Gambian culture, could possibly have made a difference on the attitudes I met in the field. In spite that every person I met were very positive to my presence and made me feel welcome, I experienced that there were tendencies among several individuals to convert me to Islam. Their mission might, therefore, have affected the way they approached me. This fact is rather evident considering that I was invited to attend Islamic lessons, which has, as mentioned, served as a part of my material.

During my study, I realised how highly valued the ethnic identity is within the Gambia, despite the fact that they do not discriminate people based on ethnicity nor religion. Further, the social hierarchy in the Gambia, is very distinct, both generally in the society and within the school area. Hence, it is impossible to find out whether the respondents were participating voluntarily or if they felt obligated because of a directive from the headmaster. This might have affected my field study.

The observations demand a wide range of previous knowledge, interpretations and descriptions and are controlled by our prejudices (Arvastson & Ehn 2009, p. 35). It has therefore been of great importance to reflect upon my own experiences, perspectives, and how they will come to affect the validity and reliability of the result (Arvastson & Ehn 2009, p. 114). Ethnocentrism is, however, an inevitable source of error because everything and everyone is compared to the researcher. In order to control the ethnocentrism one has to be fully aware of it (Hylland Eriksen 2005, pp. 81ff.). It is impossible to predict how the researches' own experiences will reflect upon the results of the study. Thus, I am aware that the presentation of the result, below, should not be regarded as truth, but rather as my own interpretations of what I have encountered.

RESULT

In the following sections I will give an account of the daily observations I made. The observations made during the school days have been roughly summarised, but with examples when I need to clarify something. To present my interpretations I will do so in two steps; first by stressing the language, second I will give an account of the level of the students' participation and interaction. During the field study I also had the privilege to attend meetings and workshops where only teachers and the headmaster were attending. This was a great opportunity for me since I was interested in finding answers to questions that had risen during my observations. The main question was; how do the teachers justify their teaching methods and the languages they used? Discussions concerning the language of instruction arose during these occasions. I have therefore chosen to present the meeting and the workshops in two different sections. I will also give an account of the assessment tests.

An Ordinary Day at School

Assembly

Every other day, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and on Fridays, the school days opened with an assembly. During this assembly, all the students and all teachers gathered in front of the building where the headmaster has his office. This was, as I came to understand after several participations, an opportunity for the headmaster and the teachers to announce important messages and make sure that they reached all the students. The assemblies always had the same structure; it started with a prayer held by an oustas in Arabic. When the prayer had ended the Headmaster spoke, in English, either to announce important up-coming events and dates, for an example. After the headmaster had spoken, the deputy headmaster announced his own messages, also in English. The characteristic of those messages were very similar to those of the headmaster. If any of the teachers had anything to share with the students then there was an opportunity given to do so. On those occasions when one or more teachers made any announcements, they all spoke in English. The students had to stand throughout the assemblies, which duration was approximately 15 minutes, each time. Before ending the assembly, the students read the National Anthem aloud and sang "The more we are together, the happier we be", among other songs.

The language to communicate, throughout the assemblies, was English. As I mentioned, it opened in Arabic, but the rest of the announcements were almost exclusively in English. There were, however, a few occasions whereby the announcements were communicated, not only through one, but by using three languages. For an example; once a week, every student had to bring a piece of firewood to school. The firewood were used to cook the daily lunches served at the school. In order to remind the students, the headmaster and the teachers announced which grade should bring their firewood on which specific day of the week. This specific matter, were a topic of several of the assemblies I attended, and were always communicated through English, Wolof and Mandinka. Other occasions where there were local languages used were generally before and after the Easter holidays, when the teachers requested the students to take extra precaution, bring firewood to the school for the cooking of their lunches, or when the aim was to discipline them. In those cases, they announced their messages in English, Wolof and a third, local, language. Only once did they repeat in local languages in order to address the younger students specifically, probably in order to assure their understanding.

21

Lesson

The lessons which I have been observing all had rather similar structures. As mentioned earlier, I was observing teachers in grade 5, during the morning shift. The lessons were 40 minutes long in order for all the students to be taught in each subject daily. The three teachers, whom I were observing most, were teaching in English and S.E.S, however, I was also observing the other teachers, as they were all teaching the same students. Hence, the five of them is the team of teachers who were collectively responsible for the success of that specific group of students. Further, the local guidelines in that school recommend each teacher to hand out and mark homework every day, if possible. As there were only male teachers teaching grade 5 I will, further on, refer to those teachers as 'him' when referring specifically to one teacher. There are mainly two reasons why I chose to summarise the results of my observations. Because of the absence of variety it has been difficult, and almost ludicrous, to attempt to distinguish the different subjects and teachers from one another. Further, I want to clarify that since English is the language of instruction, any referrals to interactions should be understood as communicated in English, if no other language is mentioned. I am able to summarise the lessons as follows;

Each teacher started the day in his own classroom, with his own class. Before starting the actual lesson he marked the register for the students' attendances and collected the lunch money for the following day. The lesson started when he had written the assignment on the blackboard. The text was an excerpt from the textbook and/or the teachers' handbook. The combination was often a number of sentences from the textbook, followed by exercises from the teachers' handbook. After the text was written, they read aloud from the textbooks. Sometimes they all read together, but occasionally the teacher chose one student to read one or more sentences before letting someone else read. When they came across new words, or words which were difficult for one or more students to pronounce, the teacher read the specific words repeatedly and wrote them on the blackboard. The words were then explained further in order for the students to understand when and how the new word could be used. This was one of the few occasions where Wolof and other local languages were being used during the lessons. During one lesson, for an example, the topic of the day was different ethnic groups in the Gambia, and their cultural ceremonies. The students were reading aloud from the textbook about a boy who had attended a funeral, when the teacher interrupted them. He asked for an explanation for funeral, but none of the students answered, whereby he explained in Wolof that the funeral is the ceremony held after a person had died. After the explanation, the lesson went on and the teacher were using English to instruct. Another example of occasions when local languages were being used is when conflicts occurr. Two students were

teasing each other during one lesson. The teacher who had exclusively been speaking English, immediately changed into Wolof to call on them, ask what was the matter, and encourage them to treat each other well. As the teacher were speaking Wolof, so did the students whom he were addressing. When they had returned to their seats and the lesson proceeded, the language of instruction continued to be English. If the students' assignments had not yet been collected and marked from the previous lesson, then the students' exercise books were now handed

in. Had the previous homework already been marked, they were instead encouraged to copy what was written on the blackboard before directions for the new assignment were given. The time left of the lesson, if there were any, was meant for the students to complete the assignment. Unfortunately, this structure is a best case scenario. On several occasions, the teacher did not have enough time to register attendance, collect money, go through the topic of the day, hand out marked homework, and give the students new assignments. Considering the fact that, the lessons were very sensitive to interruptions of any kind, for an example when conflicts occurred during lessons, but even, during breaks if it averted time from the following lesson , then 40 minutes were simply not enough to follow the guidelines for the structure of a lesson.

The students were generally very active and interactive with one another before, between, and after the lessons, but did hardly speak at all in the classrooms, at least not if the teacher were present. If and when they spoke to each other they did so, mostly in Wolof, but also in other local languages. When the students were addressing the teacher, often because the teacher had spoken and demanded an answer, they spoke very shortly, but nevertheless in English.

Religion - The Exception

As explained above, most lessons were almost identical except for the fact that the teachers and the students differed. But there were lessons which were not like the other lessons. Those were the lessons in religion/Arabic. The religion taught were Islam, exclusively, but at the school they referred to religion in general when referring to those lessons. The teachers for this subject, the oustases, were distinguishing themselves in two respects; they were always dressed in the traditional clothes of the Gambia, and they hardly ever spoke English. The only occasions when they spoke English were when addressing me and during staff meetings. However, not all of the oustases bothered to speak English to colleagues, which made the conversations very interesting. I will get back to those situations after presenting my experiences during the lessons.

During my field study, I had a few opportunities to observe lessons held in Islam. I was either

invited by the teacher or was observing another teacher, whereby an oustas entered the classroom to have a short lesson in Islam. Whether or not those short lessons were scheduled or not, never came to my understanding, but nevertheless was it a privilege to attend those lessons as I were then given the opportunity to observe something which were different from the other lessons. All these lessons were opened in the same way; as soon as the oustas entered, all the students greeted him in Arabic, whereby he started to pray. The only variations during these lessons were whether they did repeat parts of the Quran the whole lesson, or if the oustas had a moral message to share. If they were merely praying they were repeating specific parts throughout the lessons. In these cases they spoke only Arabic. When the oustas had a specific topic concerning the religious and human moral, he spoke Wolof. Not even once during these lessons did any of the oustases speak English. Only if and when addressing me did they speak English.

At one occasion, there was a short 'meeting' held on the school yard The deputy headmaster and a few teachers were present, and among them an oustas. They were discussing some practicalities regarding the monthly assessment test, which was soon coming up. As the meeting went on they all contributed to the discussion, when something interesting happened; the deputy headmaster had spoken and the others were discussing the matter in English when the oustas started to speak in Wolof. The language to communicate automatically changed into Wolof as the others replied. When the discussion in the group of teachers continued, there were now two smaller groups discussing two different topics. Both groups were using Wolof when one group, the one which did not include the oustas, changed language back to English. This seemed to be done without them reflecting on it.

Lunch Breaks

The only breaks the students had were one whereby they had their lunches. Hence, there were no breaks between every lesson, but only one break each day. During the lunch breaks, the students became completely different beings, compared to during lessons. They were active and seemed happy as they played and laughed. There were a lot of teasing and play-fighting, among both girls and boys. My observations made during the breaks were mostly from a distance, whereby I either moved across the school yard or stood on the veranda on the second floor, simply enjoying the scene. There were, of course, a lot of conversations going on during these periods between classes. To generalise, the students rarely or never spoke English to one another. When speaking to a teacher, the language to communicate depended on the subject of the conversation. They used English only and when speaking about something which was directly linked to the school, lesson and teaching. When discussing more private subjects, for an example when they were just

24

chattering freely or teasing the teacher, they were speaking Wolof or another local language. In the same way, the teacher used English to communicate when the subject concerned the school, but spoke Wolof or local languages in other cases. This fact was obvious when teachers spoke to each other during breaks. Whenever there were anything, which was a direct matter to the school and the staff, the language to communicate was English. Otherwise, except when addressing me or when I was taking active part in a conversation, they used Wolof or local languages.

Workshop

The workshop was held for the teachers, by the teachers, in order for them to share and develop their competences and creativities. On the agenda was an introduction of different teaching methods and resource management among other more general topics. English was spoken throughout the workshop, except for in those cases where the teachers were teasing and mocking each other whereby they spoke Wolof. During the workshop, an interesting discussion arose regarding the language of instruction. One teacher pointed to the fact that some students are unable to understand the full content of a lesson, when held exclusively in English, whereby his strong opinion is that of promoting an extended use of local languages in the classroom. Thus, he points out that local languages should be used as teaching aids and not as languages of instruction throughout the whole lessons. His argument was opposed on by another teacher, whom referred to the curriculum which requests the strict use of English as the language of instruction.

Unfortunately, the discussion encouraged by further arguments and contributions. I therefore decided to enquire about the opposing teacher's attitude about the language of instruction. When I asked whether he, too, had observed low English proficiency among his students , and consequently a difficulty among his students to acquire the content of his subject, he assured me that he had. Nevertheless, did he insist on the importance of not using local languages for the students to better understand, merely because he had understood the curriculum as not allowing the teachers to do it.

During the second workshop, the main purpose was to educate "untrained teachers", teachers who had not gone through the teacher training programme. The workshop was to proceed for four days, but unfortunately, I could only attend one day. During that day, however, there was a member of the Ministry of State for Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) present, who held a lecture about the content of the new curriculum. I learned that the general content of the workshop was different teaching methods, how to enhance creativity, how to register and make reports throughout the school days and the terms, which is an important task and must not be forgotten.

Meeting

On the last day of school, before the two weeks long Easter holiday, all the students had to attend in the morning since the teachers had an obligatory meeting scheduled afterwards. All students met in the classroom where they had loud conversations in local languages with one another. Meanwhile the teachers submitted and summarised the statistics of the students' attendances throughout the second term. The teachers interacted with colleagues in English, but shifted to Wolof occasionally. On this specific day, the teachers' interactions with the students were exclusively conducted through Wolof or other local languages.

All the teachers employed at the school were obliged to attend the meeting. This end-of-term-meeting had a purpose of summarising the term and to set new rules and regulations for the up-coming term. Almost instantly after the meeting had opened, a very interesting discussion arose on the topic of the quality of the teaching. This discussion was maintained mainly by the head master, the deputy head master, and two teachers. One of the teachers claimed that he had observed that his students' performances in English were very poor. According to him, only 5 students, out of 40, were able to read in English, which is far from satisfactory. Further, he shared with us that his students have no problems repeating after him, but that independent reading seem to be problematic for them. Consequently, he always had to select the difficult words and practice reading and pronouncing them aloud in class. Other teachers in the higher grades confirmed this unsatisfactory low English proficiency among their student. There were requests for alternative methods in order to improve the students' reading skills.

The topic, therefore, shifted from reading skills to test results, which show a very low general achievement, as well. All teachers were asked to work actively towards improved reading and speaking skills of the students in the next school term, since, according to the deputy head master, it only takes one less ambitious teacher in order to maintain the poor results. Also the teachers were encouraged to improve their own English proficiencies. The deputy headmaster commented on the poor linguistic skills of some members of the staff and spoke about the importance of frequent reading among other activities. It is not enough to have received a certificate several years ago, if one does not work actively to maintain and improve the academic intelligence of a qualified teacher. It is incorrect to blame the students for the poor achievements as the teachers are responsible for the quality assurance. There were some inputs however, where the students' parents were discussed. The topic concerned whether or not the parents should participate actively in their own children's schooling. The opinion among the teachers, but expressed mainly by one, was that the parents also

have to "invest" or "spend". These expressions were not referring to an economic investment, but rather a matter of offering help with homework besides the obligatory encouragement, which unfortunately is not considered an obvious matter. It was however, discussed that not all the parents are competent and literate whereby they, themselves have to find someone to help their children instead of placing the entire burden on the teachers. The meeting was generally held in English. Thus, when the teachers were humouring and teasing each other, or when the topic was of a more serious character they spoke Wolof. One interesting point however, is that when the oustases spoke, they used Wolof almost exclusively. It is important, however, to clarify that these of my observation is mainly done of a few, and not all of the oustases.

Assessment

There were mock examinations for grades 3, 5 and 6 for a period of two days. The general knowledge in the four core subjects, English, mathematics, science and social and environmental studies were about to be assessed. During these days, no other students than those who were taking the examinations, were present at school as the exams were held in the mornings. I will give an account of my general observations starting with the first day during which grades 3 and 5 were present. As there were not enough teachers to supervise in every classroom I offered, or was assigned, to help out in one of the classrooms. I was glad to help even though I realised it minimised my opportunities to observe the interactions between the students and their teachers, as I was not allowed to leave the classroom. Nevertheless was I able to do some minor observations due to the fact that the teachers both stopped by to assist me occasionally and also came to make corrections of mistakes found on the different examination sheets.

The overall atmosphere among the students was very calm during this day. There were no running around and they were speaking to each other very quiet. Never even once did I hear English being spoken by one student to another. The teachers, on the other hand, spoke English to each other throughout the day both to other teachers and to their students. While the students were calculating and writing, one teacher entered my classroom. He walked around looking at the students' answer sheets to make sure that they had written their index numbers correctly and that their names were in the right place and in right order, surname first. As mistakes were discovered, he had to go through the instructions on how to fill in the answer sheets, once again. This stole the focus from the examination as the task consumed several minutes. Throughout the day there were teachers passing by to notify us about newly discovered mistakes in the examination sheets and to correct them. The consequence of these mistakes, or rather the late discovery about them, is that less time was left for

the students to actually focus on the questions of the assessment tests. Throughout the day, I could hear Wolof spoken once, when a teacher tried to handle a situation which had risen. I never realised what had happened, and what was the reason for the confusion, and the situation were soon under control.

Summary

During the school days, both teachers and students spoke Wolof or other local languages in informal situations, when the subject of the conversation did not concern the school. However, for obvious reasons, I was always addressed in English. The lessons were an arena in which English was the exclusive language of instruction by most teachers and students, with an exception for the oustases. The oustases, on the contrary, almost exclusively spoke Wolof or local languages during informal conversations, and were teaching in either Arabic or Wolof. In spite the fact that many teachers had observed the low mastering in English among their students, they did not use local languages to explain, except from a few occasions.

All lessons were lecture led, whereby the teacher speaks most of the time and the students speak only when spoken to. The general teaching method consisted of the following components of each lesson; the teachers spoke, read aloud and marked the assignments, while the students sat silently listening and, generally, very passive.

On occasions when only teachers were present, there were discussions about the poor results of the assessment tests. Furthermore, the teachers discussed the use of local languages and different teaching methods. Nevertheless, there were few active attempts made by the teachers to change the situations in the classrooms. During the assessment tests, it became obvious that the students did not understand all the instructions given to them, prior nor during the exams. Neither did the teachers seem well prepared for the lack of comprehension among the students which resulted in a chaotic day. The findings of these observations will be placed in a scientific context in the following section. The analysis will provide the understandings necessary in order to draw conclusions.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

This analysis will be is divided into three sections; language of instruction, teaching methods, and the teachers' attitudes, in order to answer the questions which served as my main objectives during the field study. It is, however, rather difficult to make a distinction between the language of instruction and teaching methods as communication and interaction are two factors which are depending on the other and which, in turn, is depending on a sufficient language proficiency. I will summarise my conclusions at the end of this section, before giving suggestions for further research.

Language of Instruction

The curriculum framework has promoted the use of local languages as medium of instruction (MoBSE 2010, pp. 24ff). The languages of instruction during the observations were either in English, Wolof, or Arabic. The teachers can be divided into a group who used English almost exclusively, and a group who were not using English at all. However, the general teaching practice could therefore be considered as bilingual, but to a limited extent and by a small group of teachers, as one language were used almost exclusively during most of the lessons observed. There were only few occasions when other languages than English was used during the lessons in English and S.E.S, the subjects where most of my observations were conducted, but also in the other core subjects. Even during the assembly were there only occasional moments when they were using local languages. However, there were always an opening prayer in Arabic. Submersion, the enforcement of a foreign language as language of instruction makes it more difficult for the pupils to learn and the learning process is prolonged compared to if the language of instruction had been their mother tongue (Ball 2010, p. 14, 17; Benson 2004, pp. 2ff). My observations during the assessment tests revealed that the students had difficulties to understand the directions given to them, as they were communicated in English. This leads me to the conclusion that the language could be one of the reasons for the low performances during the assessments, as the students have to take the tests in a language which is not their mother tongue, and perhaps not sufficiently mastered. Therefore, since both teachers and students speak one or more local languages more fluently than English, there would be several advantages if they would extend the use of one or more local languages in the teaching practise.

Wolof and Arabic were spoken by the oustases, hence, their educational practice was, indeed, bilingual. To fully implement a bilingual teaching method, however, there is a need to, at some point, transfer that knowledge into the foreign language (Benson 2004, pp. 2ff). This was done

throughout each lessons as they were combining the languages. In a school with a relatively large number of staff members, everyone except the oustases, spoke English during lessons. Not only were they speaking Wolof when teaching, additionally they spoke Wolof or other local languages with students and colleagues throughout the school days. They replied in Wolof even when the language spoken to them was English. They did it without anyone commenting on this fact. Their role to play within the education system, is probably to teach the students about the religion and moral responsibilities. However, from a pedagogical perspective, this small group of teachers are the only ones who follow the directions regarding the implementation of a bilingual or multilingual schooling practice, which has resulted in high comprehension of the subject content among the students. This fact is demonstrated through the performances of the assessment tests. The curriculum framework hold it as an important competence to write in the mother tongue (MoBSE 2010, p. 42). There are, however, societies who have no written language (Gass & Selinker 1993, pp. 56ff). It remains unclear whether the teachers and the oustases know how to read and write in any of the local languages, as there are different opinions regarding the writing traditions of the local languages in the Gambia. It is impossible to decide whether the literary proficiency in a local language could be important for the success of the students' learning, as the oustases' bilingual education has already proved to be more successful than the other teaching practises. Nevertheless, FIOH and MoBSE, is aiming to produce an alphabet for the Gambian inhabitants to access their languages, not only orally, but also in writing. The final product is likely to be highly appreciated, especially within the branch of education. When completed and ready for implementation and use, there will no longer be any valid excuses for not using the local languages as language of instruction. Perhaps, the teachers will find it more easy to use local languages if they learn how to write in those languages. Hence, at present, the teachers seemed rather dependant on the ability to write which ever fact they wanted to convey.

The observations made during the breaks prove that there are no problems with the students' interactive skills, given the fact that they can communicate in a language which makes them feel comfortable. As the students left the classrooms, and had the chance to interact on their own premises, they did so without limitations both regarding language use and social abilities. However, they seem not to be able to communicate and interact in the same way during lessons. The reason may be the language of instruction which serves to prevent them from natural conversations (Benson 2004, pp. 2ff). My conclusion is, therefore, that the lack of communication during lessons is a consequence of the language, English, which they are constrained to use.

Teaching Methods

The overall purpose for education has always been pending depending on historical epoch and whom you ask. The curriculum framework reveals that the purpose for education in the Gambia is to promote lifelong learning, encourage creativity and the development of a critical and analytical mind (MoBSE 2010, p. 19). A teacher needs competence to encounter the variety of needs among his students and hence, be responsible for the success of the students (Menken & Holmes 2000, p. 1; Persson 2007, p.103). However, the methods for teaching at this specific school were lecture-led and there were no variety of learning activities except from reading, repeating and copying texts from the blackboard. The teaching were based textbook, which is less effective for the students' learning (Persson 2007, pp. 93ff). The teachers were focusing on the structure of the lessons rather than on the students and their learning activities. In order to achieve any goals regarding learning, the students have to take a more active part in the learning process (Dysthe 1996, p. 227; Freire 1993, pp. 60ff; Maltén 1995, pp. 136ff, 197). Furthermore, communication and interaction is the cornerstone of the learning process (Biesta 2007, p. 34). In order to learn, the students have to actively participate in the different steps towards knowledge. This is not done automatically merely through listening. A learner of English as a second language have to practice listening, speaking, reading, *and* writing during every lesson (Mc Gregor 2002, p. 3). Several researches, however, has shown that the teachers tend to talk more than necessary during lessons (Dysthe 1996, p ;Freire 1993, p. 53; Maltén 1995, p. 14; Mc Gregor 2002, p. 3). Similarly, my findings show that the interactions during the lessons were strictly limited. There were little, not to say no opportunities for the students to interact and discuss the assignments with one another. Not once during the lessons were the students encouraged by the teacher to ask each other if they did not understand, to complete and compare the results of their assignments, or to discuss any topics at all. Any interaction during the lessons was controlled by the teacher, placing him in a constant centre-of-attention position. This situation means that the teaching could actually have double negative effects on the students as they are not able to communicate properly and, additionally, are not encouraged to participate actively during the lessons in order to excel their communicative skills. However, it is impossible to tell which is the main reason for the lack of activity. I cannot exclude the language as a reason, as it is most likely to be the reason for the lecture-led teaching practice. I am aware of the fact that the situation in the Gambia, brings to attention the difficulties to actually carry out certain practices. For an example could it be considered as quite complicated to encourage a conversation on certain topics, considering the low mastery of English among the students. However, in order for the students to develop their English proficiency they have to be given every opportunity to practise. Hence, the everyday practise, promoted by Mc Gregor (2002, p. 3), must not be

underestimated. My experiences could, therefore, be regarded as a proof of the hidden curriculum and its effects on this specific school, as it is said to be more effective than the official curriculum (Biesta 2007, p. 44). Nevertheless, the curriculum framework is rather new and, hence, might not have reached out to the classrooms yet.

Teachers' Attitudes

As observed during the workshop, there were different attitudes revealed on which language should be used to teach. The teacher who insisted on solely using English to instruct, referred to the curriculum. However, curriculum framework promotes a multilingual education and, hence, the use of several languages for teaching. The new guidelines suggests the use of local languages as language of instruction during the early school years and as a subject at the upper primary-level (MoBSE 2010, pp. 24ff). One reason for this confusion might be that the curriculum has been rewritten and, hence, the content of it defers from the previous suggestions regarding language of instruction. This leads me to the conclusion that the teachers' awareness about the new curriculum framework had not been updated. Perhaps they did not know that a multilingual education is now a suggested pedagogical approach.

The workshops held for the teachers could, therefore, be regarded as an active attempt to make the teachers aware of the new curriculum and the instructions given through it, in order to educate the teachers about alternative teaching methods, which places the student in the centre and encourages the teacher to meet the need of each individual student. The *hidden* curriculum, which refers to the very actions carried out within the school area (MoBSE 2010, p. 10) should, nevertheless, be underestimated. In spite of what is written in the curriculum, the teachers actions manifest an understanding, by which their own interpretations and attitudes affect the possibilities at the specific school. The hidden curriculum undermines and prolongs the implementation of the official curriculum as it is a time-consuming process to change peoples' habits (Biesta 2007, p. 44). Hence, the importance of enquiring about the practices within the schools, and not merely the curriculum who try to control them, becomes obvious. I conclude from my observations that the school management, worked very actively in order to reach out to the teachers in order to help them change their teaching methods so that they will adjust their teaching to the students.. To meet the students' individual needs must also include assistance to acquire English, in order to learn the general subject content.

Discussion

The teaching practice at the school of the field study, were bilingual in that sense that each teacher, at least occasionally, used more than one language to teach. However, the different arenas for discussion between the teachers, revealed that there were different opinions on how to use local languages, as a complement to English. However, my observations revealed that the teachers could have used local languages more frequently to excel the learning process of the students. The teaching methods did not enhance the learning process, as all lessons were lecture-led and the students were kept passive. My experiences from the field study, however, conform to similar researches, which results has demonstrated that there need to be certain changes both regarding language of instruction and teaching methods in order to reach maximum learning potential among the students. To motivate the students during their learning process, teachers have to take them under consideration when planning the lessons. It is very important to let the students become active during lessons as they need to interact in order to develop their English skills. Practice and success will add to their motivation and self-esteem. Fortunately, there were several attempts at the school to improve the teacher competence, and additionally, the quality of the education. There were, however, no noticeable differences in the teachers' teaching methods, after the workshops. Nevertheless, as it is a project under process to change the teaching methods of all teachers, they must be given time to actually implement the new curriculum. At present, with English as language of instruction in combination with teaching methods which does not encourage the students to use the language skills they have acquired this far, the performances on the assessment tests will probably not improve. Therefore, the students need to be given the opportunity to speak up and act out. Without communication and interaction in the classrooms, the school has difficulties to offer high quality education, improve the students' performances, and hence, meet the Education for All-policies.

FURTHER RESEARCH

It would be of great interest to enquire if the results of this study are applicable on other schools in the Gambia, but also in Sweden or other parts of the world. Hence, it would be necessary to conduct a field study similar to this in order to find out whether or not the language of instruction, the second language acquisition, and the teaching methods are used in similar ways in other schools. The result would not only be of great interest for educationalists within the Gambia, but to anyone interested in language and teaching.

REFERENCES

Alasuutari, Pertti (1995). *Researching culture: qualitative method and cultural studies.* London: Sage.

Arvastson, Gösta & Ehn, Billy (2009). *Etnografiska observationer (red).* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Ball, Jessica (2010). *Enhancing learning of children from diverse language backgrounds: Mother tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in the early years*. UNESCO.

Barkindo, B, Omolewa, M, and Maduakor, E.N (2006). *Africa and the Wider World. West and North Africa Since 1800*. Ikeja: Longman Nigeria Plc.

Benson, Carole (2004). "Paper commissioned for the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, The Quality Imperative*." Stockholm University.

Biesta, Gert (2007). "Den kommunikativa vändningen I Deweys *Demokrati och utbildning*". *Utbildning som kommunikation. Deliberativa samtal som möjlighet (red).* Uddevalla: Daidalos AB.

Department of State for Basic and Secondary Education (2006). *Sector Report.* (Electronic). Available: <http://edugambia.gm/index.php?option=com_rokdownloads&view=file&Itemid=52&id=120:sectorreport2006> (2011-05-28)

Dysthe, Olga (1996). *Det flerstämmiga klassrummet*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Gass, Susan M.& Selinker, Larry (1994). *Second Language Acquisition. An Introductory Course.* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Assosiates, Inc.

Goba, Michael (2007). *Mastering Gambian History.* Fouray Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

Hylland Eriksen, Thomas (2005). *Vad är socialantropologi?* Stockholm : Natur och kultur.

Iliffe, John (1997). *Afrika – Historien om en kontinent*. Falun: AIT Scandbook AB.

Kantorek, Nyima (2006). *Wolof Dictionary & Phrasebook*. New York: Hippocrene Books Inc.

Macey, David (2000). *Dictionary of Critical Theory*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

McGregor, Gordon P. (2002). *English for Life?: Teaching English as a Second Language in Sub-Saharan Africa with Reference to Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

Menken, Kate & Holmes, Philippe (2000). "Ensuring English Language Learners' Success: Balancing Teacher Quantity with Quality". *NCBE (Electronic)*. Available: www.ncbe.gwu.edu

Ministry of State for Basic and Secondary Education (2010). *Curriculum Framework for Basic Education (Grades 1-9)*.

Sjögren, Annick (2000). "Skola och utbildning ur et etnologiskt perspektiv". *Utbildning i det mångkulturella samhället*, vol. 2.Göteborgs Universitet: Symposium.

Stukát, Staffan (2010). *Att skriva examensarbete inom utbildningsvetenskap*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Vetenskapsrådet (2002). *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning.* Elanders Gotab.

Wahlström, Ninni (2007). "Att erfara är att lära – ibland. En diskussion utifrån Deweys experience-begrepp". *Utbildning som kommunikation. Deliberativa samtal som möjlighet (red).* Uddevalla: Daidalos AB.