

# **The Effectiveness of the Intervention of the Cameroon G.C.E Board in the Reinforcement of Government Policy of Bilingualism**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study is an evaluation research to situate the extent of the effectiveness of the intervention of the Cameroon G.C.E Board in government's efforts to rely on bilingualism as an ideological underpinning for National Integration. The study tries to find out whether by cancelling the entire results of candidates who absent from French Language since 2004, there has been an improvement in performance in the subject and thus a progress in the attainment of the goal of bilingualism. An effort is made to correlate candidates' effective presence and performance, and investigate reasons for the continuous nonchalant attitude towards the subject. The study reveals that reliance on public examination to reinforce bilingualism is as illusive as ever and that until the government assumes its responsibility and demonstrates appropriate political commitment in the reforms of curriculum content, pedagogy and the management of the school system, the dream of bilingualism is still distant.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the dawn of independence most African countries were faced with the most fundamental problem of consolidation of National Unity especially as many were fashioned to suit the design of the colonialists. In Cameroon, the problem was more demanding as the country was divided into two ideological and cultural lines, English and French. The issue was even more compounded by the fact that a population of about 16 million people speak about 239 indigenous languages. Added to these numbers of languages, French and English are used in a de jure official bilingual policy. Furthermore, Pidgin English the most widely spread language (Todd 1983) and "Franglais" a metropolitan hybrid code from French and English which is common among francophones, make the Cameroon linguistic setting interesting. There was therefore the need for structural reforms to accommodate the social, political and cultural changes to meet the existing realities. According to Tchombe (2000), Education seems to have provided this

liberating force as these societies could reformulate their own purposes, organize their own means to ensure growth and development.

The union between Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon necessitated the policy of bilingualism to be instituted. In its inception, it was understood that bilingualism would initiate a new curriculum organization which will provide solutions to the complex process of social change. The reinforcement of bilingualism it was thought would be vital for the National Unity, and integration of Cameroon.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The historical origins of secondary education which started in Cameroon in 1939 for English speaking Cameroon and in 1944 for French speaking Cameroon have imbued either system with the philosophies of education prevalent in the mother country. France in the 1940s and even now emphasized 'culture generale' as an overall aim of secondary education while the system of secondary school education introduced in English speaking Cameroon emphasized through the compulsory learning of other subjects such as Mathematics, History and Geography, while the Baccalaureat is divided into series. In each series, students are bound to study and sit for examinations in French language, Philosophy and Maths, History and Geography. Through this requirement, society and the authorities are assured that students leaving secondary school will have acquired a certain general culture as citizens, which derives from the language competence they have not only been taught but have been assessed for in the Baccalaureat examination.

On the other hand, in the English speaking system that obtained in Cameroon from 1939 to 1962 students were required to present a certain range of subjects in the West African School Certificate Examination from 1955 to 1962. In both the Cambridge and West African School Examinations candidates were required to select at least one subject from four groupings, language, social science, mathematics, science. Since 1962 the English speaking school system

has been dominated by the London GCE system. This system requires the candidate to select a limited number of subjects for the examination at either the Ordinary Level or the Advanced Level.

In principle therefore, the GCE system allows the candidate to enter and to obtain a certificate for each subject he passes for. In effect, the candidate could have a one subject curriculum for each year of his studies or study only one subject until he passes before switching to another subject. However, although learners do not go to this ridiculous length, the fact is that the notion of choice of subject has developed in the English speaking secondary school system a disparity of subject groupings in which each learner or candidate virtually follows a self-made curriculum.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

A number of reviews have tempted to summarise the definitions of bilingualism:

Christopherson (1940) differentiated between two types of bilingualism, individual and national. Individual bilingualism he defined ironically as referring to the individual who has “two mother tongues”. Christopherson, a Swede who rose to eminence as professor of English, epitomised his own definition of a bilingual. Such are rare.

But many definitions of individual bilingualism, explicitly or implicitly, imply that at least one of the target languages be the mother tongue. This is the sense in which the term is used in studies on bilingualism in the United States (Anderson, 1977, Cohen, 1975), Ireland (Macnamara, 1966), Canada (Lambert and Tucker, 1972), and Nigeria (Yoloye, 1965; Daramola, 1975, Fafunwa, 1976). These investigators do not imply bilingualism as being synonymous to equilingualism, equal levels of proficiency in two languages. However, their definition excludes individual for whom neither of the two language is the mother tongue. Education in Cameroon, as previously discussed, aims to produce this type of individual.

Other definitions consider such persons as bilinguals. Bloomsfield (1933, p.56) defined bilingualism as “a native-like control of two languages” better achieved in early childhood than in adulthood. Cohen (1975, p.8) defined bilingual as “a person who possesses at least some ability in one language skill or any variety from each of two languages.”

“Bilingual” is simply defined as the capacity to use two languages” (Gozi, 1974, p.277).

Anderson (1977, p.193) reviewing several attempts at defining bilingualism and bilingual, finally proposed “knowledge of two languages” as a working definition. He thus incorporated definitions by Macnamara (1967), Mackey (1972), and Haugen (1973).

Societal or national bilingualism generally refers to “the coexistence” in the same country or speech community of two languages. Weinreich (1964, p.1), in discussing “languages in contact”, refers to bilingualism as “the practice of alternately using two languages”.

However, one may suggest another meaning of bilingualism, one which seems appropriate for individuals who are literate in two foreign languages. Such is the case with English-French bilinguals in some countries in Africa, such as Togo and Cameroon. In this case, bilingualism would be synonymous to biliteracy.

From the above definitions there appears to be little consensus on the meaning of bilingualism, except that it refers to the use by the same individual or speech community of more than one language. Indeed, many researchers hold that the search for such a consensus is unproductive. They advise that attempts to observe, describe, and measure manifestations and effects of this phenomenon will better advance knowledge of bilingualism (Macnamara, 1967, Jakobovits, 1970, Mackey, 1970).

The term bilingualism in the Cameroonian context is difficult to define, describe and delimit. Hoffman (1991) asserts that it may be up to everyone (or

community) at least, to choose the definition of bilingualism that best suits his or her purpose.

Ayafor (2002) contends that from government's point of view, language policy is limited to the use of English and French within government domains and formal transactions within private sector domains. This exclusive language management strategy has been summarily named official bilingualism. Chumbow (1980) had earlier contradicted this when he states "Yet, it may not be viewed in linguistic principles as a linguistic policy in the real sense of the term as it lacks basic clear-cut linguistic definition, description, nor a systematic framework for its implementation. Tadadjeu (1983) asserts that lack of adequate linguistic prescriptions and frame of action leaves the policy no chance to develop as a language policy and it would not function in a socio-linguistic approach.

## **CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND**

The issue of designing a harmonized scheme to accommodate the bi-cultural nature of Cameroon has been difficult to resolve and has always met with fierce resistance especially from the Anglophone minority group who always interpret reforms as a way of assimilation. The problem of a unique system becomes more complex when the question must be asked as to WHO set the criteria of the reforms? WHAT are the priority order behind such reforms? And WHAT are the assumptions on which the criteria were fixed?

In an effort to resolve the problems, two strategies were therefore used to ensure a relevant and meaningful co-existence. The Education Forum of 1995 and the Law of 1998.

Section 15 of Law No. 98/004 of April 14, 1998 states that:

- (1) The Educational system shall be organized into two sub-systems. The English speaking sub system and the French speaking sub system thereby re-affirming our national option of bilingualism.

- (2) The above mentioned educational system shall co-exist with each other preserving its specific method of evaluation and award of certificates.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

On Form GI (Instructions to candidates) it is clearly articulated. All candidates going for Ordinary Level new and repeat, must register for the compulsory subjects; English language, French and Mathematics. Candidates who absent themselves from any paper of the three compulsory subjects shall be considered absent and their results for the entire examination will be nullified.

This study tries to evaluate the overall effectiveness of this policy in terms of learner's achievement in French and investigate factors for the continued decline in performance despite the strict implementation of this policy by the Cameroon G.C.E Board. A proper understanding of the situation is represented by the results statistics presented below.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

Two approaches are mirrored in this evaluation study.

1. A comparative analysis of candidates' performances five years before the implementation of the policy and five years after the implementation of the policy is done.
2. A purposeful record of all marks scored for Ordinary Level French Paper 2; was carried out. Every examiner was provided with the form for record of marks for the two questions that make the paper. Question 1 was translation from English to French and carried a total of 80 marks. Paper 2 was Essay writing in French and also carried a total of 80 marks. For the purpose of this study, marks from 0 – 15 were used for analysis.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 1. Analysis of performance

**Table 1: Results of Ordinary Level French from 1999 – 2009 in Percentages**

Year	Percentage (%) pass	Average percentage
1999	21.23	25.87
2000	21.2	
2001	29.92	
2002	27	
2003	30	
2004	36.11	36.11
2005	25.48	24.03
2006	22.63	
2007	24.08	
2008	24.21	
2009	23.78	

Five years before the implementation of the policy, percentage pass rate range from 21.2 to 30% giving an average of 25.87%. In 2004, the year of the implementation of the policy, percentage pass rose to 36.11%, giving an increase of 10.24 from the previous average. This increase was probably as a result of the fact that candidates were afraid of a possible reprimand from the G.C.E Board.

However, five years after the implementation of the policy, the average pass rate is 24.03%. This gives a drop of 1.84% from the average five years before the implementation of the policy. The reason is that candidates came to realise that the policy was just one of those vague treats to force them to develop interest in French. This can be true if we consider that the policy did not accompany any measures to compel them to increase their performance in the subject.

2. In Essay writing, 28,734 out of the 49,000 candidates who sat for the paper scored between 0 to 15 on a total score of 80. This gives 58.6%. The score analysis is indicated below:

**Table 2: Sample Size for Question 1 (Essay) – 28,734**

S/N	Range	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
1	00	6,578	22.84	22.89
2	01 – 5	6,986	24.21	47.1
3	06 – 10	4,252	14.80	61.9
4	11 – 15	3719	12.94	75
5	Blank	713	2.48	25.15
6	Offensive answers	127	0.44	
7	Trash	6,389	22.23	
<b>Total</b>		<b>28,734</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

When scores of zeros, trash, blanks, and offensive answers are put together, 13,807 out of the 49,000 candidates scored zero. This gives 28.17%.

For question 2, (Translation), out of 49,000 candidates who sat for the paper, 24,628 scored between 0 – 15 on a total score of 80. This gives a percentage of 50.26 as analysed below.

**Table 3: Sample Size for Question 2 (Translation) – 24,628**

S/N	Range	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
1	00	1,282	5.2	5.4
2	01 – 5	2,696	11	16.16
3	06 – 10	13,481	54.74	70.9
4	11 – 15	5,497	22.32	93.22
5	Blank	1,263	5.13	7%
6	Offensive answers	161	0.65	
7	Trash	248	1.00	
<b>Total</b>		<b>24,628</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The reasons for these consistent poor performances are not hard to find. There is the absence of an official government position on the subject in spite of ongoing action and declared efforts to encourage the use of French and English at the individual, institutional and government levels. There is lack of political courage and genuine political commitment in defining a consistent language policy and putting in place a systematic framework for its implementation (Tadajeu, 1983).

Simo Bobda and Tiomajou (1995) have indicated "... due to the absence of clearly defined objectives, the policy regarding bilingualism in Cameroon has remained over the years vague with a political rather than a linguistic goal." This position introduces the argument that bilingualism in Cameroon is not a language policy thus, putting its role as an integrative policy to question. It is a political instrument used to coerce and hold two separate political entities together for the political purpose of creating a unitary state.

In other words, French and English are only an instrumental medium of reaching and making re-unification and the unitary state work at any price (Chumbow, 1980). This explains why government lacks the political courage to come up with a policy formulation as it might lead to ethnic or regional conflicts which might eventually spark national disintegration. Most government policy on the teaching and learning of English and French have been presented in vague, ambiguous and general terms to make non-compliance easy. They are usually presented as a mere statement of intent, without any provision for implementation. "It may well be articulated in pronouncements and policy documents, but remain on paper as a manifesto or its implementation may be aborted by elite self-interest" Bamgbose (2000).

Tchombe (2000) in appraising the teaching of French to Anglophones acknowledged the "absence of equity in focus." The preparation of teachers to teach English to Francophones is well organised even though in the field they meet with resistance, this is not the case of the teaching of French to Anglophones who are very willing to learn French in order to survive.

The overpowering role of Pidgin English as a linguistic bridge between the two linguistic communities both in private and official domains has weakened the desire for Anglophones to learn French. Added to this, is “Franglais” a metropolitan hybrid code from French and English.

With the advent of Globalisation and the ICT culture and the domineering role of the English as a world language, students are beginning to have a passive attitude to the significance of French. This passive attitude encourages a negative attitude to French and eventually has significant implication on students’ performance.

## **CONCLUSION**

From analysis of candidates’ performance since 2004, it is appropriate to conclude that, cancelling the entire results of candidates absent from the French language is good, at least, as a show of political intent but has no positive effect on candidates’ performance and consequently the attainment of the goal of bilingualism. It is another demonstration of the lack of political courage to make appropriate commitments in the bilingualism goal. To the Cameroon G.C.E Board, it is a waste of enormous resources to pay each year to examiners; transport dues, script dues, and out of station allowances to mark 13,000 scripts of trash.

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