

GHANA INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGES

8TH GRADUATION CEREMONY

Theme: Receiving Multilingual Training: The key to securing international positions

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Honourable chairperson, Members of the GIL Management Board, Representatives of the University of Ghana, The Acting Director of GIL, Personnel of GIL, Graduating and continuing students, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a real privilege for me to be invited as the keynote speaker for this August occasion. As I considered the theme for today's graduation, I was reminded by the assertion by Frank Smith that *One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way.* When I was growing up, I used to read stories of travel and adventure. These stories also introduced me to other languages and other worlds and I determined that I wanted to travel the world when I grow up. However, I instinctively knew that I needed other languages to travel. That was how I developed a desire to learn the French language in addition to English and the other Ghanaian languages I already knew. I have personally experienced the various advantages that being multilingual brings including when crossing borders, getting a job in a foreign land, and being able to find information for research in another language if I cannot find it in one.

In an increasing globalized world, the importance of multilingualism cannot be denied. Being multilingual and receiving a multilingual advantage presents many advantages. Some of these include a better understanding of the world in general, ease of travel and communication, and more importantly – better opportunities for securing jobs on the international market.

As Ludwig Wittgenstein postulates, *The limits of my language are the limits of my world.* This is because every language constructs and perceives the world differently and this is shown by comparing semantically equivalent expressions across languages. A typical example is the way people introduce themselves with regards to their names. In the English Language, we have the neutral – *my name is Esi*, which is interestingly similar to *nkonye enye Esi*. In both instances, we observe that the focus is on the name and there is no 'active subject'. We observe contrasts between French's 'Je m'appelle Esi' and Ga and Twi's *Atseo mi Esi/ye fre me Esi*. Whereas the French focuses on the person owning the name who 'calls himself Esi', the Ga and Twi duo present a situation where the person "is called Esi" by third parties. Of course, French, Ga and Twi also have the neutral forms – *Mon nom est Esi/Ngbee dzi Esi/Me din de Esi*. However, the frequency of usage favours the ones with active subjects.

It is argued that this simple expression of a name shows the difference between individualistic societies and more socially-dependent communities. In the French conception, a name is a person's choice. This is however difficult to understand for a typical African who considers that a name is given/conferred on someone and usually, a baby will not have a say in what name they are given.

In this conception too, people hardly call their own names unless they are asked to mention their names but usually, it is other people who mention their name.

The neutral ones (English and Ewe) leaves room for both calling and being called and the focus is on the name rather than on who does the calling.

Having given this example, I dare say that having a multilingual education opens your heart and your mind to different possibilities and viewpoints. You are more culturally and interculturally aware and are better able to adapt to different situations and people. This is an important trait for working with others. In addition to this, anyone who has successfully studied/learnt more than one language constantly makes comparisons and linkages between the languages one already has and the new language being learned. This increases the cognitive skills of the bilingual or multilingual person and studies have shown a positive correlation between Multilingualism and intelligence.

However, there is also an economic side to multilingualism and I will speak briefly on that today. As you already know, today's theme is ***Receiving Multilingual Training: The key to securing international positions.***

First of all, language skills are essential for thriving in the future of work and enhancing your professional and personal development.

We are now in a global village where people are connected through the power of the Internet. People's profiles are viewed and job offers are made through outlets like Linked In, Facebook, Instagram etc. Some of the job opportunities do not even require travel but what is important is that the person has the requisite language skills. It is for this reason that it is important to leverage one's language skills. This doesn't just heighten a person's communication and intercultural skills, but also improves their ability to multitask, makes them cognitively more agile, and prepares them for a flexible future career.

In an international job market, the ability to switch between languages is nothing short of golden. Not only would you have the chance to apply for competitive jobs that require a bilingual or multilingual speaker, but you'll also gain a diverse perspective upon different cultures and profile yourself as a highly performant, culturally aware candidate.

Another advantage of a multilingual training is that it's been proven that jobs requiring multilingual employees pay between 5% to 20% more per hour than the base rate.

Here are other reasons why being multilingual puts you ahead in the competitive job market:

1. An expanded network. While others who speak only one international language can only apply for jobs that require that language, being multilingual provides you with the opportunity to apply for jobs that require any of the language you speak.
2. You are more likely to get the job if it requires multiple languages as the employers will feel that they are gaining more by employing you than the other person. For example, instead of employing a marketing executive who speaks only English, a company that wants to reach beyond Ghana may employ a marketing executive who speaks both English

and French because it will be cheaper than having to pay for the services of an interpreter or translator anytime the company has to deal with francophone clients.

3. More opportunities for career development. Multilingual speakers have a greater capacity to change careers and workplaces more easily than English-only speakers. Global travel is another opportunity available to people who speak multiple languages.

An EU Report on a study on Foreign Language Proficiency and Employability (2015) indicates that there is a direct link between language skills and employability. It was recognised that foreign language skills are an important factor shaping the professional development of EU citizens. These findings can be extrapolated to African and West African citizens where several languages including English, French, Portuguese, Arabic and Swahili among others used in international bodies like the African Union and ECOWAS. Knowledge of these and other languages such as Spanish, Russian, Chinese, etc. also place prospective employees in good stead in organizations such as the various UN agencies, the World Bank, Doctors without Borders, Interpol, Various immigration, law enforcement and security agents, multinational companies and international NGOs and even embassies and consulates.

I will share two anecdotes about my husband who lost out on some important opportunities because he did not speak French.

The first experience was his employment with the Ghana office of the International Labour organization (A UN organization). His first appointment included working in cocoa-growing communities in both Ghana and La Côte d'Ivoire. Unfortunately for him, his French was not good enough and he just barely made it through the interview and was given the job – probably because they couldn't find anyone else with his qualification and expertise who could also speak French. He used to mention the subtle pressure he also received at work when people found out that his wife is a French lecturer. He heard comments like: "So your wife is a French teacher and you cannot speak French"? I had to encourage him many times by telling him you are an economist but I don't understand economics even though I am your wife. Language and other skills are not transferred just because you are in the same family with someone.

The Second experience was when a job opportunity in the headquarters of ILO (in Geneva, Switzerland) was posted. He had all that was required technically but still, he couldn't express himself fluently in French. He asked one of his colleagues in Geneva if he could apply and was told : "We know you can do the job, but you can't speak French". And that was the end of the story for him.

In this COVID-19 era, there have been a lot of changes but this has also brought about a lot of opportunities especially in the virtual space. Prepare yourself to take advantage of the virtual opportunities that language offers. You can be in Ghana, Togo, Cameroon or Ivory Coast and be offered a job from France, Belgium, Germany, China, Canada.

To you dear students, I will say this: Don't underestimate the power of what you have as a multilingual person or as a language professional. It is great that you have multilingual language skills. However, I want to encourage you to go a step further and leverage on those skills. Add value to your language skills. This period at home, while waiting for the next step should be a time

for self-development. Add a new skill from Coursera, Udemy, etc. Take short courses in various fields to give you an added advantage. Add an additional language using the free applications like Babel and Duolingo. Prepare yourself for the market because the market is waiting for you. I will repeat what Charlie Munger said in 2007 to graduates of the University of California Law School "You're not going to get very far in life based on what you already know. You're going to advance in life by what you're going to learn after you leave here."

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate all the graduands. We no longer say the sky is the limit but the sky is the beginning of the endless possibilities that await you on the job market because you are multilingual. As a wise person once said, *I'm not telling you it is going to be easy, I'm telling you it's going to be worth it.* I am sure it was not an easy road for some of you as taking this course meant leaving your comfort zone or making financial sacrifices. However, it will definitely be worth it. As you are released into the job market, develop yourself, research or get help to prepare a winning CV, there may be a few disappointments but don't give up. Shake yourself and move on because the world is waiting for you. Remember that at this stage in your life, **you** are deciding your life. Be intentional, don't be defined by what you didn't do or by what others think you should do or be.

Work towards the future you want to see.

I would like to end with this poem by RUDYARD KIPLING

(*'Brother Square-Toes'*—Rewards and Fairies)

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings

And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

Go out into the World and be the men and women that you were destined to be. Remember that God has a great plan for you (Jeremiah 29:11). I encourage you to commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. Proverbs 16:3.

I cannot forget the hardworking teachers and parents and other family members who trained and imparted knowledge or made financial and other investments into the lives of these graduates.

May God bless you all.

Thank you

Merci

Shukran

Obrigada

Gracias

Spaciba.