Optimising Post-Colonial Bilingual Education in Cameroon’s Primary and Secondary Schools: A Critic on School Practice

Yaro Loveline1*

1Department of Curriculum Studies and Teaching, Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Cameroon.

Author’s contribution

The sole author searched, reviewed, critically analysed related literature, she equally interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

ABSTRACT

The post-colonial period was a turning point in Cameroon’s educational system. Since Independence and Reunification in 1960-61, the various governments of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, the United Republic of Cameroon and the Republic of Cameroon have been committed to the development of Education. Significant resources have been invested in this course geared towards improved education quality in both sub-sectors of Primary and Secondary Education. The Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education continue to be amongst the top ministries to receive the highest allocation from the state budget with 19.7% in 2010 and 16.3% in 2011 (Cameroon, 2015). However, there still exist challenges to quality education in Cameroon that the government has continued to address through, formation of commission, committees, and taskforces that have influenced curriculum policy formulation and implementation. In this respect, the formulation of education policy of bilingualism to use in the teaching and learning in Cameroon schools has been one of the main concerns of education in Cameroon. There is therefore need to assess and monitor progress of how this has guided teaching and learning in schools. How this policy has evolved overtime and especially how it is serving the purpose for which it was formulated. Using the
Historical approach this study provides an opportunity to critically examine the efforts made in Cameroon in implementing the policy of bilingualism formulated for teaching in primary and secondary schools after independence and reunification. It sheds light in the meaning of bilingualism in the context of school application and broadens discussions on challenges faced by stakeholders in the implementation process. Furthermore, as the country, looks towards the achievement of the millennium development goals and education for sustainable development, the study provides recommendations to optimize bilingualism in Schools in Cameroon.

Keywords: Optimising post-colonial; bilingual education; primary and secondary schools and school practice.

ACRONYMS

C.S : Catholic School
GCE : General Certificate of Education
GTTC : Government Teacher Training College
ICT : Information Communication Technology
C.E.P.E. : Certificat d’Etudes Primaires Elementaires
CEFOB : Centre d’Enseignement et de Formation Bilingue
MINESEC : Ministry of Secondary Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The educational system in Cameroon is a legacy of the British and French colonial administration whose inherited practices gave rise to bicultural and bilingual paths on which various aspects of its national life were developed when it became independent. The country belongs to the respective linguistic and cultural entities of the Commonwealth and Francophonie [1]. Following independence and reunification in 1960/61, one of the main challenges faced by the new nation was to provide a revolutionary educational policy environment that would meet the needs of all Cameroonians. Bilingualism was seen as an option in meeting the needs of the new nation.

Bilingualism is the alternate use of two languages, while bilingual education is the use of two languages as the media of instruction for a child or groups of children in a part or the entire school curriculum [2]. In the Cameroon context, bilingualism refers to the acquisition of proficiency in English by francophones and of French by anglophones.

2. ANTECEDENT TO A POLICY BILINGUALISM IN CAMEROON

Cameroon’s option for official bilingualism is a consequence of its colonial past. According to [3], at reunification, in 1961, the Federal State of Cameroon decided to take up two official languages, French and English and to promote the alternate use of these two languages by her citizens. He called this French – English bilingualism. [4], argued that because Britain and France were the last colonial powers to occupy Cameroon prior to its independence, the pre-independence debates about the language choice for education and the administration favoured English and French for their perceived ‘utilitarian value as a global and as a language of opportunities. [5], also argued that the choice of two non-indigenous languages for education in Cameroon evidently had serious political, educational and developmental implications for the country, especially when the decision to promote official bilingualism in English and French was taken in complete disregard of other official language in education models suggested around the same period which included the use of Cameroonian languages in schools.

The threshold of bilingualism in Cameroon was the country’s attainment of independence. With the accession of French Cameroon to independence on January 1st 1960, and that of British Cameroon on October 1st 1961, both joined to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon. One of the main features of this union was the revolutionary change in the language policy from use of separate languages in both sub system to use of two languages as the official languages of the state. As a result of both states opting for bilingualism, the federal constitution adopted French and English as the official languages of the country. In 1972, the country’s name was changed to the United Republic of Cameroon, still with English and French being its official languages. Section 1(4) of the 1972 constitution stated that ‘the official language of the United Republic of Cameroon shall be French and English’ (Presidency of the United Republic of Cameroon, 1972). Since then, several decisions couched in the form of
ordinances, decrees, circulars, service notes, have been taken by the state to ensure the spread of official bilingualism in the country. One most significant attempt was the 1996 constitution which stated in article 1, paragraph 3 of January 18th, 1996 that, “the official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The state shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country.” (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1996).

According to Echu [6,7,8], the Cameroon government adopted official bilingualism in English and French as a language policy to foster the country’s unity. The application of official bilingualism is most evident in everyday life and in educational institutions; however, the formal education has been the only medium used for promoting official bilingualism in Cameroon. Since reunification, the successive governments and constitutions of Cameroon have maintained and developed this policy of Bilingualism and the government has always made great efforts to set up structures that would prepare the youth to use both official languages with ease [9-17].

3. THE MEANING OF THE POLICY OF BILINGUALISM IN CAMEROON SCHOOLS

According to Tambo [18], bilingualism as a curriculum policy in Cameroon revolves around the teaching and use of French and English in educational institutions. He maintains that this effort is thought to be the best way to promote the constitutional option of state bilingualism which Cameroon adopted at independence and unification. In 1963, Fonlon, one of the earliest advocates for bilingualism wrote an article titled “A case for Early Bilingualism” in which he proposed that both English and French should be taught together from the very start of the primary school. But the situation in fact was that in each federated state one of these languages was already a dominant language; English in the West and French in the East. Therefore, while both languages would be taught, the dominant languages in each state would be the languages of the instruction for the rest of the school subjects. His argument was based on the premise of the overwhelming importance of language as a tool of communication in life and studies.

Providing some broad goals and guidelines on the Bilingual education policy in Cameroon, President Ahidjo in an address to the nation from Buea in 1964 contended that “It is not enough that West Cameroonians learn French as a second language as can be done in other countries, Nigeria for example. It is not enough that East Cameroonians learn English as a second language, as can be done in France. On the contrary, from primary school onwards all children must learn to express themselves fluently in both languages”. The above two contentions were working against a UNESCO report of 1963 on the language situation in Cameroon which suggested that the language situation remains as it is [19-28]. This meant that all French-speaking institutions would utilize French as the medium of instruction while English be maintained as the sole medium of instruction for all English-speaking schools. According to [29], the recommendation made by UNESCO was quickly and warmly accepted by the English-speaking policy makers in the 1963. He continued that they took the stance that it would be educationally imprudent to introduce a new language to children at the primary grades because children at these early stages of education would not achieve mastery in either of the foreign languages. They suggested that the second official languages be reserved and later introduced at the secondary level.

4. BILINGUALISM AS SCHOOL PRACTICE

In order to implement the policy of bilingualism, the state of Cameroon took a number of steps in the Management of various aspects of public life. One of the most fundamental steps was taken in the domain of education whereby, bilingual schools were created as from 1963. [30] added that Children in Cameroon schools are thus expected to be introduced to the learning of English and French (bilingualism) from the first year of primary school. According to [1], the objectives of bilingual schools as stated in the “Final Report on the Reinforcement of Bilingualism in the Cameroon Education System” are [31]:

a) To consolidate national unity and integration through mutual self-respect by understanding each other’s cultural background. Cultural background here should mean, English-speaking or French-speaking background;
b) To provide opportunities for Cameroonian children irrespective of their ancestral villages or places of birth to evolve educationally in the cultural system of their parents’ choice;

c) To recreate, as it were, a microcosm of the Cameroonian society, in which students would live together and interact and thereby, hopefully breaking down some of the walls of prejudice and ignorance about each other’s language group;

d) To produce highly bilingual individuals who would be models to other Cameroonians;

e) To produce a core of highly bilingual citizens to prop up the bilingual machinery of the state in areas such as education translation and the civil service;

f) To eventually produce a core of cadres who would be suited for eventual training as translators and interpreters.

This implies that bilingual schools would be open and bilingual teachers trained so that they would be sufficiently equipped to teach English and French in schools. [1], contended that many changes were made at the primary through to the tertiary levels of learning.

At the secondary level, the institution of bilingual education can be traced as far back as 1963 when the Cameroon government opened a Bilingual Grammar School at Man O War Bay in the then West Cameroon. Called the Federal Bilingual Grammar school, the first batch of students who were only boys was made of 35 students from East Cameroon and 35 from West Cameroon with a total enrolment of 70 students. The first principal was French man called Denise Ropper. This school was later transferred to Buea in September 1969 and is today known as Bilingual Grammar School Molyko, Buea. In 1965 the Bilingual Practicing School was opened in Yaounde to serve as a practicing school for the Higher Teacher Training College with the first two Principals being white men. A Cameroonian only came in as Principal in 1973.

Kouega [32] posited that at the secondary level of learning, bilingualism was introduced in all secondary and technical schools by 1966. French was taught as a subject in all English – medium schools and so was English in all French-medium schools. He holds that in urban centres, bilingual grammar schools were created; here students following an English – medium programme were brought together on the same premises, and an effort was occasionally made to repeat in the one language a course already taught in the other. Students who did not have the privilege of being admitted into such schools could have similar courses in the American, British and French cultural centres in capital cities. During that period, private colleges were optioned in Lycee Jos Douala, C.S. Mbonadombe C.S Akwa. In Yaounde, C.S. NgoaEkelle, Celtic NgoaEkelle, Celtic Charles Atangana at Bastos. Echu [12] contended that, the uniqueness of bilingual education as practiced in Bilingual Grammar School Molyko lies in the fact that, for a long time, both English-speaking and French-speaking studied side by side in the same classroom, with some courses being taught in English and others in French. This practice obtained during the first three years of secondary education. From the fourth year onwards (Form IV for English-speaking and Troisième for French-speaking), the students were free to choose the system of their choice so as to prepare adequately for the end of the first cycle examinations (GCE Ordinary Level for English-speaking and BEPC for French-speaking) [33-42]. This notwithstanding, a good number of candidates, irrespective of their linguistic background, succeeded in both the GCE Ordinary Level and BEPC examination. Fonge [20] added that from the very beginning, the curricula of the Bilingual practicing College in Yaounde covered only the first cycle of the secondary school work while that of Bilingual school Buea, included the cycle of a lycée. In 1978, the Yaounde school was raised to the status of a lycée.

Ahmadou [1], postulated that, in technical and professional colleges, English was a compulsory subject for the French speaking counterparts and so was French for English students. In some of these schools, students who scored a low mark in the other official language were compelled to re-sit for their end of year examinations even when their overall performance in these examinations was good.

At the primary level, bilingualism was to be introduced in all schools as from 1975. The aim was to give every pupil a sound linguistic basis for further studies [1]. [5] however argued that, the first main attempts at bilingual education in Cameroon primary schools were observed with the opening of Government Bilingual Primary Schools (‘écoles publiques bilinques’) in the
French-speaking towns of Yaoundé and Douala as early as 1967. Although these primary schools operated in English and were simply replicas of Government Primary Schools as found in the English-speaking provinces, children of French-speaking parentage were encouraged to attend. He continued that as from 1972, another development occurred in French-speaking primary schools (otherwise known as ‘écoles French-speaking’) situated in the English-speaking provinces. Several children of English-speaking parentage attended these primary schools, which were initially at the service of the French-speaking population (mainly children of government civil servants and military personnel) [43-51].

For a long time, the Government Bilingual Primary School in Yaoundé was the reference institution for bilingual education in primary schools. But since the 80s, the practice has been extended to private institutions. And in order to attract an increasing middleclass clientele, these schools generally claim to be ‘bilingual’ even when in reality they were not. Although by 1974 the quest for bilingual education in primary schools had attained a high level of significance with several French-speaking parents sending their children to English-speaking primary schools and several English-speaking parents sending their children to French-speaking primary schools, the trend today indicates that while many French-speaking parents continue to send their children to English-speaking primary schools, English-speaking parents are rather reticent to send their children to French-speaking primary schools. As a linguistic minority, it would appear that the idea of language loyalty more than anything else is the driving force behind the reticence observed within English-speaking circles [29,1], also argued that the bilingualism project took off very timidly in urban centres and did not even start in rural areas for various reasons among which the lack of teachers and sufficient funding were put forward. He continued that as a result of this, most pupils leave primary schools with a limited knowledge of the other official language. [52], argued that:

‘They cannot for instance greet one another in English nor pronounce the letters of the alphabet. This explains why form one French-speaking students, in their first week of English classes are taught how to greet one another, understand and use expressions of time (good morning, good afternoon) recognize pronounce the letters of the English alphabet’(p.11).

While arguing that the Bilingual aspect of schools is only limited to the names and not the practice, [5], agreed with [1], that the concept of Bilingual schools has been misunderstood by the system whereby either English-speaking and English-speaking students sit side by side each other in the same classroom and receive 100% of formal education in one language.

According to Nana [30], bilingualism in Cameroon started off from a wrong premise. He argued that it is paradoxical that in Cameroon, the trust of bilingualism in the education system did not come through the doors of primary schools. Despite Fonlon’s proposal for early bilingualism, in which he stated that ‘My contention, repeated now ad nauseam, is that both English and French should be taught together from the very start of primary school’ (Tambo in Lyonga, 1989. p.58), the West Cameroon Educational Policy Statement of 1963 argued;

In the opinion of the Government, French should be taught to persons who have not acquired a solid foundation in English, as this would lead to a maladjustment, and might well result in pidgin becoming the lingua franca of a large section of the population who had started on the road to English, learnt it in a small degree, and then become diverted to the learning of French [53,54].

Nana [30], contended that, while the experiment in bilingual education named the Molyko model was viewed as successful in terms of training pupils to an equal level of proficiency in English and French, this was deemed to be ‘too expensive, not cost effective and unnecessary’. A report from the Ministry of Education in 2000 stated that the whole exercise was a ‘grope in the dark as there was no long-term vision or policy on bilingual schools vis-à-vis other schools’ [52].

According to Fonge [55], efforts at instituting bilingualism in Cameroonian schools encountered some major difficulties during the past thirty years with regards both to teaching and to practical application. Many of such difficulties, together with recommendations on how to eradicate them were analyzed by various commissions. He concluded that a good number
of their recommendations have never been implemented. [5], further argued that in spite of the successes registered in this institution, the Bilingual Grammar School Buea experiment was bound to fail in the long run because students of the two linguistic communities were not treated in the same way. While English-speaking students were obliged to seat for the BEPC examination, French-speaking students were not obliged to seat for the GCE Ordinary Level examination. Thus, for the English-speaking minority, this situation created the impression that the system was encouraging a type of Frenchization of the English-speaking population, while French-speaking simply evolved in their system without any constraints [56], pp. 28-29; [5]. He concluded that the practice of bilingualism in Cameroon schools was more of an immersion experience whereby French-speaking children attended English-speaking schools or English-speaking attended French-speaking schools.

Although the government has since opened many other bilingual secondary schools all over the country (beginning with the Bilingual Grammar School Yaoundé in 1965), the spirit of bilingualism in these institutions remains essentially limited to their names. Despite the above criticisms on bilingual practice in secondary schools in Cameroon, there have been some positive outcomes registered by the Bilingual schools. According to statistics obtained from the Ministry of National Education in Yaoundé, students’ performance recorded in French at the GCE Ordinary Level in bilingual secondary schools is higher than that in the non-bilingual secondary schools. While the average percentages of successful candidates in Ordinary Level French for the two leading bilingual institutions in the country (Bilingual Grammar School Buea and Bilingual Grammar School Yaoundé) were 90.52% in 1988 and 90% in 1991, the average percentage of successful candidates recorded in the same subject for non-bilingual secondary schools in the country stood at 21.2% in 1988 and 17.46% in 1991 [5].

Nana [30], added that the Launching of the operation bilingualism in the wake of the unitary state appears to have been in line with the 1963 West Cameroon Education Policy with regard to the training of the second Official language teachers and the introduction of English and French as subjects on the primary syllabus. He continued that a centre known in French acronym as CEFOB (Centre d’Enseignement et de Formation Bilingue) was created for the training of bilingual teachers who were expected to spend an additional year at the training centre if they intended to teach English and French in schools. Though operation bilingualism was perceived by government as outstanding and ushering in a sea of change in the policy of bilingualism in primary schools in Cameroon, [52], the government suspended the training of bilingual teachers when it closed down training colleges for primary school teachers in the 1990. However, a MINEDUC report blamed the failure of Operation Bilingualism ‘less as a result of the failure of teachers at the working frontiers of the classroom and more as a bureaucratic bungling and the lack of political will to sustain it’ ([57], p.19).

Despite the above perceived failure of the implementation of the policy of bilingualism in Cameroon schools, there was a reorientation of the educational policy in Cameroon starting with the Education forum of 1995 and culminating into the 1998 law laying down guidelines for education in Cameroon. As a follow up of the 1995 education forum, a ministerial order N0. 21/E/59 of 15 May 1996 was signed organizing the Grade I teacher certificate examination. It stipulated that ‘every primary school teacher would henceforth teach every subject on the school syllabus including the second official language subjects. This meant that new teachers had to be trained and the old reoriented to meet with new emphasis and challenges in teaching. Bilingualism generated a new kind of curriculum organization, representing a new approach to education reflecting a complex process of social change. The introduction of bilingualism puts pressure on the teacher factor because of lack of teacher preparedness for this new task [58].

Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 laying down guidelines for education in Cameroon stated in Part 1, section 3 that ‘the State shall institute bilingualism at all levels of education as a factor of national unity and integration’. In an attempt to implement this policy, a series of ministerial decisions were taken to improve on the bilingual practices in schools. As a take-off towards a new orientation in instituting official bilingualism in Cameroon, a committee sat and studied the problems that thwarted the smooth implementation of official bilingualism in Cameroon. In a “Final Report on the Reinforcement of Bilingualism in the Cameroon Education System” ([52], pp.21-2) the committee made the following observations:
• There is usually a general lack of teachers in some of the remote bilingual colleges;
• All the so-called bilingual schools are in reality, two schools juxtaposed;
• Because of the reasons above, many bilingual schools are empty shells that give parents and students a false sense of what they are;
• It is the duty and responsibility of all colleges and high schools to promote bilingualism;
• Both second official languages are not tested at the end of course examinations in the primary schools. This has a negative wash-back effect on teaching and learning;
• There are no single compound bilingual primary schools with one head teacher. In all, there are a handful of primary schools which are called bilingual primary schools particularly in the French-speaking regions. They are bilingual only in name;
• Parents and teachers found the elitist system too demanding on students;
• The Molyko experiment was too expensive, since it required that parents should buy two sets of books; it was not cost effective as too much money, energy and staff was spent on a minority of elitist group of students;
• The experiment was unnecessary since bilingual secondary school students could be produced in normal colleges and high schools;
• The whole exercise was a grope in the dark as there was no long term vision or policy on bilingual schoolsvis-à-vis other schools.

Reacting to this report, a ministerial Order No.62/C/13 MINEDUC/CAB of 16th February 2002, was signed introducing the teaching of English and French from class 1 to 6 in all primary schools and making them compulsory subjects in both the written and oral parts of the First School Leaving Certificate examinations and the Certificat d’études Primaires. Later on October 14th 2002, another degree was issued in a circular letter No. 033/B1/1464/MINEDUC/IE/IGPBIL, requesting primary school teachers to teach the second official language in their classrooms.

Other decisions aimed at raising the consciousness of Cameroonian about the importance of state bilingualism were taken by the Ministries in charge of Education. Decision number 1141/B1/1464/MINEDUC/IGE/BIL of 28th October 2002 instituted a National Day of Bilingualism (2nd of February each year) in all public and private schools in Cameroon with effect from the 2002-2003 school year, this with the aim of fostering bilingualism in primary and secondary education. Furthermore, a day is chosen in the week by each school and called “Bilingualism Day” for French-speaking secondary schools and Journée du Bilinguisme for English-speaking schools. On this day, all students and staff are expected to communicate in their second official language during specific moments of the day. In addition to this day, decision number B1/1464/MINEDUC/IGE/PGP/BIL of 2nd December 2002 aimed at revamping practical bilingualism in secondary schools with the creation of “English Clubs” for French-speaking students, “Clubs de Français” for English-speaking students, the singing of the national anthem in both in English and French languages on alternate days, and the awarding of prizes to the best bilingual students in each class (Circular letter No. B1/1464/MINEDUC/IGE/IGP/BIL of 2 December 2002).

Again, Circular No.009/B1/1464/MINEDUC/IGE/IGP/BIL of April 9th 2003 was issued instructing teacher training colleges to provide adequate language training to student teachers so that they may be sufficiently equipped to teach the second official language so as to effectively teach pupils in school. In-service training should be offered to teachers to cope with the changes. With a view to boost learners’ and teachers’ skills to express themselves in both official languages, a circular letter N° 31 MINESEC/IGE/IP-BIL of 30 September 2009 Instituting the “Bilingual Game” in Secondary General and Technical Schools and Technical Teacher Training Colleges was sent out to all schools in Cameroon. It stated that; as from the 2009-2010 academic year, a “Bilingual Game” was henceforth instituted in all schools within the Ministry of Secondary Education. The aim of the “bilingual game” was to improve the ability of young Cameroonians to master both official languages. The implementation of the said game, will take us closer to our main goal: to train bilingual Cameroonians. The “bilingual game’s” rule entails that every teacher who carries out a lesson in one official language, irrespective of his subject, uses the other official language during the last ten minutes. This final stage of the lesson should be fun, with the teacher acting as
a facilitator. The “Bilingual game” should be well prepared, ahead of time, by the teacher as he/she will be exclusively using the other official language. Its specific objectives should be clearly set.

Its strategy consists in learning while playing and having fun. Making students speak the other language as much as possible, irrespective of them making errors, is an important factor for the success of the game. For a better implementation of the “Bilingual game”, it was recommended that audio-visual aids, realia and participatory approaches be used to encourage group work and all learners’ participation. For more efficiency, the teacher should constantly update his/her knowledge, be creative and resourceful.

Efforts at improving on the implementation official Bilingualism were also extended to the central administration. According to Nana (2013), Article 8, Section 2 of decree NO.2002/2004 of January 2002 organizing the Ministry of Education created a general inspectorate for the promotion of bilingualism in the Ministry of education. Later on in 2003, a bilingual watch dog committee was instituted in the then Ministry of National Education which had to oversee the practice of bilingualism in the central and external services of the Ministry (decision No. 1230/B1/1464/MINEDUC/CAB of 12 June 2003). When the Ministry of Education was split in Basic and secondary education, the General inspectorate in charge of bilingualism became the General Pedagogic Inspectorate for the promotion of Bilingualism in both Ministries (Article 9, Section 1, 2 and 3 of Presidential decree No. 2005/139 and 140 of April 25 2005) creating the Ministries of Secondary and Basic Education.

Despite government’s continuous efforts at implementing the policy of bilingualism in schools in Cameroon, critics still argue that the discourse of official bilingualism is more rhetorical than practical. They blame the inefficiency in practicing bilingualism on the lack of a clear language policy. Chumbow (1980, 279) contended that ‘there has been no clear knowledge of the destination English-French bilingualism in Cameroon, consequently no clear knowledge of the best way to get there’. ([58], p791) indicated that in Cameroon on the whole, ‘bilingualism is not operational’, in spite of the country’s option for official bilingualism, there is ‘no language policy’ Nana [30], indicated that 50 years after reunification, policy inefficacy has been the main impediment to successful implementation of official bilingualism.

Studies have attributed the ineffectiveness of bilingualism in Primary schools to the failure of its implementation. [59]; MINEDUC, 2000; [5,60,61]; Nana, 2013). The MINEDUC report of 2000 underscored that the concept of a bilingual school has not yet been clearly defined because many primary school with that appellation are clearly not bilingual. It continued that the Molyko model of bilingualism failed because it was perceived as financially draining for parents who had to buy two sets of books for their children, less cost effective as too much money was spent for the training of ‘a minority of elitists group of students, unnecessary because the experience was only focused on secondary school students, and lacked long term vision on policy for bilingual schools as against other schools (Nana 2013). Proposals made by MINEDUC (2000, 24-31) on the good practice of bilingualism, suggested that there is need for ‘a clear language policy for the country as one of the strategies for a successful implementation of the official bilingualism policy. Results from a study by Fasse (2007) on the evaluation of the post-education orientation policy on official bilingualism indicated the lack of competent staff, and inaccessibility to didactic material as some of the reasons for poor implementation of bilingual policy.

Kouega [57], argued that the failure of official bilingualism has pushed French-speaking parents who ‘are annoyed over the bilingualism policy of the country and are aware of the spread of English language are now registering some of their kids in English-medium schools’. He continues that this trend by French-speaking parents further complicates the definition of the bilingual education programme in Cameroon. He contends that this practice does align itself neither with the immersion bilingual education, transitional bilingual education, mainstream bilingual education, nor any bilingual education programmes. While Echu [5] described this as the immersion experience, the MINEDUC report describes it as dual curriculum programme, with two schools, one campus, one administration with an assistant being of the other official language background, and schools offering the second official language as a subject. Data collected from schools by Nana (2013) indicated that schools labelled as bilingual are actually by name. ‘In fact they are two schools, an English-speaking and a French-speaking, with two head
teaching sharing the same premises while fostering divergent education traditions’ p.71.

Though the MINEDUC Reports (2000) recommends the administrative and physical structures of current bilingual secondary schools in Cameroon, (two schools, one campus, one administration with the assistant being from the other official language) as one of the models of bilingual schools, it provided very little suggestion about the bilingual programme to be followed in such schools. According to proposal from MINEDUC (2000), a bilingual education framework should start with the setting up of ‘genuine bilingual schools’. It should consist of a dual curriculum programme with a common administration and an integrated co-curricular activity, timetables leading to the institution of specific certificates for English and French speaking students in bilingual schools. Nana (2013) concluded that provision for teacher training and the effectiveness of such training together with the drawing up of appropriate English and French syllabi for primary and secondary schools seem to be other factors impacting on the implementation of official bilingualism in schools.

Another effort made by the Government to implement the policy of bilingualism was the creation of the bilingual programme by the Minister of Secondary education in Circular No.28/08/MINESEC/IGE of 2 December 2008. This letter stipulated that, in order to guarantee effective bilingualism in both General and technical secondary schools, the Ministry has instituted a special bilingual programme which integrates the teaching of intensive French language in English-speaking schools and intensive English language in French-speaking schools. This programme intends to produce perfectly bilingual students who master English and French irrespective of their original background. [56], held that unlike the Molyko model which was a full immersion programme, the special bilingual programme is a modification based on a partial immersion with three models. These include:

5. MODEL 1: INTENSIVE ENGLISH/ INTENSIVE FRENCH

This model has two components which are Intensive French language to English-speaking and Intensive English language to French-speaking. Different from the basic English and French taught in schools, the programme intends to teach French language to English-speaking students and French language to French-speaking students.

6. MODEL 2: CROSS CURRICULAR (TRANSVERSAL IMMERSIVE)

It involves the teaching of non-linguistic subjects in the second official language. English-speaking are taught l’histoire, geographie, mathematique, l’education physique etc. while the French-speaking are taught History, French, Geography, Mathematics and the other subject in the syllabus.

7. CO-CURRICULAR (ACTIVITIES CO-CURRICULAIRES)

This consists of activities outside the classroom usually on bilingualism day or la journée du bilinguisme, such as excursions, drama, debates singing, and other club activities in the second language. Focho [19] contends that although the immersion experiment is partial because all the subjects are not taught, the new programme still offers learners so much learning opportunities in the second language.

In implementing the special bilingual programme, a pilot phase was started during the 2009/2010 academic year. 40 schools from the 10 regions of Cameroon were chosen as pilot schools. These schools would run the special bilingual programme for four years at the end of which students will seat in for a special bilingual end of course certificate in addition to their official examinations taken at the end of the first cycle of secondary school education. Before getting into the special bilingual programme, students are giving a placement test in English and French, those who perform well are admitted into Bilingual Form one or Sixième Bilingue, and every year are moved into the next class depending on their performance. The first batch of these students wrote their certificate examinations in the 2013/2014 academic year.

8. IMPLEMENTATION TRAJECTORY OF BILINGUALISM IN CAMEROON SCHOOLS

A careful examination of the narrative on bilingualism as presented in the foregoing parts of this study would lead to the conclusion that the bilingualism policy which was inspired by a revolutionary ideology was at the level of implementation characterized by some degree of
successes and challenges as described in terms of the revolutionary and evolutionary trends in Policy Implementation.

8.1 Revolutionary Trend

As a point of departure from the colonial past, the Cameroon government adopted French and English as the official language of the state as stated in the 1961 constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Schools in the French-speaking parts of the country were encouraged to teach English and those in the English-speaking parts to teach French as a core subject in their curricula. The teaching of French to Anglophones and English to francophones became a real revolutionary action when the Government opened at Man O War Bay (Limbe) in 1963, a bilingual secondary school and later a bilingual practicing school in Yaounde in 1965. Since then, the bilingual effort has multiplied in many primary and secondary schools in the country.

8.2 Evolutionary Trend

On the bases of the foregoing discussion on implementation of post-colonial curriculum policy it can be concluded that the bilingual policy was the most articulated of all the policies. Since it was instituted in 1963, a steady flow of evolutionary actions have characterized its implementation. It started with the opening of special bilingual school in Man O War Bay in 1963, and Yaounde in 1965. Series of Ministerial orders have been signed creating bilingual primary and secondary school in almost all the Divisions of Cameroon. Bilingualism day was instituted in 2003, the bilingual game in 2009, a special bilingual programme created and students in the programme wrote the BEPC in 2013 and the GCE, O’ Levels in the 2014 academic years. Inspectorates of Bilingualism have been created in the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education responsible for bilingual matters at the different levels of the school system. Recently, a presidential decree signed on June 24th 2020 created 105 Bilingual schools in Cameroon.

9. FACTORS ACCOUNTING FOR THE EVOLUTIONARY AND REVOLUTIONARY TRENDS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BILINGUALISM

The levels of implementation of the bilingualism policy were more characteristic of the revolutionary and the evolutionary trend. The factors accounting for the revolutionary trend had to do with Government commitment while factors accounting for the evolutionary trend include the availability of human resources and lack of frequent monitoring and failure of structural harmonization.

9.1 Government Commitment

Nwana in Ndongko and Tambo [62], held that since reunification in 1961, one of the problems that plagued Cameroon was how to cope with the British and French inherited systems of Education. The policy which was issued by the Federal Government stated among other things that bilingualism must be practiced in Cameroon with French and English being the two official languages. The school was identified as the most important medium through which this was to be achieved. To this effect, dynamic forces and human resources were pulled to build out of the two educational systems and cultures, a sound bilingual education system. Since then so many efforts have been made to implement the policy of bilingualism. (Bilingual schools; the Molyko model; National Day of Bilingualism; weekly day of Bilingua lism, etc). However, the practice of bilingual education in primary and secondary school in Cameroon is plagued by a number of problems.

9.2 Lack of Trained Teachers

Fomenky in Ndongko and Tambo [62], contended that bilingual policy has not been a complete success because teacher preparation is not adequately done. This is because, the teachers who are hurriedly trained in crash programmes soon prove to be ill equipped, less informed and grossly void of the pedagogical tools needed to impart pertinent language skills to school children. They found themselves unable to teach a second language in which they had neither sufficient competence nor commending mastery.

The above view is supported by Nana [30], in a study carried out on the effective implementation of bilingualism in Cameroon schools in which he observed that teachers in bilingual classes are unable to teach in the second language because they do not have the appropriate training. This is ironical considering the fact that the bad practice was a contradiction to government’s efforts at implementing the bilingual policy. For instance, a ministerial order No.62/C/13/MINEDUC/CAB was
issued on the 16th of February 2001 introducing the teaching of English and French from class 1 to class 6 in all English and French primary schools and making them compulsory subjects in both written and oral parts of the First School Leaving Certificate (F.S.L.C) and the Certificat d’Etudes Primaires Elementaires (C.E.P.E.). This implied that pupils as early as year 1 have to study and pass the second official language.

Another ministerial decree of 14th October 2002 requesting primary school teachers to teach the second language in their classroom was also issued in a circular letter No.033/B1/1464/MINEDUC/IE/ IGPBI. This circular which was sent to primary and secondary school head teachers in all schools in Cameroon instructed that the second official language be taught in all classrooms either by the class teacher or by a qualified teacher on secondment. That all the teachers handling the teaching of the second language effectively participate in all the training activities organized for them by the authorities in charge of bilingualism. Not long after the above circulars were signed, another letter No. 009/B1/1464/MINEDUC/IGE/IGP/BIL of 9 April 2003 signed by the minister stated that

“It has come to my notice that the teaching of the second official language in GTTC does not always meet the expectations outlined in the specific pedagogic objectives contained in my circular letter NO. 33/B1/1464 of October 2002. Besides the very often cited lack of teachers, there is a discrepancy in teaching which varies from one school to another, failure to keep to the number of teaching periods allocated to the second official language and, in some cases, the complete absence of such lessons. As a result, student teachers from GTTC are not equipped to teach the second official language in primary and nursery schools, at the very time when bilingualism has become a generally accepted fundamental option of our educational system. To reverse this situation, I do require that you put your teachers of both second languages at the disposal of primary and nursery schools in your respective localities. They will then support and help primary school teachers in their task such as drawing up schemes of work, lesson preparations, providing lessons and so on...’

In analyzing the above circulars, the study argues that, the instruction given by the minister in circular letter No.033/B1/1464/MINEDUC/IE/ IGPBI of 14th October 2002 requesting teachers to teach the second official language in their classroom did not take into account their capability to carry out such teaching. While acknowledging that the failure of primary and nursery school teachers to teach the second official language in their classrooms is significant to the lack of training in these subjects during their teacher training courses in GTTC, no provision is made for the training of more teacher trainers in the second official language. Rather, the few trainers in the second official language teaching in GTTCs are being put at the disposal of primary and nursery teachers for in-service training workshops in the second official language, hampering further the teaching of these subjects to student teachers.

9.3 Lack of Monitoring

Another inhibiting factor that affects the implementation of bilingualism identified by the study is the lack of monitoring by inspectors of bilingualism. In 2005 when MINEDUC was split into the MINEDUB and MINSEC, the General inspectorate in charge of bilingualism became the Inspectorate of Pedagogy in charge of the promotion of Bilingualism. Two of its objectives were to reinforce and sustain the teaching and learning of English and French as second official languages in the Nursery, Primary Secondary and Teacher Training schools, (Private and Public) and also to reinforce the institutional use of both official languages-English and French. (Article 8, Section 2 of decree No. 2002/004 of January 2002 organizing the MINEDUC). In order to promote and sustain the teaching and learning of these languages, as well as reinforce their institutional use in schools, inspectors of bilingualism are required to visit schools to ascertain the teaching and learning of these languages and provide support to teachers through in-service training aimed at adding to their knowledge of English and French and developing further ability to teach these languages. However during the study, it was observed that bilingualism inspectors hardly visited schools.

10. INCOMPLETE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRUCTURAL HARMONIZATION

Though successful attempts have been made by government in implementing the Bilingual policy, Echu [5], argued that the presence of the two official languages in Cameroon has imposed two
distinct educational subsystems. In the French speaking subsystem, English is a compulsory subject up to the end of secondary education. This is not the case with French in the English speaking subsystem, where it is compulsory up to the GCE Ordinary level. This means that the French-speaking students are generally more prepared to affront bilingual education at the university than their English-speaking counterpart. In addition, the two subsystems practice two different methods of evaluation, a disturbing situation for Educational Experts.

While in the English-speaking subsystem the students specialize early by choosing a certain number of subjects in which they will seat for GCE Ordinary level examination, in the French-speaking system all subjects are compulsory and success is based on scoring at least the average mark. He added that as far as the teaching of foreign language is concerned, the French-speaking secondary school offers more opportunities than the English-speaking schools. In French-speaking secondary schools Spanish and German are taught as subjects throughout the secondary school cycle whereas in English-speaking secondary schools they are not. Consequently, French-speaking Cameroonians have an edge over English-speaking Cameroonians in the mastery of foreign language.

Finally, the time that the implementation of the programme has taken is more than 50 years. The progress towards the completion point has been quite slow. The initiation of the programme started since 1963 and till now only 40 secondary schools out of about 1700 schools in Cameroon are still in the pilot stages of implementing the special bilingual programme. If effective implementation should take place, there should be a need to establish some concrete time-bound plan during which the various implementations task will occur. The time line may be adjusted during the process. This should be characterized by continuous flow support, information gathering and sharing to monitor and address problems and eventually the change.

11. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy of Bilingualism stresses on the teaching and use of English and French in educational institution. It was also an attempt at a revolutionary change towards the harmonization of the two educational systems. Though this policy has not completely succeeded in its implementation, it is however the most articulated policy and has achieved the most success compared to the other curriculum policies (which do not constitute a part of this study) in the Cameroon educational system.

While the Ministers of education consider bilingualism as an essential option in school curriculum, this can only be attained when ample provisions are made for effective implementation to take place. Government should put in more efforts to ensure that the teaching of French to Anglophones and English to francophone be reinforced by the training and deployment of more teachers so that bilingualism should reach the hinterlands.

Bilingualism is an example of the curriculum theory which states that curriculum deteriorates as it moves from the centre. To avoid this, teachers should be deployed and should receive special motivation allowances to see that they stay in the areas sent to.

There should be available resources for supervision to be more effective by the presence of more supervisors in some schools.

Co-curricular activities should be generated to support the bilingualism programme by the reinforcement of bilingual activities and holiday programmes for children to visit other environment and interact with children from different official language background.

Furthermore, distance learning should be instituted for students with the capacity of educational technology. Regional pedagogic centres have been created in all twelve regions of Cameroon who have been producing materials using ICTs. Such materials from these centres and other linguistic centres can be used to provide materials for schools to teach bilingualism.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES


39. Tangwa G. Colonialism and linguistic dilemmas in Africa: Cameroon as a paradigm. Quest XIII. 1999;1:2-3-17.


© 2020 Loveline; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/58974