



Investigating Aspects of English Language Learning in Francophone sub-system of education in Cameroon: The Case of Selected Practising Primary Schools of the West Region

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Abstract: The current study analyses the problem of the inappropriate mastery of the English Language by Francophone primary school pupils upon graduation. In fact, it has been remarked that primary school leavers have very low proficiency in English contrary to the objectives and expected results outlined in the English syllabus. Data were collected from 851 pupils in 12 Government Practising Primary Schools (GPPS), added to the researcher school and classroom observations. Data were analysed using a two-step approach: some data from questionnaires and observations were analysed using the descriptive statistical method, non-statistical data were organised in terms of emerging themes. Findings show that regardless of motivation, pupils leave primary schools with inappropriate reading, writing, speaking, listening and grammar and vocabulary skills in English. The problem lies, *inter alia*, on the wrong management of the pupils' sociolinguistics and environmental backgrounds; teachers training and proficiency in English; inappropriate teaching methods/approaches and the classroom process as well as inadequate infrastructural settings for ELT¹ and ELL². The study therefore recommends a socially-adapted and culturally-responsive approach for teaching English to Francophone primary school pupils in Cameroon.

Keywords: English Language, Francophone system, Pupils, Primary Practising Schools, West Region, Performance, Competence.

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¹ ELT: English Language Teaching

² ELL: English Language Learning



Introduction

The educational system of Cameroon is divided into three different levels: the basic level, the secondary level and the tertiary level governed by three different ministries (Ministry of Basic Education, Ministry of Secondary Education and Ministry of Higher Education). The completion of the basic level requires a minimum of 6 (six) years after the nursery school (which is not compulsory) for students who succeed from moving easily from one class to the next without repeating or skipping some classes. The secondary level requires a minimum of 7 (seven) years for students who succeed gradually. The tertiary level requires a minimum of 8 (eight) to ten (10) years according to the B.M.D. (Bachelor- Master-Doctorate) system implemented in the Central African States' Universities since 2008, (Safotso, 2018:87). The basic level as well as the secondary level has both French and English medium schools organised into public and private sectors. Let's precise that the secondary level on the other hand has two main orientations: General Secondary Education and Technical Secondary Education (from Year One to Terminale/Upper Sixth) to which is added the Rural Artisan / Home Economics Centres (from Year One to Year 4)³. However, emphasis is led here much on the General Secondary Education where language issues are better addressed. The tertiary level has universities and institutions (public and private) shared between French subsystem and Anglo-saxon subsystem. The bilingual universities, primary schools and secondary schools plus bilingual classes have been opened. The basic and secondary levels have teachers' training schools in the private (primary school only) and public (primary and secondary) sectors as well. University lecturers do not have special training colleges. However, lecturers are recruited based on a well-established protocol/process among holders of Master's Degree and/or Ph. D nowadays.

The Francophone subsystem uses French Language as the main medium of instruction across the curriculum both at the primary, secondary and university level while the Anglo-saxon subsystem uses English as the main medium of instruction. French Language is taught in this subsystem as a compulsory subject while English Language is equally taught on the other side with the same status of a compulsory subject.

At the tertiary level, the two official languages are supposed to be used as the medium of instruction alternatively depending on the linguistics competences of the lecturers in most fields of studies. This is the case in most state's universities except those that are French-oriented (the University of Ngoundéré, the University of Maroua, the University of Bertoua and the University of Ebolowa) and Anglo-Saxon universities (the University of Buea and the University of Bamenda) where French and English respectively are used predominantly (Echu, 2005:654-646). Some other universities (the University of Yaounde 1 and the University of Dschang) are known as being bilingual. Also, Bilingual Training Programme is an exception to this rule (Siéwoué, 2018:3). At the tertiary level and more specifically, only English-based studies (English Modern Letters, English Literature, Commonwealth Studies) specifically use English as the main

medium of instruction for fundamental courses. On the other side, French Language is predominantly used for French-based studies (French Modern Letters, French Literatures, and Francophone Studies) as the medium of instruction. Out of this precision, "French-speaking lecturers tend to teach their courses in French while English-speaking lecturers teach in English" (Siéwoué, 2018:3). The bilingual training programme has a "double mission of filling the gap in the learner's background and instilling in them the language skills need in their specific fields of study and professional openings" (Siéwoué, 2018:3). Another reason to this is that many English Language teachers at secondary level do not realise that it is their job to prepare the learners for universities studies (Afutendem, 2013:67).

At the level of language teachers training, the government provides training schools for both primary and secondary school teachers as earlier defined. Language teachers trained for secondary schools go to the field with a DIPES I⁴ or DIPES II after at least three years (for DIPES I) and five years (DIPES II). They may either undergo a bilingual letters (English and French) enabling them to teach both languages or English Modern Letters or French Modern Letters. Till date, private institutions do not offer such a training. Just that the insufficient number of trained teachers to supply considerably existing government and private schools gave room to the involvement of non-trained teachers in the field as part-timers holder of Baccalauréat (BACC)/General Certificate of Education- Advanced Level (GCE Advanced Level) upwards. But at times, some former primary and secondary school teachers may luckily end up teaching in the university when fulfilling the required conditions in case there is an opportunity.

The situation is almost totally different in the primary school of the francophone subsystem. Trained teachers do not undergo specific training for teaching the second official language, which is English. Although few schools are provided with trained English-speaking teachers, a large number of schools do not have this privilege of having an English based-trained teachers. Contrary to the secondary level, even parents' teachers (who are not paid by the government) are selected among those who have been duly trained and are awaiting their full recruitment. This is to say that, in general, the francophone basic level is not adequately provided with teachers equipped with appropriate English Language proficiency. The willing teachers with the available competences try to do their best. Even in the training schools, much emphasis is not laid on the second official language they will have to teach once in the field. The consequence is that pupils will probably leave the basic level without expected competencies.

³ The only diploma delivered here is CAP (Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle after 4 successful years of study). Whereas it is the first diploma of the Technical Secondary School, followed by the Probatoire Technique and the Baccalauréat Technique.

⁴ Diplôme de Professeur d'Enseignement Secondaire Premier Grade [First Grade Secondary School Teacher]

Table 1: Presentation of the Primary school system in Cameroon

Francophone Subsystem ⁵			Anglophone Subsystem		
Year	Class	Certificate	Year	Class	Certificate
Level 1	SIL	-	Level 1	Class One	-
	CP	-		Class Two	-
Level 2	CE1	-	Level 2	Class Three	-
	CE2	-		Class Four	-
Level 3	CM1	-	Level 3	Class Five	-
	CM2	CEP ⁶		Class Six	FSLC ⁷

Source: Adapted from Echu (2005:644)

⁵Here are the explanations of all abbreviations used in the table illustrating the primary level of education in Cameroon:

SIL : Section d'Initiation à la Lecture. Name used for first year of primary education in Francophone primary schools.

CP: Cours Préparatoire. Name used for second year of primary education in Francophone primary schools.

CE1: Cours Élémentaire 1. This name is used for the third year of primary education in Francophone primary schools.

CE2: Cours Élémentaire 2. Name used for fourth year of primary education in Francophone primary schools.

CM1: Cours Moyen 1. Name used for fifth year of primary education in Francophone primary schools.

CM2: Cours Moyen 2. Name used for sixth (last) year of primary education in Francophone primary schools.

⁶ CEP: Certificat d'Etudes Primaires. This examination marks the end of primary education in Francophone primary schools.

⁷ FSLC: First School Leaving Certificate. This examination marks the end of primary education in Anglophone primary schools.

In the two subsystems, the primary level normally covers six full years. But sometimes, very intelligent pupils do skip some classes and can cover the primary level in five years rather than six. At the end of each subsystem there are certificates: CEP for the Francophone subsystem and FSLC for the Anglophone subsystem.

1. Review of some previous studies

Echu observes that “[...] the number of Francophone children who attend Anglophone primary schools outweighs the number of Anglophone children who attend Francophone primary schools” (Echu, 2005: 654). This shows the interests Francophone children have in knowing English on the one hand; on the other hand, this tendency illustrates the inability of the Francophone subsystem to provide pupils with necessary English skills by the end of their cycle and English teaching and learning therefore calls for particular attention. This situation is of particular interest given that English is today “[...] the key to social, economic, political, and cultural development and success of any country” (Akram and Malik, 2010:237-238).

In “*Curriculum de l'Enseignement Primaire Francophone Camerounais, Niveau 3: Cycle des Approfondissements (CM1-CM2)*”⁸ in force, the background of English explicitly indicates the following points:

- The English language is the second official language for French speaking Cameroonians. It serves as a tool of national unity and integration. It is designed to enable French Speaking Cameroonians to interact with their English-Speaking counterparts

and live harmoniously with them. In teaching this subject, it is important to lay emphasis on speaking to achieve fluency and build confidence in the learners. The other language skills, Reading, and Writing should be systematically taught in a bid to enable the learners to develop intellectually, culturally, emotionally, spiritually, socially and economically. At this level, the learners will enhance already acquired knowledge and access new knowledge in other subject areas across the curriculum.

- The teaching of English language should target the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills with emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation. Such teaching/learning activities should be built on major integrated learning themes such as the nature, the village/town, the school, occupations, travelling, health, sports and leisure, and space. For this endeavour to be holistic, the teacher should not lose sight of the National Core Skills and the broad-based competences.

- The English Language, like many languages, is rule-governed. This calls for a systematic teaching of grammar, in a functional manner, for the purposes of correctness in using the language. Vocabulary teaching makes the learners build a word bank and use words appropriately in different contexts. Spelling helps the learners to be accurate in the blend of letter sounds and syllables needed to express meaning in writing. Pronunciation helps the learners to articulate well when speaking for effective communication. To sum up, the core competence is to communicate in the English Language by listening, speaking, reading and writing effectively.

From this background, this work seeks to know what is being done in the field, how it is being done and for what results. This background is completed by well-established detailed

⁸ Ministry of Basic Education, *Curriculum de l'Enseignement Primaire Francophone Camerounais, Niveau 3: Cycle des Approfondissements (CM1-CM2)*, 2018, p.47.

expected competencies at the end of the level and evaluation criteria as well as the methodology to apply, the didactic materials to be used and assessment strategies and the programmes as the following document culled from the curriculum indicates:

Beyond all this, Siéwoué (2018:80) had already observed that “If only the policy could be adequately implemented and the materials optimised, one could rejoice that primary school graduates possess a strong foundation from which the secondary” takes over. He equally noticed that many pupils in the rural areas may not have the textbook nor do they have the possibility to practice the language given that many francophone parents today cannot speak or read English, and very few of them would hire a home teacher or get an older child to teach English to their younger siblings. He therefore raised the following questions: *-With whom will these children practise the language after school? -Who teaches them English? -Is it the Francophone all subject magister whose English should be most doubtful? -Have they been well trained to teach English? -What are the difficulties which they face in the field?* (Siéwoué, 2018:80). These worries are duly addressed in this work and will be provided answers by the end. Furthermore, he remarked that “There are some primary schools in the nation where a teacher is set aside to teach English, as well as in the Anglophone section, there is a teacher of French. Though the practice may not be official, it would be interesting to study its output” (Siéwoué, 2018:80). As such, he proposes that the creation of bilingual series in the Government Teacher Training Colleges should be evaluated. Additionally, he argued that if primary school teachers are trained to teach English to French-speaking pupils, so that in every primary school, there is a government live agent of official bilingualism with specific training to that end, better results would be obtained in the sense that many pupils will be opened to real English Language Learning, pupil’s competencies will likely be increased. It is not infrequent to hear Cameroonians say “c’est Dieu qui donne l’anglais”⁹ (Siéwoué, 2018:80). Primary school teachers are not left aback in this apathy. The earlier one learns the language, the better he/she acquires. Siéwoué concluded that it would be very easy to ensure the continuity of training in English, as the primary level and secondary level would be able to collaborate more effectively, and not operate so separately on one of the most central issues in national integration (Siéwoué, 2018:80).

In *La Pratique de l’Approche par Compétences dans les École Primaires d’Application (EPA) de Ville de Kousséri (Région de l’Extrême-Nord/Cameroun*, Mahamat studied the implementation of CBA¹⁰ in some primary practising schools (four schools) in Kousséri. A total of 352 students (through questionnaires) and 39 teachers (through semi-structured interviewed) took part in the study. After the analyses, he notices that the approach is not being implemented effectively due to its novelty in the educational system and the teachers’ apathy about the new visions and competencies. His student-informants comment that most competencies in their learning are irrelevant for their socioeconomic insertion. Moreover, most teachers continue to use the explanation method, they display poor mastery of the CBA, the large class sizes impede the individualisation of instruction and evaluation seriously, and the lack of adequate didactic materials.

More interestingly, he observes that “Le changement induit par l’APC¹¹ n’est pas encore perceptible dans les faits. La plupart de nos institutions sont encore à la première génération de l’approche par objectifs [...] les enseignants des écoles d’application de Kousséri ne recourent pas à l’approche par compétence” (Mahamat, 2011 : 47). This is to say that CBA is not as effective as expected in primary practising schools.

In their *Teaching Practice in Primary Schools*, Macharia and Wario (1989:x) as experienced primary educators in Kenya devoted a study to the requirements of primary teacher trainees who are doing examination in practical teaching. The book has been written for use by those who are undergoing pre-service and in-service training for primary school teachers, primary school teachers who are already in the field, and those training to become teachers at secondary and tertiary levels. They aimed to highlight those areas that usually cause confusion and uncertainty among student teachers during their teaching practice. In the book, these areas covered topics/chapters such as: preparing to teach, teaching methods, organising and managing classroom groups, class management and control, effective questioning techniques, using chalk board effectively (Macharia and Wario, 1989:x) and assess the student teacher performance. They use a focus point technique to highlight the essential points raised in the book and to help the student consolidate what he/she has learnt. Elements of this book will be very useful while dwelling on the analytical part of this work especially on teaching and learning processes.

In *The English Speech of Francophone Primary School Teachers and Cours Moyen Deux (CM2) Pupils in Cameroon*, Kouega and Onana Ombouda investigate the English spoken productions of primary school teachers and their graduating pupils in Cameroon with the aim of checking how much English is learnt by the time the primary child moves to the secondary education level. For the study, they used 112 participants comprising 60 pupils (CM2), 40 Sixième pupils, and 12 teachers (CM2). Pupils came from six schools selected at random in the residential quarters of Bastos, Ekoudou, Messa, Sources, Tsinga and Tsinga Oliga. The Sixième pupils came from the Government Secondary schools located in Cité Verte, Nkol-Bisson, Nkol-Eton and Tsinga, all based in Yaoundé capital city. In primary schools, only CM2 classes and their respective teachers were considered. The data came from tape-recorded lectures and a reading test. As for the pupils, they were made to read some passages drawn from their textbook and containing targeted words like *birth, women, children* etc. The passage title was “A CELEBRATION” culled from *Champions in English*. In order to have a considerable number of words, additional words were selected from other passages of the same book and submitted to the informants.

In total, 369 phonological errors were identified. Using the structural approach to phonology and Error Analysis, and the contrastive analysis, they described the data, limiting themselves to segmental features. Their results revealed that “Francophone primary school teachers in Cameroon are not proficient in English and they cannot therefore teach the subject even though they were summoned to do it. Many francophones primary school pupils learn very little English [...]” (Kouega and Onana Ombouda, 2018:90). Specifically, as they found, their spoken productions exhibit various features at the level of consonants like substitution,

⁹ English Language is God’s given

¹⁰ Competence Based Approach

¹¹ Approche Par Compétence

cluster simplification and realisation of silent letters. At the vocalic level, spelling pronunciation causes monophthongs to be replaced by foreign sounds, and diphthongs and triphthongs to be monophthongised. Most interestingly, vowel nasalization is systematic in specific context (see also Safotso, 2016b; 2018a and Abang:2006). All this render “[...] their speech unintelligible to many speakers of English” (Kouega and Onana Ombouda, 2018:99).

The present study will deepen researches focusing on primary practising schools in the West regions of Cameroon, (bordering to the two English-speaking regions Northwest and Southwest) with large population and more variables at once so as to come out with an overall view of the situation in the era of CBLT¹².

To continue, *English in francophone elementary grades in Cameroon*, by Kouega (2003a) evaluates the various measures that successive governments have taken to ensure the effectiveness of bilingualism in Cameroon. He notices that the first measures (making English a compulsory subject in all secondary schools as well as a subject in all public examinations, the introduction of English into the curriculum of primary schools where it was to be taught for 2.5 hours a week for 30 weeks a year to pupils in the last three years of primary schools, that is, Grades Four to Six (Kouega, 2003a:409) failed to bear fruit for various reasons including insufficient teachers and lack of teaching materials. He concluded that “[...] the first attempt by the government to implement its policy of bilingualism at the primary school level failed to turn out pupils who were proficient in English” (Kouega, 2003a:410-411). The third attempt was dual-language schooling programme which makes the teaching of the second official language a compulsory subject in all primary school classes (Kouega, 2003a:408). This attempt still failed as the problems of staff and materials were not solved. However, have these problems been solved 23 (twenty-three) years later? What is going on now that the interest in knowing the language regarding the socio-political and economic scenarios is urgent than never before? What has changed? What needs to be changed? These questions will probably be clearly answered at the end of this study. Sayadian and Lashkarian (2010:137-138) hypothesised that “Many learners who have not attended extra-curricular English classes at English Language institutes, even after 6 to 10 years, still cannot comprehend or compose many English sentences and fail to read, write or speak with proper fluency” in Iran specifically. This is verified in this work based on pupils from primary practising schools.

In his dissertation on *The Impact of Simulation Activities on the Communicative Competence of learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL): A Case Study of Government Practising Primary School, Group 3A Bafoussam*, Ewei (2000) sets out to investigate how much simulation activities impact EFL¹³ as well as their effect on the ability and output of EFL teachers. The sample of the study was made up of 100 pupils of CM2, Group A and 7 teachers of the same schools. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the teachers while lesson notes and written test were used for pupils. Frequency counts and percentages were used at the surface level to analyse data while the chi-square (X^2) was used to verify the hypotheses on teachers and the Z-test for pupils. The

results have shown that teachers’ ability in the selection, preparation, direction and usage of simulation activities (role-play, mime, games, dialogue...) significantly influenced their output positively. This also meant that pupils learning through simulation activities significantly have their performances influenced positively. More specifically, simulation activities make the job less tedious, and render pupil lively more engaged in the learning process. The activities “[...] break down certain barriers in classroom participation, facilitate their comprehension, and encourage team spirit and competition, leading to a significantly better performance” (Ewei, 2000: iv). This work is similar to the present one for his case study and differs in the sense that the present study covers a large scope, investigates many variables with more and different participants from different geographical settings.

From the above, very few works leant over the English Language education at the basic level which is supposed to be the foundation level, the level where the perquisite is supposed to be well acquired or emphasised. The very few works this study could lay hands on focused mostly on phonological features (Kouega and Onana, Abang), on language policy (Kouega) and on an aspect of teaching and learning methodology (Ewei). The present work takes off from these one to throw more light on the situation with regards on the contemporary contextual factors, the sociolinguistics parameters, the teaching and learning processes and related-problems as well as performances. This study is expected to come out with up to date information which can help the decision-makers, the teachers, the student-teachers, the learners, the inspectors or the society at large to improve on the English poor performances of primary school pupils by implementing the findings the research will bring out. It has been realised that “[...] given the increasing space and awareness English is gaining around the world, its teaching deserves more attention” (Enongene Ekembe, 2013:57). The next section will elaborate on the research methodology.

2. Methodology

This work is conducted in the West region. This equally implies that the research is a case study. The West Region is appropriate for this study because it does not only define the type of participants involved in the study but it equally situates the study within a specific geographical setting, which is the West region that has become a region of hospitality (Tchakote Pa’ami and Chiatoh, 2020:41-42) including the highest number of IDPs from the English-speaking regions. It demographically represents the population typology of the country (Adamson and Feng, 2014:38). Also, the implantation of various anglo-saxons primary schools, the registration of pupils from the unsafe regions in the schools of the West region (Safotso, 2020:140), the closeness between French-speaking Cameroonians and English-speaking Cameroonians, impacted the learning processes somehow. This is among other reasons how the choice of this region can be justified. More precisely, twelve (12) governments’ primary practising schools in the West region constituted the research setting of the present study. The most accessible practising primary schools were selected from the five headquarters (Bafoussam, Dschang, Mbouda, Bafang and Bagangté) of the divisions of the region.

The choice of the practising schools is justified by the fact they “[...] constituent des écoles phares pour la formation des

¹² Competence Based Language Teaching

¹³ English as a Foreign Language

futures maîtres. C'est là que les élèves-maîtres en formation à l'École Normale d'Instituteurs de l'Enseignement Général font leurs premiers pas dans la pratique de l'enseignement" as Mahamat (2011 :35) put it. That is to say that practising schools are the flagship schools where student-teachers from the Government Teacher Training Colleges of the given locality do their teaching practices. They are pilot schools for student-teachers. Additionally, "Ce sont aussi des écoles à cycle complet" Mahamat (2011 :35). They are also full-cycle schools¹⁴. More, the study has chosen the practising schools because the pupils of these schools are used to strangers who, most of the time are students-teachers and

¹⁴The researcher's translation

researchers. More interestingly, primary practising schools are as representative as possible in terms of resources, history, demography and geographical location (Adamson and Feng, 2014:38). CM2 classes, were chosen for convenience in terms of accessibility, their popularity within the division, and most importantly their willingness to participate in the research. Additionally, the focus is on the CM2 classes because the pupils of these classes are primary school leavers of the level three equally known as "cycle des approfondissements" and this study is interested in verifying their level of proficiency as indicated in the school programme to see the balance between the objectives and the real proficiency. The participants to this study include **851** CM2 pupils.

Table 2: Distribution of primary schools and number of pupils' respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ECOLE PRIMAIRE INCLUSIVE D'APPLICATION I A DE BAFANG	56	6,6	6,6	6,6
	ECOLE PRIMAIRE INCLUSIVE D'APPLICATION I B DE BAFANG	46	5,4	5,4	12,0
	EPPA ¹⁵ A 2 DE BANGANGTE	66	7,8	7,8	19,7
	EPPA 1 B DE BANGANGTE	81	9,5	9,5	29,3
	EPPA 3 A 2 DE BAFOUSSAM	59	6,9	6,9	36,2
	EPPA CENTRE 1 B DE DSCHANG	84	9,9	9,9	46,1
	EPPA DE FOTO	68	8,0	8,0	54,1
	EPPA Gr 3 B DE BANGANGTE	90	10,6	10,6	64,6
	EPPA Gr I DE MBOUDA	62	7,3	7,3	71,9
	EPPA Gr II DE MBOUDA	87	10,2	10,2	82,1
	EPPA Gr III A 1 DE BAFOUSSAM	76	8,9	8,9	91,1
	EPPA I A DE BANGANGTE	76	8,9	8,9	100,0
	Total	851	100,0	100,0	

Source: Personal computation from collected data

¹⁵ EPPA: École Primaire Publique d'Application

This table sorts out the original names of the different 12 practising schools in which pupils' data were collected. The schools are located in Bangangté, Bafoussam, Dschang, Bafang and Mbouda. "Primary school age is known to be the most favourable for learning a foreign language. Imitating abilities of a child, natural curiosity and need for new knowledge contribute to overcome the challenges facing foreign language learning" (Stakanova and Tolstikhina, 2014:456).

Globally, this research used the framework proposed by Plowright (2011) who distinguished between desk-based research and field research. Desk-based research enabled to access information on the programme, the English workload to name just a few, currently implemented in the Francophone sub-system at the basic level as well as the results in various tests. Field research consisted in meeting students in schools and collecting data from them through school and classroom observation and questionnaires.

The analytical procedure was qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative analysis concerned data retrieved from participant observation, interviews, archives (course programmes) and some data from the questionnaire. It was done in this study based on ethnographic content analysis where data cannot be displayed in graphs, diagrams or in full statistics charts as it would be familiarly found in quantitative research (Tchakote Pa'ami and Chiatoh, 2020:44). Quantitative analysis was concerned mainly with quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires. In this light, relevant information was extracted then combined and filled into the tables. This presentation enabled to arrange information in an interpretable manner. The data were arranged on lists which could facilitate calculation of percentages and read meaning out of them because quantitative analysis comes where statistics are available.

3. Findings

This part of the study focuses on the major components investigated. These include:

The syllabus and the programme content, the pupils' sociolinguistics profile, the learner motivation, the learning environment, the material of instruction and the classroom process.

a. The Syllabus and Programme Content

As the curriculum consists of all the subjects taught in the school and activities like games, clubs, educational tours, etc., "The syllabus is a document that contains all the topics for a course of teaching a particular subject. Each subject taught in the primary school has its own syllabus. A syllabus is planned to include the work to be taught for a whole school year" (Macharia and Wario, 1989:17). The English syllabus of the francophone primary schools in force has been adopted in 2018 to match the exigencies of the CBLT which is the current teaching/learning approach in Cameroon since 2012 from the ashes of the OBA¹⁶ (Nforbi and Siéwoué, 2016b:5). According to Macharia and Wario, a syllabus should contain the following features:

a)the objectives of teaching each topic. The student teacher must study these objectives so that he or she is clear about what skills, knowledge and attitudes the learners are meant to gain from them;

- b)the number of periods per week for each subject;
- c)the recommended textbooks for the pupils;
- d)the recommended teachers' guides; and
- e)the recommended reference books.

The syllabus may also contain the general objective of teaching the primary curriculum (Macharia and Wario, 1989:18).

The current English syllabus of francophone primary schools has no clear indication concerning the number of periods per week and recommended reference books. However, the expected competencies at the end of the level and evaluation criteria (p.48), the methodology, the didactic materials and assessment strategies (p.49) as well as the programme of study as from p.50 are outlined. More precisely, the programme of study is organised around 6 major skills including: Listening and Speaking (pp.50-52), Reading (pp.53-54), Writing (pp.55-56) and Grammar and Vocabulary (pp. 57-59). Textbooks and related teachers' guides are indicated every year by the Ministry through a well-established commission. Just that, most of times and because of political/religious/professional affiliations of the editors with decision-makers and merchandising reasons, the books chosen do not reflect the syllabus as well as the teachers and pupils' proficiencies. "The gap exists between the syllabus of English and its actual execution in the francophone classroom [...]" (Tendoh Inju, 2012:39). This can be confirmed by the following assertion recorded: *Parfois pour enseigner certains aspects de l'Anglais hein, un peu comme l'interjection ou autres, je dois prendre le livre du CE1, CE2 avant de trouver les éléments à l'intérieur*¹⁷ [To teach some aspects in English such as interjection and others sometimes, I must find elements from CE1 or CE2 books]. In this regard, the teacher cannot satisfactorily play the role of a mentor and an organiser who monitors the strengths and weaknesses of the learners so as to ensure coherence of effective learning (Tendoh Inju, 2012:11). In addition, Nforbi and Siéwoué submitted that "A great majority of teachers (90%) think that the new method could be dealt with (2016b:18) much more easily if both teachers and learners had adapted course books at their disposal. Textbooks constitute a veritable compass for both teachers and students".

The in-service teachers agreed at 30.1% that the current syllabus is adapted to the pupils' level and is at 39.8% adapted to their own proficiencies. But the outcomes are far from satisfying the expected results. The fact English lessons are not daily organised as required officially, can be explained by the non-adherence of teachers to the syllabus. During a classroom observation in one school, it happened that the teacher of the previous class (CM1) as the most proficient one came to substitute the teacher of the class under observation. It was not just to enable observation to take place, but to let the researcher thinks that English teaching was effective in the class. It is only when the researcher haphazardly asked about the next class that the said teacher declared the class was not hers. Astonishingly, it was heard from pupils that: "Elle fait comme ça alors qu'elle n'est même pas notre maitresse hein..."¹⁸. As earlier stated, English language is frequently organised in most classrooms on the eve of exams. Past questions with elaborated corrections are reviewed. This is

¹⁷Speech recorded from one teacher in EPPA IA of Bangangté, 1/06/2021, at 9.56min.

¹⁸ She pretends to be our teacher.

¹⁶ Objective Based Approach

because, as Tendoh Inju (2012:21) put it “[...] despite what the school curriculum and syllabus for English requires, what the students and teachers are more interested in is how the students can pass in the final exam”.

Several notebooks of many pupils across different schools in the course of this study were consulted at various times. It resulted that pupils write much in their notebooks on the eve of exams. During the school year, they may write and finish 100, 50 or 150 leaves of notebooks in other subjects but hardly cover 15 to 35 leaves of their English notebook. However, it is worth noticing that “If what the students learn cannot be transferred or applied in their day-to-day life, then, what they learn in class ends within the entrance of the school. And what they learn outside of school (pidgin) cannot be applied in the school context” Tendoh Inju (2012:40). That is why 64.5% of teachers asserted that very few pupils can communicate through writing and 59.1% of teachers also validated that very few primary school leavers can use parts of speech correctly. In the end, it is easy to say that the syllabus and the programme content are relatively well designed but do not correspond to the context where they are to be implemented mainly because of teachers and pupils’ proficiencies due to their sociolinguistics profile.

b. The pupils’ Sociolinguistics Profile

The sociolinguistics profile of the pupils as one of the main aspects of this research has proven in terms of languages used that, they navigate between French, Mother Tongue (MT), English, Camfranglais and Cameroon Pidgin English. 94.5% of pupils use French among friends, 76.7% use French between brothers and sisters, 72.0% use the MT with parents. In class, 95.8% use French and 93.4% use French in the playground. These are the languages the majority use in these various settings or contexts. This situation confirms to some extent Chiatoh’s (2012:3) assertion that “Learners speak one language at home, a different one in school and sometimes quite another between the home, and the school. It

is remarked that French dominates in all the context except at home. This is a proof to the fact pupils naturally have the MT as their L1 since the home is their very first place of socialisation and also constitutes their most frequent living environment. This is also an indication that parents are sparing no effort to guarantee students attachment to cultural values through the MT which is the passport to other languages.

As far as English is concerned, it has been revealed that an insignificant number of pupils (1.2%) speak it as their L1, 29.0% speak it as their L2, 59% speak it as their L3, 7.6% speak it as their L4 while 2.8% speak it as their L5 on the one hand. On the other hand, and in terms of the order/position pupils give to English among the plethora of languages at their disposal, 2.9% consider it as their L1, 28.6% consider it as their L2, 63.7% consider it as their L3, 2.2% consider it as their L4 and 2.6% consider it as their L5. However, English is not introduced to pupils according this cognitive representation they have concerning English. They face up with formal French, formal MT and formal English at the same time. In fact, pupils should be gradually or sequentially introduced to these languages starting from the MT, then French and English. “The implication is that in Cameroon, a multilingual country, the choice of language in the effective instruction-learning process should systematically integrate the mother tongues and dominant languages of learners in a well-planned bi-multilingual education approach” (Chiatoh, 2012:25). The following table clearly brings out the skills, expected competences and the evaluation criteria of level 3 (CM1-CM2) pupils in the francophone sub-system in English. These skills and competences should be achieved in listening and speaking, reading, writing and grammar and vocabulary. Otherwise, primary school pupils leavers involved here should achieve relevant competences in receptive skills (listening and reading), in productive skills (speaking and writing) and in Grammar and vocabulary (Atoh Chenwi and Fosso Fongang, 2021:360).

Table 3: Expected competences in English Language at the end of level and evaluation criteria

Skills	Expected competences	Evaluation criteria
Listening and Speaking	Listen attentively to simple sentences/texts in the declarative, narrative and descriptive forms on the integrated themes, interpret them, communicate orally, meaningfully and politely with people	-Communicate audibly in a meaningful and polite manner using sentences -Answer questions correctly in a specific time span
Reading	Read simple sentences/texts in the declarative, narrative and descriptive forms on the integrated themes audibly and fluently, interpret them and bring out meaning	-Read simple sentences audibly and fluently -Read silently, use words to express meaning and sentences and answer comprehension questions within a given time
Writing	Write simple sentences/text in the declarative, narrative and descriptive forms legibly, meaningfully and coherently	Write meaningful simple sentences in a given time legibly and coherently
Grammar and Vocabulary	Construct grammatically correct sentences and use appropriate words related to the integrated learning themes	Construct grammatically correct sentences Use appropriate words in specific contexts

Source: Curriculum de l’Enseignement Primaire Francophone Camerounais, Niveau 3: 2018 :48.

Data analysis particularly from classroom observation has revealed that English is not regularly taught in classes. They learn very little English. Only 17.2% of teachers achieve the teaching objectives in their class. Listening and speaking is less emphasised given that neither the instructor nor the pupils master the language of instruction. Pupils cannot communicate orally and meaningfully with the teacher and subsequently with the people. In fact, 59.1% of the teachers indicated they do not teach listening and speaking in class. Those of the pupils who even try spoken productions exhibit various features at the level of consonants like substitution, cluster simplification and realisation of silent letters (Kouega and Onana Ombouda, 2018:90). This means that listening and responding to speech is a big challenge to the large majority. This sounds as a result to the fact that “English language teachers in Cameroon are not native speakers of English, and they fail to teach speech properly, as, inter alia, many of them do not master the pronunciation patterns of English” (Ngwa, 2021:106). And consequently, when these pupils reach the secondary school, teachers have no choice than to start the English subject from the scratch regardless the official syllabus of the corresponding class. Role-play, discussions/dialogues, poems, storytelling picture talk, films, music among others as the activities that can really stimulate listening and speaking skills are almost totally absent. Ngwa (2021:118-120) sharply submits that using traditional (chalk and board) method of teaching pronunciation is not enough and stretches that teaching with NICTS¹⁹ eases understanding, increases motivation and facilitates learning. Teaching is just a matter of teacher, talk and chalk and course book (Nkwetisama, 2012). Concretely, “The students listened to what the teacher said and there is no objection to that” (Tendoh Inju, 2012:25). Evaluation of listening and speaking is limited to the course when a courageous pupil can struggle to answer a question asked by the teacher. Müge Tavit (2010:769) argued that: “People listen or speak in order to obtain the presented information or to learn about a content which is intellectual rather than factual as a way of developing their own intellectual skills so that ideas can be more effectively manipulated, possibly with the aim of influencing the behaviour of others, or of determining the outcome of series of operations”.

Renukadevi (2014:60) made an inventory of the reasons why learners feel listening difficult:

- i. Lack of effort to understand each and every word while listening. Especially in L2 acquisition they are unable [to] transfer their L1 skill easily to a second language.
- ii. Failure or laziness to build up their vocabulary gradually and this greatly reflects in their listening and keeps them low spirited in acquiring the language skills.
- iii. Listeners problem with different pronunciation, accents as they stick to one particular articulation.
- iv. Listeners’ concentration power or listening stamina greatly influences their listening skills, which is not so in the case of acquiring the other language skills (reading, speaking and reading) even when they are carried for a longer period of time.

- v. Distraction by the physical settings or the environment in which listening is to be carried out. This becomes an added challenge for an average learner and a main confront even for good listeners.

From the investigation, these problems (inappropriate learning environment, lack of concentration, poor articulation, less developed vocabulary and laziness) are common to francophone primary school learners of English in Cameroon. This failure in listening ability automatically hinders the learning of other skills. In this light, Renukadevi (2014:59) equally submits that “Listening, the very basic language skill is consistently interrelated and intervened with other language skills-speaking, reading and writing”. In other words, listening predetermines and facilitates the learning of other skills. This equally implies that without listening skills, language learning is impossible and there is no communication where there is no human interaction (Renukadevi, 2014:62).

The very few moments of communication are when the teacher as a question to the class. When the answer is correct s/he can receive standing ovation, and rarely marks bonus. There is no formal or systematic evaluation of listening and speaking skills. Shockingly, Dagasso (2021:36) posits that even teachers’ speech in English is replete with sound and spelling mismatches, whereas “Speaking is the most important skill in second language learning”(Rahnama, Fatehi Rad and Bagheri, 2016:1) given that the ultimate goal of any language learning is communication. The structure of their question papers during examinations is constantly limited to Grammar and Vocabulary, reading comprehension, dictation and writing. Listening and speaking which should be among the very first skills to be verified are not really taken into consideration in the evaluation process. Listening is carried out for many purposes other than listening to the language itself (Müge Tavit, 2010:769). Furthermore, Renukadevi (2014:61) classified listening strategies into two categories: Top-down strategies and Bottom-up strategies.

Top-down strategies are listener based; the listener relies on the background knowledge of the topic, the listening context, the text type, and the language and they help the listener to interpret the ideas he has listened. Top-down strategies are for

- listening to the main idea
- predicting
- drawing inference
- summarizing

On the other hand, Bottom-up strategies are text-based where the listeners use linguistic knowledge to understand information. Here the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar to arrive at the final message. Bottom-up strategies are to

- concentrate on specific details while listening
- recognize word-order patterns.

The Bottom-up strategies can be recommended in the Cameroonian context of the present study, because teachings are frequently text-based, the physical settings and listening material are problematic and exposure to language is also very limited for

¹⁹ New Information and Communication Technologies

many francophone pupils. Other sub-aspects (grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary) of teaching mostly derive from the text. In this regard, “Teachers should play an important role in teaching learners’ strategies and how to apply them into the listening task” (Renukadevi, 2014:62). Safotso (2018d:36-37) proposed news presentation in class as an integrated activity to foster the teaching and learning of the four macro skills. By so doing, the teachers select the presenters a week before and give instructions on the kind of information to be collected. Then, information has to be treated and organised so as to be presented. Students have to rehearse to make sure they can use five minutes for the presentation. News gathering emanates from listening and involves listening; new presentation involves reading/speaking and writing. “The activity described in this paper makes the class alert, livelier and reduces the teacher talking time to its bare minimum while concentrating on the four macro skills and even vocabulary” (Safotso, 2018d:37). In a more recent study, Nforbi and Siéwoué (2021:163) went further to maintain that practical didactic aids in the teaching/learning of listening and speaking skills added to ample teacher training in pronunciation and a simplified pedagogy for actual oral skills development that will not neglect the other skills can contribute to solving teachers’ problems in oral skills. With the ideas of natural order hypothesis, they underline that listening precedes speaking, which in turn precedes reading, followed by writing and therefore suggest that the teaching/learning of skills should be a continuum (Listening; listening+speaking; listening+speaking+reading; listening+speaking+reading+writing) (Nforbi and Siéwoué, 2021:184-185).

As far as reading is concerned, pupils are expected by the time they are leaving francophone primary schools to read audibly and fluently narrative, declarative and descriptive sentences or texts and bring the meaning out. Of the 93 teachers who participated in the study by Tsangue (2022b), only 15.1% indicated by answering “Yes” that pupils can read fluently and 61.3% validated “Very few”. These statistics illustrate that many of the primary school leavers cannot also perform well in reading. Classroom observation has equally proven that those who even try to read are hardly understandable regarding their tone and intonation. It is very difficult to perceive declaration, exclamation and interrogation when listening to them. Their reading has no rhythm and pronunciation is the worse aspect of that. The teachers too are not better if not worse than some pupils. Most of the reading is organised in terms of “listen and repeat” activities.

It has been established that for this crucial subject of national integration and future professional career, not all of the 851 pupils who took part in this research possess the basic didactic material: the textbook/coursebook. Tok (2010) argues the importance of a book as follows:

On behalf of the learners, a textbook truly affects their attitudes and performance to the lesson throughout the course. It is a fact that when learners like their textbooks, they like the course as well and become active participants to the lesson. The textbook is an important source of input and a great opportunity for EFL learners to communicate in the target language, which is realised only in classroom settings.

The statistics show that 70.5% possess the textbook and only 45.9% assumed of reading the book. This document which

can help a pupil learn the language autonomously and sustains learning at home or in private is not totally possessed and exploited by all pupils. “It guides the teacher and his learners to a great extent, and serves as a main source for homework” (Ying Lao and Krashen, 2000:261). Possible reasons for which pupils can possess the book and refuse to read can be the quality (form) of the book, the demotivating content, insufficient awareness of the importance of reading in language learning, infrequent use of the book by the teacher in class or in giving homework etc. A study conducted by Ying Lao and Krashen (2000:261) has demonstrated that reading and especially free voluntary reading has a strong positive impact on L2 development and readers achieve higher levels of competence in second languages. More interestingly, they realised that “[...] second language acquirers who read short passages containing unfamiliar vocabulary make reliable gains in vocabulary knowledge, confirming that second language acquirers, like the first language acquirers, can acquire from reading for meaning” (Ying Lao and Krashen, 2000:261). Similar investigations have previously been made by Pitts, White and Krashen (1989) and Day, Omura and Hiramatsu (1993). Unfortunately, only 24.1% of the pupils involved in this study claimed “Yes” for being able to read correctly a passage written in English and 59.3% of the pupils claimed “A little bit” whereas 63.4% of teachers claimed that reading is permanently taught in class.

Concerning writing, the syllabus indicates that pupils should be able to produce legible, coherent and meaningful simple sentences/texts either in the declarative, narrative or descriptive forms. In general, as Atoh Chenwi and Fosso Fongang (2021:375) have remarked, “[...] even the most advanced students in the ESOL²⁰ program score lower in writing than in any other domain on their test”. This observation is corroborated with the results of Tsangue (2021:389) on the writing performance of level 3 ‘trilingual letters’ students in the UD. From data analysis, only 20.3% of the 851 pupils unambiguously assumed that they can write a small and good passage in English. 59.2% asserted that they can just try a little bit, whereas 62.4% claimed to be taught writing skill constantly in class. But this is not reflected in the answers extracted from pupils’ questionnaire as the selected below *verbatim* indicate when they were asked to describe their classroom using English Language:

-Classroom a place where we learn with beautiful charts on the walls keep it clean, rit cleans with broom. keep and write the flag comfortable far learning oh my school i love my school.

-good morni and ten ligne y decrea my class. my classe is big my class ave one dor. my class ave mani cher. my class ave one an bord. my class ave two teacher an meni puple

-I am love my class I am love my teacher I am go to school I am class room I am class 6 I love banana a mango

-I am love my classe I am love mange am go the school am class yoo I am class 6 I love banane a mango

I have a big classroom in my class the are have the table the beenc

²⁰ English as a Second Official Language

-I love my class my mother to came in my class give the mony my class is shorl my school is very. I am dirty. my class is very cline.

-I love my class room I love every my class room. I love my class room...

These examples were randomly copied out from pupils' productions as they were asked to describe their classroom. They attest to the fact that francophone primary school leavers are very poor in writing. Most of these writings are incoherent and meaningless. The basic sentence structure as well as the basic writing mechanics are not respected. Grammar and vocabulary are the worst even though 88.2% of teachers claimed to be teaching it constantly. Code mixing and code switching characterise almost all the productions. These linguistic phenomena which are common in most francophone learners of English in Cameroon have been widely discussed in previous studies including Sokeng Piewo (2018; 2014), Atechi (2015a), Nkwain (2010), Kouega (2005), Echu (2003), Biloa (2003) and Tsangue (2021) to name just a few. One cannot believe the majority of them are supposed to have been learning English for 6 years and have succeeded in the Common Entrance Examinations and the CEP and will be in 6^{ème} at the beginning of the next school year as well as they are supposed to be using English for social interactions and integration.

Errors are almost similar with those observed in teachers and student-teachers' written productions (Tsangue, 2022b). This implies that much cannot be expected from poor training and poor teaching. The simplest language of the real-life environment (classroom) is not mastered at all. The spelling of every day's words like blackboard, class, teacher, class, classroom, chalk, school... is catastrophic. These results go straight in line with those found by Achiri-Taboh and Lando (2017). They realised that an overwhelming majority of teachers have difficulties in using punctuation marks and capitalisation. They also found that spelling and agreement as well as word choice constitute areas of greatest problems to many teachers and consequently "[...] the quality of language input administered to learners seems to leave much to desire" (Achiri-Taboh and Lando, 2017:20-23). The study of Tsangue (2021:389) also accounts for these errors as far as Trilingual Letters' university students are concerned. As earlier said, it has been observed that pupils do not have any possibility for creative writing through which they can improve. In most of their question papers, they work with words or expressions already proposed even on dictation; all they to do is to underline, circle, tick or copy out the corresponding element. In this light, pupils' creative writing capacities are dying progressively.

The syllabus indicated that assessment should be done following the below strategies:

At the beginning of the school year, the teacher should use a placement test to determine the characteristics of his/her learners.

-Although language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are interrelated and cannot be taught in isolation, they should be tested separately. As such, aural/oral tests, reading tests and written tests should be done independently.

-The teacher should use a variety of tests to assess different competences, multiple choice, essays, interviews etc.

-The teacher should not forget to assess the mastery of pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation by pupils.

-The teacher should ascertain that each learner keeps an individual vocabulary record.

-Integration activities should be administered to learners only after a number of lessons have been taught.

NB: The aforementioned teaching strategies, teachings aids and assessment strategies are not exhaustive. The teacher feel free to complement them in function of the peculiarities of his/her learners²¹.

From data analysis and field observation, not all teachers do conduct the placement test at the beginning of the school year. They pointed out to the large class size and time constraints as the major hindrance to the organisation of placement tests. Skills are almost tested separately. Tests' processes do not really vary (essays and interviews are never done). This means that pronunciation is not duly evaluated and no pupil has a vocabulary record. Accordingly, Akram and Malik (2010:237) maintained that: "A vivid and effective communicative class is supposed to be the integration of the four language skills training, in which the teacher needs to establish a positive atmosphere, plan appropriate activities, encourage learners and deal with problems sensitively".

A number of studies have been carried out to prove that introducing translation-based approach and code switching can better encourage and facilitate ELT in francophone classrooms in Cameroon. In this light, Neba, Chibaka and Atindogbé (2006:39) view Cameroon Pidgin English for instance no more seen as a curse as in the past, but rather as a blessing in disguise. They sustain unequivocally that: "Cameroon Pidgin English is a highly appropriate language for adoption as a pedagogical language in cities and other urban centres in Cameroon". Apart from formal instruction period in classrooms, CPE is widely used in all other settings in Cameroon. In the same perspective, Ekanjume-Ilongo (2016:154) argued that:

[...] CPE is viable, flexible and practical, and that Cameroonians are more comfortable using this language, which they consider to be an indigenous language, than using either French or English the official languages. Another claim [...] is that Cameroonians consider CPE as a more natural and unifying language which "grows" in their eyes and which transcends geographical and political boundaries, because it is not a language of a particular ethnic group and thus goes beyond the reproach of tribalism.

This means that better integration can be ensured among Cameroonians if CPE instead of French and English is adopted and is officially introduced into the school system. The language is also widely used in Cameroon popular literature. It is viewed as a bridge language between English, French and MT. On her own, Sokeng Piewo (2018:113) advocated that Cameroonians ESL/EFL classrooms should employ code switching by both teachers and learners to perform various functions. According to her, "It was observed that code switching by the lecturers is used mainly to translate difficult notions and to explain part(s) of the lesson

²¹Ministry of Basic Education, *Curriculum de l'Enseignement Primaire Francophone Camerounais, Niveau 3: Cycle des Approfondissements (CM1-CM2)*, 2018, p.49.

students have not understood; even though they try as much as possible not to code switch”. This practice is present in some Cameroonian classes nowadays as the following *verbatim* from a school manager outlines: «*Nous nous évertuons à essayer d’enseigner, mais le plus souvent, le français est plus utilisé que la langue à enseigner*».

It is worth noticing that “Code switching is also used by students as a learning strategy to encompass for their limited competence in the target language” (Piewo Sokeng, 2018:113). Decision makers need to have a deep insight in this situation so as to empower teachers’ capacities to better handle ELT in classrooms. In this light, Atoh Chenwi and Fosso Fongang (2021:381) identified three levels of problems in future teachers’ writing skills (Syllabus level, Temporal level, Psycho-cognitive level) and proposed some strategies as seen below:

A review of the syllabus used to train francophone learners with great emphasis on the reproductive skills;

Reorganization of the time table to give quality to attain ESL objectives;

Sensitization and reinforcement of the centrality of the language in the future of learners, accompanied with disciplinary measures. Enforcement of consistent writing practices.

Data revealed that only 31.2% of teachers constantly teach writing in their classes. This can be because of their low writing proficiency or time constraints in the sense of Atoh Chenwi and Fosso Fongang (2021:381) who insist that reproductive skills should be emphasised at the training college right from the syllabus.

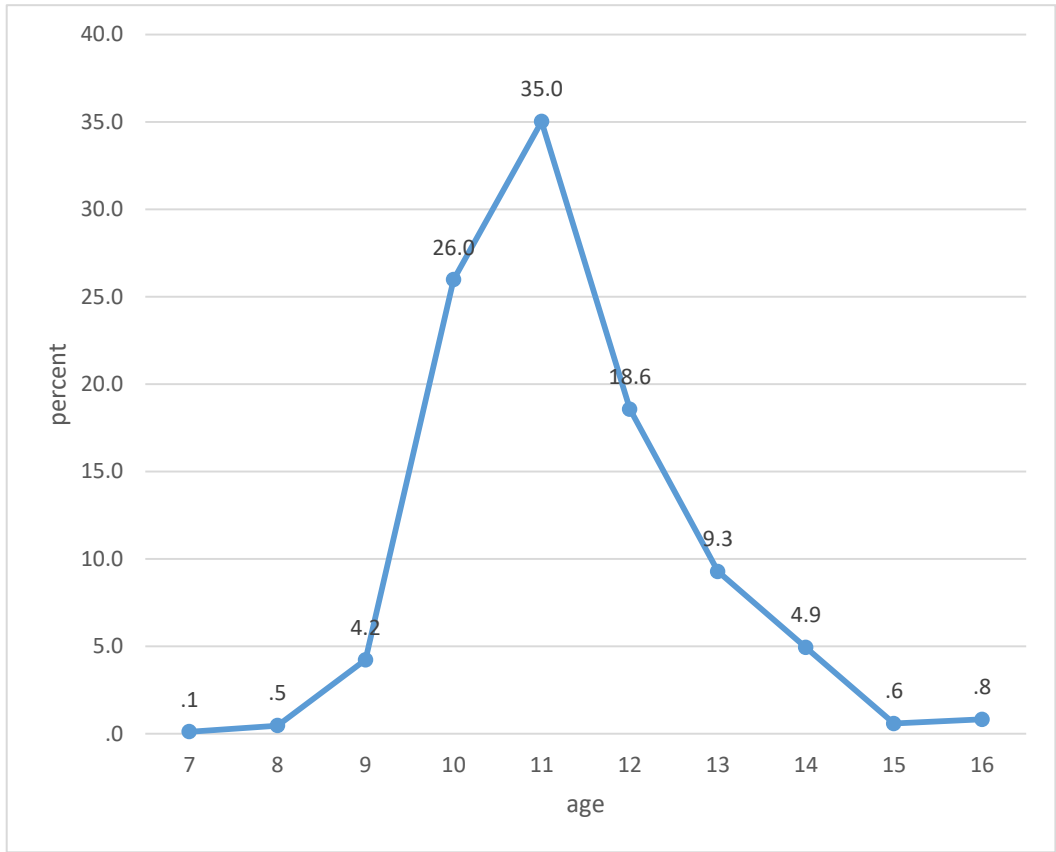
In multilingual classrooms like Cameroon, languages cannot be mutually excluded. Belibi Enama (2016:19) emphasised that “[...] the use of French in EFL classroom does not hinder learning. Rather, French is an effective scaffolding tool in the EFL classroom in Cameroon”. This position is also echoed in the works of Mbeudeu (2017:76) which revealed that teachers unanimously agree on translation strategies to be adopted in the classroom. He states that translation-based activities could foster students’ accuracy in writing and help the achievement of another skill which can be translation itself. He stretches that “[...] it should be mostly used at beginners’ level and gradually be discarded as

the learners’ progress to the end of the secondary school”. This position is also maintained by Duff (1996:6) who submits that “Translation helps us to better understand the influence of one language on the other, and to correct errors of habit that creep in unnoticed (such as the misuse of particular words or structures)”. Essossomo (2015:95) is of the opinion that instead of Standard British English and American English as well as other varieties of English spoken in Cameroon, Cameroon English (CamE) should be emphasised as the varieties which accounts for the cultural values and local specificities. Seidlhofer (2006) comments that teaching Standard English is not realistic, given that it is a language variety easy to define. Additionally, Atoh Chenwi and Fosso Fongang (2021:359) postulated that a comprehensive syllabus, and an increase in the time allocation for English as well as the implementation of a consistent practice of writing techniques can help achieving writing skill. However, it is worth underlining that there is no specific method in teaching writing successfully, “the teacher should rely on his knowledge of the approach that can best meet the needs of his learners” (Atoh Chenwi and Fosso Fongang, 2021:359) and his proficiency.

2.4. Learner motivation

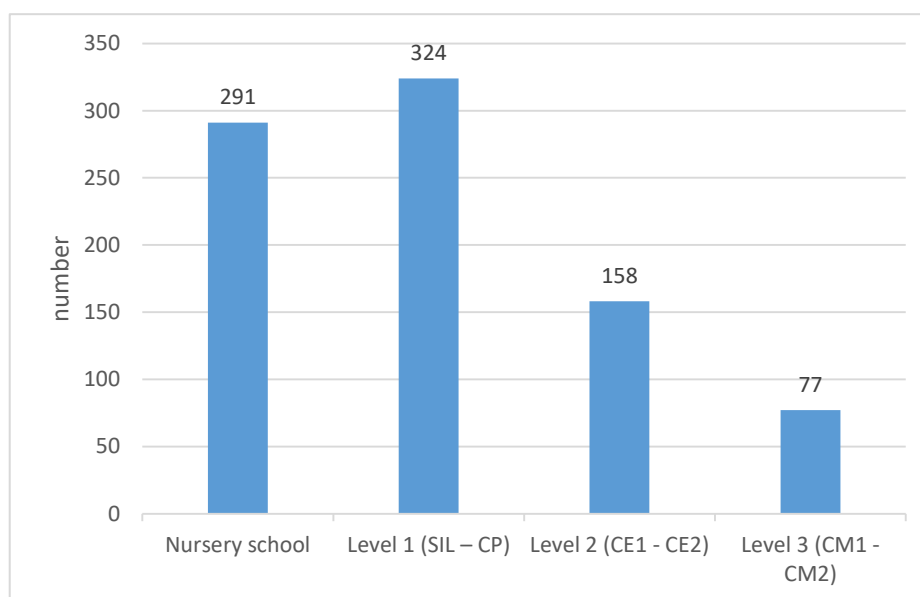
It is probably the most important factor that educators can target in order to improve learning (Rahnama, Fatehi Rad and Bagheri, 2016:4). Of the 851 pupils who participated in this survey, 80.0% like English Language against 19.7% who do not like it while 0.2% remained neutral. This implies that most pupils have a positive attitude towards English and are interested in knowing the language. They were really motivated given that 64.2% affirmed that they often like the lesson despite the fact it is not regularly organised. In general, “Young students at the beginner level are naturally curious about all new things. Their minds and memories are uncluttered; they have no fear of the unknown” (Stakanova and Tolstikhina, 2014:457). Thus, every pupil has his or her own inner incentive for learning a foreign language and the teacher’s role is to develop this motivation given that young learners feel the need for a demonstration when they are learning any language skill (Stakanova and Tolstikhina, 2014:456-459). Furthermore, meta-cognitive strategies were revealed to be employed the most frequently by this age group, while compensation strategies were the least popular ones as Doró and Habók (2013:34-35) indicated. The below chart shows that pupils are at their best ages to learn a new language effortlessly.

Chart 1: Representation of pupils' age



According to the Critical Age Hypothesis, pupils investigated here are at their favourite period of learning other languages because of the plasticity of their brain. They do not need much effort to learn, if necessary, conditions are met. Demographic data have shown that 677 representing 79.6% are more or less at the normal age of being leaving the CM2. At these ages, pupils still welcome almost everything they are proposed if they are also well sensitised about the objectives or the importance of the said subject. As earlier mentioned, “Primary school age is known to be the most favourable for learning a foreign language” (Stakanova and Tolstikhina, 2014:456). But observation has shown that apart from the brief Bilingualism Week, francophone pupils are not enough sensitised on the importance of knowing English not just as a language subject, but as a key factor of national integration given the bilingual nature of the country. “Age is a crucial social factor in studying phenomena of language shift and language maintenance.

Young people are almost always the first to adopt new vocabulary, new languages or language varieties [...]” (Irakoze, 2015:39). But good planning and management is of high importance in a multilingual context. There should be consecutive introduction of different languages in the instruction system according to language typology or language distance. The first language must share some linguistics features (phonology, vocabulary...) with the next language because “[...] children tend to rely on the patterns of their native tongue” (Stakanova and Tolstikhina, 2014:457). It is seen that these innate abilities that pupils have according to their ages are not well taken into consideration in their teaching and learning process. Another striking observation is that not all pupils involved in the study started learning English at the first level (SIL-CP) as it is officially required considering that the nursery level is not compulsory to all pupils as earlier indicated. This is better shown in the below bar chart:

Chart 2: Level where pupils started learning English in school

It is observed from this bar chart that pupils do not have the same opportunity of learning English. Though the majority started right from the nursery school through level one, others started just from the last two levels. This implies that there are some primary schools or some classes in Cameroon where English is not taught at all. It has been earlier outlined that some pupils discover English in their classrooms only on the eve of exams where revision of past questions with duly established corrections is frequently organised.

As earlier signalled, the overall pupils who participated in the survey consisted of 471(55.3%) girls and 380 (44.7%) boys. From a study conducted by Doró and Habók (2013:25-31), gender related investigations have demonstrated crucial differences in favour of girls across all six types of learning strategies (memories, cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective and social). To continue, Doró and Habók maintains with Fisher (1998) that: “Children’s meta-cognitive development, which includes knowledge of themselves (how they perform in certain situations), and knowledge about the strategies they use to solve tasks (how they do things), greatly varies among individuals” Doró and Habók (2013:28). This is probably why the same pupils subjected to the same teachings in the same environment and with the same instructional materials will always produce different results. Pinter (2006)²² concluded that children between 10 and 11 years old can think logically, organise their thoughts and focus on a wide range of cognitive tasks. However, there seems to be a great difference between girls’ and boys’ implication in learning as the following excerpt testifies:

Girls indicated that during vocabulary learning, they use new English words in sentences more frequently, employ rhymes and repeat words to remember them. They also frequently act out situations or use mental images that help them memorize vocabulary. They are more likely to connect the phonetic forms with these mental images and translate the vocabulary items to their native language. If vocabulary access from their mental lexicon is unsuccessful, they rely on words with

a similar meaning to express their thoughts. Girls take more notes, write messages, letters, reports and read in English more often than do boys. [...] Finally, they review their class notes more often than boys. [...] They initiate conversations more frequently, and they monitor their partners’ speech more closely. [...] Girls reflect on their study progress more frequently than boys. Moreover, they seek opportunities more frequently to improve their target language skills. They are less afraid of making mistakes and try to relax, reward themselves, or reflect on their errors (Doró and Habók, 2013:33).

This shows that girls have higher motivation in language learning than boys. They are better in vocabulary and speech development as compared to boys. During classroom observations, girls were the most excited to exchange with the researcher, to raise hands when a question is asked or to start reading when they are asked. They looked more curious and excited to know English.

2.5. The learning environment

Issues concerning the criteria of optimal school environment have been discussed by Kamga Djoyou (2011) and Tsangue (2022) whereby, it was realised that Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adaptability of the primary schools are not optimally ensured. This section lays more emphasis on the environment in which francophone pupils in primary school learn English. Let’s recall that 89.3% of pupils said that they like their schools. 91.3% indicated that they like their classroom. For 78.1%, their classroom is very beautiful, but too old for 14.6%, always dirty according to 13.4% and too small for 3.9%. It is important to highlight that these observations also depend on the home environment of the pupils. This can be because if most of their houses do not have better standing as compared to that of schools, they cannot appreciate the schools otherwise. Machario and Wario (1989:37) insisted that “The classroom environment must reflect a high degree of neatness and cleanliness”. This position is also confirmed by Atoh Chenwi and Fosso Fongang (2021:371) who pointed out that a safe environment can significantly reduce ESL anxiety and provide

²²Pinter, Annamaria, *Teaching Young Language Learners* (2nd ed.), Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

opportunities for risk taking which is necessary to produce even adequate writing.

Observation enabled to notice that some primary schools and teachers' training colleges share the same compound. This may give much and direct possibilities for teaching practices, but must

the two schools share the same compound given that they do not have the same break times for instance? The most frequent cases observed were those of the government schools and government practising schools sharing the same compound. The following signposts indicate some of those schools:

Images 1-4: Signposts indicating some schools



Source: Snapshot Tsangue (August 23, 2021; Dschang)



Source: Snapshot Tsangue (June 3, 2021; Mbouda)



Source: Snapshot Tsangue (June 2, 2021; Bafang)



Source: Snapshot Tsangue (June 3, 2021; Bafoussam)

NB: The below table provides information on how to read the above signposts in the Cameroonian context.

Table 4: Summary description of signposts

Images	Schools	Meanings	Authors' translation into English
Image 1	E.P.A FOTO	École Primaire d'Application de FOTO	<i>Government Practising School FOTO</i>
	E.P.A FOTO 2 A	École Publique FOTO Groupe 2 A	<i>Government School FOTO Group 2 A</i>
	E.P.A FOTO 2 B	École Publique FOTO Groupe 2 B	<i>Government School FOTO Group 2 A</i>
Image 2	Écoles Primaires d'Application Gr.1-Gr.2-Gr.3-Gr.4	École Primaire d'Application Groupe 1	<i>Government Practising School Group 1</i>
		École Primaire d'Application Groupe 2	<i>Government Practising School Group 2</i>
		École Primaire d'Application Groupe 3	<i>Government Practising School Group 3</i>
		École Primaire d'Application Groupe 4	<i>Government Practising School Group 4</i>
Image 3	École Publiques Groupe 2 "B" Groupe 2 "A"	École Publique Groupe 2 "B"	<i>Government School Group 2 "B"</i>
		École Publique Groupe 2 "A"	<i>Government School Group 2 "A"</i>
	Écoles Publiques d'Application Groupe 1 "B" Groupe 1 "A"	École Publique d'Application Groupe 1 "B"	<i>Government Practising School Group 1 "B"</i>
		École Publique d'Application Groupe 1 "A"	<i>Government Practising School Group 1 "A"</i>
Image 4	EPPA 3 A 1 ET EPPA 3 A 2	École Primaire Publique d'Application Groupe 3 A 1	<i>Government Primary Practising School Group 3 A 1</i>
		École Primaire Publique d'Application Groupe 3 A 2	<i>Government Primary Practising School Group 3 A 2</i>

Source: Tabulated from field data

On image 1, three schools lodging in the same compound are represented. On image 2, four schools sharing the same compound are indicated. Image 3 represents four schools as if each government school has a corresponding practising school. Image 4 represents two practising schools at the school entrance. All these signposts are found in the main entrance where the schools are located. Shockingly, in this group of schools, one group can be on break time when others are still in class. Some teachers of one school may be absent and their pupils disturb those in the other school. When practising schools are welcoming student-teachers other pupils can feel frustrated and marginalised somehow as being

excluded or deprived. Pupils or children in general like the same/equal treatment.

Additionally, none of these schools has the school garden and leisure activities and consequently they do not have appropriate school yards. Only 53.3% are surrounded by a fence in a context where pupils are being kidnapped from schools in the neighbouring regions (North West and South West) undergoing insecurity. Some school compounds even serve as a road to the neighbourhood. Also, only 66.6% of schools have a lively environment. From North to South and from West to East some of these schools are surrounded by main roads, high ways, market places and bars. The below images illustrate some school yards:

Images 1-4: Illustrations of some school yards



Source: Snapshot Tsangue (May 25, 2021; Dschang)



Source: Snapshot Tsangue (June 4, 2021; Mbouda)



Source: Snapshot Tsangue (June 25, 2021; Dschang)



Source: Snapshot Tsangue (June 26, 2021; Dschang)

Let's precise that many Headmasters/Headmistresses radically refused any snapshots from the schools under their control. These images globally portray the emptiness of school compounds, no particular leisure activities. From one season to the other (dry or rainy) the playground can be muddy or dusty with fine gravel all around. Running up and down, chatting and hopscotch constitute pupils' essential distraction. Apart from the classrooms, the only things one can still perceive on the compounds are the latrines, the flag stand and to some extent a school canteen. Image 1 shows from outside an effective classroom with classes going on inside by the time the picture was snapped. The plank over the water pool is the main "bridge" leading to class when it rains.

It has been remarked that all classes are labelled, that is, each classroom has at the entry the name of the class, and it is also required that the teacher's name appears there. But they neither have nature corners, discovery tables nor class libraries. A nature corner in the classroom is where the pupil's collections of scientific specimens are neatly displayed and constitute part of teaching. They may include living things or pictures/objects like insects, fish, rabbits, rats, plants etc., it should carry fresh and relevant learning items (Macharia and Wario, 1989:34-35). On its own, the discovery table is any table that can be set aside in the classroom where various objects of interest can be placed by the pupils or the teacher. It helps to sharpen the pupils' curiosity and helps them developing and acquiring scientific attitude towards learning (Macharia and Wario, 1989:34-35). Nature corners and discovery tables render learning more practical and can rapidly increase pupils' vocabulary while learning an additional language. A pupil learns a lot by simply browsing through a picture book or a story book which can be stored in neatly labelled cartons and placed in a cupboard or much still on bookshelves (Macharia and Wario, 1989:36). This can be very useful in a context of generalised poverty where not all pupils have the possibilities of buying even the textbook.

Moreover, it has been observed that 73.3% classrooms do not have notice boards, 60% are not really clean and tidy as expected. 86.6% are not provided with electricity as well as 53.3% of classrooms in their physical organisation do not enable pupils to sit comfortably. 53.3% of classes do not have any teaching aids. However, 73.3% have neat and tidy chalkboard as well as well displayed desks or tables. To this effect, Macharia and Wario (1989:37) pointed out that "The classroom must reflect a high degree of neatness and cleanliness". Despite the fact there are many types of board today (green boards, blue boards, yellow boards, white boards...) chalkboards remain the most common board used in primary schools especially in underdeveloped countries. It is a simple tool, durable and cheap to maintain as well as it is helpful to the teacher in controlling what the pupils see, when they see it and for how long. It is also effective in arousing and sustaining the interest of the pupils, convenient as a point of focus for the whole class and useful for displaying notes and diagrammatic illustrations, especially where textbooks are scarce as in the schools in the present-day Cameroon. The absence of electricity implies the ineffective use of ICT tools in the classroom settings. It was also noticed that pupils are not comfortable in some classrooms because of broken items (desks, windows, doors) which sometimes prevent the teacher/pupils to easily move around the classroom. That is somehow why "[...] teachers in the

Cameroonian schools stand in front of the classroom to teach" (Tendoh Inju, 2012:25). In this sense, it is not easy for the teachers to see what and how the pupils are writing. When a pupil knows that a teacher may bypass him/her, s/he tries to keep a good attitude. This is also why some parents do arrange with some teachers so that they give preferential seats to their children in the forefront of the classroom. In view of all the above, "There is nothing so depressing as a classroom with damaged desks or other equipment, broken window panes, door handles or doors which do not function properly" (Macharia and Wario, 1989:37).

Elsewhere, classes observed are lively, even though pupils never work in group and all do not have textbooks. As earlier indicated, of the 851 pupils considered here, 600 (70.5%) have their textbooks but only 53.9% (459) really read. Pupils in general show a lot of motivation which makes the lesson interactive when the teacher uses code switching or the translation-based approach; they raise hands to answer questions but frequently asked (*Madame on répond en Français?*) whether they can answer their questions using French.

2.6. The material of instruction

There is a wide range of teaching materials out of which teachers can select and use the most practical, context-relevant and available ones. The materials of teaching English to francophone pupils is emphasised in the syllabus as follow:

The teacher should use a variety of materials to help the pupils understand the meanings of some structures and situations. To achieve this, the teacher should, for instance make use of real objects drawn from the learners' environment, pictures, charts, drawings, flashcards, resource persons, authentic documents, language games, rhymes, poems, discussions/dialogues, practical activities, storytelling, picture talk, songs, gallery walk, miming, role-play, specialised materials for children with special needs.

NB: Teaching materials should be adapted to the specificities of the learning environment of the learners²³.

Among these myriads of materials, it has been discovered that practitioners involved in this study constantly refer only to drawing, pictures, charts, storytelling, poems, flash cards, role-play and discussions as they voted from the teaching aids proposed on the questionnaire (Tsangue, 2022b). But classrooms observation did not really approve the effectiveness of these practices; whereas these teaching aids could be very useful if well introduced in the teaching/learning process. New Information and Communication Technologies (NICTs) are almost totally absent in these classrooms in this Digital Age. Feature movies (FMs) which today best capture children attention seems to be much more dynamic than a text book or radio recording in the ELT/ELL context are inexistent. Tuncay (2014:56) argued that FMs in the syllabus can help pupils in several ways:

- (1) improve language competence by watching, listening and speaking,
- (2) understand authentic language and culture,

²³Ministry of Basic Education, *Curriculum de l'Enseignement Primaire Francophone Camerounais, Niveau 3: Cycle des Approfondissements (CM1-CM2)*, 2018, p.49.

- (3) increase fluency and integrated writing skill,
- (4) practice English for various functions and purposes,
- (5) learn vocabulary and authentic expressions,
- (6) distinguish between artificial and natural use of language, and
- (7) use the language in social exchanges and different interactional settings.

In this light, careful selection of the films will be of paramount importance according to the objective of the lessons where they are used. More, 64.9% of pupils validated that they would like to learn English through ICT²⁴ tools. These statistics concord with the results of Toure (2008:2) concluding that “Empirical evidence from school, directors, teachers, students and parents highlights how meaningful integration of ICT into teaching and learning processes provides opportunities for learners to broaden their horizons, develop critical thinking skills, represent themselves, and share with others”. Today than never before, the emotion children have vis-à-vis ICT tools (telephone, television, computers...) demands that they should be used in their education. The benefits of introducing ICTs in ELT/ELL have been established among others by Ul-Amin (2013:45-49), Shrestha (2014:474), Reza Ahmadi (2018:121-122) and Sreedhar and Amos O. (2016:27) as well as Tchombe (2006).

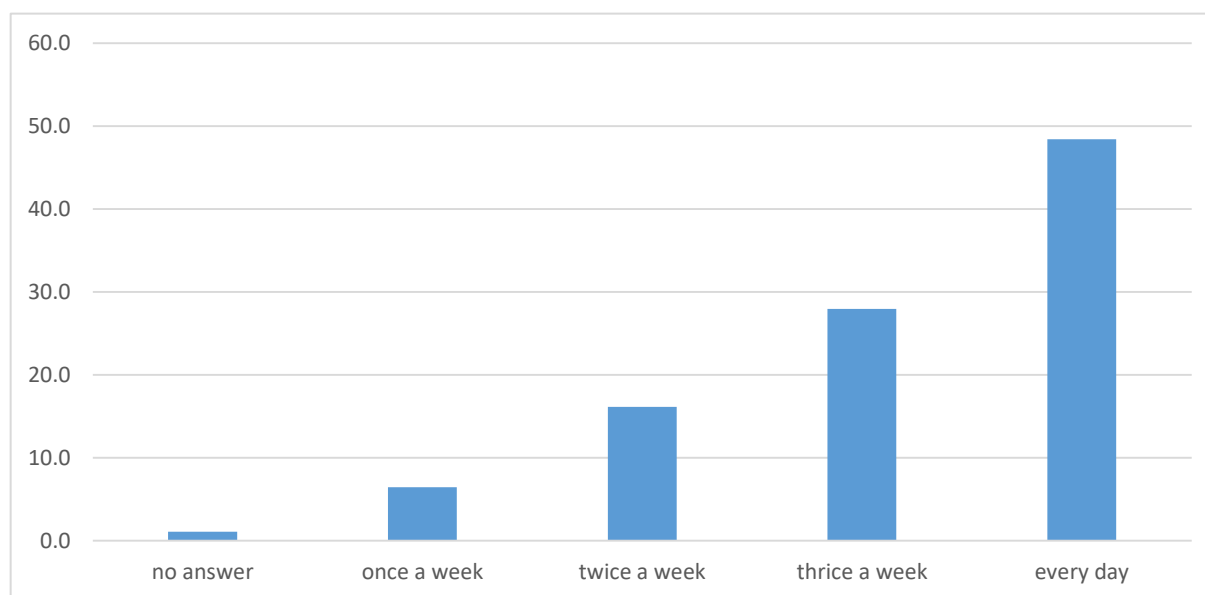
²⁴ Information and Communication Technologies

CBLT which is the ongoing official teaching approach in Cameroon has already been proven to be not yet as effective as expected by previous scholars including Mahamat (2011), Nforbi and Siéwoué (2016b), Nkwetisama (2012) and Belibi Enama (2016:24) just to name these few. For instance, they pointed out the class size, poor teachers’ training, and inadequate course contents and didactics materials as well as classroom environment as the major problems which have not found parallel solutions. Furthermore, Belibi Enama (2016:24) argued for example that “The rejection of French-the first language of literacy (L1) of all Francophone students-in the EFL classroom constitutes a major hindrance for the successful implementation of CBLT in Cameroon”. In this respect, CBLT needs to be carefully rethought so as to match the Cameroonian context of implementation.

2.7. The Classroom Process

To many pupils (63.7%), English is their L3 in terms of classification and categorisation and is used as such by 59.0%. It has been noticed that this language is not really handled as a language of social cohesion and integration by teachers. Although it is a compulsory subject, most teachers handle it as an option in the curriculum. Looking at lesson planning, teaching workload and teaching materials, this subject is given very little consideration. As seen in the following chart, English lessons are not organised every day as expected:

Chart 3: Frequency in organising English lessons in a week



Obviously, English is not frequently taught in classes. The frequency varies from school to another, from one teacher to another and from one class to another. This calls for more vigilance from school managers and inspectors. Failure rate in English proficiency can also be reduced to some extent if regular teaching is ensured. This will force both instructors and learners to make much some effort.

The few teachings did focus more on reading and writing and revisions with a high teacher-centered approach. Widdowson (1991) puts out clearly that “[...] efficient language teaching must work with, rather than against, natural process, facilitate and expedite rather than impede learning. Teachers and teaching materials must adapt to the learner rather vice versa”. Pupils carry along the same difficulties from nursery to primary schools and from SIL to CM2. Pupils are introduced to English (L3) in the

same time they are struggling to form their simplest first sentences/words in French or in the Mother Tongue.

As L3, English needs to be introduced and taught according to the basic principles of TLA²⁵. Given that they are at their best age to learn and also because English has become the global language for communication between people who had different mother tongues (Sundqvist, 2009:25). Language typology or language proximity requires that they should start with the dominant language of the home (MT) as the results revealed which is naturally their L1; continue with French (L2) as their main official language, before English (L3) which their SOL²⁶. English is a Germanic language that has been greatly influenced by a Romance language (French). Several phonological features for instance account, to some extent for the similarities between these languages. Also, many MT in Cameroon have been influenced by French and English since the colonisation periods. Therefore, TLA advocates that the knowledge of L1 will boost the learning/acquisition of L2 and subsequently the L3 in a gradual manner. Otherwise, positive language transfer and code switching from L1 and L2 can influence L3 Learning (English). In this light, Cenoz and Gorter (2011:365) argued that “Students with a high score in mechanics or vocabulary in one of the languages would also obtain good results in the other languages and vice versa”. Leung (2005:1352) as mentioned earlier sustained that “[...] the more languages one has acquired, the more beneficial it would be for the acquisition of additional non-native languages, so far as the rate of (successful) acquisition is concerned” (Bardel and Falk, 2007:460. This is also because, the acquisition of a non-native language is qualitatively different from first language (L1) acquisition, and that acquisition of a true L2 is also somehow different from that of subsequent non-native languages (L3), since the L3 learner has already acquired (at least) one L2 (up to a considerable level), and this knowledge plays a role in the acquisition of other foreign languages. In highlighting the importance of the first language on subsequent language learning, Duff (1996:6) underlines that “We all have a mother tongue, or first language. This shapes our way of thinking and to some extent our use of the foreign language (pronunciation, choice of words, tone, word order, etc.”. The mother tongue component is not taken into account in Cameroon’s English language teaching context to the detriment of learners.

Conclusion

The present research has investigated aspects of the problems francophone primary schools’ pupils particularly from practising schools encounter during their English learning process which impede on the expected competences while they are leaving the primary school. The research raises awareness and expands knowledge on the current ELT and ELL situation in Cameroon’s Francophone primary schools. Despite their positive attitudes and motivation towards English, findings from school and classroom observations have proven that pupils’ learning context leave much to be desired. They do not show average competences on any skills. Among others, environment and sociolinguistics background of the learners and teachers, teachers’ training, teaching practices (the material of instruction and the classroom process), the syllabus and content programme as well as institutional weaknesses have been

revealed as the areas of major difficulties in the ELT and ELL processes which seriously affect the expected outcomes and consequently slow down the bilingual policy of the country and national and social integration of youth. The government should be aware from this study that optimal official bilingualism cannot be expected from francophones if the current paradigms of ELT and ELL remain and still last for long. The problem is cyclical (“Teachers failed in making the pupils appropriately proficient in all the skills. Otherwise, pupils leave primary schools with weak foundation that cannot be fully built up in the secondary schools; after some years, they enter into training colleges with the same difficulties and leave with inadequate training and will be sent to teach with low proficiencies” (Tsangue, 2022b:336-337)) and the solution must start from the foundation level given that “Very few Francophone learners take pains to learn the English language for the purposes of making it a day-to-day tool for oral communication”. This is a major hindrance to national integration propounded by the Cameroonian government.

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²⁵ Third Language Acquisition

²⁶ Second Official Language

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