

Challenges in the Teaching of French as a Second Language in Some Anglophone Classrooms in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Challenges in the teaching of French (français II) in the Cameroon anglophone classroom remains current due to the ineffectiveness of the policy of official bilingualism. Within the anglophone sub system of Education, French language remains the subject with less interest and motivation. This study is out to identify the problems encountered in the teaching and learning of French language in the primary schools and the secondary general education. This scientific work sets out to investigate the suitability of the textbooks for the learners of French, the classroom practices, the capabilities of the learners in the French language and to examine the quality of the teaching. We set out to answer this main question: "In what ways is the French language in the textbooks suitable for the anglophone classroom, and how competent are the teachers to handle every linguistic situation? Data collection has been done through these methods: Questionnaires, interviews and observation. For the theoretical framework, we have used three theories in this study. They are: Social Constructivism, Communicative Competence, the Input and Output Hypothesis. From the findings, the results are indicative enough that the teachers need more training, and the learners need simple and more explicit textbooks. They need more posters and pictures put up everywhere in the French language to create some atmosphere of immersion.

KEY WORDS: *Anglophone classroom*

INTRODUCTION:

A lot of studies show why we should strive to learn foreign languages. The latest scientific investigations on the benefits of multilingualism indicate that being able to speak multiple languages is more useful to one. This enables communication with a larger number of people. Multilingualism also contributes to keeping the brain fit and making us smarter. There exists a range of terms in this area: Language ability; language achievement, language competence, language performance, language proficiency and language skills. Do they all refer to the same entity, or are there subtle distinctions between the terms? To add to the problem, different authors and researchers sometime tend to adopt their own specific meanings and distinctions. There is no standardized use of these terms. (Stern, 1992).

Multilingual countries face many dilemmas in choosing the medium of instruction at primary level,

depending on whether they choose the child's mother tongue which may not have wide currency outside local communities; a regional language with wider currency; or an international language such as English or French. In the choice of these two, it may well be that teachers lack proficiency thus creating barriers to understanding subject content. One reported case is that of Cameroon, where English and French are the two main second languages with which Cameroonians affiliate, depending on whether they come from the area previously colonized by the British or the French. It is within this context that the policy of official language bilingualism in Cameroon seeks to promote the use of English and French nationwide.

At reunification in 1961, English and French became the two official languages of Cameroon as the country opted for the policy of official language bilingualism.

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In the area of education, two subsystems exist in Cameroon. The Anglophone subsystem of education based on the Anglo-Saxon model and the Francophone subsystem based on the French model. The teaching of French and English languages to all Cameroonians has the legal backing of the constitutions of 1961 and 1972 and 1996 where bilingualism is enshrined. This made Cameroon a bilingual state with French and English as official languages. The January 18th 1996 constitution in its Article 1 paragraph 3 is abundantly clear in this regard. This 1996 constitution of Cameroon states that, the state shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour, to protect and promote national languages. It does not say anything about its implementation and enforcement throughout the country. There exists no well-defined language policy till date as to its conception and implementation. Chumbow (1980: 297) is certainly of this opinion when he asserts that "There has been no clear knowledge of the destination of English - French bilingualism in Cameroon and consequently no clear knowledge of the best way to get there.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The teaching of French as a foreign language in Cameroon's English speaking elementary and secondary medium education is challenged by a number of factors which are political, curricular, didactic, pedagogic, psychological, economic and environmental in nature. These huddles hinder the progress of Anglophone learners in their acquisition of the French language. These factors internal and external to the school milieu, influence learners' attitudes towards the language and their education as a whole. Specifically, there is a general lack of interest in the French language amongst Anglophone learners which affect their performance at the certificate examination and causes a gradual disappearance of the A1 series in the second cycle

The problematic of teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in the Anglophone classroom starts from the basic education through secondary education. The challenge of analysing representations and teaching techniques of French as a foreign language in Cameroon refers to the inconsistency and inefficiency of the educational system. There are not enough competent and trained teachers especially for the primary schools. This is further compounded by choices of textbooks. Tomlinson (1988) points out that, when evaluating instructional material for language teaching, it is important to consider how interesting the content is for the learners, but it is paramount for the material to be clearly linked to the

course objectives. If the textbook focuses on the linguistic skills employees need in the workplace, it will be useful. According to Alexander (1998), such usability is a principle that should guide the selection of instructional material. The choice of some textbooks is really giving room for so many questions to be asked.

You have textbooks designed for pupils in the basic education looking quite suitable for their level, and can hardly facilitate acquisition. A book like *Parlons Francais*, is attested to be difficult for the mainstream teachers who have received little or no training for teaching the language. Policy makers here certainly did not take note of corpus planning. As a consequence, many schools especially the private ones make do with teachers borrowed from amongst the Francophone teachers they find around irrespective of their specialty. When the learners get to the secondary school, they are supposed to have mastered some simple basic grammar by the senior primary schools.

The teaching and learning of French in the Anglophone classroom is compulsory up to form five. The choice of textbooks as we said earlier comes in to compound the problem of insufficient teachers to teach the French language to anglophone secondary schools and a complete absence of trained teachers of French for the primary schools. When we look at a textbook like *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* by Aimé Césaire, a literature textbook to be studied in the second cycle of the secondary school, we see that it is really giving room for so many questions to be asked. Its complex and hermetic language leaves much to be desired.

RATIONALE OF STUDY

This study is circumscribed around the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (TOFFL), in the Anglophone classroom in Cameroon. It is out to identify the problems encountered in the teaching and learning of French language in the primary schools and the secondary general education. The study attempts to understand the attitudes of teachers and learners in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language. It is just but normal that any issues that may hinder the teaching and learning process are identified and redressed with the hope that the ministerial objectives be attained. The Cameroon educational system has undergone some renewal activities including foreign language education from time to time, but there are recurring challenges for teachers and learners. As in many educational fields, the role of the language teacher is primarily important in motivating the learners to reach the objectives.

Therefore, the methods, approaches and techniques used by the teacher affect learners' attitude toward the French language course positively or negatively. With this study, one hopes to educate stakeholders, researchers and other teachers on strategies that can be implemented in our foreign language classrooms for those students who need intervention the most, so that every student in our classroom has an equitable chance to succeed. Anxiety for the French language can be hugely augmented when a student has learning difficulties. As an educator and future applied linguist, we have the responsibility of supporting these students in particular, so they can be successful in their French as a foreign language courses even while struggling with a language learning difficulty.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. In what ways is the language of the French language textbooks used in the anglophone classroom suitable for foreign language learning?
2. How prepared are the learners for the French language?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

At the present time, there is a period of methodological eclecticism in which it is proposed the use of an "accumulative and cyclic" teaching that encourages the use of the spoken language, paying attention equally to all aspects of comprehension, and production, both oral and written. The present eclecticism presents the advantages of a method or approach which is supple, capable of adapting itself in different teaching and learning situations. One of the main goals of language teaching is to improve communicative competence of learners. This study will adopt three theories to analyse the data collected and to back up every other fact found. These are: Social constructivism; Communicative competence; Input and output hypothesis;

Social constructivism is a learning theory propounded by Lev Vygotsky in 1968. The theory states that language and culture are the frameworks through which humans experience, communicate, and understand reality. According to social constructivism learning is a collaborative process, and knowledge develops from individuals' interactions with the culture and society. According to Vygotsky, language and culture play essential roles both in human intellectual development and in how humans perceive the world. This is to say that learning concepts are transmitted by means of language, interpreted and understood by experience and interactions within a cultural setting. Since it takes a group of people to have language and culture to construct cognitive structures, knowledge therefore is not only socially constructed but co-constructed.

The link here is that while the constructivist sees knowledge as what students construct by themselves based on the experiences they gather from their environment, the social constructivist sees knowledge as what students do in collaboration with other students, teachers and peers. Social constructivism is a variety of cognitive constructivism that emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning under the guidance of a facilitator in collaboration with other students.

In social constructivism children's understanding is shaped not only through adaptive encounters with the physical world but through interactions between people in relation to the world that is not merely physical and apprehended by the senses, but cultural, meaningful and significant, and made so primarily by language. Hein (1991) puts it in his own way that the level of potential development (academic achievement) is the level of development that the learner is capable of reaching under the guidance of teachers or in collaboration with peers. He sees learning as a social activity associated with other human beings like the peers, family members as well as casual acquaintances, including the people that existed before.

Social constructivism recognizes the social aspect of learning and the use of conversation, interaction with others, and the application of knowledge as an essential aspect of learning and a means to achieving learning objectives. Vygotsky believed that language develops from social interactions, for communication purposes. Vygotsky viewed language as man's greatest tool, a means for communicating with the outside world. According to Vygotsky (1962) language plays two critical roles in cognitive development:

1. It is the main means by which adults transmit information to children.
2. Language itself becomes a very powerful tool of intellectual adaptation.

Vygotsky believed too that a lifelong process of development is dependent on social interaction and that social learning actually leads to cognitive development. In other words, all learning tasks (irrespective of the level of difficulty), can be performed by learners under adult guidance or with peer collaboration. This theory helps to give a backup to the establishment of opportunities for learners to collaborate with the teacher and peers in constructing knowledge and understanding. Kapur (2018), observed that social construction of knowledge takes place in various ways and at different locations

Communicative competence is a term introduced by Hymes (1972), who defined it as the ability to convey

and interpret messages and to negotiate meaning with other speakers in specific contexts. Communicative competence centres primarily on the negotiation of meaning in real situational contexts. The notion of communicative competence is one of the theories that underlies the communicative approach to foreign language teaching. It refers to the learner's ability to use language to communicate successfully. It is also the ability to understand and use language to communicate in authentic social and school environment. In short, that means, understanding and using vocabulary, language conventions (grammar, punctuation and spelling), syntax (e.g., sentence structure); using techniques to; overcome language gaps, plan and assess the effectiveness of communication, achieve conversational fluency, modify text for audience and purpose.

The skill dimension in communicative competence refers to how individuals use the language knowledge at their disposal in actual communication (Canale, 1983). Communicative competence is "the ability to use language in a true communicative setting, which is in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic of one or more interlocutors" (Savignon, 1972, p.8). It requires, having an awareness of social rules of language (e.g., formality, politeness, directness), non-verbal behaviours, cultural references (e.g., idioms, expressions, background knowledge). To another extent, it requires, understanding how ideas are connected through patterns of organization cohesive and transitional devices.

All the competencies of communication were synchronized together to serve the purpose of developing learners' communicative proficiency and it is impossible to detach one from the other. It will then be appropriate that TOFFL/ELT instruction in classroom context should fairly treat the components of communicative competences, for the general goal cannot likely be attained in the absence of the other. When we review the literature in second/ foreign language teaching, learning and assessment, there are widely receipted models of language proficiency the instructors are supposed to use, through them learners can master easily, testers are expected to measure, and programme evaluators must evaluate following these models.

The input hypothesis is Krashen's attempt to explain how the learner acquires a second language. The learner receives input that is one step beyond his current stage of linguistic competence. Since not all the learners can be at the same level of linguistic competence at the same time, Krashen (1982)

suggests that natural communicative input is the key to designing a syllabus ensuring that each learner will receive some "I +1 input that is appropriate for his or her current stage of linguistic competence. This I + 1 means that, the learner is a little more advanced than the current state of the learner's interlanguage. Halliday (1994) stresses that all materials, should serve as comprehensible input, "communicating with the student, who is in the position of the receiver of the text". Materials should thus allow students to broaden their knowledge of rules of use and subconsciously acquire sounds, patterns and language through roughly – tuned input. Besides the linguistic elements of materials, design and user – friendliness of layout also communicates, serving as additional sensory input.

Krashen was an important figure whose input hypothesis once exercised powerful influence on SLA. According to his input hypothesis, SLA takes place when the learner understands input that contains grammatical forms that are at "i + 1" (i.e., are a little more advanced than the current state of the learner's interlanguage). He suggests that the right level of input is attained automatically when interlocutors succeed in making themselves understood in communication (Krashen, 1985: 2). In his view, the input hypothesis is central to all of acquisition. In other words, L2 acquisition depends on comprehensible input. In the classroom then, the teacher's main role is to ensure that learners receive comprehensible input by providing them with listening and reading materials.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What children learn in school is often designed to give them access to the next higher level of the educational system. The textbook should not be boring or seen irrelevant. That which obtains here quite contrasts with the objectives of communication stipulated by the official bilingualism in Cameroon. *"The advocates of bilingualism for national integration would like their bilingual citizens using French and English to be able to communicate with ease and be able to reach out to the rest of the world of the Francophonie and the Commonwealth."* Mbangwana (2004:18).

In fact, G. Mendo Ze (2007:35), remarked thus, *"le système éducatif camerounais connaît des problèmes qui contribuent [...] à la détérioration des conditions d'apprentissage du français"*. This is especially true when one observes the general conditions of study for the learners in Cameroon and specific conditions for some in the remote areas. The plethora we find in the classrooms, the cost of textbooks that apparently is not affordable for some parents, the absence of

libraries and good reference documents to boost studies and reading in school for learners as well as their teachers. This is quite demotivating and the culture of reading now remains farfetched. Just imagine yourself telling learners and teachers in this context that they must read and widen their scope and vocabulary. A long-term plan is better envisaged in this context. Furnish schools and municipalities with teaching aids and libraries.

How can one forget the progressive deterioration of the training of teachers of French language? In fact, the drop in standard of the French language today cannot be denied especially with the new generation of teachers of the French language. Most specialists say so. According to G. MendoZé (2003: 28), “*les enseignants de français n’ont plus le niveau de base requis*”. What then should be the profile of the new teacher of French in these days? M. F. Minyono-Nkodo gives a very pertinent answer to this question and we can buy his point of view. According to him one needs to define topics or the threshold for the new teacher of French in five axes:

La formation académique générale; la formation complémentaire ou interdisciplinaire; la formation didactique et pédagogique; l’intégration des TIC dans le système de formation des enseignants de français; l’évaluation au service de l’apprentissage du français (2003:49).

In addition, once in the field, in-service trainings and reorientation should be regularly organized with the intentions of completing the training the teachers had in school and for their adaptation to new tendencies and new inclinations in the teaching of French language.

Finally, one notices the insufficiencies in the teaching and learning of French most especially in the incomplete coverage of the course programmes which at times are compounded by the few hours allocated in the school timetables. It is also for this reason that G. MendoZé (2007:45) observes:

Les objectifs éducationnels ne sont pas atteints et des chapitres importants des programmes de français non abordés. Les élèves traînent ainsi, d’une année à l’autre, des lacunes réelles parce qu’ils n’ont ni maîtrisé, ni étudié, ni pratiqué certaines règles de la langue française. Ces lacunes se reflètent dans leur expression écrite et orale. [...] Ceux-ci deviendront, à coup sûr, des élèves vivant dans l’insécurité linguistique.

To sum it up, decision makers should carry out radical measures to fight the linguistic insecurity in the French language which mortgages the future of Cameroonian youths of today and tomorrow. How do we think that learners barely managing a few words,

and cannot read a few sentences will embark on such an arid pathway to social integration and the competition toward globalization?

Ngamassu (2006) analyses the dynamism of the French language in Sub Saharan Africa and the modalities of its appropriation. Can an African writer in Sub Saharan Africa appropriate the French language, that is to say, adapt it to a literacy use that is good for black Africa? Does Francophone literature constitute a means of appropriation of French, in a double sense of the term: its mastery by Africans and its adaptation to the African word?

To elucidate these questions, he goes from a double assumption. No writer, be him French or African will have the claim and the ambition to write exclusively in standard French because the standard norm is an idealized norm, even imaginary, thus inaccessible. Moreover, in France like in Africa, we do not find single French, but many French (varieties), every language being essentially heteroglossia. In fact, in the linguistic domain no literary text is homogeneous, because every literary text is a meeting place for several levels of language, even many languages.

Heterolingualism, which is the presence, in the same text, of words belonging to different languages, simply translates the dynamism and vitality of languages. The writer does not target a standard norm, but an individual norm or style. In other words, if one considers the role the renaissance writers played in the defence, the illustration and the enrichment of the French language, one can affirm that the writer’s style or his individual norm contributes to the dynamism of the language, and that the appropriation of the French language by African writers participate in the same process.

Ngamassu (2006) shows through a comparative study, the techniques of violation of the standard norms of French by African authors like Ahmadou Kourouma, Sony Labou Tansi and Mongo Beti. So, moving a little bit away from the standard norms deliberately and voluntarily is not only common with African authors. These writers aspire to a singular style, which distinguishes them from other writers. Consequently, they are at the periphery of the language, a language that is not normalized or good for teaching.

The teachers do not have a background good enough to enable them handle some difficult textbooks. The learners do not buy the textbooks, manifest lack of interest in the subject. This result is consistent with the findings of the researcher. We found that instructional issue in French teaching was very important in order to attain the main objective of

TOFFL in Cameroon. Similarly, the result was coherent with the findings of Echu and Simo (2004), who reached the conclusion that the main challenges in the teaching of French in the Anglophone classroom was focusing on mostly theory-based rather than practice-based and generally teacher-centred rather than learner-centred.

RELEVANCE OF STUDY

This study contributes to the field of foreign language teaching and to TOFFL (Teaching of French as a Foreign Language) in particular. This scientific work seeks to identify problems and propose possible solutions in the teaching of French as a foreign language in the Anglophone classroom in Cameroon. Since this research work was centred on the difficulties faced in the teaching and learning of French in the anglophone classroom, it was understandable to anticipate that the implications of the research might lead to designing a curriculum proposal including instructional strategies to help students. This study is quite original and the researcher has gone down to the root cause of the difficulties encountered in the teaching and learning of French from the elementary school level through the secondary school.

METHODOLOGY

The study involved a mixed method approach employing both qualitative and Quantitative data collection methods, and sampling techniques. It took a constructivist approach meaning that many different perspectives, or different views of reality, were considered (Kiehl and Rea- Dickens, 2005).

The setting for this research was Bamenda, Cameroon. The selection of participants was based on their background, experience, level of education and level taught. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested a large sample and narrowing it down to the desired size to add credibility to the process. Criteria such as qualification, subjects taught, region of origin, experience in teaching French and age were well considered. Combining such multiple criteria should lead to a “maximal variation sampling” (Creswell 2012).

For this study, a good number of questionnaires have been given to teachers in schools. Questionnaires were administered to the Secondary school teachers of French. Questionnaires were also administered to the mainstream teachers of primary schools. The primary schools do not have trained teachers for the teaching of the French language. Every main stream handles all the subjects in the curriculum. Some piloting was done with a few teachers of both the basic and secondary schools who were available at the initial stage. After piloting, feedback was gotten.

Based on the initial piloting feedback, changes were made in the formulation of questions. Given the scope and objectives of this study, it was determined that the use of questionnaires as the main research instrument would facilitate the implementation of the study.

We observed four lessons in some private and public primary schools in Bamenda, and two in government secondary schools. This we did to be able to reconcile the beliefs of the teachers and respondents with the actual practice in the classroom. Patton (2002) discussed the importance of naturalistic observations in the field. First, field work allows the researcher to understand the context where individuals interact, and to discover first-hand what is happening within that context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In today’s society many learners are facing the challenge accessing the course programme in a language other than their mother tongue. To enable the young anglophone learners of the French language to fully participate in both the academic and social aspects of school life, educators need to recognize how this phenomenon impacts on teaching and learning and identify ways to support language development. Learners who are learning in a language other than their mother tongue will often have a wealth of knowledge in a language other than that of the classroom. However, these students will often not have been introduced to the vocabulary and concepts of the new language necessary for comprehending content. Cameron (2000: 40) comments, “... If they are not understanding, they cannot be learning.”

As it can take up to seven years for learners who are using a language other than their mother tongue to attain the same levels of academic language proficiency as those expected for learners learning in a mother tongue, the implications of this in relation to learning are paramount. The learning of a language other than the mother tongue will really need a threshold level of proficiency in cognitive academic language and the learner needs to participate and engage fully. Do we really find this in our classrooms today? Policy-making should ensure the realization of this objective. Cameron (2001: 4).

The challenges highlighted could be addressed through professional training and development for teachers, motivating learners and providing teaching and learning resources in schools. There should be constant in-service training for teachers on the field to improve their pedagogic skills and to help them develop professionally. Training on how to make teaching and learning resources from locally available material would be ideal. Learners should be made to

see how relevant what they are learning is to their real- life experiences. This could help to motivate them when they remark that what they learn in school is not far removed from their lives.

CONCLUSION

A glance through the past century or so of language teaching gives an interesting picture of how varied the interpretations have been of the best way to teach foreign language. As schools of thought have come and gone, so have language teaching methods waxed and waned in popularity. Albert Marckwardt (1972:5) saw these “Changing winds and shifting sands” as a cyclical pattern in which a new paradigm of teaching methodology emerged about every quarter of a century, with each new method breaking from the old but at the same time taking with it some of the positive aspects of the previous paradigm.

There are a series of challenges hampering the acquisition and teaching of this second language in anglophone classroom. When the knowledge, competences and the proficiency to be acquired sufficiently meant to enable the learners embrace higher challenges like moving from the basic to the secondary education are not there, then there will be no reason trying the programme for the next level.

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