English in Francophone Elementary Grades in Cameroon

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Since Reunification of French Cameroon and British Cameroons in 1961, the country has adopted French and English as its joint official languages and recommended the promotion of bilingualism in these two foreign languages in official domains. This paper focuses on the primary school level in the francophone sub system of education and examines the various measures that successive governments have taken. The first two measures failed to bear fruit, for various reasons including insufficient teachers and lack of teaching materials. The most recent measure still to be implemented makes the teaching of the second official language a compulsory subject in all primary school classes and a subject in both the First School Leaving Certificate and the Certificat d’Etudes Primaires (CEP), its French equivalent. This decision seems to have been taken hastily, as the problems of staff and materials are still not resolved. The position of the present researcher is that, as the Government is at present better prepared to provide teaching in one or other of the two official languages, it should make some French-medium and some English-medium schools available in as many localities as possible, and give parents the choice of which system they want for their children.

Introduction

Cameroon is a central African country where two systems of education operate simultaneously, namely an English-medium subsystem intended for the country’s anglophone population and a French-medium subsystem intended for the francophone population. This situation stems from the country’s history (see Todd, 1982 for details). In fact, Cameroon was a German colony and, as Germany lost the First World War, its possessions were handed over to the victors. As a result, one part of Cameroon was to be administered by France and the other part by Britain.

In 1960, the French part obtained its independence from France and in 1961, this French part was reunited with a fraction of British Cameroons: a new state was thus formed and was called the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The first Government of this new state had one major objective, namely national cohesion: it had to tackle pressing political problems such as management in a situation of federation of states, preservation of power, intertribal skirmishes and so on.

Knowing that language issues can be used to divide people and manipulate their political views, this Government decided not to take any unnecessary risks at raising language problems. It therefore shelved issues such as choosing the Cameroonian language(s) that could be promoted to official status out of the several scores of languages available (Chia, 1983), or counting the speakers of each language group so as to work out the numerical weight of each tribe. The only language that was likely to be wholeheartedly accepted by all citizens at the time was the language of the ex-colonial master. As the country had had two such masters, both their languages were chosen. French and English thus became the
official languages of Cameroon, and to further confirm this choice, it was recommended that bilingualism in these two languages be encouraged.

From this period, French, which used to be the medium of instruction in francophone schools before Reunification, was introduced into anglophone schools; similarly, English, which was the language of education in anglophone schools, was introduced into francophone schools. By so doing, it was envisaged that, in the long run, all Cameroonians would become proficient in the two official languages. For over 40 years attempts have been made by successive governments to achieve this objective (see Kouega, 1999). In the domain of mass media, for example, the official press was produced in two versions, one in French and the other in English, and the national radio broadcast programmes in French and English at regular intervals. In the domain of education, courses were taught in the only state university in either French or English depending on the availability of teachers; at the secondary education level, French was a subject in anglophone schools and so was English in francophone schools. This paper focuses on the measures taken in one specific sub-domain of education, namely the level of primary school education. It first reviews the first two policies of bilingualism conceived by the Government for francophone primary schools. Then it discusses the latest policy still to be implemented and finally makes some recommendations.

Review of the First Two Policies of Official Bilingualism

Before taking any action in its effort to promote bilingualism, the Government first specified the language to be used in education and the objectives to attain. The language recommended was the standard British variety of English and not Cameroon Pidgin English (a widespread lingua franca used for various purposes (see Kouega (2002) and Mbangwana (1983)), which on no account was to be used in the classroom. The general objectives were to give the child a practical knowledge of the second official language, which he or she will need for further studies and in everyday life after leaving school.

To realise this objective, the Government made English a compulsory subject in all secondary schools as well as a subject in all public examinations taken at this level. After some time, it was observed that the proportion of pupils who continued their education after primary school was very limited. Also, as some secondary school students were not performing well enough in the second language, it was felt that the child ought to be introduced to bilingualism at a much earlier stage, that is before secondary school. Professor Fonlon (1963), in particular, advocated the introduction of the second official language as early as the first year of primary education.

As from 1975, which marks the beginning of the implementation of the second attempt, English was introduced into the curriculum of primary schools; 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 school, that is, Grades 1 Four to Six. Teaching was reported to have been going smoothly and francophone children to have been highly motivated. The few problems alluded to were regarded by the Government as minor difficulties that would be overcome with time. However, in practice, something was definitely going wrong. In an investigation into official bilingualism in
education, Tchoungui (1983: 113) concluded that ‘21 years after Reunification, bilingualism – at least the type advocated by official proponents – is still more a wish than a reality’; it had become a ‘financial waste and burden’ for the country.

Various reasons were put forward by state officials to account for this failure, the most compelling being the shortage of teachers and of teaching materials. The insufficient number of teachers coupled with mismanagement of available human resources affected the programme considerably. Some teachers were appointed as specialist teachers whose duty was to teach English in francophone primary schools. These specialist teachers were to move from one class to the next, entertaining the pupils of each class in English for a period of 30 minutes some three to five times a week. This practice was not evaluated, but it is evident that it did not work. There were not enough ‘revolving’ teachers to go round and so only some government schools in urban centres were served; those in rural areas, which had more than half the pupil population in the country, had no teachers. Worse, private and mission schools in both urban and rural areas, which used to handle over one-third of the pupil population, said that they could not afford the luxury of employing ‘revolving’ teachers.

Regarding teaching materials, there existed in 1975 no book for the teachers to use. In 1981, a series of three books entitled Living Together . . ., whose production was funded by the British Overseas Development Agency and which was at the same time a textbook and a syllabus for the course (Harrison & Wilson, 1981), was adopted for use in the three classes cited above (Ze Amvela, 1999). Unfortunately, teachers in most areas are reported to have refused to teach the course – perhaps because there were no incentives. As a result, the pupils did not use the textbook. The Ministry of Education blamed this on the ‘pedagogic inspectors’ of bilingualism in primary school education, who are appointed officials responsible for the implementation of ministerial orders in the schools of the country. These school inspectors, who seemed to have let the teachers override ministerial orders, were all dismissed and their posts removed from the organisation chart of the Ministry.

It is difficult for an outsider to understand why the event took such a radical turn: there is no available official document relating the facts, and potential informants who are contacted give evasive answers when they are not rude. However, in hindsight one can make an inference. The book series cited above was produced by two British citizens; present books used in various subjects systematically include the name of at least one ‘pedagogic inspector’ as co-author. It appears that in those days, school inspectors had been taking a very active part at all levels in the school book industry, including writing, producing and marketing. It is also rumoured that when these inspectors lost their post, the textbooks of which they were co-authors were hastily removed from the school programme and replaced by new books of different authorship. In other words, the choice of a textbook does not seem to be motivated by its academic value, but by financial and other factors. This may be the reason why the appointed committee who choose school books do not include professional teachers in each field, as the list for the year 2003 published in the official daily Cameroon Tribune (11 April 2002) shows.

In brief, the first attempt by Government to implement its policy of bilingualism at the primary school level failed to turn out pupils who were proficient in
English. Worse, it had not even succeeded in getting every pupil to meet an English teacher before completing primary education. This explained why in every secondary school Form One class in the country, the proportion of students who had never had any English lessons was generally very high. For this reason, secondary school teachers of English tended to assume that Form One classes were made up of complete beginners, even though a few students might have had some English before.

Overview of the Third Policy of Official Bilingualism

The third attempt by Government to promote bilingualism in primary schools has just been put in place. It is a form of dual-language schooling programme. It does not seem to result from the findings of a body of experienced researchers working on language-in-education policy, as such a body does not exist. The programme is the outcome of a series of proposals emanating from state functionaries appointed to work in the Ministry of Education on the basis of confidence and reliability, and not their competence in handling language issues. This new programme is a series of decisions taken as a solution to the various problems identified in the previous programmes such as insufficient staff, syllabus design, evaluation of courses taught, and coverage of the primary school classes. These problems have been raised since 1975 when the first policy was implemented. That the Government should suddenly decide to solve them all is a laudable act, but the general public would have liked to know the motive underlying such a radical shift in policy. This section of the study first reviews the ministerial orders that underlie the new programme; then it makes an appreciation of this new policy and an evaluation of the new syllabus therein outlined.

Review of new ministerial orders

To ensure that there are sufficient staff to carry out the new bilingual education programme, the Ministry of Education decided (Order No 21/E/59 of 15 May 1996 organising the Grade One teacher certificate examination) that graduates – that is, every primary school teacher – will henceforth teach all subjects on the syllabus, including the second official language course. This means that, at best, only bilingual candidates will eventually graduate from the various teacher training schools in the country. These teachers will be asked to follow a course outline already drawn by the Ministry and recorded in a document entitled Programmes officiels de l’enseignement primaire, which is reviewed below. By Order No 66/C/13 of 16 February 2001, it was also decided that the second official language will henceforth be a subject in both the written and the oral parts of the First School Leaving Certificate examinations and those of the Certificat d’Études Primaires, its French equivalent. In addition, by the same order are reinstated the posts of ‘provincial pedagogic inspectors’ whose duty is to oversee the implementation of ministerial orders in their areas of jurisdiction.

The teaching of the second official language was initially limited to the last three years of primary school education; now a third ministerial order extends it to all six primary school grades. What has therefore been put in place is a bilingual education programme in which pupils, from the first year of primary school education, are exposed to the second official language. To be more precise, the
francophone child is taught content material in the French medium and in addition English language as a subject. It should be recalled that this very dual-language schooling programme was proposed in 1975 and the proposal was rejected on grounds that:

a very early exposure to English (which would be a third or even fourth language for many of the children) might impose an over-heavy language burden and might result in failure to keep different language systems distinct. (Todd, 1982: 12)

It is wondered today what research work has been carried out by which researchers and which findings have motivated the Ministry’s shift in policy. Because of this radical new policy, government schools in rural areas will have to ask for bilingual teachers, and private institutions will have to recruit a good number of them. Failing this, their pupils will hardly earn the primary school education certificate, as they will fail in the second-language paper, which comes up in both the written and the oral part of the examinations.

Appreciation of the new policy

This new policy is likely to fail to yield pupils who are proficient in the second official language. It may even contribute to an increase in the number of illiterates in the country. It should be recalled that in the 1998–1999 academic year, out of a total of 3.6 million children of school age (6–14 years), only two million were attending school, that is around 57.5%. With the implementation of these new measures, this proportion is likely to drop sharply. This conjecture can be supported by at least two observations.

First, it will take a very long time to train bilingual primary school teachers. On the one hand, the old teachers are monolingual French teachers who have learned English as a subject, like other students of comparable level in other state institutions in the country. For them to acquire bilingual teaching skills, they have to undergo large-scale in-service training which, hopefully, will be organised and financed by the Government despite its heavy commitments with the World Bank structural adjustment programmes. It is also hoped that when such national training projects are organised, all trainees will actually attain competent teaching proficiency in the second language (see Kouega, in press). Besides, the Government will surely not wait for them to ask to be granted a material compensation for the extra work they will be called upon to do. To cut down on expenditure, the new teachers will have to be drawn from the class of people who are already proficient in the two official languages; such people, unfortunately, are not likely to be found in great numbers in present-day Cameroon (see Kouega, 1999 for details).

Secondly, private schools, which handle over one-third of the primary school pupil population (see MINEFI, 2000) will have to increase their fees to make up for the extra expenses, as they will have to recruit dual-medium teachers. This will lead to a higher rate of pupils dropping from school because their parents will be unable to foot the bill, given the economic situation of the country which has just been ‘promoted’ to the rank of Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). One would like to assume that the Government can rapidly solve all the prob-
lems reviewed above. There would, however, remain one major nut to crack, namely, the syllabus, which has already been drawn up by the Ministry.

**Evaluation of the new syllabus to be implemented**

This evaluation examines the new syllabus devised by the Government and raises the problems of teacher training and textbook production. The new syllabus, which is an official document signed in 2001, groups primary school teaching into three levels: Level One (*SIL-CP*, short for Grades One and Two), Level Two (*CE1-CE2*, Grades Three and Four) and Level Three (*CM1-CM2*, Grades Five and Six) respectively. It includes the list of subjects to be taught and the time allocated to each of them. Below is reproduced the list of the official titles of the 18 subjects of Level One (MINEDUC, 2001: 5); in brackets is an explanatory note inserted by the present researcher:

**Subjects (official titles)**

1. Lecture (French language: reading)
2. Lecture/Production d’Écrits (French: reading/writing)
3. Langage/Grammaire (French: expression/grammar)
4. Langage/Vocabulaire (French: expression/vocabulary)
5. Langage/Conjugaison (French: expression/verb forms)
6. Ecriture/Copie/Orthographe (French: writing/copying/word spelling)
7. Recitation (French: Recitation)
8. English/Reading (English/reading)
9. English/Writing (English/writing)
10. English/Language structure/Speech (English/grammar/speech production)
11. Mathématiques (mathematics: French medium)
12. Sciences et Education à l’Environnement (sciences and environmental studies: French)
13. Education Civique et Morale (civics: French)
15. Activités Pratiques (art work: French)
16. Musique, Chant (music, songs: French)
17. Culture Nationale (national culture: French)
18. Education Physique et Sportive (physical training: French)

It should be noted that since independence, content subjects like the ones cited above have been taught, right from the first day of school, to pupils who were not literate in any language. Since then, very little has changed. Very often, the teachers do not speak their pupils’ languages, and the pupils do not have a common language, especially in big towns: linguistically diverse classrooms constitute the norm in the country. To overcome this problem of linguistic heterogeneity, the teachers are called upon to instruct their classes monolinguistically using French in French-medium schools and English in English-medium ones; they are encouraged to use any pedagogical means within reach – excluding, of course, the use of indigenous languages – to communicate with their classes. Pupils who have spent one or two years in a kindergarten tend to be more alert, but those who have not, especially in rural areas, obviously take some time to adapt to the
classroom environment. That was the situation when only one official language was involved; now, the second official language has made the situation even more difficult.

As far as English as a subject is concerned, the syllabus stipulates that, for Level One, it shall be taught for five hours a week for the 28 weeks of each school year, and for Levels Two and Three, 4.5 hours a week. It also includes the general and specific objectives of the course at each level. To take just one example, the general objective for Level Three is stated as follows (MINEDUC, 2001: 30):

The teaching of English as a second official language in primary schools seeks to meet the following objectives:  
– provide the learners with English that they will use at the end of their Primary School Education in their daily life requirements;  
– establish a basis for further work in English for those who will go into secondary education;  
– expose learners to other aspects of the English-speaking culture;  
– foster bilingualism and national integration.

The specific objectives for Grade Six (CM2) of this same Level Three are listed in Table 1. The first column, labelled ‘communicative objectives’, includes a total of thirteen teaching items; the second column, labelled ‘structural focus’, gives a few sentences illustrating each of the teaching items entered in the first column (MINEDUC, 2001 p. 32).

The objectives of each of the other classes, which are not reproduced here for reasons of space, are outlined in the same way as those of the CM2 grade. These elaborate objectives were drawn up by officials of the Department of Education (Ministry of National Education), who seem not to have examined the implications of their proposals. As far as we are aware, no public debate was organised to enable these officials to have an idea what the general public thinks about the issue. The public is left out altogether, as these objectives are not published in book form or even as articles in official or private newspapers.

Regarding implementation, if these objectives could be achieved, the pupils who will sit through the three levels of primary education would surely attain a certain level of bilingualism yet to be specified. But one is apprehensive about the outcome, for at least two reasons. First, the teachers who are called upon to teach the course have not themselves mastered these teaching items; the structural focus for most of the items cannot safely be handled by the vast majority of monolingual French primary teachers. They did not learn these items when they were secondary school students; neither did they learn them in their teacher training course, which lasts for three years for entrants with the BEPC (diploma obtained in Form Four), two years for entrants with the Probatoire (obtained in Lower Six) and one year for entrants with the Baccalauréat (obtained in Upper Six). Now, the ministerial order cited above requires that these teachers teach these items. Evidently, it would be difficult for them to successfully teach what they themselves are still to learn. Secondly, there is a problem of teaching materials: there are at present no textbooks on the market to help both teachers and pupils. Perhaps some relevant materials are being developed; if this is the case, then they will have to be subjected to experimental trial prior to their generalised use in the
In view of the above, it is evident that very little second-language teaching will effectively take place in the classroom.

**Table 1 Specific objectives for Level Three (CM2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Communicative objectives</strong></th>
<th><strong>Structural focus</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talking about one’s present actions</td>
<td>We are cleaning the room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about one’s habitual actions</td>
<td>We sweep the classroom everyday, She comes to school [on] Friday[s], They go home every weekend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing what one is good at</td>
<td>She is good at mathematics/jumping . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing the activities of someone</td>
<td>He is a good fisherman. He catches fish with a net.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about one’s future intentions</td>
<td>She is going to visit her aunt next week; I shall visit my uncle next year . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing people and things</td>
<td>He is taller than I. Peter is more intelligent than John. An elephant is stronger than a cow. This bamboo is as long as that ruler.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about hypothetical situations</td>
<td>If I have headache, I will take some tablets. If it rains tomorrow, I’ll take my umbrella.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing one’s wishes</td>
<td>I would like to be a teacher. I wish I were a bird . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking about the past</td>
<td>I was in class four when I was eight years old . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counting objects</td>
<td>Counting up to 1,000,000 (one million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing a journey</td>
<td>The journey was interesting/boring/dangerous . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicting outcomes</td>
<td>Following this story / situation, I think . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describing ways of travelling</td>
<td>He goes by land (on foot, by bicycle, on horseback . . . ) by air (by plane, by balloon . . . ), by sea (by canoe, by raft, by boat, by ship . . . )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** MINEDUC, 2001:32

classroom. In view of the above, it is evident that very little second-language teaching will effectively take place in the classroom.

**Recommendations**

At present, the proportion of people in the francophone zone who can use their second official language – English – for their daily life requirements is alarmingly low (see Kouega, 1999). If the programme set up for primary school education, as outlined above, were to be implemented in secondary school education instead, perhaps would it make sense. Primary school education is supposed to have a clear objective, especially in poor, underdeveloped countries like Cameroon; it should aim at giving the young child the basic knowledge that will enable him or her to make a living in society, should he or she not proceed to further education. In this respect, the child on completion of primary education should have got a good understanding of key subjects such as numeracy and mathematics, science and technology, biology and environmental studies, hygiene and health, history and geography, civics and human rights, sports and
music, and practical work and crafts. These subjects should therefore be allotted the bulk of the teaching time and available resources.

It has been observed that, in an ideal situation, these key subjects are best assimilated if the child is taught in a language that he or she already knows, that is, the first language\(^3\) (UNESCO, 1953). In Cameroon, children in government schools have never had the advantage inherent in native-language instruction; since independence, nearly every Cameroonian child has been started in school in one official language which is an unfamiliar medium, namely French or English. The reasons which motivated this policy close to half a century ago are still valid today and may continue to be so for years to come. Problems such as corruption, embezzlement, violence, mismanagement, tribalism, marginalisation and the like are constantly apparent and some extremists are claiming these days that the solution can be found only in secession.

The position of the present researcher is twofold. The unfamiliar medium should continue to be used, as the Government is still not prepared to tackle the issue of national language choice, which in any event would be an enormously costly undertaking. In view of the above, what is proposed here is that the Cameroonian child be taught through one and only one official medium, either French or English. Nothing whatsoever prevents the francophone child from being taught in English from the first day of school; a child whose parents come from the francophone zone of the country is not in any way predestined to learn French. Actually, in many rural areas of Cameroon, parents are illiterate and, as a result, French is as new a language to children as English would be. Consequently, instead of pushing the child to become at all costs bilingual in languages neither of which is mother tongue, the Government should simply make some English-medium and some French-medium schools available in as many francophone localities as possible. This does not mean that the budget provision for school construction will necessarily be increased to cater for bilingualism. It simply means that when the need to build a new school in a given locality arises, the Government should make sure that this new school does not use the same language of instruction as the existing one. By so doing, all localities will end up having a certain proportion of English-medium and French-medium schools, since the Government is bound to build new schools every year.

Once the schools are built, the parents will decide whether their children will attend an English-medium school or a French-medium one. By so doing, the problem of bilingualism will be solved, as some children who will be using English in the classroom will be interacting in French with other children in the neighbourhood. Besides, the presence of a community of anglophone teachers in a purely francophone locality will foster national integration as well as bilingualism.

If the problem of bilingualism is solved in this way, the primary school teacher will now have more time at his or her disposal to teach the primary school child what he or she really needs, namely, content subjects like numeracy, science and others listed above. Children from rural areas will understand why water is useful to plants and how germs spread and kill their flocks and cattle, how manure can produce gas, how the sun’s rays stored in batteries can generate electricity, how china plates and mugs are made, how to count objects and money,
how to make use of banking facilities, how important it is to take part in elections, to name only a few.

A look at the weekly distribution of teaching in the new syllabus for Level Three, to take just one example, shows that French takes up 8 hours, English 4.5 hours, mathematics 5 hours, science and environmental studies 2 hours, moral and civics 2 hours, hygiene and health 2 hours, history and geography 1.5 hours, practical work 1.5 hours, music and songs 1.5 hours, sports 1.5 hours, in all 30 teaching hours a week. As can be seen, French and English take up a total of 12.5 hours out of 30 hours, that is, 41.67% of the weekly teaching time. There is a need to reduce the time spent on language teaching from the current 41.67% to a maximum of 20%, and to increase the time devoted to the teaching of fundamental subjects such as science and technology from the present 58.33% to around 80%. These useful subjects are precisely what the child needs to know in order to control his or her environment.

As Constable (1977: 253) notes, ‘it is the educated elite who in fact need to handle both official languages, rather than the mass of primary school leavers’ and, it can be added, the mass of primary school dropouts. The following figures (MINEFI, 2000) can be cited to elucidate what is meant here. In the year 1998–1999, some two million children were attending primary school out of a total of 3.6 million of school age in the country (6–14 years). It is difficult at present to tell how many of them will eventually go through the six grades of this level; however, an approximation can be made by comparing the percentage in the country of pupils in primary school (76.54%) and of students in secondary school (23.46%) in that same year. The wide gap between these two percentages shows that few children (actually one child out of three) take up secondary school education; the others either drop out of school after a few years or on completion of Grade Six. These youngsters who do not move to secondary education are the people who did not need bilingualism when they were in school. What they needed then was mastery, in one official language, either French or English, of a sum of practical knowledge that will enable them to make a living in their society.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the first two measures taken by the Government to foster bilingualism in primary school education had failed to turn out bilingual pupils, and the third measure still to be implemented already bears the seeds of its downfall. ‘Monolingual teachers’, whose linguistic knowledge of English and proficiency in second-language teaching are yet to be assessed, are instructed to teach a second official language. It seems that, in its effort to promote bilingualism, the Government has lost its way; indeed, when one looks into the new syllabus to be implemented, one feels that it is motivated by an agenda of which the people are not aware. It is evident that the real objectives of primary school education have been sacrificed to the advantage of linguistic knowledge for reasons still to be made public. Unfortunately, even if this linguistic knowledge was acquired, it would be of little practical use to those learners who will leave school and embark on manual activities. What the Government needs to do, which is easy, cheap and can be done fast, is to make some French-medium and some
English-medium schools available in francophone localities. Parents, who know what language their children need to be competent in, will choose one school or the other depending on the needs of their individual children.

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Notes

1. The primary school Grades are as follows: SIL: Section d’Initiation au Langage (Grade One); CP: Cours Préparatoire (Grade Two); CE1: Cours Elémentaire Première Année (Grade Three); CE2: Cours Elémentaire Deuxième Année (Grade Four); CM1: Cours Moyen Première Année (Grade Five); CM2: Cours Moyen Deuxième Année (Grade Six).

2. Aspects of school enrolment: (a) School enrolment for the year 1998–1999

| Children in primary school (6–14 years): Grades 1–6 | 2,073,266 | 57.53 |
| Children of school age (6–14 years) not attending school or attending Coranic school | 1,530,734 | 42.47 |
| Children of school age (6–14 years) | 3,604,000 | 100.00 |

Source: Adapted from MINEFI, 2000: 7–8

(b) Primary and secondary school enrolments for the year 1998–1999

| Primary school | 2,073,266 | 76.54 |
| Secondary education level (general, technical and teacher training) | 635,574 | 23.46 |
| Total | 2,708,840 | 100.00 |

Source: Minefi, 2000: 8

3. The expression ‘monolingual teacher’ is used here to refer to a teacher who is trained to teach in the French medium only. This does not mean that the teacher speaks only French. Actually, in Cameroon, the vast majority of educated francophones have at least three languages in their repertoire, namely one indigenous language+French+English; similarly, anglophones have at least four languages, namely one indigenous language+Pidgin English+Standard English+French.

4. Some private institutions have been developing literacy in a few indigenous languages of the country. The Catholic Mission, for example, made the teaching of some languages a compulsory subject in most of its secondary schools in Cameroon. Presently, this programme is discontinued for various reasons including financial resources: it was difficult to produce teaching materials and pay for additional teaching hours when no subsidy was received from the Government (see Essono, 1981 for details). However, it is still going on in some of its primary schools.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), on the other hand, embarked on a mother-tongue literacy programme; its main interest is to devise a written form for indigenous languages so as to preserve and foster ‘cultural authenticity’ and resist ‘culture loss’ (see Shell, 1981). It has been preparing alphabets, orthographies and didactic materials for various languages, generally with a high involvement of mother-tongue speakers. Languages whose native speakers have not shown much interest are not yet studied. Sadly, ‘much more has been done in the area of mother-tongue literacy for those who are already literate in French or English than for those who are illiterate in any language, be they children or adults. It is the illiterates who could probably profit most by mother-tongue literacy’ (p. 148). This institute is
prepared to organise workshops to train mother-tongue literacy teachers and develop didactic materials for any of the languages of the country.

Other institutions and programmes include: PROPELCA (Operational Research Project for the Teaching of Languages in Cameroon), CABTAL (Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy), NACALCO (National Association for Cameroonian Languages) and CBS (Cameroon Bible Society). PROPELCA experimented, with some success, in the development of bilingual literacy in ‘one mother-tongue and one official language’ (Cairns, 1987) and in 1999, the project entered its generalisation phase: it now covers a total of forty languages (Mba & Chiatoh, 2000: 4). Each year, new teachers are trained for language projects which already have primers (Tanyi Eyong Mbuabaw, 2000: 143; Tadadjeu et al., 1991). CABTAL does linguistics and literacy work and tries to involve the churches in Bible translation. CBS, which owns a publishing house, prints materials produced in the indigenous languages and helps in the distribution of bibles in the country. NACALCO, in collaboration with SIL-Camer- oon, has been organising language committees; from a 40-member language committee in 1997, it now counts 62 members whose native speaker population, it is claimed, ‘constitutes half of the population of the country’ (Mbah et al., 2000: 4).

The ultimate aim of these institutions and projects is to develop literacy in the close to 250 indigenous languages of Cameroon. What they are doing, therefore, is not just language literacy per se, but rather language and culture preservation, which may promote language and culture consciousness and eventually lead to language and culture problems. Such problems, the Government still does not seem to be prepared to tackle, for obvious reasons. With the mandatory teaching of the second official language in all elementary grades, as outlined above, and its introduction as a subject in both the written and oral part of the school leaving certificate examination, it is feared that mother-tongue education in the country will stall.

5. Weight of language teaching in the new programme (Level Three)

| Time devoted to the teaching of French | 8 hours weekly | 26.67% |
| Time devoted to the teaching of English | 4.5 hours | 15.00% |
| Time devoted to language teaching | 12.5 hours | 41.67% |
| Time devoted to the teaching of other subjects | 17.5 hours | 58.33% |
| Total teaching time | 30 hours | 100.00% |

Source: Adapted from MINEDUC, 2001: 5

References


