



Evaluating the pertinence of foreign languages (German, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Italian) in Cameroon's education curriculum: needs for reform of the curriculum and language in education policy

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Abstract: The ongoing debate regarding the decolonisation of Africa should focus primarily on the domain of education, as ideologies about languages are reflected, implemented and reproduced in the language in education policy (LIEP) of a country. Most African countries have inherited the Western monolingual LIEPs and have given prevalence to ex-colonial languages as official languages of education, media, and administration. Some countries, like Cameroon (host to more than 270 African languages), have gone beyond preferring French and English as a medium of instruction, adding more foreign languages (German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian, and Arabic) in secondary schools and universities, to the detriment of national languages. Most studies on language policy address the issue of language as a medium of instruction and neglect to critically evaluate the pertinence and relevance of the generalised teaching/learning of foreign languages in schools and universities in Cameroon. This study looks at the connection between teaching foreign languages and Cameroonians' transnational aspirations. The data were collected from discussions on two Facebook threads about the topic, discussions with lecturers of foreign languages at university, and a meta-synthesis analysis of existing statistics about international migration for educational purposes. The findings reveal that inbound international migration flux is associated with language but is not the most crucial factor. As a result, the study suggests either suppressing the generalised teaching of foreign languages in the francophone subsystem of education and setting up a public-private partnership or at least suppressing the Spanish and Italian languages whose knowledge has not provided any direct benefit for the majority of the learner. The cost of running those languages is not equivalent to the return.

Keywords: Cameroon, Language In Education Policy (LIEP), foreign languages, transnational aspirations, educational migration

1. INTRODUCTION

Language policy remains a contentious issue in Africa. Ferguson (2013, p.1) commented that:

The choice of medium of instruction in multilingual states in Africa has always been a major component of state language policy. The choices made are often more informed by political, economic and ideological considerations than strictly educational ones, and are deeply controversial with issues of feasibility, popular aspiration, cultural identities, globalisation and

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development featuring prominently in discussion, though these often pull policy in different directions.

More than sixty years after the independence of most African nations, many African countries are still considering with reluctance whether it is high time they fully decolonized the education system by giving a better place to indigenous languages. Cameroon has been one of the influences of foreign powers as foreign languages are fostered in the Language in education policy (LIEP) to the detriment of indigenous languages. Cameroon is multilingual, with over 270 indigenous languages (Eberhard et al. 2022). Despite the multitude of its local languages, Cameroon has two non-indigenous languages –English and French – as the only official languages and languages of education since 1963 (Cameroon Constitution 1963). It was postulated during the colonial and postcolonial period that having European languages as a medium of instruction fostered learning and openness to the world. Brock-Utne (2009:32) remarked that ‘the purpose of schooling in colonial times seems to have been to make children familiar with the cultural heritage of the colonial powers to convince them of Europe's superiority.’ It would appear that Cameroon has maintained the colonial paradigm and philosophy in education. The language in education policy (Kaplan and Baldauf 2002) reproduces the ideology that foreign languages are more likely to empower the learner for social mobility and represents an asset to fulfilling transnational aspirations. In Cameroon, apart from English and French as the main languages of instruction, the language in education policy has promoted some foreign languages (German, Spanish), since the late 1950s, to the detriment of the indigenous languages, as subjects at levels of education from secondary to tertiary level. It is difficult to account for that move. Historical ties with Germany could be the reason for teaching German, as this language had been taught since the early 1900s (Stumpf 1979).

1.1. Statement of the Problem and Research objective

However, given the changing geostrategic and world order, it is essential to question whether the place given to foreign languages in the curriculum of the Francophone subsystem of education is still congruent with people's aspirations and pertinent to fostering educational migration that may potentially contribute to empowering human capital and enhance the political and economic development of Cameroon.

This paper surveys opinions regarding the pertinence of foreign languages like German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian and Arabic in the Francophone sub-system of education on the one hand and discusses, based on statistics on educational migration around the world, the pertinence of this policy for Cameroon's educational system and development. In this light, the study evaluates the curriculum and proposes that reform should revisit the place of FLs to make FL teaching a tool for the development and geostrategic positioning of Cameroon in the world. In this light, it suggests which languages are to be maintained, which are to be removed, and which are to be added.

By education practice, not by law, one of the foreign languages (German, or Spanish, (and now Chinese, Italian and Arabic) are taught as a compulsory subject in the third and fourth years of secondary school. In High schools, all art students take it as a compulsory subject, and at universities, it is one of the fields of study in 5 out of all eight state universities.

2. Literature review and conceptual framework

There is an excellent amount of research on the language situation of Cameroon in general and, more specifically, the problem of English as a linguistic problem in Cameroon. Right back in the 1960s, at the inception of the young Cameroonian state, Fonlon (1969) discussed the language problem in Cameroon. Many other studies also have examined the cohabitation of French and English in a dual lingual model, showing how Cameroon has failed to effectively foster the use of English in formal domains (Wolf 2001, Fonlon 1969; Kouega 2008, 2018). Kouega (2005, 2007, 2008), Biloa (1999), and Echu (1999a and b) have

discussed the issue of bilingual education and bilingualism in Cameroon and the need to promote bilingual training in Universities. As concerns the management of linguistic diversity in Cameroon, many linguists have suggested a variety of models. Tabi Manga (2000-2001) suggested quadrilingualism. Tadadjeu (1975) proposed a model of extensive trilingualism. Some studies specifically investigate educational policy in general and language in education policy (Dupraz 2015; Gwanfogbe 1995; Echu 2003, 1999; Kagury et al., n.d.).

Echu (2003, 1999) and Kagury et al. (n.d.) are the few studies discussing foreign languages' place in Cameroonian curriculum. Regarding the pertinence of foreign languages (FLs), Echu (2003) and Kagury et al. n.d.) seemed to suggest that the teaching of foreign languages in the Francophone subsystem of education was a good policy. Echu (2003:35) criticised that the Anglophone students did not take those subjects in secondary and high schools and could not take them as a university course.

As regards the teaching and promotion of foreign languages, this, in most cases, is limited to the French-speaking sector of the country. [...] Spanish and German (the two widely promoted foreign languages) are taught only within the French-speaking education system. [...] In the English-speaking system of education, these languages are completely absent. [...] Consequently, Anglophone students hardly offer Spanish and German as majors at the university... (p. 35)

There are no existing studies evaluating (questioning) the pertinence of the generalised teaching of foreign languages against the backdrop of chaoccurring worldwideworld. For some years now, the generalised teaching of FLs in Cameroon education has been going on without questioning its pertinence given the changing geopolitical and geostrategic environment. However, inspired by the Afrocentric and the Pan-Africanist ideologies, many voices have come up to question the place of these FLs in the educational system in recent years.

2.1. Concept of Language policy and language in education policy

This study falls within several related concepts dealing with language politics. These include language and language in education policy (LIEP) or language policy in education (Sposky 2004; Paulston and McLaughlin, 1994, Djité, 1994). Language in education policy and its repercussions on educational migration is the central issue being discussed in this study.

Djité (1994: 63) defined language policy as "the deliberate choices made by governments or other authorities about the relationship between language and social life". When applied to education, language policy is conventionally known as language-in-education policy (Baldauf, 1990; Kaplan and Baldauf, 2002; Paulston and McLaughlin, 1994) or acquisition planning (Cooper, 1989).

In nations, the LIEP is established by the constitution and legal framework (encompassing official documents and laws, decrees and orders) prescribing which languages are to be used and for what purpose in education. This also affects the whole curriculum architecture of the nation.

2.2. Language in education policy in Cameroon

Foreign languages in the Francophone subsystem of education of Cameroon

Cameroon's 1961 and 1996 constitutions provide that Cameroon is a bilingual country with English and French having equal status as official languages. This undermines that Cameroon is the 2nd most linguistically diversified country after Papua New Guinea. While some paragraphs of the constitution require the state to "guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country." Government efforts to

encourage bilingualism have since leaned heavily on the education system¹. The law 'n° 98/004 of April 14 1998 'd'orientation de l'éducation au Cameroun', passed in 1998 and still in force as the country's guiding legal framework for education, enshrined bilingualism at all levels of education as a factor of national unity and integration. Article (section) 4 provides that the state emphasizes bilingualism at all levels of teaching (education) as a factor of unity and integration. Law Number 98/004 of April 14 1998, to lay down Guidelines on Education in Cameroon is not a law about linguistic prescription; it is about education. However, articles (sections) 5, 11, 15, 16 and 17 deal with teaching national and official languages (French and English). Missions assigned to education point four or section 5: promotion of national languages. There is no legal provision in the constitution or law prescribing the conditions for teaching foreign languages in Cameroon.

The teaching and learning of foreign languages in Cameroon

Despite the absence of legal provisions, teaching FLs in Cameroonian schools seems to be part of the colonial legacy. Information about when the Francophone system of education instituted the teaching of foreign languages is hard to find. Many generations of Cameroonians who have taken those courses are now retired university dons. According to some reports (Toumba Haman 2020), Spanish and German were introduced into the Francophone education curriculum in 1957 to reproduce the French education curriculum from which Cameroon got inspiration.

German, Spanish as FLs (and later Chinese, Italian, and Arabic) have occupied a significant position in Francophone education curriculum: in secondary schools and universities. They are taught for three hours in 4e and 3e (second and third year of lower secondary school), three hours in Seconde, and four hours in Terminale and Première (upper secondary school). Some confessional schools readjust regulations and started offering FLs right from the first year of secondary school. In 2000, the Minister of National Education had to take an order suspending this move. The order emphasized that those languages must be taught only from the third year of secondary school.

Spanish language teaching and learning

After about 70 years of teaching Spanish in Cameroonian schools and universities has been going on for many years, more students seem to be choosing it as the subject. On October 15 2018, Cameroon Tribune² echoed a comment of the Spanish Ambassador to Cameroon, revealing that there were 250,000 Cameroonians studying the Spanish language in Cameroon, expressing hope that the number would keep increasing (secondary, high school and university students). Spanish was introduced as an elective in Higher Teachers' Training College (HTTC) Yaoundé in 1963 (Toumba Haman 2020), probably at the same time as German. After the University Reform of 1993, German and Spanish were introduced in the Universities of Douala (1994), the University of Dschang (1995), the HTTC of the University of Maroua (2008-2009), in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of the University of Maroua (2013-2014), and eventually in the HTTC of Bertoua of the University of Ngaoundere 2017-2018).

German language teaching and learning

The German language is another major language in Cameroon. Since Theodor Christaller, the first German teacher appointed in Cameroon in 1887 (Gwanfogbe 1995), the teaching of German has gone uninterrupted, despite the rule of France. Colonial and historical ties with Germany --Cameroon was a German

¹ In 2005, 57 percent of the population aged 15 and above spoke French while just 25 percent spoke English.

² <https://www.cameroon-tribune.cm/article.html/21376/fr.html/carnet-diplomatique-250-000-cameroonians-studying-spanish>

protectorate-- may account for the teaching of German being sustained. Cameroon has the highest number of German speakers in Africa (WES 2019, 2021). Many cohorts of university graduates in German (in University of Yaounde 1) since the 1980s have received a scholarship to study German in Germany up to the doctoral level. The Goethe Institute also facilitates the learning of German and administers German proficiency tests to those who want to study in Germany.

Italian language teaching and learning

Italian is among the latest languages to have been introduced into the education system of Cameroon. It was first taught at the University (of Dschang) in 1995 before being introduced in secondary and high schools in 2011. Formal teaching as a subject in secondary schools started in 2012 after the first batch of teachers trained in HTTC Maroua were posted in some schools in the country. Italy seeks to sustain this trend. Cameroon Tribune of March 27 2017, reported the signing of a partnership agreement between the Italian ambassador and the Ministry of Higher Education in Cameroon to enhance cooperation with Italian Universities and to generalize and intensify the teaching of the Italian language in schools in Cameroon, such as the Universities of Douala, Yaoundé 1, Dschang, and Maroua. In this same vein, two conventions were signed between Cameroon state Universities and Italian Universities (about 20) to enhance cooperation between Italian Universities and those in Cameroon in the domain of recognizing certificates, improving teaching, scholarship offer, exchange between lecturers and students from both parties to improve mobility academic mobility between universities. The convention with Sienne University would foster the teaching of the Italian language and permit sending many Italian language teachers to Cameroon to teach the Italian language in secondary schools, including schools of the Anglophone system. Finally, the convention would enable the best Italian language students to obtain a scholarship to study in Italy and later return to teach in Cameroon. The ambassador said:

We want to generalize the teaching of the Italian language in secondary education, be it in the Anglophone subsystem of education or the Francophone subsystem. But we must train teachers at the higher education level as in all the state universities who will later teach young Cameroonians at the secondary level. We want Cameroonians to have many teachers in the Italian language. *Italian Ambassador in Cameroon Tribune of March 27 2017*

Within this framework, about 120 secondary school teachers participated in a capacity-building seminar organised by the HTTC of Maroua in 2021. Thanks to the contribution of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the course was jointly organized and coordinated by the HTTC and by the National Pedagogical Inspectorate for the Italian language in Cameroon at the Ministry of Secondary Education. Following the rising need, in 2021, the University of Maroua was proud to announce that a Master's programme in Italian studies was to be started.

Chinese language teaching and learning

Besides the other arrays of influence, China has been using language diplomacy to exert its soft power in the World and Africa by establishing Chinese and cultural teaching in the Confucius Centre. A Chinese language centre was first established in Cameroon in 1996. This was followed by the creation of the Confucius Institute in 2007 on the campus of the International Relations Institute of Cameroon (IRIC) under the University of Yaounde II, Soa. According to Prof. Chen Mingkun, Deputy Dean of Zhejiang Normal University's Institute of African Studies, the centre provides training for professionals from the diplomatic and foreign trade cycles. He has attracted students from several countries in the Central African sub-region. Meanwhile, Cameroon is one of four African countries that signed a mutual degree recognition agreement with China. Since then, roughly 40 smaller CI teaching centres or Confucius Classrooms have been

established throughout the country. They enrolled more than 10,000 Cameroonian Chinese language learners (WES 2021). The Confucius Institute also liaises with primary and secondary schools and the National Social Insurance Fund office, where Chinese teachers offer short courses on demand. Starting in 2004, the centre organised a Chinese language competition each year, and the winners benefited from a trip to China. In September 2005, cooperation between the education ministries in Cameroon and China gave birth to the Cameroon National Ballet with the assistance of two dance instructors from China.

In 2012, the first batch of teachers trained in the HTTC of Maroua was posted in schools across the country, and teaching Chinese became generalised. Currently, the Department of Foreign Languages of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Maroua offers BA in Chinese Languages. The teaching staff has also become indigenised with the return of formal graduates who have defended their doctoral degrees and have been recruited as lecturers at the University of Maroua.

Arabic language teaching and learning

Although Cameroon is host to a significant Muslim community and maintains strong ties with the Arab and Islamic countries worldwide, the formal teaching of Arabic has lagged. As the language of Islam, koranic Arabic has been taught informally in koranic schools across the country. Some Franco-Arab schools have also sustained their teaching in the few institutions across the country. However, Arabic was only introduced in 1995 as a course at the University of Yaounde I (Echu 2003) and taught as a foreign language at the University of Ngaoundere. In 2008 the HTTC of Maroua started training teaching staff for secondary and high schools, and now it is a subject in high school, in BEPC and Baccalaureat examinations. It is taught in the Department of Foreign Languages of the University of Maroua up to the Master's and doctoral levels.

3. Research design and methodology

As the above presentation of the place of FLs in education in Cameroon suggests, the policy and trends tended to favour the promotion of FL learning. This paper aims to analyse Cameroonians' opinions regarding the policy and to discuss the interdependency and instrumentalities between foreign languages and outbound migration for studies. It analyses whether there is some causality, correlation and interdependency between the FL taught and learned in Cameroon and the migration destination of Cameroonian outbound students. When more voices are pushing for a reform of the educational system to give more space for national languages, to the detriment of foreign languages, it is wise to survey the opinion of the populations that would have a word about the issue.

Two methodological approaches were used to achieve these aims: one qualitative and one quantitative.

The qualitative approach was used to analyse opinions regarding the LIEP, which supports FLs. The qualitative approach used data from two sources: Facebook posts and comments on the one hand, and on the other hand, discussions with lecturers in the Department of Foreign languages of the University of Maroua in Cameroon regarding their perception of the importance of foreign languages, and their reactions regarding the ongoing debate. Facebook platforms constitute a source of real data regarding controversial issue. It has been the source of qualitative data for those in digital ethnography, just as it can serve as a source of information that could have otherwise been collected using focus group or interviews (casual or semi focus). The comments on Facebook were triggered by a post made by a journalist and a university lecturer, suggesting that--on the backdrop of academic reform going on in Rwanda—Cameroon should consider reforming its education by suppressing the generalised teaching of foreign languages in Francophone schools across the country. Another Facebook post suggested that foreign languages should be removed from the curriculum because they are useless.



The links to the two Facebook posts and comments are the following:

1. <https://www.facebook.com/bana.barka/posts/10220127985850358>
2. <https://web.facebook.com/mediasducameroun/posts/809610603239650>

As a follow-up to the above posts, we discussed the ongoing debate with the Head and some lecturers of Department of foreign languages of the University of Maroua. The objective of the discussions was to elicit their perception of the importance of FLs in the world.

The quantitative approach analysed the correlation between FLs taught and migration destinations. In this light, a meta-synthesis (Atkins S. et al. 2008) of statistics on global migration for education was done. The data were collected from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics on Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students and WES' World Education News-Review (WENR). The data were analysed to examine whether there is some congruence between FLs learned in Cameroon and outbound mobility for education. Data from other countries of Africa and other continents were also examined to establish a correlation between the provision of foreign languages in education and greater accessibility to Western countries for education.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1. Qualitative analysis: A discourse analysis of opinions on Facebook

The section makes a discourse analysis of the opinion of some learned Cameroonians on Facebook and a discussion with lecturers of foreign languages. The analysis of the discussions of online participants shows that there was no consensus regarding whether or not FLs should be maintained in the educational system of Cameroon. Arguments for and against their pertinence in education were provided.

4.1.1. Opinions for the suppression of foreign languages

Those who supported the suppression of FLs suggested differing reasons and alternatives to their support for the generalised and compulsory teaching.

The first argument suggests that FLs be removed from the educational system, but their teaching should be assigned to specialised institutions or private establishments. These respondents suggested that the state should stop supporting and sustaining the generalised teaching of foreign languages in all schools and universities. They proposed that FLs be provided only in specialised institutes (like with INALCO Paris, SOAS in the UK, or the University of Hankuk Foreign Studies in Seoul) or devolve the mission to private institutions to provide FLs to people who need them, and at their expenses. According to these comments, those who want to learn foreign languages should enrol in those specialised linguistic centres.

A second opinion suggested that official bilingualism be promoted to the detriment of FLs. Those who proposed this argued that instead of wasting resources and time on FLs, more emphasis should be laid on reinforcing official bilingualism: Cameroonians need to become bilinguals in French and English, not in foreign languages; time and resources invested in teaching FLs should be curtailed and devoted to the second official language (English Francophones or French for Anglophones).

A third opinion supported Afrocentrism: local languages must be taught. They suggested that foreign languages should be replaced by Cameroonian languages, like ‘Basaa’, ‘Bulu’, ‘Bamileke’ and ‘Ewondo’. One respondent said: *‘I support the suppression of foreign languages, and I propose Fulfulde, Hausa and Swahili as a substitute to those languages. As with Erasmus Mundus in Europe, Africa needs to have one of its languages for intra-African interaction. Our autonomy passes through one language and culture. (My translation from French)’*

Other commentators suggested that the entire school curriculum must reform to set objectives and competencies that should empower learners at the end of the education cycle.

4.1.2. Opinions against the suppression of foreign languages

Unlike the above opinion, which supports the suppression of FLs from the general curriculum, many people proposed why FLs must be maintained. They seemed to see many benefits which one can derive from knowing a foreign language. These reasons are summarized as transnational aspirations, globalisation and cooperation, study abroad, and jobs preservation for those already teaching the languages.

Globalisation and cooperation

According to some comments, the world is a global village and countries as well as citizens have to be open to the world. Knowing a foreign language is an asset in achieving that goal. FLs are also seen as an important instrument in migration. Other respondents are outraged that such a suggestion would come from a journalist. They comment that there is a need to expand our knowledge of other cultures surrounding us. The knowledge of foreign languages has facilitated Cameroonian insertion into Western societies.

To them, FLs are important assets in studying abroad, migration, short stays for tourism and visit abroad, travelling and business.

Travelling and studying abroad

The perspective of travelling to a foreign land for studies, visits, tourism and business are strong arguments proposed by those who support teaching foreign languages. Some discussants ironized that those who support the suppression of foreign languages are probably those who have never found themselves in a foreign land. The participants who support teaching foreign languages claim that FLs are an asset for travellers. Those whose horizons do not extend beyond the national borders would not understand that. Thanks to those compulsory language subjects, some have been able to go to Germany and Spain, and only those who have never found themselves in those foreign countries would say such stupidities. Many Cameroonian have become engineers in Germany, France, etc. These opportunities have been made possible because they learnt FLs in schools; some comments emphasized,

They give jobs

The Head of the Department and teachers of foreign languages, as well as online participants in the debate have suggested some reasons for the retention of FLs some Cameroonians earn a living teaching them or working as translators. If the suppression is enacted, what would become of all the teachers trained in HTTCs? They would become jobless, and national unity would be jeopardized. In this vein, another person responded that one must be insane to think that FLs are not important.

Responding to those who argue that FLs take up much space in the curriculum, thereby placing an excess burden on the students, some respondents argued that the poor quality of graduates could not be attributed to the teaching of FLs; besides, FLs are only compulsory subjects in the first cycle of general education and for Arts students in upper secondary school. Probably out of ignorance, some

respondents pointed out that teaching FLs does not weigh on the state finances because foreign bodies (countries) provide financial support.

It may appear from the above analysis that the people's opinions are not against FLs altogether. Most respondents find the generalised teaching of FLs unacceptable and impertinent. As someone argued, there are centres for language teachings in almost all developed countries. The problem in Cameroon is the generalized teaching of those languages in schools and universities across the country. Such programmes require a lot of human and financial resources that the government lacks.

4.2. Quantitative analysis

The above discourse analysis shows divergent points of view regarding the importance of FLs in education: most arguments are based on personal and subjective opinions, not hard facts. In the respondents' opinion, the expected benefits of learning FLs could be easy migration and integration in a foreign country, either for studies or better opportunities.

The following section makes a meta-synthesis of migration statistics to establish, based on factual data, whether there is a correlation between FLs learned and the migration destination of Cameroonians. This will help highlight whether there is a benefit for the country investing resources in FLs teaching—is there a return on investment?

4.2.1. Cameroonians' migration statistics

Cameroonians are prone to migration, as some statistics show, but there is no accurate and reliable official database in Cameroon about diaspora because while some are legal migrants, quite a several others are undocumented. Some fact figures reveal that in 1995 about 400,000 (383,029: 1.4%) Cameroonians lived abroad, some of whom had acquired foreign nationalities—thereby giving up their Cameroonian nationality. 43 % (164,715) of them lived in the EU (EUDiF 2020). The top countries of destination of Cameroonian diaspora was (France 89,496; United States 53,185; Gabon 50,273, Chad (33,936); Nigeria (28,177). Lately, Germany has become one of the favourite destinations. According to EUDiF (2015), 14,414 Cameroonians were officially registered in Germany from the years 1980-2006 by the German statistical Offices and the State Agency for Refugees and Migrants (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge – BAMF)(Kadje 2020). This will make around 20,000 if naturalized and undocumented Cameroonian migrants are included.

According to more recent sources from the Cameroonian Ministry of Foreign Relations (MINREX) cited by Kadje (2020), between 2.5 and 4 Million Cameroonians now live abroad, the majority being on the African Continent, particularly in Nigeria (about 2 million,) and about 50,000 in Gabon. Between 800,000 and one Million Cameroonian migrants live in the USA (some of whom have obtained American citizenship³ through the Diversity Visa Lottery before departure from Cameroon) and around 60,000 in Europe, with France being the first host country due to its colonial past with Cameroon (40,000 Cameroonians).

Migration for education

Most documented Cameroonians migrate for educational purposes. International mobility among students is an old phenomenon and concerns citizens of all nations. In recent years, the number of internationally mobile students has been increasing and destinations diversifying; China has become the first provider of international students, followed by India and Germany. In Africa, according to data from the UNESCO Institution for Statistics (UIS), Cameroonians (25,582) constitute the second-largest source of international students from sub-Saharan Africa, behind Nigeria (76,338), and before

³ In Cameroon, the nationality code of June 11, 1968, states that; once a Cameroonian citizen obtains the citizenship of another country, s/he automatically loses his or her Cameroonian nationality. Law No. 2011/013 of 13 July 2011 permits voting abroad for Cameroonian nationals but excludes Cameroonian diaspora with other nationalities.

Zimbabwe (19,679). In the latest statistics, Cameroonians would go to Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, USA, Canada, Tunisia, South Africa, Turkey, and Morocco in their quest for further qualifications (UIS 2021, WES 2020).

Statistics of Cameroonian outbound students in the world in 2021 (source: UIS 2021)

Germany	7,214	Switzerland	138	Thailand	42
France	4,773	India	119	Austria	32
Belgium	1,633	Rwanda	114	Australia	29
Canada	1,257	Saudi Arabia	112	Denmark	29
United States	1,219	Lithuania	93	Guinea	28
Italy	930	Kenya	84	Portugal	27
Tunisia	697	Hungary	79	Czechia	26
South Africa	625	Malaysia	77	Ireland	19
Morocco	584	Sweden	71	Greece	18
Turkey	583	Romania	65	Grenada	11
Poland	560	Brazil	63	Latvia	10
Russian Federation	511	Cyprus	63	Malta	10
Côte d'Ivoire	371	Japan	63	Viet Nam	10
Ukraine	316	Spain	60	Namibia	9
United Kingdom	300	Norway	54	Bulgaria	6
Benin	296	Estonia	53	New Zealand	6
Ghana	271	Mauritius	53	Azerbaijan	5
Korea, Rep.	264	Belarus	52	Slovakia	5
Finland	215	Netherlands	50		
Niger	172	Luxembourg	48		

Other destinations (non-African) of Cameroonians that were recorded include Poland (560), Russian Federation (511), Ukraine (316), Republic of Korea (264), Finland (215), Lithuania (93), Hungary (79), Sweden (71), Romania (65), Cyprus (63), and Japan (63).

Cameroonian students were recorded in South Africa (625) and Ghana (271) as concerned African countries with English as a medium. For African countries with French as a medium, Cameroonian mobile students outnumbered all other nationalities in Tunisia (697); they were also present in Morocco (584), Côte d'Ivoire (371), Benin (296), and Niger (172).

Foreign countries whose languages are taught in schools

Germany is a special case of all the countries whose languages are taught in the Cameroonian education system and tops the list (7214 students in 2021, on the drop as compared to 7,373 in 2018). She attracts a solid plurality of all outbound degree-seeking Cameroonians. Cameroonians constituted Germany's 10th largest international student population in 2019, according to data from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). In the last decade (1995 -2015), the number of Cameroonian students has nearly quadrupled. A high proportion of Cameroonian students in Germany were enrolled in bachelor's degree programs, nearly three-quarters in 2018.

As concerns China, She has made a concerted effort to attract African students in recent years. Although the figures are difficult to find, China which has enjoyed more than 40 years of diplomatic ties, hosts around 3,000 Cameroonian students. Recently, China has become one of the main economic partners of Cameroon. The Chinese government has provided scholarships to help cover study costs, room and board, and even travel to and from China to attract more foreign African students. Other scholarships are provided by Confucius Institutes (CIs), which promote the Chinese language and culture (WES 2020).

Italy was one of the third destinations for Cameroonian students on the OCDE list, with 2668 students (Wes 2019). In 2021, the figure dropped to 930 in 2021(IUS 2021).

As far as Arab countries are concerned, 112 Cameroonian students were registered in Saudi Arabia in 2021. There are no official figures in other Arabic-speaking countries. This is very negligible considering the number of scholarships the Islamic Development Bank provides annually. Dr Al Qassim noted that “Arabic was the lingua franca for trade and science during the medieval age. He comments that Scholarships for students to study the Arabic language and culture are suitable options to improve inter-ethnic relations, celebrate cultural diversity and create mutual bonds between Arab and non-Arab communities, foster dialogue and fight rising xenophobia and Islamophobia.

Spain and Spanish countries

Spain and Spanish countries stand at odd as Cameroonian students’ destinations. Although Spanish has been taught for years and many Cameroonian students (more than 250000 in 2015) study it right up to doctoral level, Spanish-speaking countries seem not to attract Cameroonians. Barely 60 students were registered in Spain in 2021 (UIS 2021).

Statistics of international Mobile students’ communities in some top world destinations. (Compiled from UIS 2021)

Germany	France	Belgium	Canada	USA	Italy	Tunisia	South Africa	UK									
China	32,472	Morocco	31,352	France	15,441	China	75,768	China	340,222	China	11,965	Cameroon	69	Zimbabwe	10,779	China	122,140
India	18,574	Algeria	24,612	Netherlands	5,110	India	74,340	India	133,321	India	3,021	Libya	53	Congo, DR	3,142	India	27,300
Austria	12,865	China	23,524	Luxembourg	1,840	France	17,523	Korea, Rep.	49,593	Iran, Isl. Rep.	2,725	Congo, DR	49	Nigeria	2,990	United States	19,418
Syrian Arab rep	12,442	Senegal	10,163	Cameroon	1,633	USA	9,111	Saudi Arabia	38,410	Turkey	2,001	Mauritania	44	Lesotho	2,652	Hong Kong	16,278
Russia	9,646	Tunisia	9,823	Italy	891	Viet Nam	7,161	Canada	26,582	Albania	1,670	Mali	43	Namibia	2,442	Italy	14,412
France	8,720	Italy	8,181	Morocco	709	Nigeria	6,708	Viet Nam	25,951	France	1,534	Côte d'Ivoire	41	Eswatini	1,844	Malaysia	14,094
Turkey	8,494	Côte d'Ivoire	6,625	Germany	609	Korea, Rep.	6,489	Brazil	15,245	Germany	1,533	Congo	39	Botswana	1,056	France	13,826
Italy	8,405	Lebanon	4,903	China	557	Iran,	5,214	Mexico	15,149	Romania	1,400	Morocco	34	Zambia	1,025	Germany	13,232
United States	7,430	India	4,779	India	476	Brazil	4,770	Japan	14,730	Sweden	1,327	Gabon	30	Kenya	996	Nigeria	10,796
Cameroon	7,214	Cameroon	4,773	Congo, DR	451	Bangladesh	3,735	Nepal	14,084	Greece	1,155	Niger	26	United States	768	Spain	10,716
Spain	6,768	Viet Nam	4,307	United States	435	Pakistan	2,475	Nigeria	13,199	Russian Fed	1,052	Chad	23	Ghana	765	Greece	10,026
Iran, Islamic	6,421	Spain	4,165	Slovenia	401	Mexico	2,403	Iran, Islamic	11,072	Slovenia	931	Palestine	20	Malawi	734	Romania	9,846
Ukraine	6,313	Germany	3,998	Romania	381	China, Hong Kong	1,953	Kuwait	10,525	Cameroon	930	Algeria	17	Germany	671	Ireland	9,690

Tunisia	6,223	Gabon	3,733	Greece	326	Turkey	1,914	UK	9,934	Brazil	836	Burkina Faso	170	Cameroon	625	Cyprus	9,115
Bulgaria	6,150	United States	3,532	UK	325	Morocco	1,722	Turkey	9,354	Pakistan	791	Senegal	126	Angola	562	Poland	8,520
Korea, Rep.	5,328	Brazil	3,448	Syrian Arab Rep.	283	Japan	1,698	Bangladesh	8,122	Israel	754	Guinea	109	Congo	558	Saudi Arabia	8,023
Poland	5,083	Guinea	3,382	Turkey	257	Saudi Arabia	1,692	Indonesia	7,984	United States	751	Djibouti	79	Uganda	530	Singapore	6,795
Switzerland	5,036	Colombia	3,218	Spain	256	Egypt	1,659	Malaysia	7,712	Egypt	714	Togo	53	Gabon	456	Canada	6,564
Pakistan	4,936	Congo	3,214	Iran, Isla Rep.	218	Philippines	1,629	Pakistan	7,583	Colombia	658	Madagascar	52	India	446	Pakistan	6,549
Luxembourg	4,911	Madagascar	2,933	Brazil	217	Colombia	1,443	Venezuela	7,451	Croatia	633	Benin	51	Tanzania	412	Thailand	6,314
United Kingdom	4,746	Russian Federation	2,785	Poland	188	United Kingdom	1,431	Colombia	7,391	Lebanon	608	Indonesia	42	Mozambique	381	Bulgaria	6,120
Morocco	4,012	Benin	2,744	Norway	179	Russian Federation	1,383	Germany	6,742	United Kingdom	577	Angola	36	Mauritius	333	Portugal	6,099
Egypt	3,993	Togo	2,454	Rwanda	178	Ukraine	1,314	China, Hong Kong	6,712	Korea, Rep.	560	France	26	United Kingdom	274	Korea, Rep.	5,579
Brazil	3,806	Romania	2,439	Tunisia	175	Cameroon	1,257	France	6,311	Morocco	527	Turkey	24	Ethiopia	228	United Arab Emirates	5,341
Greece	3,565	Mali	2,357	Republic of Moldova	174	Jamaica	1,218	Thailand	6,039	Republic of Moldova	527	Saudi Arabia	18	Libya	203	Kuwait	4,715
Viet Nam	3,052	Mexico	2,324	Switzerland	167	Côte d'Ivoire	1,173	Slovenia	5,945	Ukraine	527	Nigeria	17	France	203	Lithuania	4,410
Mexico	2,922	Greece	2,255	Algeria	162	Bahamas	1,119	Romania	4,903	Viet Nam	508	Jordan	17	Rwanda	185	Norway	4,215
Bangladesh	2,920	Belgium	2,169	Ukraine	151	Indonesia	1,101	Australia	4,344	Azerbaijan	480	Syrian Arab Republic	16	Netherlands	181	Switzerland	4,123
Colombia	2,782	Korea, Rep.	2,141	Lebanon	142	Germany	1,101	Singapore	4,133	San Marino	457	Egypt	15	China	165	Netherlands	3,822
Romania	2,521	Turkey	2,007	Canada	139	Malaysia	1,050	Egypt	3,616	Tunisia	444	Malaysia	15	Korea, Rep.	144	Turkey	3,710
Indonesia	2,460	Egypt	1,871	Nigeria	130	Tunisia	1,038	Kenya	3,609	Norway	412	Iraq	14	Pakistan	136	Russian Federation	3,640
Belgium	2,459	Iran, Islamic Rep.	1,763	Mexico	130	Kenya	1,020	Ghana	3,524	Bulgaria	392	Oman	13	Burundi	119	Viet Nam	3,465
Nigeria	2,290	Syrian Arab Republic	1,760	Colombia	126	Ghana	1,017	Oman	3,378	Mexico	359	Ghana	12	Norway	97	Belgium	3,186
Hungary	2,082	Burkina Faso	1,590	Pakistan	119	Senegal	963	Philippines	3,376	Ghana	358	Burundi	11	Somalia	94	Indonesia	3,087
Japan	1,930	Mauritius	1,554	Albania	119	Mauritius	927	Peru	3,332	Uzbekistan	352	Mauritius	11	Canada	90	Sweden	2,933
Georgia	1,892	Haiti	1,444	Portugal	118	Italy	762	Sri Lanka	3,209	Argentina	341	South Africa	8	Belgium	82	Qatar	2,874

Netherlands	1,796	Comoros	1,376	Suriname	112	Ecuador	750	Jamaica	3,022	Belgium	299	Yemen	7	Iran, Islamic Rep.	81	Czechia	2,755
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5. Data interpretation and Discussions

The divergent views regarding the place of FLs tend to be subjective because they may be driven by emotions and personal experience rather than hard facts. From the discourse, transnational aspirations, utilitarianism and cultural extroversion seem to be why some Cameroonians may continue to support the policy.

Benefits: Positive results of FL teaching in Cameroon

Undoubtedly and unquestionably, the knowledge of foreign languages is an asset for social mobility and international studies, and the decision taken by Cameroon to facilitate the acquisition/learning of FLs has had some positive results as there are close connections between language policies and broader social, economic and political processes within the framework of international exchange. The statistics show that Cameroon has benefited from having ex-colonial languages in its educational system. So far, compared to indigenous Cameroonian languages, the utilitarian value of foreign languages is unquestionably and unarguably higher. The migration statistics presented cohere with Mitchell (2019)’s remarks that the use of FLs in education has helped many Cameroonians study in universities worldwide. In fact, they have easily found a place in French and English-speaking Western countries like France and the UK – which have been the top destinations because of strong colonial ties. The teaching of German is connected to similar considerations: Germany had had historical ties with Cameroon, the latter having been a Protectorate from 1884 to 1916.

Adverse effects of FL teaching

The teaching of FLs has not had only positive effects; there are negative consequences too. FLs seem to drive in some taste of globalisation, modernity and exotism and more possibilities like emigration and brain drain. The policy reinforces the Eurocentric mindset that tends to foster cultural extroversion among Africans when revival movements push for decoloniality, pan-Africanism and Afrocentrism on the continent. Ndlovu (2013:38) comments that to the Africans, the so-called ‘globalisation’ amounts to westernization. Moreover, it has long contributed to reinforcing the language ideology and negative attitude towards Cameroonian languages.

Moreover, such a policy creates a fertile battleground for foreign nations to exert their soft power (Nye, 1990, 2004) at the expense of Cameroon. In fact, imperialistic countries' economic and geostrategic influence is also felt in their language and culture diplomacy, the modern soft power weapon. Nye (1990, 2004) forecasted that countries' power might rely on less hard (tangible) elements like weaponry and finance. He postulated that elements like language and culture would constitute more powerful weapons in modern imperialism. Language diplomacy is an important tool in soft power as some governments view the ‘language as a marketing tool’, plus incentives in the form of scholarships and opportunities to travel to Western countries. Countries like France and Britain have used their languages' dominant position for a long time to diffuse their ideas and models. Many other foreign countries with geostrategic and formerly imperial aspirations have emulated them, establishing institutes around the world to foster their influence. Today, we have the American language centres, the English British Council, Germany's Goethe-Institut and Spain's Instituto Cervantes, the French Institut Francais, and the Chinese Confucius Institute⁴ as such instruments for the promotion of language and culture. The Japanese have promoted the language in Asia as a key element in displaying the image of a Cool Japan (Hashimoto 2018). Most countries establishing institutions for language and culture promotion across the globe are also countries of the G20: the wealthiest countries. The USA ranks among the most powerful nations in terms of political, economic and military power. Japan, China, France, and Germany to the list. Powerful countries are ready to

⁴ 513 Confucius Institutes in 140 countries, with 48 of them in 37 African countries.

invest financial resources in expanding their soft power through language diplomacy. Cameroon has been helping them achieve this goal at her own expense.

In the above discussion, we have noted that FLs are useful assets in international relations as Cameroonians have benefited from the opportunity of learning FLs at home to access a variety of migrants' destinations. However, we have also argued that besides these benefits, there are negative effects such as excessive extroversion, but most importantly in promoting foreign powers' soft power at the countries' expense.

The next section discusses the curriculum reforms that must be brought to educational policy concerning foreign languages. The central argument is that there is a misrepresentation of the FLs as an asset in migration. People tend to overestimate the potential that some FLs have in migration. It is a fact that knowing a language is important for integration, but with the development of English as an international language, other languages are no longer very important for advanced studies.

What reforms are to be brought?

. FLs should be removed from the national Francophone curriculum because they are no longer very instrumental in national development. We are challenging the arguments that teaching a diversity of FLs contributes to multiplying the chances of Cameroonians willing to migrate for educational purposes. What is questioned is the pertinence of the widespread and compulsory teaching of FLs in general, and some in particular in 2021, when many socio-political and geostrategic changes have occurred.

Argument 1: The cost involved in maintaining FLs in the Francophone curriculum does not yield proportionate or expected benefits

There is an argument that learning an FL in school empowers students seeking to migrate.

The point here is that keeping on with an education policy which promotes the FLs gives students more chances to succeed in a foreign country. However, the migration statistics show that countries whose languages are taught in Cameroon are not necessarily the top destinations of Cameroonians. Even when they happen to be, as is the case with Germany and Italy, many other reasons account for that. Many Cameroonians would have loved to be in France, Germany, USA, UK (to a lesser extent to Spain and Italy because they are in the Schengen zone) rather than China and Saudi Arabia. Out of more than 250,000 students who were learning Spanish in Cameroon in 2015, there are barely a hundred reported studying in a Spanish country, and there is no Spanish-speaking country among the top destination of Cameroonians. Furthermore, the few who go to Spain can study at the tertiary level in English, just like in Germany.

Argument 2: The cost-and-benefit analysis of the generalized teaching of FLs shows that the return on investment is not what should be expected due to brain drain

Promoting FLs in the education system of Cameroon is as useless as watering the neighbour's garden. Many Cameroonians who have migrated for educational purposes have refused to come back to settle and develop the country. Admittedly, they contribute through remittances (funds sent to families) or through some small projects, but their input is still negligible compared to the investment in teaching FLs. It is reported that fewer than 30,000 Cameroonians have received German degrees. Unfortunately, these 'hardworking, intelligent, dynamic and highly qualified' Cameroonians who constitute the most vibrant diaspora in Germany do not want to come back to develop their country; HE Holger Mahnicke, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Cameroon, regretted in 2015. Some have naturalised as German despite the risk of being ripped off of their Cameroonian nationality. Germany, therefore, benefits more from the highly qualified human resource than Cameroon, which has provided the basic training.

Argument 3: The teaching of FLs is a waste of resources because it is ineffective

The teaching of FLs is not useless because most students do not achieve the desired proficiency. One of the criteria for admission to Germany is basic knowledge of German. As such, any Cameroonian must pass the German Language test Goethe Institute Yaoundé conducted before proceeding with the admission procedure. Although Cameroonians are highly proficient compared to

other African countries (WES 2020), they still need to take extra classes and get a certificate in German. Meeting these requirements demands a lot of time and resources from families. Kadjie (2020) reported that candidates have to afford the means of subsistence, as well as money for the language certificate *Zertifikat Deutsch*, which is provided exclusively by the Goethe Institute in Yaoundé. She reported that it took a 24-year-old student two years of German classes at a private school in Yaoundé to achieve the desired level. For each level, his uncle paid 110,000 CFA (170€). If things have to be so, then what is the need to spend years learning German in schools. Just like Francophones, Anglophones Cameroonians must take a full course because their education system does not provide foreign languages—which is an injustice. It is useless to maintain this policy as it tends to favour a minority who come from rich families.

The problem of low proficiency may be because only students in the arts and humanities (languages, history, geography, philosophy, etc.) have FLs as a compulsory subject in high school. This means that most Sciences-Technology-Engineering- Mathematics (STEM) students have taken FLs only for two years in secondary school, which is not enough to help them develop minimum literacy and proficiency to study in higher education in a foreign country. Most students who would most probably need to know an FL would-be students in the STEM who would most need to migrate to find quality training in their field, which is inexistent in Cameroon

Despite the incentives provided by German institutions to Cameroonians who studied German at the university to terminate their study in Germany, there is little impact on the real transformation of Cameroon in the STEM that attracts most students. As the country was less endowed in those domains, most students in Germany went for engineering programmes, with more than two-fifths, and mathematics and the natural sciences, with a quarter each. Many students and graduates are also in medicine (EUDiF 2020). As those fields of study offer a promising professional future and good chances for advancement, Cameroonians usually choose them and seldom enrol in social sciences, law and languages.

Argument 4: Cameroonian students do not choose Germany just because they know the German language.

The argument that the generalised teaching of FLs in schools and their knowledge are the key factors when it comes to migration is groundless and weak. There is no compelling evidence that Cameroonian migration's high rate is attributed to their knowledge of the language of the country of destination. Germany is not the top destination for Cameroonians only; With 333,233 hosted students, Germany is the third top destination for international students in the world, after the USA (976,853) and the UK (489,019) (UIS 2021). China and India have the highest international student communities in those countries.

Of course, German is a popular language in Cameroon. As a result, it has the highest number of German speakers of any country in Africa (WES 2021) and its basic knowledge could be an added advantage when planning to study in Germany as it may ease their integration. However, Cameroonian students do not go to Germany (just like many other international students) because they know German. According to Fleischer (2011) and WES 2019, many Cameroonian students are irresistibly attracted to German because of (a) the high quality of Germany's tertiary education (it is reputed as a global leader in engineering) with an excellent network of universities, which is also still free of charge (low tuition fees) and relatively easy to access with flexible admissions requirements; (b) the opportunity to learn German in school in Cameroon as a precondition for university enrolment in Germany; (c) the strength of the German economy and technology, which was connected with hopes of finding work and earning money in their country of destination; (d) historical ties with Germany, and antipathy against the former colonial power France; and (d) the existing private transnational networks between Germany and Cameroon. Even though Cameroonians may have to make a huge deposit in a bank account and find an affidavit of support in Germany before moving in, the country remains by far (as compared to the USA, the UK, and Canada) a

cheaper option. Moreover, Cameroonians are attracted by generous scholarship programs and rosy post-graduation employment prospects (WES 2019).

Knowing German is not the most crucial for advanced studies because many university programs are taught in English. Like Tunisia and Iran, China and India top the list of migrant students. Recently Syrian student population has been at the top (UIS 2021). Statistics also indicate that Nigerians and Ghanaian students had in previous years outnumbered Cameroonians in Germany's universities. WES (2020) indicates that Nigeria is Africa's highest provider of international students in almost all countries, including Germany, whereas German is not taught in their schools.

Argument 5: English is the global language of tertiary education at the tertiary level, and it is already a language of instruction and a second language in Cameroon.

One of the arguments the supporters of foreign language teaching provide is that the knowledge of an FL is very useful outside the country. This argument no longer holds today, with English being the global language. In most developed countries, education can be taken in the national language or English. The data from the literature shows that knowing German or Spanish would not be more helpful than knowing English which is already a language of instruction. Many Anglophones have also migrated to Germany even though they do not learn German in high school. Some Spanish colleagues revealed that even in Spain, they could communicate with the Spanish in English.

Furthermore, Spanish-speaking countries are not among the top destinations for Cameroonian migrants, probably because they are not the wealthiest. It would therefore be more advantageous to lay more emphasis on the study of English, as the USA and Canada remain potential top destinations for Cameroonians. Nigerians top the African list because they can afford to study there (WES 2020).

Table 1. Country of origin of international students in Germany (synthesis from UIS 2021)

China	32,472	Pakistan	4,936	Netherlands	1,796
India	18,574	Luxembourg	4,911	Israel	1,759
Austria	12,865	United Kingdom	4,746	Albania	1,604
Syrian Arab Republic	12,442	Morocco	4,012	Palestine	1,576
Russian Federation	9,646	Egypt	3,993	Czechia	1,424
France	8,720	Brazil	3,806	Jordan	1,307
Turkey	8,494	Greece	3,565	Canada	1,266
Italy	8,405	Viet Nam	3,052	Malaysia	1,215
United States	7,430	Mexico	2,922	Peru	1,137
Cameroon	7,214	Bangladesh	2,920	Lebanon	1,121
Spain	6,768	Colombia	2,782	Belarus	1,063
Iran, Islamic Rep.	6,421	Romania	2,521	Nepal	1,058
Ukraine	6,313	Indonesia	2,460	Azerbaijan	1,049
Tunisia	6,223	Belgium	2,459	Ghana	1,038
Bulgaria	6,150	Nigeria	2,290	Australia	1,018
Korea, Rep.	5,328	Hungary	2,082	Chile	1,008
Poland	5,083	Japan	1,930		
Switzerland	5,036	Georgia	1,892		

The need for curriculum reform in Cameroon

The above discussion has permitted us to demonstrate beyond doubt that continuing the teaching of FLs does no longer provide tangible benefits for Cameroon because they are not as useful as one may have taught. English and French are more important. I, therefore, suggest a curriculum.

1-My main point is that FLs should be removed and English/French should be promoted.

English is the global language. In most developed countries, education can be taken in national languages or English. Some Spanish lecturers I discussed revealed that even while in Spain, they could communicate with the Spanish people in English. It would therefore be more advantageous to lay more emphasis on the study of English as other top destinations of Cameroonians are either English-speaking (the USA, UK, South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria) and many other French-speaking countries (France, Belgium, Tunisia, Morocco, Cote d'Ivoire).

As Africanists may suggest, having French and English as official languages in Cameroon is an asset rather than an impediment. Therefore, official bilingualism should be promoted not as a slogan but through new measures to help Cameroonians achieve a high level of bilingual fluency and literacy to pursue advanced studies. The two official languages already enjoy enough institutional support, even to the detriment of indigenous languages.

English is the world's most important language today, and Cameroonians have the opportunity to learn it in school or to have it as a medium of instruction should be cherished. Although not the most spoken, English is the most widely diffused language in the world (1,132 million speakers) when factoring in second, third, and higher language speakers⁵. This is due first to the colonial influence of the British Empire but later to the spread of American culture. Unarguably, with English, one can migrate to most countries of the world as it is used natively in most advanced countries and as a second language in fifty other countries that constitute Cameroonians' top destinations. However, despite institutional support, the proficiency level of Cameroonians in English remains below international standards. Following the English Fluency Index (EFI), Cameroon is amongst the countries with very low proficiency⁶, at the same level as countries (like Angola, Kazakhstan, Cambodia; behind Morocco, Algeria, Mozambique, Iran and Chile) (EFI 2021) —a shame. English is already the main language of education in the world. More resources should be provided for its learning and teaching. The Low proficiency in English dissuades many students from attending school in the U.S and the UK. (WES 2019).

French is the main language in Cameroon. 63.7% of the population aged 15 and older in Douala and 60.5% in Yaounde can read and write French; an additional 13–15% can speak French without being able to write it (BUCREP 2010b). French is seen as essential among residents of the capital, especially in government and information. Three-quarters feel close to other Francophone countries. The 2005 census found that 57.7% of the population over 12 could speak French (BUCREP 2010b), up from 41.1% in 1987.

Although not one of the most important at the global level (despite being a language of the United Nations), French is an important language in Africa. One who speaks French can easily move to several urban areas of Central Africa and the ports on the Gulf of Guinea. It has become a first language, such as in Abidjan, Ivory Coast,[4] in the urban areas of Douala and Yaoundé in

⁵ <https://blog.busuu.com/most-spoken-languages-in-the-world/>

⁶ This ranking is so dire because the survey was taken in Yaoundé. Although it is the Capital city, very few Cameroonians in the street can express themselves fluently in English. And many studies have shown that even in public offices, service providers refuse to reply in English to English speakers, thereby causing this sense of marginalisation and exclusion by the Anglophone Cameroonians.

Cameroon or Libreville, Gabon. In some Maghreb countries (Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria), French is the first language among some upper classes of the population, which are simultaneous bilinguals in Arabic/French), but only a second language among the general population. An estimated 430 million people speak African French in Africa, spread across 29 Francophone countries (it is projected that In 2050 their population will reach between 845 million[2] and 866 million. [1]). Africa is thus the continent with the most French speakers in the world, and African French speakers are now a large part of the Francophonie.

Given the potential of English and French in global communication and studies, there is no need to continue teaching other FLs.

2-FLs should only be maintained in the curriculum if some adjustments are made

Should the government want to continue with the LIEP, which permits the teaching of FLs, I would suggest some adjustments:

Even if education stakeholders would not want to erase FLs from the education system, some reforms must be undertaken. Cameroon should take a bold step to reasonably choose the foreign languages to be taught based on the benefit that the country can derive from them. In that case, the English subsystem should also provide FLs.

1: Remove or add some languages

My opinion is that the choice of the language to invest resources in its teaching in the nation should be based on the benefits that the country may derive in maintaining ties with those nations. Cost and benefit analysis must be based on the benefits (direct, indirect, tangible, competitive) derived from the cooperation with such a nation. The cost must be lower or at least equivalent to the benefit. Some countries are powerful politically, others are economically, and others are military and deserve that the country maintains cooperation with them.

FLs are part of a nation's diplomacy because they are important in maintaining bilateral and multilateral relations. In that light, some languages must be maintained, some removed, and others added. I believe German, Chinese and Arabic could be maintained as subjects; Spanish and Italian have to be removed; Russian and Swahili have to be added.

With regards to speakers' population: What is the most spoken language?

Although the world languages do not have the same demographic weight, their importance are linked to the economic and geostrategic influence of the countries that harbour them. Decision makers should consider the speakers' population. However, the linguistic demographic factor must no longer be the main criteria for choosing to teach a foreign language.

Based on demographic strength, Mandarin Chinese (1,117 million speakers)⁷ is the largest. This is due to the significant population of China. Mandarin is concentrated, while English is spread out. English is spoken in 146 countries, a stark difference from Mandarin's 38.

⁷ Mandarin is the largest of the Chinese macrolanguage, a grouping of thirteen languages all considered "Chinese" due to a shared writing system and literature.

<https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/most-spoken-languages>

Other important languages include 3. Hindi (615 million speakers), 4. Spanish (534 million speakers), 5. French (280 million speakers), 6. Arabic (274 million speakers), 7. Bangla/Bengali (265 million speakers), 8. Russian (258 million speakers), 9. Portuguese (234 million speakers), 10. Indonesian (199 million speakers), 11. Urdu (170 million speakers), 12. German (132 million speakers).

Considering the economic might of the country whose language should be taught

The pragmatic question to be answered is what the country gains in having some of its citizens know the language of this country and maintain closer diplomatic ties with it. In this light and to be coherent, China is the second-largest economy in the world, and Chinese is the language with the highest number of native speakers. In recent years, China has become a major economic partner for Cameroon, with major development projects funded through loans provided by the China EXIMBANK. A very important geopolitical bloc in the world speaks Arabic, while a cross-section of the Cameroonian population is Muslim. Cameroon also maintains close diplomatic ties with the Arab world, being a member of the Icesco (the Arabic language is spoken in more than 25 countries and is the mother tongue of approximately 400 million people in different regions of the world. It is also recognised as one of the six official languages of the United Nations, thus belonging to the common heritage of humankind).

The choice of language to be taught must also be guided by the political, the military, and the economic might of the language's country. On that ground, Russian should, and Hindi should have been considered.

To be coherent with the above changes, Cameroon has to consider reforming the programme by removing Italian and Spanish and adding Russian and Swahili.

According to the IMF forecast in April 2021 (Statista: Global evolution of GDP measured by purchasing power show the greatest economic power), the USA, China, Russia, India, and Germany will be the world-leading countries in 2024. The world has witnessed many changes as some countries that once occupied top positions have regressed while other powers have emerged. In terms of economic power, in 1992, the USA topped the list and was followed by Japan, Germany, Russia, China, Italy, France, India, Brazil, and the UK. According to the same sources, in 2008: the USA had maintained its leadership but was now followed by China. Japan regressed to the third position while India popped up in the fourth. Russia (fifth) had overpowered Germany, Brazil, France, UK. Italy, which previously occupied 6th position, was now at 11th. It is anticipated that as the economic guard keeps changing with emerging-market economies—particularly in Asia—making huge development strides and the hegemony of the West looking ever more unstable, by 2024, China will take the leading position, and India will further close the economic gap to take the third position after the USA. While Japan, Germany and Russia should keep their position, Indonesia is expected to take over Brazil, France and UK. And as the Covid-19 crisis has seemingly accelerated this change, and Europe is mired in deep recessions, the next several years should see a continuation of recent trends, with Italy expected to bow out as the pandemic severely hit it.

Italian and Spanish should be removed

In that light, I would propose that Italian and Spanish be removed. Why teach Italian, a language spoken only in a few countries (Italy and a part of Switzerland) and whose economy is no longer as strong as it used to be? With a total population of less than 100 million, Italian is a small language compared to Hindi and Chinese. Although a member of the G20, Italy's

voice is not preponderant in the Security Council. Although the Spanish-speaking community is a large one, there is no country with political, economic, and military might in their consortium. Moreover, there is no Spanish-speaking country among the top destination for Cameroonians. The statistics show that in 2021 only 60 Cameroonians studied in Spain. This is far less than other countries such as Russian Federation, Turkey or even Poland.

Russian, Hindi, and Swahili should be promoted.

Russia is one of the most powerful nations, while India is an emerging economy. Russian and Hindi ought to be taught too. Russia has become economic, military, and political. Russia is political and economic power, a member of the Security Council whose voice matters. Moreover, Russia is spoken by 258 million people. 615 million speakers speak Hindi. However, since India has English as one of its official languages, it is not necessary to overstock the educational programme with a language which will not yield added value. Swahili is one of the languages of the African Union, and if Cameroon has to remain relevant to its African position, this language must be taught.

Continuing FL teaching

The other burning questions would be: Once foreign languages have been removed from the curriculum, what become of language diplomacy and foreign languages in the country? What will become of foreign language teachers? What to do to continue the teaching of FLs in Cameroon?

The country has invested enormous resources to train teachers in HTTCs and Universities. These teachers constitute a human resource that can be recycled to serve in other capacities.

First of all, FL teachers are first and foremost language teachers with pedagogic skills and minimum proficiency in at least one of the official languages. They can be recycled to teach those languages or other subjects. They can also be assigned to specific FL teaching centres where the language will continue to be taught.

University lecturers would continue as researchers and teachers of foreign languages in specialised institutions where diplomats and foreign affairs staff are trained. They could also serve as embassy attachés in Embassies where their language skills as translators and cultural attachés would be much needed. The country can continue language diplomacy by reconverting language teachers as translators and diplomats.

Develop public, private partnership (PPP) to continue teaching FLs to those who need them.

Now that there is a critical mass of proficient literate speakers of those FLs in Cameroon, the government should consider developing a PPP with private enterprises⁸ (which abound in the country) and the already established institutes (Goethe, Confucius) to provide FL courses to citizens who need them, at their expenses. So far, foreign countries give little credibility to academic records and still have students take tests in their institutions to certify their proficiency level, and students have had to pay for classes from their pockets. They are very few who can afford that. If the majority of Cameroonians do not have that privilege because of social inequalities, why should the government continue to squander the limited financial

⁸ The government and diplomatic missions interested in promoting their languages would provide pedagogical support in the form of capacity building to private enterprises. A partnership agreement should be signed between the governments and any of the institution in charge of enhancing foreign nations

resource to teach languages that benefit less than 90% who already come from families with resources? This is injustice. Let those who find a benefit in learning the languages pay for them in private classes. Even if the government should maintain this policy, the languages should be provided only in a few schools in the country's regional capitals, and they should be optional.

It is a loss of teaching hours that should have been allocated to teaching English, which can have a better return on cost because it is a global language. With English, one can travel to most world destinations and study in most premiere universities.

With the withdrawal of foreign languages, resources will be curtailed and redirected to funding the teaching of English, which seems to benefit its speaker more.

Even so, FLs should have been taught in specialised institutions in foreign affairs like it was started with the Confucius institute and not in all state universities and HTTCs. The department of foreign languages in Universities ought to disappear in HTTCs

6. Conclusion

Are foreign languages essential for Cameroonians to command their maintenance in the school curriculum in Cameroon? Is Cameroon's language in education policy (which, despite the absence of official and legal prescriptions, has prioritized the generalised teaching/learning of some foreign European languages) still relevant after major changes in the world?

That was the central issue of this paper. We have noted that since independence, students of the Francophone system of education have to choose between German and Spanish (and later Chinese, Italian, and Arabic) as a major class subject in secondary schools; students in the Arts series of high schools also take it as a compulsory subject in their final Baccalaureat Exam. Furthermore, foreign languages are offered in five out of eight state universities and three out of four HTTCs. Many Cameroonians have benefitted from this policy and have studied those languages up to the doctoral levels, with support in the form of incentives and scholarship from the host European countries—particularly Germany.

This policy and curriculum, which were established in the very early years of the nation when the French curriculum inspired Cameroon, have remained unchanged until today, despite mutations at the global and national level

The opinions regarding the pertinence of FLs in the school curriculum and, eventually, the need for a curriculum reform remain divided, as some people still see the utility of FLs for potential outbound students. The statistical data on outbound migration have shown that Germany is the top destination for Cameroonian students seeking advanced degrees in engineering and medicine. This might suggest that learning German is an asset to migration. We have argued that this is not indisputable evidence as Spain is host to less than 100 students where Spanish has been taught in Cameroon for many years.

If the rationale behind introducing foreign languages was bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the then powerful nations, today, there have been changes, and new powers have emerged. As a result, reform must be implemented to help the LIEP adjust to new linguistic, geopolitical and geostrategic parameters.

We have suggested that the government undertake curriculum reform to reinforce the teaching of official languages, particularly English to Francophones and French to Anglophones, as these two languages are more useful for national integration. Moreover, the teaching of English should be fostered nationwide to develop a critical mass of proficient

English speakers as it provides the most benefit in terms of international communication and studies.

The cost of running many foreign languages in the educational system is high, and the benefit is low. As a result, the return on investment is not effective. The state invests so much in teaching students languages that are not very useful to them; only a minority of Francophones take advantage of it, leaving out a majority of others and all Anglophones. The state should consider all FLs from the educational system and develop an incentive environment to enable the development of private enterprises, which, in collaboration with institutes, will continue offering those classes to only the students who need them, at their own expense.

If the teaching of foreign languages has to be maintained, the government should consider removing Italian and Spanish from the list of taught languages and adding Russian and Swahili.

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