

The Immersion Experience in Anglophone Primary Schools in Cameroon

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1. Introduction

Although bilingual education is a reality in Cameroon as observed at various levels of the school system, immersion as an organized language education practice exists in limited degrees, the most popularly known example being the Koranic schools in the north of the country where Arabic total immersion is practiced in the early years of primary education. As regards the traditional Anglophone and Francophone systems of education, the term immersion is commonly used when Francophones attend Anglophone schools or when Anglophones attend Francophone schools.

Since the 70s, many children of Francophone parentage have been attending Anglophone primary schools on a large scale in the major urban areas of French-speaking Cameroon. Although the practice began in government primary schools (otherwise known as 'Government Bilingual Primary Schools' in French-speaking Cameroon), it soon extended to private institutions partly because of the large number of children who got enrolled into such schools and partly due to the fact that well-to-do parents believed that the private institutions had much more to offer academically than the public institutions. Eventually, even these private institutions began wearing bilingual cloaks for reasons of publicity, terming themselves bilingual just because admission is open to pupils of both Anglophone and Francophone background whereas in reality English is the sole medium of instruction.

This paper focuses on a form of English-only system of education, wherein children of the majority language (French) pursue their education in the minority language (English). In this case, English becomes the school language while French is the home language. However, the system as practiced in Cameroon differs from the Canadian French immersion programs where English-speaking Canadians study in French, the minority language. While immersion in Canada is organized, it is more or less a private initiative in Cameroon having no systematic form of organization whatsoever. This work is an exploratory investigation into this type of immersion observed in Anglophone primary schools. Its main objective is to study the reasons for this trend, investigate the attitudes of the children, parents, teachers and school authorities to the system, as well as the overall linguistic and academic performance of the children. These observations are made possible through a case study of a Yaoundé-based elite primary school, the Parents' National Educational Union (PNEU) Etoug-Ebe.

2. Background to study

2.1. *Language situation in Cameroon*

Cameroon is a multilingual country comprising 247 indigenous languages, two official languages and Cameroon Pidgin English (cf. Breton and Fohtung 1991; Boum Ndongo-Semengue and Sadembouo 1999). Globally, three lingua franca zones can be identified: the Fulfulde lingua franca zone in the north, the Cameroon Pidgin English lingua franca zone in the west and the French lingua franca zone in the rest of the country (Wolf 2001: 155). The Fulfulde area covers the Adamawa, the North and the Far North provinces; Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) is widely spoken in the North-West and South-West provinces; while Cameroon Popular French covers mainly the Littoral, West, Center, South and East provinces. However, as is to be expected, such division is far from being watertight.

The two official languages, English and French, are legacies of Franco-British rule in Cameroon following the defeat of German forces in the country in 1916 during the First World War. The new

colonial masters then sought to impose their languages in the newly acquired territory both in the areas of education and administration. This led to the solid implantation of the two languages during the colonial era, a situation that was later reinforced after Cameroon became independent. At Reunification in 1961, English and French became the two official languages of Cameroon as the country opted for the policy of official language bilingualism with the creation of a federation made up of English-speaking Cameroon (20% of the population) and French-speaking Cameroon (80% of the population). Consequently, the population referred to, as Anglophone and Francophone is in fact a multilingual population, wherein various indigenous languages are spoken. It is important to point out that if the main lingua franca of Anglophone Cameroonians is Cameroon Pidgin English, the Francophones may either use Cameroon Popular French and/or Fulfulde. For the young Francophone urban dwellers, French appears to be gradually replacing the indigenous languages as mother tongue. According to a study carried out by Bitja'a Kody (2001), 32% of Francophone Yaoundé city dwellers between the ages of 10 and 17 admit that they do not speak any Cameroonian indigenous language(s); their L1 is French. Such statistics only go to testify that French is one of the most widely spoken languages in Cameroon.

2.2. The Cameroon educational system

In post-colonial Cameroon, formal education is carried out essentially in the two official languages. The educational system is made up of two subsystems: the Anglophone subsystem and the Francophone subsystem. The Anglophone subsystem is in vogue mainly in the two English-speaking provinces, while the Francophone subsystem is mainly in vogue in the eight French-speaking provinces. However, in view of the policy of official language bilingualism, which aims at national unity and integration, the two educational subsystems are used all over the country. In other words, there are Anglophone schools in the French-speaking part of the country and Francophone schools in the English-speaking part of the country.

Generally speaking, the Cameroon educational system has three main levels: primary, secondary and tertiary¹. These are presented in the tables below:

a) Primary

Francophone subsystem			Anglophone subsystem		
Year	Class	Certificate	Year	Class	Certificate
1	SIL ²	-	1	Class One	-
2	CP	-	2	Class Two	-
3	CE1	-	3	Class Three	-
4	CE2	-	4	Class Four	-
5	CM1	-	5	Class Five	-
6	CM2	CEP	6	Class Six	FSLC

¹ The Kindergarten (Nursery) is not a compulsory component of the formal educational system in Cameroon. Besides, it exists mainly in urban centers and only children from relatively well-to-do families can afford to attend it.

² Here are explanations of all abbreviations used in the table illustrating the primary level of education:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the two subsystems, the primary level of education covers six years of instruction. At the end of primary education, the two end-of-course certificates are the CEP in the Francophone subsystem and the FSLC in the Anglophone subsystem³.

b) Secondary

Francophone subsystem			Anglophone subsystem		
Year	Class	Certificate	Year	Class	Certificate
1	Sixième	-	1	Form One	-
2	Cinquième	-	2	Form Two	-
3	Quatrième	-	3	Form Three	-
4	Troisième (end of first cycle)	BEPC ⁴	4	Form Four	-
5	Seconde	-	5	Form Five (end of first cycle)	GCE ⁵
6	Première	Probatoire			Ordinary Level
7	Terminale (end of second cycle)	Baccalauréat	6	Lower Sixth Form	-
			7	Upper Sixth Form (end of second cycle)	GCE Advanced Level

Although the two subsystems are made up of seven years of studies each, the length of the cycles varies. In the Francophone subsystem, the first cycle is made up of four years and the second cycle is made up of three years. On the contrary, in the Anglophone subsystem the first cycle of secondary education is made up of five years and the second cycle is made up of two years. At the level of certificates, the Francophone subsystem has three certificates: the BEPC at the end of the first cycle, the Probatoire⁶ at the end of the Première Class and the Baccalauréat at the end of the second cycle. In the Anglophone subsystem, there are two certificate examinations: the GCE Ordinary Level which marks the end of the first cycle and the GCE Advanced Level which marks the end of the second cycle.

c) Tertiary

Francophone subsystem		Anglophone subsystem	
Year	Certificate	Year	Certificate
1	-	1	-
2	-	2	-
3	Licence	3	BA, BSc, LLB
4	Maîtrise	4	-
5	D.E.A. ⁷	5	MA, MSc, LLM
6	-	6	-
7	-	7	-
8	Doctorat	8	Ph.D.

Among the six State universities in Cameroon, four are bilingual (University of Douala, University of Dschang, University of Yaoundé I and University of Yaoundé II), that is to say both English and

³ We have not considered the Government Common Entrance Examination because it is not a certificate examination as such, but simply an examination that allows children to be selected for entry into government secondary schools.

⁴ BEPC means 'Brevet d'Etudes du Premier Cycle'. This examination marks the end of the first cycle in Francophone secondary schools.

⁵ GCE stands for 'General Certificate of Education' examination.

⁶ Although the Probatoire has been officially erased from the school system since 1995, it still exists in practice as an official examination.

⁷ DEA stands for 'Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies', a graduate degree which comes just before the doctorate degree in the French system of tertiary education.

French are used for instruction. For the remaining two, one is an Anglo-Saxon university (the University of Buea) and the other is French-oriented (the University of Ngaoundéré).

3. Aspects of bilingual education in Cameroon

3.1. Primary education

The first main attempts at bilingual education in Cameroon primary schools were observed with the opening of Government Bilingual Primary Schools ('écoles publiques bilingues') in the French-speaking towns of Yaoundé and Douala as early as 1967. Although these primary schools operated in English and were simply replicas of Government Primary Schools as found in the Anglophone provinces, children of Francophone parentage were encouraged to attend. In spite of the fact that detractors of these schools contend that their bilingual aspect is only limited to their names, this practice has been intensified in recent years to such an extent that many parents of Francophone background send their children to Anglophone primary schools, whether public or private. Eventually, this has become a strong tradition in the Cameroonian educational system. Another peculiarity of these schools lies in the fact that the teaching of French is intensified, a situation rendered easy by the availability of French language teachers. It would appear that the Cameroonian authorities originally wanted the Bilingual Primary Schools to be models of bilingual education. The result was an ill prepared and poorly organized system peculiar in its own right wherein both Anglophone and Francophone children studied side by side in the same classroom and received 100% of their primary education in English.

As from 1972, another development occurred in Francophone primary schools (otherwise known as 'écoles francophones') situated in the Anglophone provinces. Several children of Anglophone parentage attended these primary schools, which were initially at the service of the French-speaking population (mainly children of government civil servants and military personnel).

For a long time, the Government Bilingual Primary School in Yaoundé was the reference institution for bilingual education in primary schools. But since the 80s, the practice has been extended to private institutions. And in order to attract an increasing middleclass clientele, these schools generally claim to be 'bilingual' even when in reality they are not. Although by 1974 the quest for bilingual education in primary schools had attained a high level of significance with several Francophone parents sending their children to Anglophone primary schools and several Anglophone parents sending their children to Francophone primary schools, the trend today indicates that while many Francophone parents continue to send their children to Anglophone primary schools, Anglophone parents are rather reticent to send their children to Francophone primary schools. As a linguistic minority, it would appear that the idea of language loyalty more than anything else is the driving force behind the reticence observed within Anglophone circles. Given that Anglophone Cameroonians perceive the French language and culture as domineering, their general attitude towards French education is characterized by skepticism and reservation.

3.2. Secondary education

At the secondary level, the institution of bilingual education can be traced as far back as 1963 when the Cameroon government opened a Bilingual Grammar School at Man O War Bay in the then West Cameroon. This school was later transferred to Buea and is today known as Bilingual Grammar School Molyko, Buea. The uniqueness of bilingual education as practiced in this institution lies in the fact that, for a long time, both Anglophones and Francophones studied side by side in the same classroom, with some courses being taught in English and others in French. This practice obtained during the first three years of secondary education. From the fourth year onwards (Form IV for Anglophones and Troisième for Francophones), the students were free to choose the system of their choice so as to prepare adequately for the end of the first cycle examinations (GCE Ordinary Level for Anglophones and BEPC for Francophones). This notwithstanding, a good number of candidates, irrespective of their linguistic background, succeeded in both the GCE Ordinary Level and BEPC

examinations. Furthermore, in this institution, the teaching of the LO2⁸ was given utmost priority. This probably explains why for a long time, this institution produced some of the best bilinguals in the country (cf. Ekane 1988, 1991).

In spite of the successes registered in this institution, the Bilingual Grammar School Buea experiment was bound to fail in the long run because students of the two linguistic communities were not treated in the same way. While Anglophone students were obliged to seat for the BEPC examination, Francophone students were not obliged to seat for the GCE Ordinary Level examination. Thus, for the Anglophone minority, this situation created the impression that the system was encouraging a type of Frenchification of the Anglophone population, while Francophones simply evolved in their system without any constraints (Courade & Courade 1977: 28-29). Since the death of the Buea experiment, bilingual education at the secondary level is close to something like a farce. Although the government has since opened many other bilingual secondary schools all over the country (beginning with the Bilingual Grammar School Yaoundé in 1965), the spirit of bilingualism in these institutions remains essentially limited to their names⁹. If some measure of bilingualism actually exists, it is probably due to the fact that particular emphasis is laid on the teaching of the LO2. According to statistics obtained from the Ministry of National Education in Yaoundé, students' performance recorded in French at the GCE Ordinary Level in bilingual secondary schools is higher than that in the non-bilingual secondary schools¹⁰. While the average percentage of successful candidates in Ordinary Level French for the two leading bilingual institutions in the country (Bilingual Grammar School Buea and Bilingual Grammar School Yaoundé) was 90.52% in 1988 and 90% in 1991, the average percentage of successful candidates recorded in the same subject for non-bilingual secondary schools in the country stood at 21.2% in 1988 and 17.46% in 1991. These figures indicate that students of bilingual secondary schools have a significant edge over students of non-bilingual institutions in the mastery of the LO2.

3.3. Tertiary education

In Cameroon universities and professional institutions of higher learning, bilingual education began when the Federal University was opened in 1962 with the teaching of courses in both English and French. Chumbow (1980: 292) remarks "the lecturer has the choice between English and French as medium of instruction (whichever suits him best) whereas the student has no choice but to do his best to understand lectures, write (and 'present' oral) examinations in either language". This entails that both Anglophone and Francophone students sit side by side in the same lecture hall and follow-up classes in any of the official languages. Whether the course is taught in one language or the other depends on the linguistic background of the lecturer concerned. This practice is currently in vogue in the four bilingual universities, as well as in some professional schools (cf. Echu 1999).

Critics of bilingual education as practiced in the Cameroonian tertiary educational sector affirm that very often the professor evaluates the student's work in a language (s)he probably understands very little. This constitutes a handicap in itself and even tends to question the very foundations of bilingual education. It is therefore very common for some students in these bilingual institutions to attribute their failure in tests and school examinations either to the fact that they did not understand the courses due to language handicap (the courses were taught in their LO2) or to the marker's lack of proficiency in the LO2. This vision corroborates findings obtained from Njeck's (1992: 84) study on bilingual education in the University of Yaoundé, where 88% of students interviewed confirm that they have difficulties in following up courses in their LO2, and claim that their performances would be better if they were to work solely in their LO1. Another rather disturbing observation in these

⁸ As used throughout the paper, LO1 means 'first official language' while LO2 means 'second official language'. In the Cameroonian context, English is the LO1 of Anglophones while French is the LO1 of Francophones. In the same manner, French is the LO2 of Anglophones while English is the LO2 of Francophones.

⁹ Although these schools are said to be bilingual, there exist within them two distinct subsystems of education, one Anglophone and the other Francophone, functioning side by side. Thus the young secondary school student chooses his cultural model from the first year and pursues it to the end.

¹⁰ These statistics were obtained in 1995 during a research project carried out on the attitudes of Anglophone Cameroonians towards the French language.

bilingual institutions is that the teacher ratio in terms of linguistic background is 80% for French-speaking professors as against 20% for English-speaking professors (Tambi 1973; Njeck 1992). This implies that most of the courses are taught in French, a situation that tends to place Anglophone students in a disadvantaged situation vis-à-vis their Francophone counterparts. In all, bilingual education as practiced in institutions of higher learning in Cameroon produces a lot of passive bilinguals who understand the LO2 but do not speak it and who read in the LO2 but do not write it.

In order to meet with the challenges of bilingual education in Cameroonian institutions of higher learning, the teaching of French to Anglophone students and English to Francophone students was instituted in 1962 following the creation of the Federal University. This compulsory course known as 'Bilingual Training' had as primary objectives to help improve both the oral and written skills of students in the LO2, facilitate their acquisition of knowledge in the university, and eventually help in their linguistic integration in public life. Bilingual Training is not limited to faculties of the universities, but extends to professional institutions of higher learning. Today, it is generalized in the University system, covering virtually all the six State universities except the University of Yaoundé II for reasons still unclear. In spite of the difficulties encountered in the teaching of the LO2, this course no doubt contributes immensely in the implementation of bilingual education at the tertiary level and consequently in the promotion of official language bilingualism in Cameroon.

After this brief panorama on bilingual education in Cameroonian schools, our attention will be focused on the PNEU Etoug-Ebe case study wherein several children of Francophone parentage study within an all-English program.

4. The PNEU Etoug-Ebe (Yaoundé) case study

4.1. Background of institution

The Parents' National Educational Union (PNEU) Etoug-Ebe (Yaoundé) is a lay private primary school affiliated to the British World-Wide Educational Service (WES), and run on the British educational model. Opened in September 1976, the school is run by a group of shareholders. It comprises both the nursery and primary sections.

The nursery section is made up of two levels (Nursery I and Nursery II), while the primary section is made up of six levels (Class One, Class Two, Class Three, Class Four, Class Five and Class Six). The children generally start Nursery I at the age of three or four and complete primary education by the age of eleven or twelve. Following the standard practice in the institution as regards recruitment of children, a 30% quota is reserved for Francophone children. This practice was put in place to check the influx of children of Francophone background, as the head teacher of the school explains: "If we admit too many Francophones, then the Anglo-Saxon nature of the school system may disappear and thus the very purpose of the institution will be defeated. It is in the interest of the Francophones like the Anglophones that the school keeps its strong Anglo-Saxon culture, for it is for this reason that Francophone parents send their children to PNEU". The school enrolment, which has been increasing steadily since the creation of the institution, stood at 899 children (442 male and 457 female) in the 1999-2000 academic year.

As of the 1999-2000 academic year, the total number of teachers in the primary section stood at 25 (15 male and 10 female), while that of the nursery section stood at 8 (all female). The 33 teachers in the school were generally very qualified. 29 of them were holders of a professional teachers' diploma (Grade II, Grade I or Higher Diploma). For the remaining, they were either holders of a university degree, the GCE Ordinary Level, or the GCE Advanced Level. 2 out of the 33 teachers were French teachers, who taught exclusively French lessons, moving from one class to the other during French periods. The subjects taught in the school, like in other Anglophone primary schools, include English, French, Mathematics, General Knowledge, Religious Knowledge, History, and Geography.

4.2. Methodology

This study was carried out in April 1999-2000. Questionnaires were prepared for the Francophone pupils, their parents, and their teachers so as to better understand the educational system in place as well as the performance of the pupils and their attitude towards the Anglophone system of education.

Then to complement the questionnaires, interviews were conducted with 5 parents¹¹, the 10 teachers of Classes Four, Five and Six, and the head teacher in order to obtain views that could not be clearly expressed in the questionnaires. Finally, school records were analyzed, and some observation done around the school environment basically to determine the behavior and attitudes of the target population in the area of language competence and performance.

The study focused on a target population of 124 children of Francophone background attending the last three classes of the primary section of the school (Classes Four, Five and Six). It is important to note that in Anglophone primary schools in Cameroon the teaching of French is introduced in the last three classes, an important determinant factor for choosing these classes for the study. Out of the 124 children, 60 were semi-randomly selected for the administration of questionnaires. All the 60 children admitted that they were multilingual, for apart from English and French they were equally proficient in an indigenous language. The tables below present the distribution of the class population for the academic year 1999-2000.

Table 1: Population Distribution for Anglophone and Francophone Pupils of Classes Four, Five and Six

Class	Anglophones	Francophones	Total No. of Children
Four	60	55	115
Five	52	37	89
Six	33	32	65
Total	145	124	269

Out of the total number of 269 children in the three classes under study, there were 145 Anglophone children (53.9%) as against 124 Francophone children¹² (46.1%). With the Francophone population standing at 46.1%, there is every indication that the percentage of Francophones goes far beyond the originally assigned 30% quota reserved for them. Thus there were far more Francophones per class than was originally deemed acceptable by the school authorities. One possible explanation for the massive presence of children of Francophone background is the fact that their parents are generally more economically viable than Anglophone parents. Thus market forces are bound to have an impact on admission policy in the school, in spite of the precautions taken by the school authorities.

The tables, which follow, show the division of the children per classroom for each level. The classes were partitioned into A, B, C and D for Class Four, and A, B and C for Classes Five and Six. With an average classroom population of 29 pupils in Class Four, 30 pupils in Class Five and 22 pupils in Class Six, there is no doubt that these classrooms are relatively small by Cameroonian standards, especially when one compares them with public primary schools where very often there are over 80 pupils per classroom. Thus, with the PNEU Etoug-Ebe classroom situation, learning is ideal as the teacher is expected to know his pupils on an individual basis, and therefore follow up their academic progress easily. In such circumstances the degree of interaction between teacher and pupils is very high, and this promotes interactive learning.

Generally, as observed earlier, the Anglophone population dominated for each classroom except for Class Four A where there were 11 Anglophone children as against 17 Francophone children, and Class Six B where there were 10 Anglophone children as against 12 Francophone children. Apart from these two cases, the Francophone population in each class closely competed with that of Anglophones. When we enquired why there were so many Francophone children in the school than was to be expected following the school policy, we were made to understand that admission into the school is done on a first come first serve basis. This implies that those who came first for admission were considered, notwithstanding whether they were Anglophones or Francophones. There is no doubt that the school fees of 105,000 FRS CFA (approximately \$175.00) charged annually by the school for

¹¹ The parents chosen for the interview were those who were readily available.

¹² Although these children are of Francophone parentage, they have been studying in the Anglophone system of education since Nursery I and so should be rightly considered as Anglophones. Unfortunately, in Cameroon, belonging to the Anglophone or Francophone community does not follow any real linguistic considerations; the criteria for judgment are generally ideological and political. Anglophoiness in Cameroon is linked to one's region of origin (those from the South-West and North-West provinces), and perhaps has very little to do with the purely language factor.

each child (1999-2000 and 2000-2001 academic years) are relatively high by Cameroonian standards. Consequently, only parents with a comfortable socioeconomic background, many of whom are Francophones, could afford to send their children there. These parents belonged to different walks of life, among them lawyers, researchers, teachers, diplomats, businessmen, engineers, medical doctors and pharmacists. Thus the Cameroon experience, like other immersion programs, draws considerably more enrolment from higher socioeconomic groups (Harley 1991: 12). It should be noted that these parents participated actively in the smooth running of the institution through the parent-teacher association, and therefore contributed in the success of their children.

Table 2: Population Distribution of Anglophones and Francophones per Classroom for Class Four for the academic year 1999/2000

Classroom	Anglophones	Francophones	Total
A	11	17	28
B	16	12	28
C	18	13	31
D	15	13	28
Total	60	55	115

Table 3: Population Distribution of Anglophones and Francophones per Classroom for Class Five for the academic year 1999/2000

Classroom	Anglophones	Francophones	Total
A	16	13	29
B	16	15	31
C	20	9	29
Total	52	37	89

Table 4: Population Distribution of Anglophones and Francophones per Classroom for Class Six for the academic year 1999/2000

Classroom	Anglophones	Francophones	Total
A	11	10	21
B	10	12	22
C	12	10	22
Total	33	32	65

The 60 children of Francophone background who filled the questionnaire under the close supervision of their class teachers¹³ were generally between the ages of 9 and 12. Out of the 60, 45 of them (75%) began their primary education at PNEU Etoug-Ebe while the remaining came in from other institutions. The questions asked them centered on the following: their mother tongue, language use at home with parents, language use with playmates, language use in school with peers, their attitude towards English language in general and as a subject in school, academic performance in school, how they like the school, whether or not they like their teachers, whether or not they would like to continue their studies in the Anglophone system, and their attitude towards their Anglophone peers.

Of the 60 questionnaires that were sent to the children's parents, 55 parents returned the questionnaires. Among the questions asked the parents featured the following: their socioeconomic status, their educational background, competence in English, whether the children were exposed to English at home, why they decided to send their children to an Anglophone primary school, the overall performance of their children in school, whether their children received home tuition, whether they would like their children to continue in this system of education, etc. The teachers were very helpful in

¹³ However, the teachers did not influence the responses of the respondents.

serving as a link between the parents and the researcher, thereby facilitating the administration of questionnaires.

Another questionnaire was addressed to the teachers in the school, who were all encouraged to participate in the exercise by the school administration. Thus all the 33 teachers of the school filled the questionnaires designed for them. Questions addressed to the teachers had to do with their professional qualification, pedagogic strategies used to foster learning, the academic performance of the target population, the use of language by the target population, and the relationship between the Francophone children and their Anglophone peers.

4.3. Findings and discussion

Out of the 60 pupils, 55 (91.67%) were initiated into the Anglophone system of education by their parents. For the remaining, they were either encouraged to attend the school by family friends, neighbors or relatives. Parents therefore played an important role in the choice of this educational model for their children. This is obvious because even when the initiative comes from friends, neighbors or relatives, the parents' consent usually plays a determinant role in the final decision. From the parents' responses, we gathered that some parents sent their children to these schools because they themselves have had the opportunity of studying in the Anglophone system of education, especially at the tertiary level, or admired the Anglophone system of education, or were simply inspired by the material and social benefits to be reaped from such an educational system. Another strong reason advanced by parents for sending their children to the school was to enable them study English, in view of the dominant place of English in the world. All the parents encouraged their children's efforts in pursuing the Anglophone system of education. They were globally satisfied with the educational system in place at PNEU Etoug-Ebe, and none of them regretted having sent his/her child to this institution. On the contrary, they even encouraged other Francophone parents to send their children to Anglophone schools. It is equally important to note that the Francophone parents believed that when their children study in Anglophone schools, they easily acquire bilingual competence in the two official languages. Some parents interviewed affirm that the educational model adopted by their children enhances the integration of the two main linguistic communities in the country, the Anglophone and Francophone communities. In all, Francophone parents who send their children to study in Anglophone primary schools, like other parents in situations of bilingual education, are generally "well informed, committed to bilingualism, and active participants in their children's education" (García 1997: 418). On their part, the pupils were unanimous in asserting that they enjoyed the Anglophone system of education. Asked what system of education they would prefer were they to decide for themselves, all of them (100%) agreed that they preferred the Anglophone system not only for primary education but also for the rest of their educational life. This finding contrasts with that of Njeck (1992) who studied students involved in bilingual education at the tertiary level and where 88% of respondents at the University of Yaoundé preferred their LO1 for instruction, claiming that the LO2 constitutes a handicap to academic attainment. Thus the students involved in early total immersion programs are more favorable to bilingual education than those in late bilingual education programs.

All the pupils claimed that they faced no language barrier in school. They seemed to have adequately mastered the English language to such an extent that language no longer constituted a barrier for them. This can be understood since they all have at least three years of primary education behind them, and so have successfully adapted themselves to their new linguistic environment. Consequently, they all used English in the company of their peers, except during French classes, and made friends indiscriminately from the two linguistic communities. The PNEU case study reveals that children of Francophone background do not have any real handicap in English when compared to their Anglophone peers. On the contrary, they are fluent in both English and French. Consequently, they contribute significantly in bringing bilingualism closer to the home, for they serve as a source of inspiration not only to their brothers and sisters, but also to other family relatives, friends, neighbors and the community at large who are encouraged by their example to attend similar institutions. In fact, Francophone children who attend Anglophone primary schools are very much admired by other Francophone children in the community.

Our classroom observation revealed that the children expressed themselves freely in class, as did their Anglophone peers. The teachers confirmed that for children of Francophone background, English did in no way constitute a handicap to their academic progress. They evaluated the success rate of

these children at about 90%, emphasizing that some of them featured among the best in their respective classes. In the teachers' opinion, the children of Francophone background did not particularly need any extra language classes to cope with the LO2. It is worth noting that in the area of language teaching, PNEU Etoug-Ebe lays emphasis on the four skills (speaking, listening, writing and reading) as essential for any comprehensive acquisition and use of language. The importance attached to these skills stems from the fact that they are essential in helping the students develop high levels of communicative competence.

As far as the French language is concerned, 8 hours of French were taught weekly, an indication of the importance of French in the school curriculum in keeping with the policy of official language bilingualism. Although all the Francophone children interviewed claimed that they studied French with the same ease as they studied English, 18 respondents out of 60 (30%) affirmed that they did not like the French language course. This group of pupils probably believes that they came to PNEU Etoug-Ebe to study English and not French, in which they claim to be proficient. Such an attitude may have negative long-term repercussions on the proficiency of some of these children in the LO1, thus leading to subtractive bilingualism.

Out of the 60 pupils, 24 (40%) agreed that they receive home tuition. This implies that the children furnish a lot of effort in their academic work. Asked if their children needed home tuition, 60% of the parents saw the need for home tuition while 40% of them did not see the need to rely on home tuition. Here it should be noted that the tendency to rely on home tuition was not only observed among children of Francophone background, but also among children of Anglophone background. It was brought to our notice by one of the teachers that many children resort to home tuition because the spirit of competition in the school is very keen, a normal situation for such an elitist school.

Concerning the overall performance of the children, it was generally satisfactory. The parents were on the whole satisfied with their children's performances. While 72.73% of the parents (40) said they were **very satisfied** with their children's performances, 27.27% (15) said they were **satisfied** with their children's performances. The fact that all the 32 pupils of Francophone background in Class Six passed in the Government Common Entrance and FSLC examinations, the two official examinations which mark the end of primary education, is ample proof of the brilliant performances recorded by the target population. Such overwhelming academic success should be credited partly to the parents, the teachers and the institution¹⁴. While some parents resort to the services of a home teacher, especially in the advanced classes, the class teachers spend extra time and effort to help weaker students in the classroom. Of course, institutional support is vital given that the school authorities discourage the use of the LO1 by children of Francophone background within school premises (except during French lessons), thereby facilitating their acquisition of the LO2 and ensuring their integration into the mainstream school system. Mention should also be made of the fact that institutional support is equally manifested at the level of follow-up activities such as discussing the progress of pupils with parents and taking special initiatives for weaker pupils, like in the organization of Saturday remedial classes.

Furthermore, we also tried to find out whether the Yaoundé linguistic environment being dominated by French does not hamper the learning of English by the Francophone children, since they will most certainly use English only in the classroom and resort to French or other languages out of the classroom. Our findings showed that the geographical situation of Yaoundé as the political capital of Cameroon encourages bilingual education more than other urban centers. Yaoundé is the host of diplomatic services, and offices of international organizations, regional organizations and NGOs. When one considers the fact that for many of these institutions English is the working language, there is little doubt that for the inhabitants of Yaoundé mastery of English should enable them gain access to the attractive labor market offered by these organizations. This is certainly a very important motivating factor. Consequently, although the Francophone children's background and environment does not encourage the frequent use of English out of the classroom, our multilingual respondents are no strangers to language learning in multilingual situations. After all, even their Anglophone peers, be it in the French-speaking or English-speaking part of the country, do not frequently use English out of the classroom.

¹⁴ Information obtained from the school testifies that between 1993 and 2000, pupils' performances stood at 100% for the two examinations. This means that during this period, no single candidate from the school failed in any of these examinations.

Francophone parents, it was observed, send their children to Anglophone primary schools so that they should master the English language and attain higher academic goals by pursuing studies in the Anglo-Saxon system of education. In other words, while permitting children of Francophone parentage acquire competence in the LO2, the English immersion initiative also enables them develop positive attitudes and cultural sensitivity towards Anglophone Cameroonians. This observation is in line with the idea that immersion programs help students develop positive attitudes towards target languages and cultures, and may help lower perceived barriers between social groups (Kinberg 2001: 40). Our study reveals that there is an additive form of biculturalism (Lambert 1985) given that the Francophone children are happy and proud to be part of the two cultures – Francophone and Anglophone.

The phenomenon of globalization seems to play in favor of the quest for Anglo-Saxon education by Francophone Cameroonian city dwellers. Francophone parents are of the opinion that the Anglophone system of education guarantees better academic and employment opportunities for their children not only within the country but also at the international level. Consequently, the socioeconomic advantages to be reaped by the children for being bilingual in English and French are strong motivating factors for the parents. In opting for this educational system as the surest way of attaining proficiency in English, the English language ceases to be viewed against the background of its situation in Cameroon as a minority language, lacking in prestige, and constantly assuming the second role as an official language. On the contrary, English is viewed in terms of its global world situation, where it is unquestionably the leading world language. It is this global image of English and its status in the world that encourages Francophone parents to send their children to Anglophone primary schools, and not so much because they like Anglophones or the English culture. Our point of view corroborates that of Simo Bobda (2001) who holds that “the Francophone views English not necessarily through the patriotic eye of a Cameroonian who wants to be a better citizen by learning the other language, but in terms of individual interests and the educational and professional opportunities it offers, especially abroad”.

Finally, one major preoccupation of the study is that of determining whether the educational experience presented above could be rightly termed immersion. According to Swain & Johnson (1997: 6-8), the core features of a prototypical immersion program could be subsumed as follows: the L2 is the medium of instruction; the immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum; overt support exists for the L1; the program aims for additive, not subtractive bilingualism; exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom; students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 proficiency; the teachers are bilingual; and the classroom culture is that of the local L1 community. In the context of the present study, the Francophone children have as LO1 French and LO2 English, which may not necessarily be their L1 and L2 respectively. As regards the core features of a prototypical immersion program, there is every indication from the study that the following criteria are met: a) the LO2 of the Francophone children is the medium of instruction, b) exposure of the Francophone children to the LO2 is largely confined to the classroom, c) the teachers are bilingual but not trained to operate in a bilingual educational context, d) by getting involved in this form of education the objective is additive bilingualism. However, the situation described in this paper fails to meet all the core features of immersion presented by Swain & Johnson (1997) above. First, both Anglophone and Francophone students are present in the same classroom, unlike in a typical immersion situation where all the children belong to the same linguistic background, having in common the L1. Second, the fact that the classes are originally intended for Anglophone students limits the applicability of the term immersion in this context. Third, unlike several traditional immersion programs where special classes or schools are created outside the mainstream school system, the Cameroon example does not follow this trend; it operates within the traditional school system. In fact, the Cameroon experience, as observed through Anglophone primary schools, looks more of a submersion program in that L2 speakers (in this case Francophones) with limited L2 proficiency (in this case English) are placed in classes dominated by and organized for L1 speakers (in this case Anglophones). Yet, while not being *sensu stricto* immersion, the experience described in this paper may jolly well be one of those “unwarranted extensions” of the term suggested by Swain and Johnson (1997: 12), at least as far as the Francophone students are concerned. Thus with the Cameroonian experience presented here, immersion education is not limited to the creation of special schools or programs wherein the children are taught partially or exclusively in their LO2. It entails children of the majority official language being encouraged to study exclusively in their minority official language as from the early stages of their educational life.

5. Conclusion

In view of the fact that the total English immersion practice is becoming more and more popular in Cameroon, it would be advisable for educational authorities in the country to pay some special attention to Anglophone primary schools that recruit large numbers of Francophone children. These originally intended English immersion programs have not been developed, given that educational and language education experts were never associated in the conception and elaboration of this initiative. Therefore, in designing syllabi and schemes of work, it is important to associate educational specialists, curriculum developers and language education experts. Teachers involved in such programs should benefit from some pre-service or in-service training, or at least some immersion teacher education programs that adequately prepare them to meet up with the demands of their French-speaking pupils. In addition, guidance counselors should be introduced in these schools to follow up the pedagogic activities of (Francophone) children, so as to identify their problems and areas of weaknesses in order to advise school authorities on how the educational system could be adapted to the specific needs of these pupils. It will also be interesting to study the performance of Francophone children who go through such programs when they get to secondary school, and observe their performances as well as their mastery of language skills. Such a study is feasible through specific case studies, even when the children are scattered all over in different secondary schools. In other words, there is a dire need for evaluation studies of this type of program such as that carried out by Ekane (1988; 1991) at the secondary school level on Bilingual Grammar School Buea graduates.

Another point of concern is that in Cameroon today, the number of Francophone children who attend Anglophone primary schools far outweighs the number of Anglophone children who attend Francophone primary schools¹⁵. If such a trend continues, Francophones would certainly have an extra linguistic edge over Anglophones, since in addition to French many of them will equally be proficient in English. Consequently, the evolution of official language bilingualism would be tilted in favor of Francophones, a situation likely to further endanger the place of Anglophones as a linguistic minority in the country.

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