



## English Language Pedagogy in a Multilingual Context: Reversing the Multilingual Curse in Cameroon

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### Abstract

The prioritisation of English has relegated local languages to the background. They are dying out and may eventually go extinct. This paper investigated the extent to which the rich multitude of languages in Cameroon are exploited to the advantage of Cameroonian language users; how English is prioritised to the detriment of local (and other) languages in Cameroon; how translanguaging could be used to facilitate the learning of English and other subjects on the curriculum. The paper was guided by the Critical Discourse Analysis, The Cognitive and the Socio-cultural Theories. 106 students and 20 teachers constituted the sample population selected from schools in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. Questionnaires were administered to teachers and students; interviews were conducted with sixteen male and female teachers and students. A video of a live classroom observation was done. The study revealed that the rich multiplicity of languages in Cameroon is not sufficiently exploited to the advantage of learners and users; that English is overprioritised to the detriment of local languages, that translanguaging would be a panacea to local languages. Recommendations were made to policy makers, the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education, course book designers, teachers and parents. Suggestions for future research were also made.

**Keywords:** Cameroonian language users, translanguaging, facilitate, learning of English, curse

### INTRODUCTION

An essential part of human existence and relationship is the ability to communicate with one another. The word “communicate” comes from a Latin word meaning “to share in common.” When people communicate, they share their feelings and thoughts with one another.

Any language, however widely or narrowly spoken, is significant to those who speak and share it. In fact, language is an invaluable component of the cultural identity of a people. When a people’s language is neglected or relegated to the background it is seen

as a deliberate attempt to alienate them from their own culture which is so dear to them.

The degree of prominence that has been attributed to English (and French) over local languages in Cameroon in both pedagogic and official spheres is increasing, resulting to what we shall call here “linguistic alienation.” This linguistic alienation increasingly suffered by speakers and users of local languages in Cameroon is further giving birth to an even worse phenomenon: cultural erosion. One who is alienated from his or her local language is distanced from his or her culture; and one who loses his/her cultural identity may become a cultural mulatto, a socio-cultural misfit, a culturally lost soul wandering in a socio-cultural vacuum.

Cameroon has a rich linguistic history. The existence of over 285 languages (Nkwetisama, 2017) spoken in Cameroon is already an adequately complex situation that is only further compounded by the advent of English and French via the colonisation of Cameroon by France and Britain. English and French which were later adopted and imposed as the two official languages only made an already complex situation even more complicated as they were not only additions to the multitude of already existing languages but further required Cameroonians to start learning new languages that they had the obligation to master for all official purposes.

The sociolinguistic history of Cameroon shows that English, which is the basis of the present research, has a longer presence in Cameroon than French as it arrived Cameroon in 1841 (Echu 1999a:4) while French influence only started after World War I (Vernon-Jackson 1967: 13). Initially, the British showed some consideration for indigenous languages as they reserved a place for three local languages in schools, viz: Douala, Bali and Fulani. This was guided by the policy of “Indirect Rule” and an attempt to avoid uprooting Cameroonians from their cultural roots. British missionaries are known to have been the first to put Cameroonian vernaculars into writing (Vernon-Jackson 1967:12). Unfortunately, although initially more localised, the British policy gradually became less friendly to Cameroonian vernaculars after several decades (Echu 1999a: 6). By 1956, local languages were only used if more than 75% of students spoke the language (Ibid). Slowly but surely, English language replaced the native languages and English was declared an official language in 1961.

Historically speaking, French Cameroon gained its independence in 1960 and the union of French Cameroon and English Cameroon took place in 1961 (Vernon-Jackson 1967: 18-19). Bilingualism was adopted to resolve the problem of multilingualism in the country and to preserve national unity in a fragile federation (Echu 1999a: 7). It would not have been possible under these circumstances to privilege one of the languages to the detriment of the other (Ibid). This was not just a matter of policy as actions to support teaching and translation soon followed. As a follow-up, for example, a bilingual university was created in the new country’s capital, Yaoundé. Also, to encourage individuals to speak both English and French, the then Ministry of National Education directed that English be taught in all institutions above the primary level in the French-Speaking regions, and that French be taught to schools above the primary level in the English-speaking regions. Vernon-Jackson (1967:21) claims that the use of both

languages became widespread, but we will see later that this does not mean they are universal.

Today, the two official languages French and English exist with over 285 local languages, yet priority is given to the “foreign” rather than the local languages the indigenes were already familiar with. Within this backdrop, this study seeks to probe into the consequences of prioritising English Language teaching over local languages, and how these multitudes of languages can be harnessed to enhance the teaching of English in Cameroon.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Necessary efforts and strategies need to be adopted to bring local languages back to the limelight, and prevent them from extinction. This, and other multilingualism related issues have caught the attention of researchers like Atindogbe and Dissake (2019), Nkwetisama (2017), Tabe (2017), Yaro (2020) and a host of others.

Atindogbe and Dissake(2019) intimate that with more than 250 national languages and two official languages, English and French, used to run the affairs of the state, Cameroon is a typical example of a nation with linguistic complexity. In such a multilingual country, bilingualism is the preferred language policy. Nevertheless, they are quick to point out the shortcomings of such preferences as they say that bilingual education, in its genuine assertion, i.e., the teaching of academic content in two languages, a native and second language, is far-fetched. They point out that instead, the language – in – education policy is rather geared toward the **systematic exclusion of the plethora of mother tongues and the promotion of official bilingualism**, i.e., the exclusive use of English and French in the education milieu.

This paper ends up by suggesting that the government, by investing the appropriate resources into the model of **extensive trilingualism** language policy, and in partnership with specialised institutions, can scale up teaching and learning to meet the national development agendas, specifically “The Africa we Want” by 2063. They posited that unfortunately, since independence, the successive language planning activities in various African countries have favoured foreign languages rather than the national/home ones. Yet, since the publication of *The use of vernacular languages in education (UNESCO, 1953)*, it is a truism that children learn better in their mother tongue, whether in a monolingual or multilingual context. Moreover, in multilingual settings, like Cameroon, mother tongue – based multilingual education (MTB –MLE) is highly recommended for its benefits during the learning cycle, and for the lifelong performance of such a graduate in the society. Indeed, they say young learners who follow multilingual education develop sharper learning abilities than their peers enrolled in monolingual programmes (Bialystok, 2001) cited by Atindogbe and Dissake (2019). Thus, the advocacy in Mother Tongue instruction in early childhood care and education as conditions for strong intellectual foundations (UNESCO, 2007, 2008a), and mother tongue – based teaching and education in a multilingual world (UNESCO, 2003, 2005), have been the battle horse for UNESCO and many other specialists of education of poor and multilingual nations. The slogan is that mother tongues or local languages

matter, because they constitute genuine keys to effective learning (UNESCO, 2008b, SIL, 2015).

Inasmuch as this paper falls in line with the present research, and evokes similar issues of policy and focus, the two differ in the manner of approach to the revival of local languages. While Atindogbe and Dissake (2019) focus on the model of extensive trilingualism, this research is tailored more towards translanguaging.

Nkwetisama (2017) begins by qualifying the English language as a doubtlessly solid actively promoted strategic weapon of postcolonial domination and maintenance of colonial hegemony. The paper assesses the functional load of English and the extent to which it is threatening the development of local languages as well as effective access to education in Cameroon. From the analyses the study states with certainty that the functional load of English in Cameroon encourages its spread and threat. It adds that English is a stumbling block to the educational and intellectual development of Cameroonians, and that Cameroonian English Language practitioners are uncritical and are uninformed of the effects of the propaganda of the English Language teaching tenets.

The study concludes that justice should (and must) be done for local languages to live alongside the English practices through multilingual education approaches. This, it concludes, will be a proffer to balance the linguistic ecological discrepancy in the global biodiversity.

The orientations of this study are in line with, and are actually similar to those of this paper. However, the point of divergence or difference is that while the former hardly brings out a clear – cut, concrete pedagogic method or procedure to reverse the linguistic imperialism or genocide (Nkwetisama, 2017), the present research proposes and focuses on translanguaging as the way out.

Yaro (2020) on her part examines the issue of inclusion of indigenous languages in the school curriculum. Yaro (2020) is rather more interested in the level of use of the curriculum policy of multilingualism as a guide to teaching and learning in schools in Cameroon.

Ngefacs (2010) investigates linguistic choices made by Cameroonians selected according to some sociolinguistic factors. It then analyses the political, sociocultural and sociolinguistic ideologies such choices are likely to convey. Others like Alobwede (1999), Baker (2011), Calvin (1996), Ebot (1999), Echo (1999a) and (1999b), Mbangwana (1999), Robinson (1994), and Tsoungui (2000) have equally written on the multilingualism situation in Cameroon. Far from objective of the present research, these researchers focus on the historical background of Cameroon's bilingualism or multilingual context, official sociolinguistic functions of the languages, and problems associated with the existence of French and English. This research is rather focused on how the multilingual context of Cameroon can be tailored to enhance the pedagogy of English and other subjects while at the same time projecting local languages and keeping them alive.

Critical Discourse Analysis theory forms the basis of the theoretical framework for this paper. The study adopts the critical discourse analysis as one of the tools to analyse the linguistic and the social, taking particular interest in the question of identity. The issue of identity questions the inter-relationship between particular entities such as society, religion and culture. Understanding the changing issue of how people express themselves related to both social and cultural discourse seems necessary in order to achieve a constructive communication. According to Van Dijk (1995) quoted by (Ulinuha, Udasmoro, & Wijaya, 2013), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a special approach in discourse analysis, which focuses on discursive conditions, components, and consequences of power abuse by dominant (elite) groups and institution. It examines, as Van Dijk argued, patterns of access and control over contexts, genres, text and talk, their properties, as well as the discursive strategies of mind control. Van Dijk's research shows that CDA does so in opposition against those groups and institutions who abuse their power, and in solidarity with dominated groups, e.g., by discovering and denouncing discursive dominance, and by cooperating in the empowerment of the dominated.

The point of convergence between the CDA and this research is seen first in the fact that both take keen interest in linguistic and social issues with the question of identity being central to them. Guided by the principles of CDA, this work probes into the predominance of English over local languages in Cameroon. These local languages are gradually fading out due to the over prioritisation of English. This study does not only see this as a linguistic problem, but also as a social, cultural and/or socio-cultural one. As local languages are relegated to the background in official and academic spheres, these languages are gradually dying, Cameroonians are increasingly being distanced from their culture which is their identity. As Cameroonians lose touch with their language, culture and identity, they are by the same token incapable of being English men and women because they cannot speak and be like the English. The problem of identity therefore arises: Who therefore are we? Backed by CDA, this study probes into the situation and finds out how translanguaging can be used to redeem the identity of the indigenous people of Cameroon via the incorporation of local languages in official and pedagogic matters in Cameroon.

In conformity with CDA belief in the fact that language is a powerful tool in the transmission of knowledge, this paper is propagating the fact that using local languages in Cameroon to teach English as well as other subjects on the school curriculum will enhance better understanding of lessons and give a greater opportunity to learners who do not master the English language to study and achieve pedagogic and professional goals. This paper stands for the fact that learners can acquire knowledge and skills in physics, carpentry, building and construction, and so on, and even excel in them if taught using local languages in Cameroon.

In all, CDA is not just about observing practices in society but actually drawing on them to transform social practices and society as a whole! This study conforms to this as it rejects linguistic imperialism/genocide in favour of a revival of local languages via translanguaging.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory is important to this study. His view that human development is a socially mediated process in which children acquire their cultural values, beliefs and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society is central to this study. Local languages in Cameroon are at the core of the culture of the people. Introducing local languages in the school curriculum and in the classroom will not only revive the indigenous culture, but will create a medium of exchange between learners and teachers that will boost the learners' personal development and ensure acculturation. Also, as Vygotsky's theory propagates, the social interaction that will arise from translanguaging and cultural immersion via the revival of local languages will foster cognition as the community plays a central role in "making meaning." (Mcleod, 2020).

## **METHOD**

The design is both quantitative and qualitative. This study made use of questionnaires for teachers and students, interviews with teachers and students, classroom observation and a video of a sample English language lesson. The questionnaire for teachers had 16 questions, that of students had 12 questions which participants had to answer either by a selection from given options or by providing their suggestions or answers to open-ended questions. The questions were conceived to represent all the areas that were necessary for the research.. The questions touched on the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, students' and teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging and the effectiveness of the use of the local languages in the teaching of English and other subjects in classroom situations. The classroom observation was guided by a checklist – a list of things the observers were keen on when observing classroom teaching and learning. A video of a real English language lesson was equally made. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with secondary school teachers and students. Eight randomly selected teachers and eight students from the different types of schools answered with (08) interview questions each. The objectives and nature of the questions were in line with those of the questionnaires as mentioned.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Questionnaires, interview guides and classroom observation were used as instruments in the collection of data. The analysis of the data from questionnaire will be done in statistical form in tables showing the number of respondents per question and the percentages and cumulative percentages emanating from the results. That of the interview guide and classroom observation will be by content analysis of the information gathered via these instruments.

### **A. Responses to questionnaire**

#### ***a1. Students' questionnaire***

A total of 38 male and 68 female students responded giving a total of 106 students out of the 120 students targeted, giving a percentage of 88.3%.

**Table 1:** Respondents' love for their local language or Mother Tongue.

Opinions	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Very Much	30	79	51	75.1	81	76.4
Much	04	10.5	13	19.1	17	16.1
Very Little	03	07.9	02	02.9	05	04.7
Little	01	02.6	02	02.9	03	02.8
Not at all	00	00	00	00	00	00
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Source (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 1 shows that 76.4% of the total respondents love their Mother Tongue very much, 16.1% love it much, hence the need to preserve and promote our local languages.

**Table 2:** Degree of Understanding of the Mother Tongue.

Opinions	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Very Much	09	23.7	23	33.8	32	30.2
Much	14	36.8	17	25.0	31	29.2
Very Little	12	31.6	13	19.1	25	23.6
Little	03	07.9	10	14.7	13	12.3
Not at all	00	00	05	07.4	05	04.7
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Source (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 2 shows that 30.2% of the total respondents understand their Mother Tongue very much, 29.2% understand it much, 12.3% understand it little, and 23.6% understand it very little, while 04.7% do not understand it at all. The low level of understanding of the Mother Tongue militates in favour of the promotion of local languages.

**Table 3:** Degree of Mastery of the Mother Tongue.

Opinions	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Very Well	08	21.1	17	25.0	25	23.6
Well	17	44.7	22	32.4	39	36.8
Little	04	10.5	17	25.0	21	19.8
Very Little	08	21.1	08	11.7	16	15.1
None	01	02.6	04	05.9	05	04.7
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Source (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 3 demonstrates that 23.6% of the total respondents speak it well, 19.8% speak little, and 15.1% speak very little, while 04.7% do not speak their local language at all. At this rate, local languages will go extinct, hence the need for revival.

**Table 4:** Frequency of Teachers' use of local languages in teaching English and other subjects.

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Very Often	01	02.6	03	04.4	04	03.8

Often	00	00.0	01	01.5	01	0.90
Sometimes	14	36.9	13	19.1	27	25.5
Never	23	60.5	51	75.0	74	69.8
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Source (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 4 reveals that only 03.8% and 0.90% of student respondents say that teachers use local languages very often and often respectively while teaching English and other subjects while the majority 69.8% declare that teachers never use Cameroonian local languages in the teaching and learning process. Translanguaging is thus inevitable in assuring the survival of local languages in Cameroon.

**Table 5:** Level of use of local Languages in teaching by Teachers.

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Very Much	00	00.0	02	02.9	02	01.9
Much	02	05.3	01	01.5	03	02.8
Little	09	23.7	06	08.8	15	14.1
Very Little	14	36.8	17	25.0	31	29.3
Nil	13	34.2	42	61.8	55	51.9
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Table 5 shows that 01.9% of the total respondents say teachers use very much, 02.8% say they use much, 14.1% say they use little, 29.3% say they use very little of Cameroonian local languages in teaching, while 51.9% say that teachers do not use these languages at all when they teach.

**Table 6:** Belief in local language use enhancing better understanding of English and other subjects

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Yes	14	36.8	17	25.0	31	29.3
Maybe	05	13.2	14	20.6	19	17.9
To some extend	08	21.1	16	23.5	24	22.6
No	10	26.3	15	22.1	25	23.6
Uncertain	01	02.6	06	08.8	07	06.6
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 6 reveals that 29.3% say yes to local languages fostering understanding, 17.9% say maybe, 22.6% say to some extent. On the contrary, 23.6% say no to it, while 06.6% of the respondents are uncertain about the outcome. That the majority believes that local languages can foster understanding is a pointer to the necessity of translanguaging in the school milieu.



**Table 7:** Level of Effectiveness of Local Languages in Enhancing better understanding.

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Very Effective	09	23.7	12	17.6	21	19.8
Effective	20	52.6	20	29.4	40	37.7
Less Effective	03	07.9	17	25.0	20	18.9
Not Effective	05	13.2	08	11.8	13	12.3
Uncertain	01	02.6	11	16.2	12	11.3
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 7 above shows that 19.8% believe using local languages to teach can be very effective, 37.7% believe it can be effective, 18.9% consider it less effective, 12.3% think it is not effective, while 11.3% are uncertain about the effectiveness. The fact that most respondents believe in the effectiveness of translanguaging needs not be overemphasised.

**Table 8:** The place given to local languages in the present school curriculum

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Very Much	00	00.0	04	05.9	04	03.7
Much	01	02.6	05	07.4	06	05.7
Little	20	52.6	16	23.5	36	34.0
Very Little	12	31.6	31	45.6	43	40.6
None	05	13.2	12	17.6	17	16.0
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 8 reveals that 03.7% think the place given is very much, 05.7% say it is much, 34% declare it little, 40.6% consider it very little while 16% think no place is attributed to local languages on the curriculum at all. It is glaring here that very little place is given to local languages on the present school curriculum, hence the need for a change in policy.

**Table 9:** Importance to be attached to the use of local languages in schools.

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Very Much	12	31.6	24	35.3	36	34.0
Much	14	36.8	11	16.2	25	23.6
Little	05	13.2	14	20.6	19	17.9
Very Little	02	05.2	12	17.6	14	13.2
None	05	13.2	07	10.3	12	11.3
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 9 : The figures combined reveal that 34% think the importance to be attached to local languages in school should be very much, 23.6% say much, 17.9% say little, 13.2% say very little and 11.3% think none at all. That most respondents think very much

importance should be attached to local languages in schools lends great support to the bid for translanguaging.

**Table 10:** Opinion about developing some local languages in Cameroon into official languages.

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Highly Agree	13	34.2	22	32.4	35	33.0
Agree	14	36.8	30	44.0	44	41.6
Disagree	09	23.7	08	11.8	17	16.0
Strongly Disagree	02	05.3	08	11.8	20	09.4
TOTAL	38	100	68	100	106	100

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

From Table 10, 33% strongly agree that some local languages be developed into official languages 41.6% agree. 16% disagree, while a meagre 09.4% strongly disagree.

Question 12 of the questionnaire for students sought suggestions on how to revive local languages in Cameroon through the teaching and learning process. The following suggestions arose from the responses given by the respondents.

### **Ways of reviving Mother Tongues in Cameroon from students.**

- ✓ The Mother Tongue be taught in schools as a subject; be included in school curriculum and school time tables.
- ✓ A presidential decree be signed instituting the study of local languages in schools.
- ✓ Teachers be trained and/or recruited to be able to teach local languages.
- ✓ Classes be organised for students on their local languages.
- ✓ Some local languages should be developed and given the status of official languages.
- ✓ Teachers should use/speak local languages often when teaching.
- ✓ The Mother Tongue be taught through radio and television.
- ✓ Special days or programmes be instituted in schools to promote local cultures, particularly the language aspect.
- ✓ Local language schools be created or opened
- ✓ Peer teaching /learning or exchanges between learners especially of the same origin, be encouraged.
- ✓ Parents should begin by teaching the Mother Tongue at home.
- ✓ Teachers should create local language slots or time during lessons/while teaching.

- ✓ Teachers should create local language slots or time during lessons/while teaching.
- ✓ Students be sensitized on the importance of the Mother Tongue.
- ✓ Rewards/prizes be given to students who speak their Mother Tongue fluently, or who speak more than local languages in every school.

The responses above show that students have a high level of consciousness of the importance of local languages. These proposals on how to revive local languages in Cameroon touch on all the dimensions and objectives advanced by this research. They raise ideas like developing some local languages and giving them the status of national Languages, the teaching of local languages in schools, the use of the Mother Tongue to facilitate the teaching of English, special days/school programmes and activities which revive, enumerate and promote local languages. If even students demonstrate such a high level of consciousness of the importance of the Mother Tongue and the necessity to revive local languages, then policy makers and stakeholders in this issue should take the proposals and recommendations of this study seriously. Local languages should be revisited, revived and brought to the limelight in issues of national, educational (pedagogic) and socio-cultural import. It is only then that Cameroonian languages, culture and identity shall be restored and sustained.

## A2. Teacher's questionnaire

A total of 20 English Language Teachers; 12 females and 08 males responded to the questionnaire as follows. Given that most of the responses were similar to those of students, very few of the tables will be presented here.

Statistics from table 11 shows that 50% of teachers speak the Mother Tongue very well, 20% speak it well, 10% speak little, 15% speak very little and only 05% are not capable of speaking it at all.

Figures from table 12 reveal that 70% of teachers love their Mother Tongue very much, 30% love it much and zero percent either love it little, very little or not at all.

**Table 13:** The number of other Cameroonian local languages teachers speak.

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
1	05	62.5	03	25.0	08	40.0
2	01	12.5	06	50.0	07	35.0
3	01	12.5	00	00.0	01	05.0
4 and above	00	00.0	01	08.3	01	05.0
Zero	01	12.5	02	16.7	03	15.0
TOTAL	08	100	12	100	20	100

Table 13 tells the number of other local languages teachers in Cameroon speak. The statistics show that 40% of teachers speak one other language, 35% speak two others, 05% speak three others, 05% speak four others and above, and 15% speak no other local language apart, probably, from their own Mother Tongue. This shows that teachers

have the capacity to learn and use other languages apart from their Mother Tongue, a condition which favours translanguaging.

Statistics from Table 14 reveals that globally, 00% of teachers use local languages very often or often. 45% use them sometimes, while up to 55% never use local languages at all while teaching. This confirms the absence of the use of local languages in schools.

**Table 15:** Local Languages and enhancing understanding.

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Yes	07	87.5	09	75.0	16	80.0
No	01	12.5	03	25.0	04	20.0
TOTAL	08	100	12	100	20	100

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 15 demonstrates that a total of 80% of teachers believe in local languages enhancing understanding, while only 20% do not seem to agree with that. The figures thus speak in favour of translanguaging.

**Table 16:** Opinion about developing some local languages in to official languages.

Opinion	Male Frequency	Percentage (%)	Female Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total	Percentage (%)
Highly Agree	03	37.5	04	33.3	07	35.0
Agree	04	50.0	06	50.0	10	50.0
Disagree	00	00.0	02	16.7	02	10.0
Strongly Disagree	01	12.5	00	00.0	01	05.0
TOTAL	08	100	12	100	20	100

Source: (Field Survey, 2021)

Table 16 reveals that 35% of teachers highly agree, 50% agree, 10% disagree, and 05% strongly disagree with the fact that some local languages should be developed into official languages. This validates the case for the promotion of local languages in Cameroon.

### Teachers' opinions on ways of reviving the Mother Tongue

- ✓ Parents should begin by teaching/speaking local languages to children at home.
- ✓ Building a curriculum that includes some approved local languages to be taught in schools.
- ✓ Train teachers in the selected languages or recruit those with the competence to teach local languages in schools.
- ✓ Languages to be taught or learnt should be included in teacher training programmes.
- ✓ Books should be written in local languages, especially interesting stories.
- ✓ Institute 10 minutes of local language use in (each) class

- ✓ Using words from local languages in class to ease understanding.
- ✓ The alphabet of local languages should be taught in schools.
- ✓ Local languages should be taught as a subject in schools.
- ✓ Extracurricular activities (clubs, drama, folklore, songs, folktales, etc.) be conceived to promote local languages in schools.
- ✓ Local languages should be developed into languages of instruction, especially at the basic level, as studies have proven that children who learn their Mother Tongue easily acquire English (or other languages).
- ✓ Translating from local languages into English and vice versa while teaching/learning.
- ✓ A National Day be instituted on which everyone speaks only the Mother Tongue.
- ✓ Initiating/encouraging group/peer discussions and exchanges within linguistically intelligible groups or pairs of learners.
- ✓ Using the Mother Tongue to explain certain structures and concepts while teaching English.
- ✓ Soliciting and/or giving examples from local languages while teaching.
- ✓ Making an analogy between the Mother tongue and English.
- ✓ Adopting some National local languages as official languages.

The above are suggestions made by teachers on how local languages (the Mother tongue) can be revived in Cameroon. Ideas raised range from teaching children the Mother Tongue at home, training teachers to teach approved local languages, through including local languages in training programmes and school curricula, to teaching the Mother Tongue/ using the Mother Tongue in teaching and adopting some local languages as official languages. Like students, teachers demonstrated a very strong attachment to local languages which they see as part of that culture of theirs which distinguishes them from others and gives them the dignity, personality and identity which is so clear, so invaluable to them. Their proposals all confirm the hypothesis emitted by this research: That local and other languages are underexploited in Cameroon; That English is overprioritized to the detriment of local languages; and that translanguaging would revive local languages and keep them alive.

### **A. Qualitative data from interviews**

To further investigate the situation of local languages and translanguaging, interviews were carried out with four (04) students and four (04) teachers drawn from the different categories of schools. Questions asked and the responses they gave were as follows:

As to what place or importance is given to local languages in the school and official milieu in Cameroon today, the respondents for the most part believed that it is very little; that local languages are not actually given the place or importance they deserve, especially in the school and official milieu. About the place given to Cameroonian local languages in official matters and in the educational milieu, the majority declared that it is wrong, unfair to attach so little importance to local languages which are the cultural identity of indigenous Cameroonians. This is indicative of the fact that Cameroonians want their local languages to be recognised, projected and given an image of which they shall be proud. As to whether they would love to have Cameroonian national Languages increasingly used in official matters and in the classroom, the opinion of respondents was largely positive. The majority of respondents affirmed that an increased use of local languages in official matters and in the Cameroonian classroom will be very welcome as it will provide an opportunity to those who do not know their Mother Tongue to learn or acquire from their peers. Also, to them, increased use and mastery of the Mother Tongue will enable people to keep secrets, reduce the effect of the overbearing presence of English as well as restore the cultural identity of Cameroonians. These opinions justify the *raison d'être* of the campaign for translanguaging conceived and defended by this paper. Reacting to the pride of place given to English over local languages in Cameroon, the opinions showed that it is wrong, unfair, and even frustrating.

### **B. Classroom observation/video of a live class scenario.**

The observation of the live English Language lesson showed that no other language was used during the lesson. This confirms the prioritisation of English and the relegation of local languages to the background.

### **C. Analysis of findings**

The analysis of research instruments confirms the fact that the multilingual context of Cameroon is inadequately exploited to the benefit of Cameroonians and that translanguaging is largely not exploited to give Cameroonian local languages the value, dignity, importance and the place they deserve.

All the respondents are unanimous in their protest against the pride of place given to English over local Cameroonian languages as evident in the reasons they advanced: children grow up not knowing their culture, children cannot communicate with their grandparents smoothly, Cameroonians are making themselves inferior and enhancing and promoting a culture that is not theirs. These are indicative of the frustration which conscientious Cameroonians feel against what is evidently linguistic imperialism/linguistic genocide (Nkwetisama, 2017) and cultural estrangement. The earlier policy makers reverse this "curse" the better for Cameroonians. Translanguaging will be a giant step towards finding a panacea for this rather frustrating and damaging practice

About what should be done in the school milieu to revive local languages, a number of proposals emanated from the study, namely: the promotion of clubs that dwell more on cultural values and the Mother Tongue, making the Mother Tongue obligatory, using local languages to teach, sensitizing students sufficiently on the importance of local

languages, and the teaching of local languages in schools. Although for different reasons, respondents largely agree that local languages be used in the course of teaching English and other subjects on the curriculum. While some think that it will revive local languages, others believe that learners will understand content better if notions are explained in the Mother Tongue. This advances the hypothesis emitted in this study that translanguaging will not only revive local languages and culture, but will go a long way to enhance better understanding. The set back about a single teacher being incapable of explaining in all the possible languages spoken or understood by the learners would be taken care of by the training of teachers in various local languages. Talking about the advantages of teaching English and other subjects using the Mother Tongue, the study raised a number of merits. Respondents said it eases understanding and improves performance (which English sometimes impedes). Also, it encourages students to speak their home language. Consequently, to them, it is a motivation for students to learn local languages more to be able to catch up with others. In addition, mastery of local languages will help young people to interact with other indigenes and with people from other villages. Furthermore, to them, students will prioritize their local languages, will better understand where they come from, and this will cut down the rate of extinction of local languages. Moreover, many more will learn other subjects and trades that the lack of knowledge of English discouraged them from learning.

According to teachers, first the Ministries of Education should come up with a policy decision to promote local languages in schools. At that level, the first language upon entry into nursery and lower primary schools should be the Mother Tongue. As they move ahead, the language of instruction may become English while the Mother Tongue becomes a language taught. Secondly, on the National Day of the Mother Tongue, more exciting programmes should be created to give credence to the Mother Tongue. Children should be made to know the importance of the Mother Tongue. To them, the Mother Tongue could be made to be a school course. Thirdly, the government or curriculum designers should give a prestigious place to the Mother Tongue. Learners could be grouped into tribes and given tasks in the language they can all understand and use. Lastly, there should be sufficient sensitization, to make students know the value of our local languages and culture. Some evoked the teaching and testing of local languages in official examinations as a catalyst that will compel learners to take the learning of the languages seriously. To many, if national policy, school curricula and individual or personal commitment recognize and uphold local languages at various levels, the revival survival and sustenance of the dignity, identity and personality of indigenous Cameroonians and Africans in general will be a reality

Positive-thinking respondents consider the multiplicity of languages in Cameroon as a blessing from God as we are enriched and made richer by these many languages. To them, there is variety (which is a spice of life), we live as one in spite of the multilingual background as language has never been a barrier to social cohesion in Cameroon.

This paper stands for the fact that the multilingual situation of Cameroon is a blessing that needs to be adequately exploited to the benefit of Cameroonians. Translanguaging in the teaching /learning process, revalorization of local languages in school curricula

and official spheres will go a long way to tap from the rich variety of languages for the pleasure, benefit and development of Cameroonians. The fact that the majority of both students and teachers are positive towards the use of local languages in teaching is a pointer to the fact that translanguaging is a welcome and highly rated way out of linguistic imperialism and linguistic genocide as Nkwetisama (2017) terms it.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Following the findings of this study, the researcher found it necessary to advance some suggestions to various stakeholders of the teaching – learning process, especially as far as translanguaging is concerned. This is because the way forward needs or has to be tackled from the classroom with the blessing and assistance of the powers that be. Recommendations here are addressed to language policy makers, the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education, course book designers, parents, teachers and other researchers.

Language policy makers and the government could be realistic to demonstrate some degree of flexibility in policy relating to English language teaching in Cameroon. That is, attention should be paid to translanguaging which is very practical and necessary for the revival and sustenance of local languages in Cameroon. Translanguaging could even be included in course books. Inspiration could be drawn from linguists such as (Labor, 1981) who advanced the principle of linguistic autonomy which says “Members of a speech community may choose for themselves which language or language variety they want to use”. In the same line, SIL has proposed, in line with a world – wide desire for non-native speakers, to place value on local cultures and languages rather than take western models as norm. Moreover, the government and legislators should select local languages that can be developed and given the status of national languages that will have an equal status with English and French, and can be used in official matters in Cameroon. This will help restore the culture and identity of Cameroon and Cameroonians.

We strongly recommend that the cases of Ghana and Nigeria on one hand, Uganda and Tanzania on the other where during the first four years of primary school, pupils are taught in their Mother Tongue should be adopted and adapted in Cameroon. Inasmuch as we acknowledge the training of teachers of Mother Tongue in the Higher Teacher Training College (ENS) Yaoundé, we regret that this measure cannot actually be effective because the base is weak or inexistent in most cases. A well-conceived policy that builds from the roots will reverse the present multilingual quagmire in Cameroon. We equally appeal to individual consciences to desist from political tussle on which language to be elevated and taught in schools. Carving out linguistic zones and lifting the most intelligible variety or language per zone will certainly ensure effective and successful implementation of national policy and translanguaging pedagogy in English Language teaching in Cameroon.

The Ministries of Basic and secondary Education should implement certain measures like introducing translanguaging in the school curriculum so that local languages could be taught vis-à-vis the English language (and French). Since this cannot be achieved



overnight, the teaching of, or use of local languages in teaching, can begin from the very basic level so that in some years to come, translanguaging will gain a deserving position in the educational system in Cameroon. It will be necessary to recruit and/or train teachers who can teach local languages or at least use them in teaching English and other subjects in the school curriculum. We applaud what is going on in the Higher Teacher Training College Yaoundé with the Department of African languages that trains teachers to teach the Mother Tongue in Cameroonian secondary schools. That is still not enough for a Country like Cameroon. It may also be necessary to create a department for the promotion of local languages which shall have pedagogic Inspectors who shall liaise with other inspectors and teachers in the field for a fruitful and successful implementation of the policy in the field. Inspectors of pedagogy would have to organize seminars very often, and devise teaching strategies that would accommodate the teaching of our local languages or the use of the languages in or while teaching. The Competency Based Approach was instituted to redress the old curriculum which had failed to produce skills that address local, national and international standards. The institution of translanguaging will thus be very instrumental in linking lessons to the environment.

Course book designers would do a lot of good if they reconceived and/ or restructured course books in English language (and even other subjects in the curriculum) to include translanguaging. By so doing, learners would be drilled not only on the mastery of English which is even far from being attained, but also in a more familiar and more culturally adapted language – The Mother Tongue. They shall be expected to put their heads together to come up with the alphabet and dictionary of individual local languages. This will facilitate teaching and learning via the use of local languages.

To successfully achieve translanguaging in schools, parents will have to take their responsibility of teaching their children the Mother Tongue at home. Parents would have to renew their linguistic priorities and calendar to include speaking and using local languages at home more often to keep their children abreast with their Mother Tongue. This will form the basis of translanguaging that will largely be built on the foundation of at least some knowledge of the Mother Tongue. Parents would also have to sensitize their children on the importance of their local languages to their person and culture, as well as prepare their minds to meet and deal with the teaching and/or use of local languages at school. They would eventually have to buy books related to the teaching/learning of local languages for their children.

Teachers are at the centre of the process of translanguaging as they are responsible for the implementation of any eventual policy, ideas and procedures in the classroom. They would have to master, teach and/or use local languages in the classroom via translanguaging. They would have to receive instructions, information and recommendations from policy makers, the Ministries of Education, Pedagogic Inspectors and other stakeholders and harness them in to a bouquet that can be delivered to learners with the dexterity that it warrants. They would thus have to be open-minded, psychologically prepared and ready to go with translanguaging. They may also need to upgrade their own knowledge and mastery of probably more than one

local language. They will have to prepare their students for a world of diversity by exposing them to other languages (mainly local languages in this case) which they will most likely encounter in their own vicinity.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Further research may focus on a comparative study of the situation of translanguaging in the North West vis-à-vis another or other Regions of Cameroon

Also, further investigation can focus on practical modalities for the actual implementation of translanguaging not only as a policy but as a reality in the field.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper set out to investigate the extent to which the rich multitude of languages existing in Cameroon are exploited to the advantage of Cameroonian language users, how English is over prioritised to the detriment of local (and other) languages in Cameroon, and how translanguaging could be used in schools to teach English as well as to explain notions in other subjects on the curriculum. Through research instruments like questionnaires and interviews with both teachers and students, classroom observation with a video coverage, the study collected data that was analysed and discussed. The results demonstrated that the multilingual context of Cameroon, with a rich multiplicity of languages, is not sufficiently exploited to the advantage of Cameroonians or users of language in Cameroon, thereby confirming Hypothesis 1 (H1) of this study. Also, the study proved that the adoption of English (and French) as the official language(s) in Cameroon and the pride of place given to it (them) in the official sphere and in the domain of pedagogy has relegated local languages in Cameroon, hence bringing about linguistic imperialism or linguistic genocide. (Nkwetisama, 2017). This confirms Hypothesis 2 (H2) of this research. Moreover, the survey results showed that if translanguaging is used in schools to teach English as well as to explain notions in other subjects, not only will English and other subjects be better taught and learnt, local languages, which have hitherto been relegated to the background, will be revived and kept alive as well. (Hypothesis 3). It is therefore our hope that the recommendations made to various stakeholders in this work will be taken seriously, be studied and implemented as a matter of urgency. If this is done, the English language and other subjects will be better taught in schools but at the same time local languages will be promoted and the cultural identity of the Cameroonian will be revived and preserved.

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