

Integrating “Connecting Classrooms” as a Tool for the British Council’s Cultural Policy in Ghana

Intégration de “Connecting Classrooms” comme outil pour la politique culturelle du British Council au Ghana

دمج برنامج "توصيل الفصول الدراسية" كأداة للسياسة الثقافية للمجلس الثقافي البريطاني في غانا

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Submission date :26/01/2020

Acceptance date: 09/07/2020

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Published date :20/09/2021

-Abstract: This paper centers on the British Council’s cultural policy through English language teaching and its impact in the Ghanaian schools through the International Schools Partnerships Programmes between the UK and Ghana. This paper aims to shed light on the influence of the British language and culture with the implementation of the British Council “Connecting Classrooms” Programme in the Ghanaian schools. To conduct this research, we relied on different case studies, investigations, and statistics for a clear understanding of the implementation and effectiveness of the “Connecting Classrooms Programme” in Ghana. The findings of this study determined that there is an ongoing influence of the British Council’s cultural policy through the application of the “Connecting Classrooms” Programme in which English is used and considered as one of the core points of the project. Thus, English language teaching in this programme is used to enhance Ghanaian students’ English language performance and support the intercultural dialogue through cultural activities with their partners in UK schools.

- **Keywords:** British Council- Connecting Classrooms- cultural policy- English Language Teaching- Ghana- international partnerships.

- **Résumé:** Cet article est dédié à l’étude de la politique culturelle du British Council à propos de l’enseignement de la langue anglaise et son impact dans les écoles

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Ghanéennes, à travers les programmes de partenariats internationaux entre le Royaume-Uni et le Ghana. Cet article vise à mettre en lumière l'influence de la langue et de la culture britanniques avec la mise en œuvre du programme « Connecting Classrooms » du British Council dans les écoles ghanéennes. Pour mener cette recherche, nous nous sommes appuyés sur différentes études de cas, enquêtes et statistiques pour une compréhension claire de la mise en œuvre et de l'efficacité du « Programme de classes connectées » au Ghana. Les résultats de cette étude ont déterminé qu'il existe une influence continue de la politique culturelle du British Council à travers l'application du programme « Connecting Classrooms » dans lequel l'anglais est utilisé et considéré comme l'un des points centraux du projet. Ainsi, l'enseignement de la langue anglaise dans ce programme est utilisé pour améliorer les performances en langue anglaise des élèves ghanéens et soutenir le dialogue interculturel à travers des activités culturelles avec leurs partenaires dans les écoles britanniques.

Mots-clés: British Council- Connecting Classrooms-langue anglaise- le Ghana

- الملخص: تهتم هذه الورقة البحثية بالسياسة الثقافية للمجلس الثقافي البريطاني من خلال تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية وتأثيرها في مدارس غانا من خلال برامج شراكات المدارس الدولية بين المملكة المتحدة وغانا من خلال تسليط الضوء على تأثير اللغة والثقافة البريطانية في تنفيذ برنامج "توصيل الفصول" بالمجلس الثقافي البريطاني في المدارس الغانية ولتحقيق ذلك، اعتمدنا على دراسات سابقة في هذا المجال والتحقيقات والإحصاءات المتعلقة بهذا الجانب لفهم أوضح لتنفيذ وفعالية هذا البرنامج المطبق في غانا. حيث تبين في هذه الدراسة وجود تأثير مستمر للسياسة الثقافية للمجلس الثقافي البريطاني من خلال تطبيق برنامج "توصيل الفصول الدراسية" الذي تستخدم فيه اللغة الإنجليزية التي تعتبر واحدة من النقاط الأساسية للمشروع. وعليه، يتم استخدام تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في هذا البرنامج لتعزيز أداء اللغة الإنجليزية للطلاب الغانيين ودعم الحوار بين الثقافات من خلال الأنشطة الثقافية مع شركائهم في مدارس المملكة المتحدة. - الكلمات المفتاحية: المجلس الثقافي البريطاني- برنامج "توصيل الفصول الدراسية"- غانا- تدريس اللغة الانجليزية.

- Introduction:

British cultural policy is considered to be one of the most important mechanisms of the powerful British Empire. It served the cultural, economic and political interests of the British through different policies, most importantly through the teaching of English and education. It largely contributed to the ruling and maintenance of the British legacy in its colonies during and after independence.

In the post-independence, Britain kept a lingering relationship with its former colonies mainly through economic, political and mainly cultural relationships, especially the countries which joined the Commonwealth of Nations. One of the most important programmes and institutions established by the British government are English Language Teaching (ELT) and the British Council. This institution included within the British cultural policy helped in the widespread of the English language and culture.

British cultural influence still has an impact on its former colonies in the age of globalization, however, the U.S cultural programmes are considered as the heart of globalization, thus this may have a negative impact on the British cultural policy and its influence mainly on its former colonies. This would pose an important question on the extent to which Britain is still alive in terms of the cultural policy and the teaching of English in Ghana in the face of the globalization, and the extent to which cultural influence of Britain in this country is also apparent. Central to this present research work is the question: To what extent is there a continuation of British cultural policy in its former colony Ghana?

-Literature Review:

The British Council has been celebrating 80 years of its establishment in its former colonies and other countries through establishing offices in more than 100 countries. Many studies have shown the development and influence of the British Council since its establishment in 1934 through discussing its cultural activities namely in English Language Teaching. For instance, Ali Fisher looks into the history of

the British Council in his work “ A Story of Engagement: The British Council 1934-2009”, in which he traces the changes and the advances in the way the organization works in more than 220 offices in 110 countries worldwide with the development of the staff in more than 7,400 employees in which 15 percent are in the UK and 85 percent in other countries and territories (p.2). In the same vein, Alice Byrne (2013) traced the evolution of the British Council in her work *The British Council and the British World, 1939-1954*, in her work Byrne has discussed the shifts and continuities of the British Council Policies and activities since its establishment until the period of the Second World War (pp.21-34).

In its reports, the British Council have successfully discussed the development of its cultural activities with a focus on the Commonwealth countries and the countries which never colonized by Britain, mainly in English Language Teaching, education, and arts. One of the programmes of the British Council is Connecting Classrooms, this latter is introduced to help learners to engage in intercultural dialogue with their peers in the U.K, the aim of this programme is to reach more than 1.5 million people in the U.K and Africa (Sub-Saharan African and Commonwealth countries). (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2007).

Connecting Classrooms is a global educational programme that reached different schools with the objective of spreading ELT, however, the British Council cultural influence mainly in its activities such as Connecting Classrooms programme have not been studied in details in terms of its cultural influence in Ghana. Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine the ongoing British cultural influence in its former colonies like Ghana in the face of Globalization, chiefly in the impact of English language teaching (ELT).

-The Study Aim:

The main objective of this study is to find whether British cultural policy still affects the cultures of its former colony Ghana and to explore the degree of influence of British cultural influence in Ghana in terms of implementing “Connecting

Classrooms” programme in the Ghanaian schools as a part of the international partnerships between the UK and Ghana. On the other hand, the researcher aims at solving the issue of the dominance of the English language and its impact on other languages because, the researcher belongs to a country that was colonized by another country and still suffering from the left outs mainly the linguistic and cultural ones. Thus, the research in the context of British colonization will help the researcher to understand one`s society by delving deeply in the issue of the colonial language and its impact in the former colonies.

1- Country Overview:

Ghana, an old African empire that is situated in the West of Africa, was known as the Gold Coast (Arowolo, 2010, p.6; Nkrumah, 2001, p.6). This country shares the boundaries with Burkina Faso on the North, Togo on the East, Ivory Coast on the West, and the Gulf of Guinea on the South. Ghana was a former British colony that gained independence in the 1960s. English is the official language in Ghana, and there are many local languages used by the Ghanaians (Briggs, pp. 2-3; 1998 and Ansah, 2014, p. 2). British educational systems highly influenced Ghanaian languages and cultures due to the adaptation of British Western styles. As a result, English became the medium of instruction in Ghana through English language teaching in schools, and the British culture was deeply rooted in Ghana due to British colonization (Owu- Ewie, 2006, pp. 77-80). After independence, English was still taught in schools, and new educational projects were introduced by the British for an effective widespread of the teaching of English language and culture. This was effectuated by several institutions, including the British Council, as the ultimate instrument of the British cultural diplomacy in Ghana.

1-1-ELT in Ghana:

English language teaching is inextricably interwoven with the history of the British Empire in which it evolved along with the empire. English language was taught in the British colonies and was adopted in their educational systems even after

independence. Ghana, the former British colony, is still using English as a medium of instruction after decades of freedom due to historical factors such as British Colonization.

English Language Teaching, as it pertains in Ghana, seems to be historical in its origin. Scholars point to the fact that after British colonization was over, there was a continuing legacy of English language and culture for decades in Ghanaian educational systems as the only medium of instruction and as the official language in Ghana. In post-independence Ghana, English managed to remain the official language, precisely the medium of instruction for all levels (Ansah, 2014, p. 2) and this was achieved through including different methods, programs, and institutions. One of the most active institutions was the British Council that was later to be the means through which English remains the only medium of instruction.

Since colonial times, the British Empire established many schools and institutions for a multilingual education, teaching of the English language for several reasons, including the political ones. Ghana had its share in English language teaching programs. Thus, it seems to be the pioneer in the implementation of English language teaching projects on all levels. The British Council educational project that was established in Ghana had its roots in the colonial times through English language teaching in schools.

The advent of English language teaching was one of the main goals of the British in their colonies; they established schools, introduced new subjects and curriculum that teachers taught them through English to extend the British language, culture, and ideals. These educational systems were exported from public schools of England that were to become prevalent in the colonies due to the desire of the British to teach an elected mass to work for them in administrative affairs (Phan, 2016; McCulloch, 2007; Wise, 1956, pp. 2-170-31). During the colonial period, educational systems were transferred to Ghanaian systems; and this would be evident to the profound implementation of ELT in the Ghanaian schools (Quist, 2003, pp. 426- 427).

In this respect, scholarly literature discussed the expansion of the English language, which directly led to the widespread of Anglo culture and institutions, and this resulted in using the English language as an alternative for other languages and displacing them due to British colonization (Baker and Jones, 1998, p. 10).

In colonial Ghana, English was the only medium of instruction in all levels of educational systems; even after independence, it remained the language of education (Badu & Amoah, 2004, p. 4). For instance, In the Senior Secondary School curriculum, students have to choose the core subjects to study, and the English language was one of them. During that period, missionary schools were seeking to extend the curriculum of the English schools in Ghana in the schools established by the British known as Castle schools (Graham, 1971, p. 4). Hence, the British educational system was introduced to serve the missionaries in communicating with the natives, mainly through English language teaching.

In the mid-1960s, all the links were intersected with the British Empire, and Ghana gained independence along with other colonies. As a result, Britain established new ties with the newly independent colonies to stay “at the table of world politics” (Gillepsie et al., 2014, 8), this was attained by the British Council cultural diplomacy and reputation as the new representative of the UK` s position internationally.

1-2- The History of the British Council in Ghana:

In 1934 Britain established “the British Committee for Cultural Relations” that would later become the British Council. The institution targeted Europe, Africa, and the Middle East (Byrne, 2013, p. 21). It also extended and focused on the British colonies and Commonwealth countries. Its aim was: “strengthening the common cultural traditions of the British Commonwealth” (White, 1965, p7). The British Council also promoted the idea of the “projection of England” in which it would work on expanding and diffusing British language, culture, and civilization. Tallents defined this concept as follows: “to make the life and thought of the British people more widely known abroad; and to promote a mutual interchange of knowledge and ideas

with other people” (Tallents, 1932, quoted by Taylor, p.112). Hence, the British Council was the means to redefine the relationship of the UK with other countries, mainly the Commonwealth countries, in terms of spreading its language, culture, and civilization overseas.

The advent of the British Council led to new policies and the removal of the old traditional ones that relied heavily on economy and politics. Thus, Britain started to realize and focus on its influence and prestige to cope with international politics through the British Council. As a result, “The Council had been described as a cultural propaganda, cultural diplomacy and cultural relations” (Eastment, 1982, p. 9). Another perspective that tackled the origins and early development of the British Council states that the British Council was a reaction for protecting British interests and reputation. In other words, the British Council introduced cultural policy as the forefront of the foreign office (Taylor, 2009, p. 2). British Council channeled British affairs through cultural diplomacy within British foreign policy (2009, p. 2).

In the first years its establishment, the Council worked on many cultural activities, including music and theater. For example, in colonial Ghana, the Council came as a cultural agency to work on cultural matters and to redefine the relationship of the Africans and the British culturally. The British Council organized the English theater in Ghana and funded schools’ productions as well. British actors used to take tours all over Ghana to promote the English language and culture with the schools syllabus. Hence, from 1943, the British Council became the alternative of the old colonial institutions and the chief cultural agency responsible for the English theater and cultural matters in Colonial Ghana (Agovi, 1990, pp. 9-10).

After working on theater and music, the British Council shifted to teaching English in British centers all over the world for the promotion of English language and culture (Taylor, 2009, p. 15). The British Council was also the pioneer in establishing libraries, they established the first library in 1944 in Accra, the Capital of Ghana (Pitcher, 1970, p. 1). The British Council operates in the domains of arts, education,

and society through grants associated by the UK foreign policy and the Commonwealth Office, the most common is Grant in aid to make international opportunities and a relation of trust for UK through the dissemination of the English language (British Council Website, 2019).

2- English as a Medium of Instruction: Promoting Interculturalism:

The main goal of EMI is Teaching English in non- speaking English countries. In the time of globalization, the British Council promoted the teaching of English intensively due to the need of people for a good education and getting a job to adhere to the globalized arena. Ribeiro, et al., attributed the overwhelming promotion of English language teaching worldwide to the idea of interculturalism and the inextricable links among Britain and other countries, chiefly its former colonies. Thus, the British Council adopted the concept of "An intercultural vision to avoid many cultural issues with the British society", The British Council adopted such an approach for developing and sustaining its operations; thus, it has a higher influence on different countries worldwide (2017, p. 33). For instance, the British Council runs the programme of Intercultural Fluency: Global Skills for Business in Ghana as an effective way that helps people to interact with each other from different cultures. The focal point of this programme is face-to-face training, that helps in increasing peoples intercultural awareness and developing their skills through various intercultural activities that assist them to advance in the business world (British Council Website, 2019).

2.1- Today`s British Council in Ghana:

The British Council in Ghana aims at sustaining a long-lasting educational association between Ghana, and the UK (The British Council Website, 2019). It includes education, sciences and the English language. The core of the British Council is teaching English and culture mainly in the Commonwealth countries because it is the principal bound between the UK and its former colonies that joined the Commonwealth and now it expanded as a global language (Seymour, 1957, p. 8).

The council embraces many cultural activities in partnership with the Ghanaian schools and institutions. For example, in education, the Council initiated International Education in Services: British Council Agent and Counselor Training Suite, Connecting Classrooms, Intercultural Fluency: Global Skills for Business, and Services for International Education Marketing (SIEM). Besides, the British Council has inaugurated many activities in Ghana for improving learning outcomes starting with Services for student recruitment and institutional partnership, Examination Services, English Language learning services, and British Council National Services Recruitment 2019 for Ghanaians (British Council Website, 2019).

2-2- Connecting Classrooms in the World:

“Connecting Classrooms” is considered as a worldwide programme in more than 40 countries that collaborates with more than 800 policymakers and works with 10.000.000 learners to help them gain knowledge and the required skills to cope with the new trends in the globalized world (Connecting Classrooms, Year 2 Annual Report, p. 1). This programme is established and funded by the British Council in cooperation with the Department for International Development (DFID). This programme aims not only about connecting classrooms, but it is also about connecting the languages and cultures of different people all over the world (Ecorys UK and University of Glasgow, 2017).

Among the activities that Connecting Classrooms programme embraces is the students` English language performance, that discusses the performance of the students in the English language tests after engaging in many activities about global issues and their influence on students` academic achievement (The British Council website, 2019). Furthermore, connecting classrooms operates in South East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa, and the Middle East. For instance, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the programme connects the UK and Ghanaian educational systems for supporting international understanding and trust through Grant Preparation Workshops and a

Series of Preparatory Seminars in the British Council Office in Accra, Ghana (The British Council website, 2019).

2-3- Connecting Classrooms in Ghana:

“Connecting Classrooms” is one of the suitable examples of the implementation of the British Council’s cultural projects through English language teaching in Ghana. It is a global educational programme for schools and it introduced itself for improving teachers’ and students’ levels (British Council website, 2019).

“Connecting Classrooms” programme is operating since 2008. It aims to maintain an everlasting relationship in terms of developing educational partnerships between schools in Ghana and schools in the UK (The British Council, 2015). The essence of the CC is the enhancement of students’ learning levels in terms of developing their English language skills for a better international exchange. The programme also helps improving the skills of leadership among teachers, and headmasters. Connecting Classrooms is a “learning journey that includes face-to-face and online courses, international professional partnerships and visit funding opportunities based around the core skills” (British Council, 2015).

Many scholars are discussing British Council’s Connecting Classrooms Sub-Saharan Africa programme, in terms of its definition, activities, and impact in Sub-Saharan African countries, including Ghana. Also, the British Council published several reports, case studies, and success stories about the implementation of connecting classrooms programme in Ghana.

In 2007, the British Council’s “Connecting Classrooms” programme engaged in Ghanaian schools as an integral part of the International Schools Partnership programme. The Council organized Grant Preparation Workshop for Connecting Classrooms and a Series of Preparatory Seminars in the office of Kumasi in Ghana (The British Council). Mandeep Samra conducted a research entitled “Connecting Global Citizens? The Case of `Connecting Classrooms`” in which, the researcher explored in her case study the implementation and the impact of Connecting

Classrooms in a school of Central Peaks Cluster, which situates in Ghana. Through several interviews and observations with the headmasters and teachers, also discussions with co-coordinators of the British Council, the researcher examined the implementation and the effects of CCP in Ghana between theory and practice.

The findings of this study focused on the impact of this programme on teachers and students, and they revealed it had “broadened their horizons through different ways.” CCP was a way for the teaching staff to correct the stereotypes and misrepresentations in school partnerships for intercultural exchange with the UK. The use of English language in this exchange benefited the Ghanaian children to acquire English language and culture as well (Samra, 2007, pp. 33-34).

In their report for the Cambridge Primary Review Trust, Douglass Bourne et, al.; entitled “PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL LEARNING AND SUSTAINABILITY” in which they discussed the context of global learning and sustainability in Ghana as a part of their work. They stated that from 2007-2010 British schools joined the Connecting Classrooms programme with schools from Ghana. Furthermore, this report claims that in the staff development section, 50% of staff encouraged the idea of global learning and Connecting Classrooms project in Ghana (2016, pp. 3-4).

A study by Prof. Douglas Bourn, Dr. Nicole Blum also tackles the presence and the impact of Connecting Classrooms worldwide and other types of partnerships, mainly in the Commonwealth countries. It also discusses the vital role that Connecting Classrooms plays in the field of international school partnerships as one of the effective programmes over the past few years. This report traced the evolution of different educational partnerships between the UK and Ghanaian schools. For instance, in school-based initiatives, the British “Brighton College” established many links with different Ghanaian schools in the field of cultural exchanges between schools. Another school partnership that initiated Connecting Classrooms between Southern Ghana and the UK was Partner Ghana, “Sabre Trust” that focused on

teaching and learning and exchange programmes for a better future for Ghanaian students (2016, pp. 22-26).

Connecting Classrooms in Ghana is widely used in the educational systems and international partnership programmes established between the UK and Ghana. However, there is a little scholarly attention on this side. But this does not neglect the fact that the British Council “Connecting Classrooms” programme is still on the top of the UK educational programmes in Ghana chiefly in the international partnerships field. British Council’s continuing cultural policy with its former colonies, Commonwealth countries, seems to be traceable mainly in Ghana due to the extensive use of the international partnerships programmes in the Ghanaian educational systems. On top of them is “Connecting Classrooms” programme that expanded all over the globe. Precisely, in the Commonwealth countries, Ghana participated in this programme through many links between its schools and UK schools. Several reports and case studies have shown that there is a profound implementation of Connecting Classrooms programme in Ghanaian schools as a part of promoting partnerships between teachers, learners, and school leaders.

“Hull and Ghana Connecting Classrooms Project” is an example of connecting with international classrooms and students for learning English core skills and creating a chance for intercultural dialogue and exchange through collaborative activities between two schools from the UK and Ghana. This project includes learning journeys in which it will grant students visit funding opportunities to travel to the UK and study there. Many Ghanaian students studied at “Wilberforce College” as a part of “Connecting Classrooms project”. Also, British students visited Ghanaian schools for intercultural exchange and this fostered an effective learning process, mainly for Ghanaian students because they had the opportunity to learn the English language and the British culture (The British Council, 2014).

The example that entails the implementation of CCP in Ghana is the partnership between “Muthill Primary School in Scotland and Juliet Johnston Primary

School” in Ghana. This cooperation lasted for 15 years and has been directed by the International School Partnership through Connecting Classrooms Programme. The core of this latter is working on Selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also seeks to encourage students in the school to protect their environment and to make it cleaner. Thus, this programme aims to keep an environment of understanding and cooperation between the UK and Ghanaian primary schools (British Council, 2019).

Airedale Junior School in Ghana also used Connecting Classrooms project, this partnership has spanned for 4 years from 2015-2019, the British Council connected teachers and students from Ghana with their peers in the UK in 2015-2016 through arranging visits for teachers in their partner school in Ghana then they built their first library school in 2018. In 2019, 3 teachers visited their partner school in the UK and are working with their peers in enhancing their library (Airedale Junior School, 2020).

- The Results of the Study:

The findings of this study will hopefully redound to the benefit of the existing literature on the spread of British language and culture and their influence on their former colonies in the light of globalization. Moreover, this study will show the impact of globalization on cultural British policy in its former colonies in terms of English teaching, precisely Ghana. British Council cultural policy through English language teaching is evident in the educational systems of Ghana. That is, based on the findings above, it is crucial to settle on the implementation and the effectiveness of the British Council “Connecting Classrooms” Programme in the Ghanaian schools as a part of the UK International School Partnerships field. At the outset of the establishment of the British Council in Ghana, it was clear that there is a continuing influence of the British language, and culture

-Conclusion:

In the post-independence period, English became the language that functions as an official language in Ghana and to reinforce the use of English language and

culture, the British Council run many programmes for cultural linkages between the two countries. "Connecting Classrooms" in Ghana seems to serve British Council cultural policy in Ghana. One of the critical points of this project is integrating the core skills into the English Curriculum, which means that CCP helps make the English curriculum more project-based and learner-centered and measuring students` performance in the English language. CCP is seeking to extend creative and collaborative activities between the UK and Ghana. Over the last decade, the programme developed in Ghana as the pioneer of its kind in the field of international School partnerships to support cultural linkages and mutual trust and understanding between Ghana and the UK.

-List of Abbreviations:

BC: British Council.

CCP: Connecting Classrooms Program.

ELT: English Language Teaching.

EMI: English as a Medium of Instruction.

SIEM: Services for International Education Marketing.

SDGs: Selected Sustainable Development Goals.

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