

THE ENGLISH AND FRENCH EDUCATIONAL SUB-SYSTEM LITERARY CURRICULA
AS INFLUENTIAL FACTORS OF STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN
AFRICAN LITERATURE IN CAMEROON UNIVERSITIES: THE CASE OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE 1

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UNDER THE SUB THEME: ASSESSMENT PERSPECTIVES IN MULTICULTURAL
SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

In Cameroon there are two sub-systems of education resulting from the French and English colonial experience. The students from the English sub-system are admitted into the University with a minimum requirement of the GCE A/L while those of the French sub-system are admitted into the University with a minimum requirement of the Baccalaureate. Students coming out from these two sub-systems into Cameroon Universities have to follow the same courses in certain faculties under the same conditions. These researchers looked into the curriculum of such students who are reading a degree program in African Literature in the University of Yaoundé 1 and observed a variation in their academic performance. Amongst the many factors that could cause variations in academic performance include school background factors as a possible cause in the variation of performance. The researchers found that students with the Baccalaureate performed generally better in African Literature than those with the GCE A/L. They further found that most students with the Baccalaureate had a better mastery of more than one foreign language than their mates who have the GCE A/L. This enabled them to appreciate many literature texts in their original language structure and thus expressed more stylistic features than their mates with the GCE A/L. The researchers therefore recommended that for students to pursue literature at higher levels of education they need to master more than one foreign language. Hence the English system of education needs to introduce other foreign languages in their secondary school curriculum in order to get their students better prepared to pursue literary studies at the University level.

Theoretical Framework

The theories that were used in this study are the theories of behavior and academic performance. These are the psychological field theory and the persuasive theory.

The central concept of the psychological field theory as propounded by Kurt Lewin (1935) is built on the formula that behavior (B) is a function of person (P) and the environment (E). Thus $B = f(P \leftrightarrow E)$. In this formula P and E are interdependent. It therefore explains that behavior is as a result of the sum total of all the environmental and personal interactions. Before registering in the University, the students have interacted variously in their environments as structured by the different educational sub systems. This invariably has an impact on their performance in the courses in the University. Conger (1973) opined that to understand behavior, one must consider both the individual and his environment as a constellation of a dynamically interacting interdependent factor.

The persuasive theory was propounded by McGuire (1987). This theory draws attention to the importance of message and source factors in influencing the individual learner. The message factors are the characteristics of the message that makes it appropriate and conducive for learning. The source factors are the characteristics of the message source that make it interesting,

relevant and persuasive for a particular learner. In African Literature many texts that are used are not in the original language of the authors. Ability to read these texts in the original language of the authors improves on the characteristics of the source factors and influences the learning capacity of the individual learner. The characteristics of the message in these texts can better be appreciated if the text is read in the original language of the author.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to look into the English and French educational sub-system literary curricula as influential factors of students' academic performance in African Literature in Cameroon Universities using the University of Yaoundé 1 as a case study. The study will therefore (i) find out whether there are variations in academic performance in African Literature between students from the English and French sub systems (ii) bring out disparities in the language and literacy curricular of secondary schools in the English and French subsystems during pre-university schooling. (iii) Verify the influence of language use on the academic performance of students in African Literature in Cameroon Universities.

Review of related Literature

According to Wheeler (1983) the curriculum process consists of five phases:

1. The selection of aims, goals and objectives,
2. The selection of learning experiences calculated to help in the attainment of these aims, goals and objectives
3. The selection of content (subject matter) through which certain types of experiences may be offered
4. The organisation and integration of learning experiences and content with respect to the teaching learning process within school and classroom
5. Evaluation of the effectiveness of all aspects of phase 2,3 and 4 in attaining the goals detailed in phase 1

In ascertaining the aims goals and objectives in the curriculum process a three step process is necessary. These are the ultimate goals, mediate goals and proximate goals. Ultimate goals are

the expected end products of an education carried out over time. They are the kinds of behavior that the educator hopes learners will exhibit as a result of the education they have received. Mediate goals are statements of intended behaviour in classes of situations at given stages. Thus certain behaviours which may be intended at one level cannot be instilled unless certain other behaviours have been established at earlier stages. Proximate goals are the most specific statements of intended behavioural outcomes possible. They are usually termed the course of study. The study of language and literary studies in the two subsystems in Cameroon have their aims structured depending on the inherited colonial systems.

The means of changing or instilling behavior is through learning experiences. These could be physical, mental or emotional. The teacher might have experiences in mind, derived from the record of experiences, either his own or someone else's, directed to change behavior. In presenting the aspects of learning in the language and literary programs, the teachers in the various sub systems present experiences according to the orientations that are their own or those they got from their teachers.

The selection of subject matter or content tends to be the principal concern of most curriculum makers. Selection of content will principally involve the decision of what knowledge, concepts, principles, generalizations, theories, techniques and procedures in a particular subject shall be used. This will end up in the drawing up of a syllabus that is to be used in the subject concerned. Drawing the syllabus in the language and literary studies in the subsystems is done by different and independent groups hence may have many aspects that are different.

The organisation and integration of experiences and content are planned to produce certain behaviours within the general areas of understanding, sensitivities, feelings, attitudes, values and skills. The principles that operate in this phase are best derived from those which govern learning situations in general and those in school and classroom in particular. Such principles as proceeding from simple to complex, from part to whole, from concrete to abstract, from the here and now to the then and there, or on the presumed logic of the subject matter. The organisation and integration of the subject matter in language and literary studies in the two subsystems in Cameroon are varied depending on the teacher and the subsystem.

The phase of evaluation will then involve answering questions like:

- i. Has the student actually acquired the facts, knowledge, the skills, the attitudes, the beliefs and the values that were intended?
- ii. Were the experiences chosen suitable enough for attaining the operational goals, or would other experiences perhaps have been more suitable?
- iii. Did the selected content contribute effectively, or would other content have been more suitable?
- iv. Was the integration of experiences and content effective or were related areas of subject matter learned in a conceptualized fashion?
- v. Would a different sort of organisation have produced greater change in the desired direction, either for some or all of the learners?

Many other questions could be structured whose answers will bring to mind the disparities that exist in the language and literacy curricular of secondary schools in the English and French subsystems during pre-university schooling

Research questions

To give focus to the study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What disparities exist in the language and literacy curricular of secondary schools in the English and French subsystems during pre-university schooling?
2. How does the regular use of language of instruction influence the academic performance of students in African Literature in Cameroon Universities?
3. What are the variations in academic performance in African Literature between students from the English and French sub systems?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in their null form to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the regular use of language of instruction between students of African Literature from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1.
2. There is no significant difference in academic performance in African Literature between students from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the Ex-post Facto research design. The Ex-post Facto research design basically studies phenomena after they have occurred. Kerlinger (1986) defines Ex-post Facto research as

“a systematic empirical inquiry in which the scientist does not have any control of independent variables because their manifestations have already occurred or because they are inherently non manipulable. Inferences about relations are made without direct intervention from concomitant variation of independent and dependent variables” (p379).

This research which is designed to study the English and French educational sub-system literary curricula as influential factors of students’ academic performance in African Literature in Cameroon Universities using the University of Yaoundé 1 as a case study would best be carried out using this design because the students in the universities have already passed through secondary schools where the manifestation of the various curricula are already showing in them and is already impacting on their academic performance in different ways. Here the researcher does not have any control over the variables under study because they have already occurred.

The study was carried out using 240 (two hundred and forty) students of year one in African Literature drawn from the University of Yaoundé 1. These students of year one were chosen because they are just coming from secondary schools and the impact of their sub systems is still very dominant in their study styles. The selection of the students used in the sample was done using purposive, stratified and quota sampling techniques. The instrument used for data collection in this study was a questionnaire while for the research question, the syllabuses of the

both sub systems were used. The questionnaire was trial tested using fifty (50) students in order to establish its reliability and do adjustment of certain items if necessary. Using the Cronbach coefficient Alpha reliability method, the reliability of the variables ranged between 0.79 and 0.88. These values were considered good enough to accept the instrument for used for the study.

Data Treatment and Analysis

Research question

What disparities exists in the language and literacy curricular of secondary schools in the English and French subsystems during pre-university schooling?

The disparities that exist in the language and literacy curricular of secondary schools in the English and French subsystems during pre-university schooling were examined guided by the Wheeler model of the curriculum process. This model puts the curriculum process to contain:

1. The aims and objectives
2. Selection of learning experiences
3. The selection of content
4. The organisation and integration of experiences and content
5. Evaluation.

Aims and objectives

For this study the main aim of studies in the literary curricular that was looked into was that of furthering learning in higher education in the area. The two subsystems share this same goal. This furthering of learning was measured from the scores in students' academic performance in African literature in the first year in the University. From the scores of these students it generally seen that the Francophone students performed better than the Anglophone students in the subject. Whether the difference was significant was studied in hypothesis two.

Selection of learning experiences

This study revealed that the teachers when employed start of their teaching using the experiences that their own teachers used. That is most of them start teaching using the notes that their teachers gave to them when they were in secondary schools. Then they start developing them as the times go on and they gain experience. This causes them to transmit the same experiences that

they got from their teachers to the students. The teaching approach of Francophone teachers has a vast disparity from that of the Anglophones.

Selection of content

This involves the content of the curriculum in the two subsystems. The courses taught in the pre-university schooling are shown in Table 1

Table 1

	ORDINARY LEVEL/BREVET		
	Anglophone subsystem	Francophone subsystem	
1	English Language		
2	French language		
3	English Literature		
4	History		
5	Geography		
6	Economics		
7	Mathematics		
8	Biology		
9	Chemistry		
10	Physics		
11	Commerce		
	ADVANCED LEVEL		
	Anglophone subsystem (Arts subjects)	Francophone subsystem	
	English Literature		
	French		
	History		

	Philosophy		
	Economics		
	Geography		

The organisation and integration of experiences and content

In the Francophone subsystem, there is that emphasis on language courses from secondary school all through high school when they write the BACCALAUREATE examination. They continue to intensifying their mastery of languages by adding a third foreign language which could be German or Spanish to the English Language and French that they already do. This improves on their literary skills in general before they enter the University. The Francophones compulsorily do Philosophy in high school. This trains them in logic that helps them in analyzing literary works more deeply. The format of presentation of essays takes a more systematic approach (Dissertation). It allows for a clearer analysis when they discuss about a literary text. Explain terms, analyse them then drawing a conclusion. This is taught from secondary schools to the francophones even before they go to high schools.

The Anglophones do a good number of subjects before going to High School but in the high school they reduce to only three or four subjects excluding courses that can help them improve on their language skills. Even while they study French in secondary school they shy away from the lessons. This further reduces their chances of learning language structures before they go to High school. Though they are taught all other courses in English Language teachers are cautioned not to care much about their language errors when they express ideas either in assignments, tests or examinations. At the High school

Evaluation

The BREVET and the Baccalaureate are group certificate examination that are taken at secondary school and high school respectively in the Francophone system. A pass in any of these examinations is dependent on the average score that a candidate makes in all the subjects taken. The languages and mathematics have high coefficients. In order to make a good average the candidates put much emphases in course with high coefficients.

For the Anglophones, they do single subject certificates. A candidate can be declared successful at the General Certificate of Education (GCE) even if the candidate fails all the language courses. These disparities consequently impact on the academic performance of the students when they enter the University to read related courses.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the regular use of language of instruction between students of African Literature from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1.

Table 2

Independent t-test analysis of the difference in the regular use of language of instruction between students of African Literature from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1.

Subsystem	n	X	SD	t-value
English	109	18.67	2.94	13.47*
French	131	23.21	2.11	
Total	240	21.15	2.26	

$P^* < 0.05$, $df = 238$, critical $t = 1.97$

The result of the analysis reveals that the calculated t-value 13.47 is higher than the critical t-value of 1.97 at 0.05 level of significance with 238 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected. This result means therefore that there is a significant difference in the regular use of language of instruction between students of African Literature from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1.

Since a significant difference exists in the regular use of language of instruction between students of African Literature from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1, a further pattern of the difference was explored. The mean score for the Students of the French subsystem (mean = 23.21) was seen to be higher than that for students from the English subsystem (mean = 18.67). It therefore stands that students from the French subsystem of education use their language of instruction more regularly than their counterparts from the English subsystem.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in academic performance in African Literature between students from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1.

The independent variable in the hypothesis was the kind of subsystem that the students passed through in their pre University studies while the dependent variable was the students' academic performance in African literature. The independent t-test analysis was used. The result of the analysis is shown in Table 3

Table 3

Independent t-test analysis of the difference in academic performance in African Literature between students from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1.

Subsystem	n	X	SD	t-value
English	109	12.00	2.41	4.81
French	131	13.48	2.31	
Total	240	12.81	2.37	

$P^* < 0.05$, $df = 238$, critical $t = 1.97$

The result of the analysis reveals that the calculated t-value 4.81 is higher than the critical t-value of 1.97 at 0.05 level of significance with 238 degrees of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis was rejected. This result means therefore that there is a significant difference in academic performance in African Literature between students from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1.

Since a significant difference exists in academic performance in African Literature between students from the English and French educational sub systems in the University of Yaounde 1 a further pattern of the difference was explored. The mean score for the Students of the French subsystem (mean = 12.81) was seen to be higher than that for students from the English subsystem (mean = 12.00). It therefore stands that students from the French subsystem of education perform better in African Literature than their counterparts from the English subsystem.

Major findings

- The main aim of studies in the literary curricular that was considered in this study was that of furthering learning in higher education in the area
- The selection of learning experiences is different. For instance “dissertation” the format of presenting essays for Francophones is peculiar because it allows for a clearer analysis when they discuss about a literary text. Explain terms, analyses them then leads to the drawing of conclusion.
- The Anglophones do a good number of subjects before going to High School but in the high school they reduce to only three or four subjects excluding courses that can help them improve on their language skills
- Even while Anglophones study French in secondary schools they shy away from the lessons. This further reduces their chances of learning language structures before they go to High school.
- Though Anglophones are taught all the other subjects in English Language teachers of those subjects are cautioned not to care much about their language errors when they express ideas either in assignments, tests or examinations. At the High school
- The BREVET and the Baccalaureate are group certificate examinations that are taken at secondary school and high school respectively in the Francophone system. A pass in any of these examinations is dependent on the average score that a candidate makes in all the subjects taken. The languages and Mathematics have high coefficients. In order to make a good average in the certificate, the candidates put much emphases in the course with high coefficients.
- For the Anglophones, they do single subject certificates. A candidate can be declared successful at the General Certificate of Education (GCE) even if the candidate fails all the language courses.
- These disparities consequently impact on the academic performance of the students when they enter the University to read related courses.
- Students from the French subsystem of education use their language of instruction more regularly than their counterparts from the English subsystem

- Students from the French subsystem of education perform better in African Literature than their counterparts from the English subsystem.

Conclusion

- Students with the Baccalaureate had a better mastery of more than one foreign language than their mates who have the GCE A/L. This enabled them to appreciate many literature texts in their original language structure and thus expressed more stylistic features than their mates with the GCE A/L.
- Students from the French subsystem of education use their language of instruction more regularly than their counterparts from the English subsystem.
- The learning experiences that the Francophones are exposed to are more enabling for them to perform better in literary studies in the Universities than the Anglophones.
- It therefore gives reason for students from the French subsystem of education to perform better in African Literature than their counterparts from the English subsystem.

Recommendations

Base on this study the following recommendations were made:

- There should be the introduction of a second foreign language at the GCE Ordinary Level
- There should be a minimum required performance in the language of instruction for the candidate to have their results for the GCE Ordinary Level accepted.
- Students going in for literary studies in literature in high school must passed in at least two languages at the ordinary level
- Philosophy should be compulsory for those doing Literature in High school
- Joint Seminars for both systems could be organized that could bring together those teaching language and literature to enable them share experiences.
- In the university, the teachers should have joint departmental meeting to share their experience in the methods of teaching

References

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