

## The ‘Hidden’ curriculum in higher education in Ghana: The perception of language students in the college of education

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### Abstract

A holistic curriculum or education seeks to develop all three domains of learning: cognitive, psychomotor and affective. While the cognitive domain focuses on the mental and psychological fortitude of learners, the psychomotor focuses on the use and development of muscular or motor skills and the affective domain deals with the feelings, emotions and attitudes of students. Interestingly, not all these domains are sufficiently written or documented as guidelines or curricula for classroom practice. It is for such reasons that the ‘hidden’ curriculum becomes needful, as it not only complements the official curriculum but plays a significant role in shaping the values of learners. This qualitative study engages 52 language students in a college of education in Ghana to reveal their views on their experiences with the ‘hidden’ curriculum. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were the data collection instruments. The inductive content analysis technique is used to analyse the collected data. The outcome of the study reveals that gender and sexuality, religion, politics, hard work and confidence are values ‘taught’ through the hidden curriculum. The findings of the study create awareness, especially for teachers that, beyond ‘what’ they teach in the classroom, ‘how’ they teach also unconsciously transmits lessons. This means that teachers should be mindful of how they dress, walk, talk and behave in the classroom since all these virtues contribute to the overall teaching and learning process.

**Keywords:** Curriculum, cognitive skills, psychomotor skills, affective skills, classroom practice;

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## 1. Introduction

The curriculum is an important element in education and hence, its planning, development and preparation are often the first and fundamental phases of any educational process (Rahayu, 2020). Hamiyah and Juhar (2014) define the curriculum as a collection of plans and guidelines for educational goals, content, materials and activities or strategies for achieving the overall educational goals and objectives. In harmony with Hamiyah and Juhar (2014), Rosyada (2007) believes that the curriculum spells out the specific objectives and general goals that need to be achieved at the end of the educational process. Again, as part of its basic functions in education, the curriculum determines what teaching and learning materials should be selected and organised for a lesson. Aside from that, the curriculum also outlines the content of the lesson to be taught and the classroom activities, methods and techniques that can transmit the lesson successfully. Finally, the curriculum prescribes the evaluation and assessment of learning outcomes. Johnson (1989) is more liberal in his definition of the curriculum as he views it as all the factors, in and outside the classroom, working together to ensure a successful teaching and learning programme. These important factors thus attest that curriculum is core and fundamental to any educational organisation or process.

Curriculum can be 'official' or 'unofficial' (Kian, Ehsangar, & Izanloo, 2020). The official curriculum, also referred to as the documented or overt curriculum, is generally the pre-planned, intentional and well-documented, explicit and often measurable goals and guidelines for education. This curriculum is often presented in print with copies given to all the educational stakeholders – policymakers, principals, headmasters, school administrators and teachers, and sometimes, even made accessible to the learners. Since everybody is aware of its stipulations often before the commencement of the academic period, they work at it and make sure classroom materials and activities are in line with it.

On the contrary, Rahayu (2020) asserts that the unofficial curriculum, also referred to as the hidden, covert or 'collateral' curriculum, is the unplanned, unintended, unconscious and/or undocumented educational process and activities. Yahya (2013) adds that the hidden curriculum is not formulated programmatically and unstudied, yet its existence and implementation have an impact on learning outcomes. Again, even though the hidden curriculum is not planned by the government or the educational institution, it has some remarkable influence on learning outcomes. Usually, the hidden curriculum encompasses all other issues emanating from the classroom, aside from what is explicitly stated in the core curriculum. Such other issues include the tools and teaching methods used, techniques or strategies a teacher employs to enhance learners' knowledge and the teacher's behaviour, attitudes, manners, opinions, philosophies and beliefs exhibit in the teaching and learning process to stimulate critical thinking in learners. Mei (2015) argues that the hidden curriculum is the distinguishing reality of what teachers believe they do in the classroom and what they do. Ruff (2013) emphasises that the hidden curriculum, in varying degrees, is experienced in every teaching and learning environment where, depending on how the school is organised, it is more felt in some schools or classes than others. In effect, it is the 'hidden' but 'bold' message in the classroom (Kian et al., 2020).

Nunan (1989) contends that teachers are usually not conscious of the covert impressions, messages or lessons they verbally or non-verbally transmit in the classroom. These messages and impressions reveal the teachers' beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, manners and social constructs towards different components of the teaching and learning process. Even though most educational programmes, courses and activities are carefully planned, thought-through and regimentally programmed often in consultation with education and curriculum experts, the fact that the hidden curriculum, which is not planned or drafted by any educational or curriculum expert, is equally as significant as the official curriculum in terms of impacting knowledge, shaping and moulding behaviours, encouraging critical thinking and determining learning outcomes cannot be overemphasised (Mei, 2015). Still on the relevance of the hidden curriculum in education, Abroampa (2020) had this to say:

*It (the hidden curriculum) is responsible for as much as 90% of all learning taking place in school. It may therefore be posited that learners learn more than they are taught. The implication then is that a huge chunk of what learners consume unintentionally (90%) in any school environment, be they worthy or unworthy, happens on the blind side of the school and not under careful control since schools, policymakers and parents are interested in what learners have been taught and how it manifests in their grades (pg. 77).*

Iraninejad and Chitaei (2011) equally opine that regardless of its lack of conspicuous presence in the classroom, the hidden curriculum can shape attitudes and beliefs towards the school and community living learners. Hidayat (2011) specifically details two important roles of the hidden curriculum by enumerating that

- a. It provides an in-depth appreciation, knowledge and understanding of the beliefs, values, personalities and norms which are not thoroughly explained in the official curriculum.
- b. It also provides essential non-academic skills, often social skills, which are useful for the later phase of a learner's life, often after graduation.

Regardless of its equally significant impact in the classroom and influence on the educational process generally as evidenced in the earlier studies, the hidden curriculum has been less investigated and almost neglected, unlike the official curriculum which has received a lot of empirical and theoretical investigations (Mei, 2015). Rahayu (2020:3) is emphatic that 'the hidden curriculum needs to be discussed' because teachers and students need to be aware and be thoroughly informed about it to be guided in their classroom practices. Li (2018) was more specific when he articulated that, 'the development and utilisation of hidden curriculum in college English teaching are worthy of attention'. Premised on these arguments, this study draws the attention of the language teachers to the hidden curriculum. It investigates the 'lessons' that hidden curriculum transmits to the learners in the language classroom and how this goes to influence language learning. With these, it is anticipated that language teaching and learning in Ghana would be more effective, efficient and successful.

### 1.1. Research objectives

The study aims to:

1. investigate the 'lessons' that are unconsciously transmitted to learners in the language classroom.
2. reveal the way(s) in which the hidden curriculum influences language pedagogy.
3. examine the implications of the Hidden Curriculum for Language Teaching.

### 1.2. Research questions

The following questions guided the study.

1. What 'lessons' are unconsciously transmitted to learners in the language classroom?
2. In what way(s) does the hidden curriculum influence language pedagogy?
3. What are the implications of the hidden curriculum for language teaching?

### 1.3. The hidden curriculum: conceptualisation and related literature

The proposition of the concept of hidden curriculum is credited to the renowned American curriculum expert and educator, Phillip Jackson, who is acclaimed to have first mentioned it in his book 'Living in Class' (1968). However, Li (2018) contends that, even before Jackson, another American scholar, Dewey, had already, around the 20th century, proposed and talked about the concept of 'collateral learning', which Tanner and Tanner (2007) confirm is another terminology for hidden or covert curriculum. About collateral learning, Dewey is quoted to have said that,

*Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular things he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of like and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned... (Dewey, cited in Killick, 2016: 2)*

Explaining Dewey, Li (2018) intimates that what learners are consciously taught and the knowledge they are intentionally imparted with are merely a part of learning. In that, learning only becomes holistic and thorough when the experiences learners acquire in terms of the values, interests, wills, ideas, attitudes and emotions are critically, carefully but 'non-formally' imbibed in them as well. Li further asserts that when properly coordinated, the functions, impacts or benefits of collateral learning can even sometimes exceed those of 'official curriculum learning'. This is where Abroampa (2018) gets more specific to posit that the impact of collateral learning is 90% of the students' learning experience.

Consistent with the earlier scholars, Lord (2017) and Neve (2018) define the hidden curriculum as a range of subtle things such as socialisations and cultural orientations which are not explicitly acknowledged, scripted or articulated in the formal curriculum but are learnt and experienced by the students by virtue of being in school. They are the unspoken messages transmitted through the relationships between teachers and students, appraisal structure, organisation and composition of the institution, discipline measures and the general ad hoc learning of the various subcultures which are practised and transferred to learners in the school. Alsubaie (2015) clarifies that the hidden curriculum encompasses all the undocumented, unofficial, unwritten and unintended life virtues and lessons which are used to teach learners. Abroampa (2018) gets more specific about the social and behavioural dispositions and values of the hidden curriculum by stating being cooperative, exercising restraint, being patient, starting and completing work, appearing neat and punctual, showing allegiance and ties with peers and teachers, keeping busy and courteously conducting oneself, as some of the 'hidden' practices and lessons. Neve (2018) believes that these practices can have a powerful impact and influence the professional development of students.

The definition of the hidden curriculum on the part of Andarvazh, Afshar, and Yazdani (2017) reflects the position of the current study; hence, it is adopted as the operational definition in this paper. They are quoted as saying,

*The hidden curriculum is a hidden, powerful, intrinsic in organisational structure and culture and sometimes contradictory message, conveyed implicitly and tacitly in the learning environment by structural and human factors and its contents includes cultural habits and customs, norms, values, belief systems, attitudes, skills, desires and behavioural and social expectations can have a positive or negative effect, unplanned, and neither planners nor teachers nor learners are aware of it. The ultimate consequence of the hidden curriculum includes reproducing the existing class structure, socialisation, and familiarising learners for transmission and joining the professional world (pp. 198).*

To illustrate the strength of the power of curriculum in education, Bedrick (2013) surveyed Georgia to practically ascertain how parents were influenced by the hidden curriculum in taking decisions relative to the selection of schools for their children. The study recruited 754 parents as participants across low and middle-income social classes. The findings of the study, expressed in percentages, are shown in Figure 1.

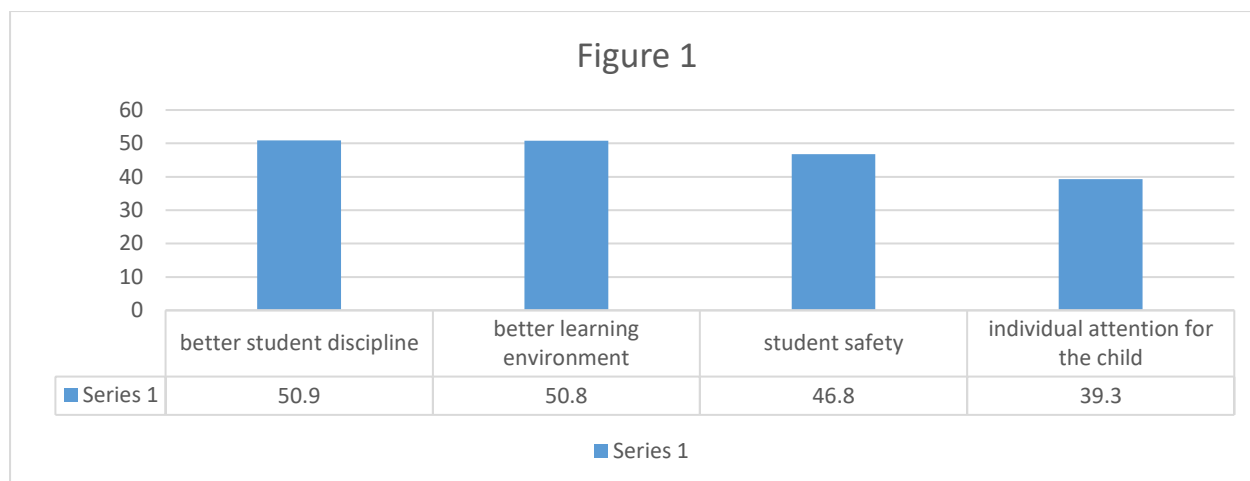


Figure 1.

From Figure 1, it can be observed that, even with the decision of which school a parent would send their child to, the hidden curriculum plays a significant role. While the 'discipline' of students as instilled by the school influences parent's decisions at the rate of 50.9%, a better learning milieu influences them at 50.8%. The parents are also concerned about the safety of their wards and hence are influenced at a rate of 46.8% and the ability of the school to pay particular attention to individual children also has a 39.3% impact on the parents. Bedrick insinuates that the school's management themselves also use these virtues of the hidden curriculum as unique selling proposition to build and sell their school's image and brand.

Gardeshi, Amini, and Nabeiei (2018) also investigated the perception undergraduate medical students have about the hidden curriculum. Engaging a sample of 32 students, the qualitative study used the semi-structured interview as the instrument for data collection. The collected data were then analysed through thematic analysis. The outcome of the study revealed four major themes as the perceptions of lessons encoded in the hidden curriculum. These are ethical and social culture, personal beliefs and attitudes and hierarchy and role modelling. The study also found out that educational stakeholders are generally ignorant about the hidden curriculum and even in the extremely few instances, where they seem aware of it, they are unwilling to act on it. The study, therefore, recommended an open-ended thorough discussion about the hidden curriculum and the need for it to be taken seriously.

Muhammed (2012), in his PhD dissertation entitled, 'Awareness and Application of Hidden Curriculum of Iraqi EFL University Teachers and Its Effect on Their Students' Performance', used a questionnaire, observation checklist and results of 3 essay tests to collect data from randomly sampled 147 students and 21 EFL faculty members from 3 Iraqi universities. The study aimed to establish the awareness of teachers about the hidden curriculum and how they applied it in the classroom. The collected data were analysed using suitable statistical methods. The outcome of the study revealed that the teachers were generally aware of the hidden curriculum, with varying depths of awareness. For instance, those in the literature had better awareness than those in ELT and Linguistics. It was also realised that teachers with over 10 years of experience in teaching had better awareness than those with less number of years in teaching experience. Despite the general awareness, the study also found out that teachers did not apply the hidden curriculum, and for various reasons such as culture disparities, classroom organisation, the ideology of society, personal ideology and dated curriculum. The study, therefore, recommended that training should be given on the hidden curriculum.

The findings of the studies espoused above concur that the hidden curriculum is inarguably a very important aspect of education and plays a very critical role in the development of the learner. The studies are unanimous in their arguments that beyond the formal curriculum which consciously teaches contents, knowledge and skills to students and plans activities for learners to participate in, there are other important aspects such as obedience, discipline, attitude, values, morals, perceptions,

opinions, beliefs, ideas and philosophies which educational institutions (must) attempt developing in the learners. These aspects of education are not explicitly captured in the statement of educational goals or objectives and are not taught effectively in the classroom. Bedrick (2013) insinuates that it is these implicit, unspoken and unwritten cultural and social messages which determine largely the learners' development.

## **2. Methodology**

### *2.1. Approach*

Gardeshi et al. 's (2018) methodology is generally adopted for this study. The qualitative approach is adopted for the study to explore the perception of teacher trainees on the hidden curriculum. This choice of qualitative approach is informed by the argument of Doja, Bould, Clarkin, Eady, Sutherland and Writer (2016) that the qualitative approach is proven to be effective when it comes to exploring or investigating issues that are connected to the hidden curriculum.

### *2.2. Sampling technique*

The maximum variation sampling technique was used to engage participants in the study (Coyne, 1997). This technique was employed to ensure that a wide range of variables was fairly represented to ensure that the final results of the study will have inputs from different perspectives which will strengthen the results. Adapted from Gardeshi et al. (2018), the variables included ethnicity, religion, social class, sex, age and programme of study to ensure the researchers obtained maximum variation.

### *2.3. Sample*

Having been assured of absolute anonymity and confidentiality, 52 language students of a college in the Western North region of Ghana availed themselves and were recruited for the study. The participants are spread across three language specialisms, which are English, French and Akan (Fante and Twi).

### *2.4. Data collection instruments*

Two instruments were used to collect the data for the study. These were open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was structured such that the participants did not have to merely pick from a list of already provided options as in the case of the close-ended questionnaire where sometimes the options do not reflect the situation of the respondents. With this questionnaire, participants were allowed to provide all information that reflected their perceptions, views and positions on the substantive matter without any form of restriction. The questionnaire was answered and submitted by all the participants. In addition, interviews were held. The interview was to corroborate information on the questionnaire. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes. However, unlike the questionnaire which was responded to by all participants, 8 were interviewed based on the concept of data saturation as asserted by Boyd (2001) that a range of 2–10 participants is sufficient to reach saturation.

### *2.5. Data analysis*

The inductive content analysis technique was used to analyse the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Data from the questionnaire were subjected to multiple readings to gain a broader understanding while relevant portions of the data from the interview were transcribed and analysed. The texts were categorised into units of phrases and sections or sentences following the underlying common meanings and messages. These underlying meanings were developed into themes and examined to reveal the perceptions that the students held about the hidden curriculum.

### *2.6. Ethical considerations*

Participation in the study was voluntary and under no circumstance were any of the students compelled to participate in the process. While the study was in progress, any of the participants had the liberty to withdraw at any point in time. Again, on condition of confidentiality, the names of the

respondents and their college of affiliation or any information that could lead to exposure of their identity were not mentioned in the scripts.

### 3. Results and discussion

In this section, attempts have been made to respond to the research questions of the study. Data from both the questionnaire and the interview are collated and discussed with evidence from relevant excerpts.

#### 3.1. RQ 1: What lessons do language teachers unconsciously transmit in the classroom?

It is already established in the earlier works of literature that the hidden curriculum is lessons, virtues and attitudes that are 'taught' unconsciously while the teacher is in the process of teaching the official curriculum. Therefore, the participants, in response to this first research question, were expected to bring the 'lessons' they have observed or learnt in the language classroom which are not explicitly stated in the official curriculum. An assessment of the data gathered from the respondents reveals that they have 'learnt' and 'observed' some unconsciously transmitted lessons. Figure 2 shows the dominant lessons which are transmitted in the hidden curriculum in the opinion of the students.

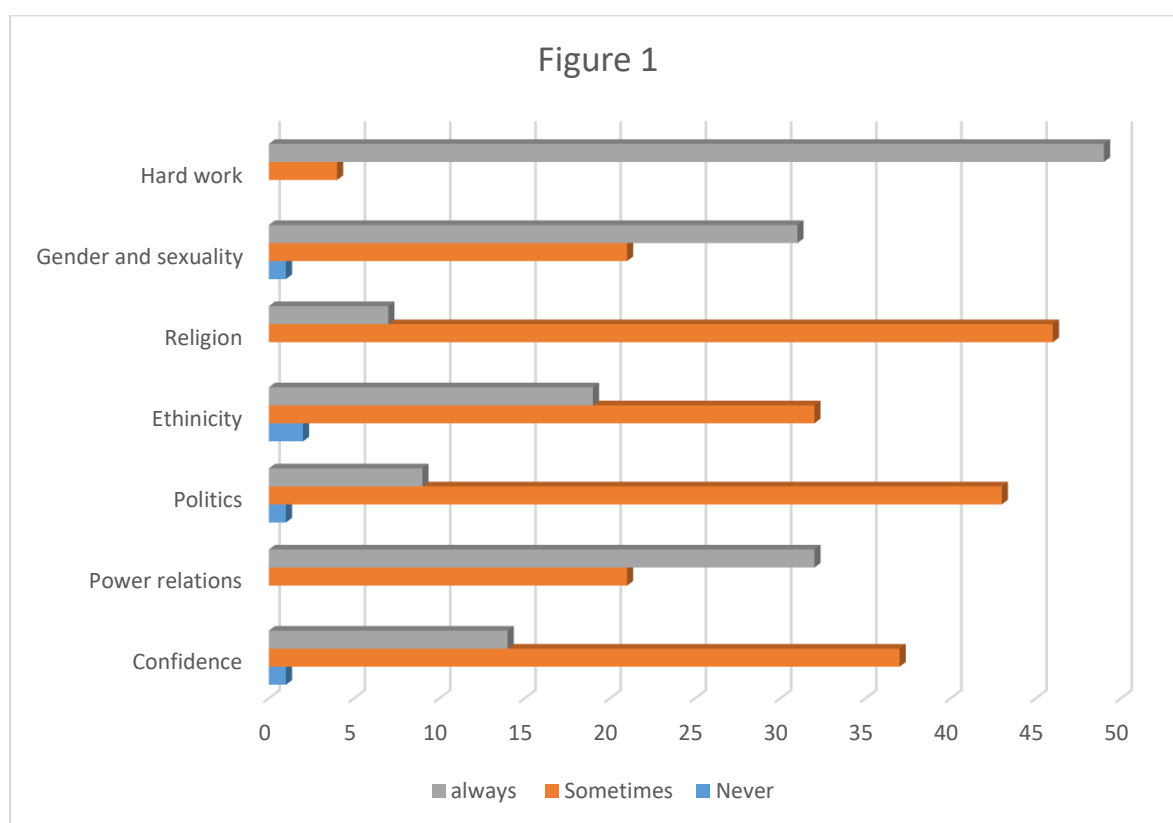


Figure 2.

As shown in Figure 2, one of the lessons 'taught' in the hidden curriculum is hard work. It is revealed in the data that language teachers unconsciously teach the need for hard work in the language classroom. Although the concept of hard work is not a part of or an explicit topic in the English language, the behaviours, attitudes and utterances of the language teachers reveal that working hard is a good virtue that the learners are supposed or encouraged to learn and practice. The respondents indicate that the language teachers 'teach' hard work mainly in two ways. First, by the *reward system*. Students who prove to be hard working in class are often given rewards to encourage them to continue practising such behaviour while serving as motivation for lazy students to do away with such attitude. A student indicated,

*Our language teacher would often tell the class to give a standing ovation to a student who answers a question correctly. This motivates all of us to work hard. I believe such behaviour is part of the hidden curriculum.*

Another student affirms this by asserting that,

*When students are rewarded for working hard, they are encouraged to put in more efforts to gain more rewards. My teacher rewards hard work by sometimes giving gifts such as money, books, pens, among others.*

Students are normally considered to be hard-working when they report to the school/class on time, attend class punctually, submit their assignments and read widely. These experiences or lessons are not part of the official curriculum but the behaviour of the language teachers towards these practices makes the students willing to learn it, as though they are 'taught'.

Second, language teachers do employ the *punishment system* to 'teach' and discourage students from laziness, contrary to the reward system. Lazy students are often punished in various ways to show that a such character is not welcomed in the language class. A student reported,

*When a student does not do an assignment or reports late to class, our language teacher would normally walk such person out of the class or give them a portion of weedy land to weed. This discourages us from being lazy.*

The fact that hard work is considered a lesson which is unconsciously taught through the hidden curriculum concurs with the findings of Cbukcu (2012). In his study, Cbukcu identified that students gain two things from the hidden curriculum – personal benefits and social benefits. Personal benefits are those values an individual gains and uses to develop him/herself. One of such personal benefits/lessons, according to Cbukcu, is hard work.

Secondly, *gender and sexuality* are other lessons transmitted in the hidden curriculum. Gender and sexuality are very sensitive social phenomena which, although not an explicit part of the official language curriculum, are encoded or transmitted unconsciously in the language classroom. Language teachers have their peculiar idiosyncrasies towards the various gender orientations and these perceptions are exhibited through the way they behave, talk and relate to the different genders in the language classroom. It is revealed that three gender orientations are mainly displayed in the classroom: feminism, male chauvinism and gender neutrality. For the teachers who are feminists, their attitude in the classroom indicates that the woman needs to be empowered, given some preferential treatment and respected. Such teachers would normally put the female students in leadership positions, call their names first in a list of names, give more attention to female characters in textbooks and make the female item or pro-form the subject of a sentence. A participant explained,

*My language teacher is a feminist. He is always bias towards the ladies in the class. He treats the ladies as queens and sometimes we the men in the class even feel jealous and wish he does same to us. This attitude of his has 'taught' us to see the woman as a special breed deserving of special care and attention.*

Another respondent also indicated that

*My language teacher 'teaches' feminism in language class but he doesn't know. He does so through his attitude and the utterances he makes about ladies. In fact, even in sentences that have positive message in them, he makes the subject female.*

On the issue of gender, another orientation identified is male chauvinism. Teachers with such orientation often feel that the man is a superior being and must be given a kingly treatment. For such people, the woman is expected to remain silent when the man is talking. The woman is virtually blamed for every negative thing that happens in the classroom. Such teachers still hold the traditional belief that a woman's place is the kitchen and, therefore, the ladies in the class are wasting their time. A student had this to say:



*My language teacher's attitude 'teaches' me that the man is a superior being so I should remain subservient to him. The male students are usually given leadership roles and always encouraged to learn hard so that they can take care of themselves and their families in future.*

Another sexual orientation 'taught' in the language class is gender neutrality and equality. Supporters of this orientation believe that both males and females should be treated and regarded equally. There is no preferential treatment or bias towards any particular gender. A participant reported that,

*My language master treats all genders equally. She doesn't think any gender is superior or inferior to the other. We learn a lot from such attitude of hers. For instance, any time I am dealing with my friends, I treat them equally regardless of their gender.*

The concept of gender and sexuality and the need for one to develop the necessary skills to live in harmony with all individuals, regardless of their gender, is emphasised in the study of Cbukku (2012), who believes gender is one of the social benefits a student gains from the hidden curriculum.

Thirdly, the data reveal that *religion* is another unconsciously 'taught' lesson in the classroom. Reports have it that Ghana is a highly religious country with about 70% of the citizens belonging to the Christian religion, while the remaining 30% are Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu and African traditional religion. Supporters of each of these religions consider themselves more ideal and wish to associate themselves with people from other religions. From the data, as shown in Figure 2, the concept of religion is manifested in the language classroom. Language teachers exhibit their religious biases in the classroom. In their utterances and dealings with students, it is clear that they are influenced by their religious beliefs and practices. A student participant posits,

*Our language teacher is a Reverend Minister. Any time he comes to class, he makes us use the first 5 minutes of the period to pray. He always tells us that our learning and academic life can only be successful through the mercies of God. I believe this is part of the hidden curriculum because such practice is not stipulated in the language course.*

Another participant who has had an experience with an Islamic language master also added,

*Anytime it's 12 noon, my language teacher will stop the class and go and offer his prayers. He is a Muslim. Regardless of where we have reached in the lesson, he will halt and go out. This attitude sometimes disrupts the class.*

Another student reported a case with a language teacher who is a believer in the African traditional religion.

*This lecturer always talks down on Christianity and Islam. He always project his god as more superior to the God/Allah of Christians and Muslims. In fact, there is a situation where one of my colleagues have joined his religion. This is how powerful the hidden curriculum can be.*

This result concurs with the findings of Kcill (2016) that religion is a very powerful tool that can get so engrained in a person's mind, including the teacher's, such that when they go to the classroom to teach, some of the religious beliefs and practises manifest in the process. Consequently, these 'lessons' are picked by the students.

ourthly, *ethnicity, tribalism and cultural identity* are revealed to be part of the 'hidden' lessons taught in the classroom. It is argued that Ghana is an ethnically diversified society with a range of 40–80 different tribes and ethnic groups (Owu-Ewie, 2006). The members of each of these groups have strong bonds and identities with their backgrounds. Therefore, the average Ghanaian is always projecting his ethnic group as more powerful, superior and ideal than the other. It is believed that the country is not able to settle down on one native language as a national or official language because no ethnic group is ready to shed their linguistic identity and learn the language of another. Such a

phenomenon is replicated in the language classroom where some of the language teachers, aside from what they teach in the formal language curriculum, also transmit ethnicity and cultural identity as a hidden curriculum. A student reports,

*My language master always relates better with students who are his tribesmen than those of us from other tribes. Even in the English class, he speaks to such students in the native language which he knows perfectly well that many of the students do not understand.*

Another student insinuated that,

*I always feel like a stranger in class. Due to where my college is located, over 90% of the class are natives of the area and speak the same L1, including the teachers as well. We are always left estranged in the language class.*

Beyond language, there was also the report of situations where language masters talk about the rich cultural values and tourist sites in their hometowns. The student opined,

*A language topic we treated last semester was 'Noun'. During the class session, students were asked to give examples of names and everyone named something in their hometown. The language master also took the opportunity to name many attractive sites in his hometown and even discussed embarking on an excursion to his hometown. I believe this was to influence us to 'learn' about his ethnic identity.*

Another important aspect of the ethnic element of the hidden curriculum is *dressing*. The examination of the data reveals that the type, style and code of dressing of the language teachers sometimes reflect their ethnic biases. While some of the participants acknowledge that some of the dressing styles of the teachers are appealing and worth learning and emulating, others believe that the dressings of some others are not appealing. A student remarked,

*One of my language teachers who is from the Northern region always dresses in 'smock' (a popular traditional dress among the Northerners). His appearance is always very beautiful and that actually spurs our interest to learn very hard and become like him.*

Sampson (2018) asserts that culture has no serious influence on the students, his justification being that the students are naturally born into their native cultures; therefore, they do not go to school to pick anyone's culture. However, on the contrary, this study found that students can be influenced by the culture of their teachers. Some of the learners even attested that they had picked pieces of their language teacher's native language. However, the point remains that students do not throw away their own culture.

Fifthly, *national politics* is another unconsciously transmitted *lesson* in the language classroom. Politics plays a role in the life of most adults in the country. There are two major political parties and ideologies in Ghana. Each of these two has its own orientation, perception and programmes about how they can contribute their quota to the development of the country. Members of these political groups come from varied fields such as law, engineering, medicine, teaching, street hawking, artisans, students and even the unemployed. Persons belonging to these groups try as much as possible to speak well of their parties and convince other people to join them through their actions and inactions. According to reports from the respondents, the language classroom is not left out in the attempt to persuade people into respective political groups. Beyond their utterances, the language teachers introduce such hidden curriculum through their dressing and singing. In this regard, a student respondent opined,

*I have observed some political undertones in the manner some of the language teachers dress. Sometimes, they come to class wearing attires dominated by the colours of their political party.*

Another participant also highlighted that,

*My language teacher speaks well of his party. He sometimes wears dresses that combine colours of his political party. I remember there was a time he even sung the ode of his party in class.*

Tekian (2017) equally believes that politics is a strong phenomenon that occasionally rears its head in the language classroom, especially during election periods. This assertion is confirmed in this study where it was realised that some of the language masters carry their political orientations into the classroom.

Additionally, *power relationships and socio-affective relationships* were identified in the data as part of the transmitted unconscious 'lesson' taught in the classroom. In every adventure, relationship plays a very important role. Even beyond the classroom, the students would depend on social, capital, cordial and corporate relationships to survive in the field of work. Regardless of how important relationships can be, it is not included as an explicit component of the official curriculum. It is for this reason that the students are quite meticulous about the relationships they are taught in the language class through the behaviours, actions and inactions of the teachers in the classroom. How teachers enact relationships with the students influence, to some extent, how the language lesson is taken by the student. In this regard, two forms of relationships were identified and exposed by the students. The first is the type of relationship where the teacher comes across as the 'boss' of the class. Such teachers are authoritative and would not countenance any form of insubordination from the students. In such a class, students are not allowed to hold counter opinions to what the teacher teaches. A participant explained,

*In the language class, we, the students, are not allowed to talk or contribute in the teaching and learning process. We are made to feel timid and dummy in the class. No contribution is allowed in the class. In fact, counter ideas from students are seen as insubordination.*

Meanwhile, some other language teachers bring themselves down to the level of the students and actually relate very cordially with them in the language class. Such teachers act as elder brothers and sisters of the students. The classroom environment is not tensed. Such teachers accept counter ideas and opinions from students. The learners are allowed to initiate and negotiate knowledge creation. A learner indicated,

*We are at liberty to challenge or contribute to discussions in the language sessions without any intimidation. Our language madam acts and treats us as her younger brothers and sisters. She encourages us to voice out our concerns and this has boosted the confidence level of some of us. I believe such lesson is part of the hidden curriculum.*

The concept of a socio-affective relationship between the teachers and the students is established by Vygotsky (1978), who asserts that values such as concern, care and responsiveness significantly contribute to the creation of a learner-friendly milieu.

Finally, an important virtue 'taught' in the hidden curriculum is *confidence*. The students reveal that some of them are inherently introverts and timid. They fear standing before a large group of people to speak. However, some of the language masters regularly give them assignments and project works and they are asked to present their findings to the class through oral presentation. However, they believe that the teacher intends that students share their knowledge with the entire class, unconsciously, standing before a class of about 100 people boosts confidence as well. A student who believes that he is inherently a shy person but his confidence level has been boosted through continuous class presentations insinuated,

*Before coming to the university, I was very shy and always avoided crowd. I would do anything to stay away from staring eyes and attention. However, things have changed*

*now thanks to my language master. He gives us class presentation every week. This has given me confidence and I don't fear to stand before people anymore.*

The virtue of confidence as one of the offshoots of the hidden curriculum is attested in Mikk's (2019) study. In congruence to this study, Mikk asserts that when the hidden curriculum is enacted well, students can develop and build on their confidence.

### 3.2. RQ 2: In what way(s) does the hidden curriculum influence language pedagogy?

This section sought to investigate, examine and reveal the manner or ways in which the hidden curriculum, as exposed in question 1, impacts or influences the teaching and learning of language, from the viewpoint of the tertiary language students. Careful observation and examination of the responses from the students reveal that the hidden curriculum influences the teaching and learning of language from different angles and in varied ways.

To begin with, the data reveal that the hidden curriculum influences *class participation*. There are generally two types of participants in the classroom: (a) active participants and (b) passive participants. These participants are created based on the type of physical, psychological and emotional classroom environment a teacher creates. The creation of the classroom atmosphere is not necessarily stipulated in the official curriculum; hence, it is a part of the hidden curriculum. For instance, a teacher who is seen to be an authoritarian and does not welcome counter ideas and opinions from the students kills learners' initiatives. Such a practice makes the learners become passive participants in the language class. Meanwhile, teachers who welcome different opinions and encourage the sharing of varying views make the students active participants. In most cases, students who are active class participants are better able to understand and appreciate concepts than passive/dull participants. A student recounts

*I believe the hidden curriculum influences class participation. Students become active or passive participants in the classroom discourse based on the environment a teacher creates. A strict teacher who creates a highly tensed classroom environment will not have the learners actively engage in the teaching and learning process.*

*My language competencies have considerably improved ever since I became an active participant in the language class. I am able to contribute to classroom discussions without fear or intimidation.*

Another participant recounts how she has been made to become a passive class participant and it is affecting her competence in the language. She indicated,

*I am getting worried that my competence in language is growing weaker and weaker by the day. We are not allowed to contribute to classroom discussions in any meaningful manner. The teacher sees us as kids who must be 'fed' and that's how he approaches the language lesson.*

Kbledj (2015) attests that the hidden curriculum affects or determines class participation. He describes that in situations where the hidden curriculum is enacted such that the classroom environment looks friendly for the students, they can fully participate in the teaching and learning process. A course like language can sometimes be quite technical and, therefore, for a student to understand it thoroughly, he/she needs to be engaged actively in the process.

Secondly, the hidden curriculum also influences and enhances the speaking skills of students. Speaking is one of the four important language competencies (Fenyi, Mensah, Andoh, & Pere, 2021). The other skills are listening, reading and writing. Speaking is not only about the ability to put sounds together and articulate the same but also includes the ability to construct sentences correctly, and choose letters, words and sentences appropriately concerning time, place and social context of usage. It is also the ability to make oneself understood and includes the skill of knowing *when, what, where* and *how* to speak at what point in time. Not all these skills are necessarily incorporated in the 'official'

language curriculum but when learners are given the right classroom 'atmosphere' to practice speaking, they can develop the skills perfectly as though they are consciously taught. Given the fact that continuous practice makes one good and an 'expert' in a thing when students are given the free will to speak, brainstorm and discuss topics in the language class, they can build their speaking competence. The data captured a participant's comment:

*I believe that the more one is allowed to practice a thing, the more they become perfect in it. Our language teacher does not create a classroom environment that encourages speaking. Students are made to quietly sit through the entire class stifling their speaking initiatives.*

*Anytime a student speaks and makes a mistake, he is turned into a laughing stock. This discourages everybody from speaking in class.*

A learner who has a different experience from the two opinions above narrated,

*My experience is different. We are allowed to make class presentations every other week. Every student is made to stand before the entire class and make presentations of their findings on assignments and project works. This has improved my speaking skills a lot.*

Speaking skill is very important. People who have good speaking skills have great resources. Indeed, the skill to speak fluently and correctly relies predominantly on language. Through the hidden curriculum, the speaking skills of learners can be enhanced (Trudy, 2017).

Thirdly, the hidden curriculum also influences and develops *critical* and *creative thinking* skills in language students. When the language classroom encourages consensus-building, opinion-sharing and analyses of different views and experiences of others, students develop the ability to think critically and creatively to be able to challenge or accept the opinion of others. The students reveal that, sometimes, the teachers divide the class into smaller groups and assign each group specific tasks. When these smaller groups meet for discussion in an attempt to find solutions to their assigned tasks, each member is expected to contribute critically to discussions and help to develop answers or solutions. Continuous group discussions make the learners develop the skill of critical thinking. Besides that, the groups are normally requested to present their findings to their class in the form of a class presentation after which the entire class interrogates the presentation by asking questions. It takes critical thinking to be explaining concepts to college students to their understanding and responding to the questions as well. Each member of the group is, therefore, expected to read widely and make broader consultations before making a presentation in the class. All these exercises help the students to become critical thinkers. A participant, in his opinion, stated,

*I believe the hidden curriculum has made me a critical thinker because anytime I am asked to make a presentation in class, I am compelled to read widely, consult broadly and present advanced arguments such that all my colleagues will understand me. All these skills are not consciously taught us but we develop them in our attempts and preparations to make presentations in class.*

Another student who concurs with the above assertion narrates,

*I think it takes a lot of critical thinking for one to be able to identify lapses in the arguments of colleagues and present one's arguments convincingly and get the colleagues to agree and accept yours. However, such a skill can only be enhanced if the language classroom is conducive enough to give opportunity for varied opinions and counter analysis.*

It is, indeed, asserted in Uonip (2019) that the hidden curriculum plays a significant role in the development of critical and creative thinking skills of students. When students are engaged in

practices outside the official curriculum, they can think deeply and come out with problem-solving thoughts and suggestions.

Fourthly, it is revealed that, through the hidden curriculum, students develop a love for the language courses which translates into positive learning outcomes. Generally, students learn and pay particular attention to a course or subject when they have a love for or some appreciable level of emotional connection with the course or the teacher who handles it. The attitude of the teacher, which is normally a part of the hidden curriculum, can make the students develop a special interest in the course or a particular topic. It is observed in the responses of the participants that students normally attend the lectures of the lecturers they love or cherish. Even in their various halls of residence and homes, they prefer to learn or read the notes of the teacher they love than that of the teacher they do not love. When the students continue to study the notes and books of a particular lecturer, they end up performing better in the course as well. A student who had had the experience of taking special interest in a particular language tutor resulting in better performance in language learning had this to say:

*My language teacher is very friendly. He presents very difficult concepts in a friendly manner. Due to his behaviour, I have developed a lot of love for her. I learn only his notes and listen to his tapes in my leisure periods. I have therefore become very good in English and I am able to contribute significantly in classroom discussions.*

Another participant indicated,

*Due to the love I have for my language master, I learn his subject every day. I have become a good student in English. The way he speaks and articulate ideas audibly makes every student love him.*

Yomark (2018) attests that students can develop some love and emotional affinity for a particular programme due to the attitude of the teacher in charge. When this happens, learners are subconsciously compelled to always learn the subject/course and this practice can positively affect the scores they obtain during evaluation.

Finally, it was revealed that the hidden curriculum, in many respects, influences assessment or test scores/grades. Interestingly, many are those with the conviction that students' test scores are based on the contents they are consciously taught in the classroom. For this reason, most teachers mainly commit their attention and energies to ensure that all the topics in the official curriculum or syllabus are taught thoroughly. In the Ghanaian context, students and teachers are so focused on obtaining high examination scores that they do not mind if students engage in rote learning without any in-depth or critical understanding of concepts. Once students can pass their examination, through whichever means, the goal of teaching and learning is seen to have been accomplished. Conversely, however, it is exposed in the data that the scores obtained by students in a test go beyond what contents they are consciously exposed to. In other words, test grades go beyond the official curriculum. Admittedly though, participants of the study agree that the hidden curriculum plays a role as significant as the official curriculum in determining what scores learners attain in the examination. They state that the emotional and psychological conditions of the learners, as influenced by the behaviour, actions, beliefs, inactions and perceptions of the teachers in the classroom, also influence what scores they can garner in the examination. Some participants commented,

*Most teachers only concentrate on the official curriculum. They think the scores we attain in examinations are solely based on the things they consciously teach us. In my opinion, that is not the case. All the 'unsaid, unwritten and informal' things which happen in the classroom equally contribute to the scores we get.*

*I remember last semester, my teacher's attitude in class made me develop hatred for the course. He always called only the females in class to ask or respond to questions. He claims he's a feminist. This got me upset always and that affected me gravely in*

*the examination too. It was the first time I scored grade D in examination. I believe the hidden curriculum is very important.*

Indeed, the role of the hidden curriculum in evaluation or assessment is emphasised by Al-qomoul and Al-roud (2017) who establish that a teacher's orientation influences their methods or strategies of assessment. How a teacher administers his/her assessment goes a long way in influencing the scores learners obtain.

### 3.3. RQ 3: What are the implications of the hidden curriculum for language teaching?

The hidden curriculum has received minimal attention in the language classroom over the years, especially in Ghana. While most language facilitators give more attention to the official curriculum and put in their maximum efforts to ensure that they can teach everything on the official curriculum, they are less mindful of the impact of the hidden curriculum and its importance to the teaching and learning process. Corroborating the data gathered in response to RQ 1 and 2 above, it is obvious that the hidden curriculum is important and must be given equal, if not more, attention to language pedagogy. It is also observed that the knowledge and awareness of the hidden curriculum and its impacts on teaching and learning have implications for classroom practice.

First, the teacher should be mindful of their physical appearance or dress (Kenner & McCune, 2002). Impressions are very important to teach. How one dresses determines whether he draws or repels attention and what kind of attention. The basic objective of classroom pedagogy is to have the learners comprehend what the teacher delivers. Therefore, it is ideal that the teacher becomes more conscious of what and how they dress, and where necessary, avoid colours that sell out any particular political, ethnical or religious ideology. Glatthorn and Jailall (2009) contend that the appearance or how a teacher dresses is a sign of the hidden curriculum because, to a very large extent, it affects or determines the classroom atmosphere. The average teacher is expected to be professionally dressed in order not to draw so much attention to his/her body. However, the data reveal some teachers dress so colourfully that it gets difficult for the students to take their minds off the body/dress of the teacher to focus on the content he/she delivers. A student indicated,

*Our language madam sometimes wears dresses that expose some sensitive parts of her body. This distracts the guys in the class and we are not able to pay full attention to what she teaches. I wish she could look more modest.*

Another participant in concurrence noted,

*As for me, my language master is too carefree. He doesn't iron his dress and sometimes doesn't even polish his shoes. He mostly looks very funny like a comedian. Sometimes, we sit in his class and laugh throughout the session without learning any substantive thing.*

The need for teachers to be mindful of their dressing corroborates the research findings of Barocas and Karoly (1972) and Sosu (2016). In their respective studies, these scholars found out that how a teacher dresses creates an impression on the students which stays with them through the entire lesson, and sometimes, even beyond. They further assert that the demeanour of the teacher concerning how they dress in class influences students' learning which is shown unconsciously in the behaviours they (the students) exhibit in all aspects of their life, be it politically, economically or socially.

Secondly, the hidden curriculum has implications for teaching methods, strategies and techniques. It is revealed in the data that class presentations are ideal for developing the confidence level and critical thinking skills of learners. Confidence is not consciously taught. It is part of the hidden curriculum. When learners are given regular tasks to present in class, they can build on their confidence over time. Standing before a large group of people and making presentations take some level of confidence and

this can only be taught to the students if they are made to practice more. A participant's observation corroborates the following opinion in thoughts expressed:

*I believe that, even though, confidence is not part of the official curriculum, it is a significant part of the hidden curriculum. For those of us in the colleges of education, we will end up in the teaching profession where our job will centre on classroom presentations every day. Therefore, we should be made to practise it more often here at the tertiary so that our confidence level will be boosted.*

Another teaching method emphasised in the hidden curriculum is group discussions or tasks. In the Ghanaian language classroom, where critical thinking is not a consciously taught topic in the language curriculum, the students believe that group tasks could develop their critical thinking skills as though they were taught in an official curriculum. When learners are given group tasks, they are expected to meet, share ideas, analyse different views and accept strong arguments and ideas to be presented to the teacher. While learners go through these activities, their thinking skills are developed since it takes someone who has read widely to advance cogent and stronger arguments that can be accepted by the group. A student posits:

*Anytime we meet in our smaller groups, we engage in open-ended discussions and everyone is permitted to share their views. While some views are accepted, others are rejected. Therefore, for one to have his view accepted, one is compelled to read widely and be adequately informed so that he/she can present strong arguments. Regular practice of same can develop our critical thinking skills.*

The assertion that an awareness of the hidden curriculum can change, affect or have implications for teaching methodologies concurs with the findings of Jerald (2006) who emphasised that the teacher would need to adjust his classroom practices to shape and guide students' values as expected in the hidden curriculum.

Thirdly, the hidden curriculum should be planned. It is high time the hidden curriculum was not made to 'hide' anymore. Given the fact that the hidden curriculum plays a very important role in language teaching and education generally, it should receive some conscious attention. For example, the way teachers dress, walk, talk and the strategies they adopt in teaching should be stipulated in the official curriculum. It is attested that people normally take the official curriculum more seriously. Therefore, if the hidden curriculum can be taken seriously and be considered a significant part of the teaching and learning process, then it must feature in the official curriculum. Some participants had this to say:

*I think the hidden curriculum should be part of the official curriculum. knowing how important and impactful this can be to the teaching and learning process. I think, going forward, our curriculum planners should start being intentional about it.*

Another respondent also intimated,

*The hidden curriculum has shaped my beliefs and thinking skills. I believe if it is more consciously carried out, it will be more impactful than its current state.*

Lastly, the use and choice of language in the classroom must be carefully done since it has a great impact on students' learning. Sosu (2016) emphasises that the way and manner a teacher chooses and uses words in language form part of the hidden curriculum. Therefore, how a teacher goes about language and his language constructions in the classroom ought to be carefully shaped. Even though the diction employed in the classroom is not strictly stipulated in the official curriculum, the teacher is supposed to be careful in his articulations so that learners will understand concepts better. One of the participants indicated,

*Our language teacher normally abuses us verbally in class. Any time a student gets something wrongly, he insults us. This has made us lose interest in his course and it is affecting us greatly.*



Another participant also posited that,

*This language teacher always uses complex vocabulary in class. We normally leave his lectures, not understanding anything. The words he uses are usually above us. He talks as though he is teaching postgraduate students. Due to this, all of us don't do well in his assessments. I wish he could change and come down to our level.*

Regardless of the above-mentioned sentiments, however, another participant had this to say positively about his language teacher:

*My teacher speaks very clearly and uses words appropriately. We enjoy her articulation and her words are easy to understand too. I think her choice of words have made me develop special interest in her course.*

The point that the hidden curriculum has or should have implications for the choice and use of words/language is supported by Taylor (2008), who insinuates that a significant amount of unconscious lessons are transmitted through language. Taylor explains that teaching is not only about 'what is said', which is the contents of the official curriculum, but 'how it is said', which includes the demeanour, mannerisms, beliefs, philosophies, social, religious and ethnical backgrounds of the speaker. It is expected that the language teacher becomes vigilant of all these 'silent messages' which inadvertently accompany the official curriculum.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study is an attempt to investigate the often neglected but important concepts of the hidden curriculum in the language classroom and bring to light the need to pay critical attention to it in pedagogy. The study adopted the qualitative approach. To triangulate the data, three data collection instruments were used, i.e., observations, open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Upon careful examination and analysis of the data, three conclusions are drawn.

- i. Education must aim at the holistic development of the learner by paying critical attention to all three domains of learning: cognitive, affective and psychomotor. It is through the need to have all three domains developed that the concept of hidden curriculum becomes very important. Since the official curriculum predominantly takes care of the cognitive domain, the hidden curriculum should be carefully planned and effectively enacted to cater sufficiently for the emotive and affective parts of the domain. The fact that the official and hidden curricula have a strong relationship or connection in the development of the three domains cannot be overemphasised (Yuksel, 2005).
- ii. Teachers must be aware that students do not only learn what is consciously taught to them (Mei, 2015). Students equally learn what is unconsciously transmitted to them. Such lessons could include the manner a teacher dresses; the way he talks; and his religious, ethnic and political orientations. Since the hidden curriculum has implications for classroom pedagogy, teachers should, therefore, be careful with how they carry themselves in the classroom.
- iii. While the official curriculum could be most useful for academic business, the hidden curriculum is useful for life. In other words, the students would normally need the official curriculum to prepare, learn and use it to pass examinations and assessments. However, after passing out of school, the virtues, cultures, behaviours, perceptions, ideologies and social orientations that they picked in the school environment, which were not necessarily consciously taught to them, are what they would use to survive in the world. This explains how important the hidden curriculum is and hence deserves a great deal of attention.

#### **5. Recommendation**

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that policymakers, curriculum planners and designers, teachers, students and all educational stakeholders find a way to ascertain the level or

extent to which all the three domains of learning – cognitive, affective and psychomotor – are influenced, affected or shaped through the hidden curriculum. It is not only enough only to be interested in the test scores students can attain. It is also not enough to be interested in how much content students have grasped in terms of the official curriculum. It is important to ascertain how the behaviours, beliefs, perceptions, cultures, ideologies such as gender and sexuality, politics and religious orientations of the students are shaped through their encounter with the school environment and where there are lapses, the appropriate measures are put in place to level up. These are qualities the students will take to their homes, places of work and the general society, for which it is critically important to check them.

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