



## The Special Bilingual Education Program: Pace-Setter for a Harmonized Educational System in Cameroon

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### Article History

Received: 17.09.2022  
Accepted: 22.10.2022  
Published: 29.10.2022

**Abstract:** This article considers the government's strategy to densify young learners' education in their Second Language (L2) through a Special Bilingual Education Program (SBEP) as a pace-setter for harmonizing the Anglo-saxon and the French subsystems of education. This article is guided by Foucault's (1997) theoretical perspective of Governmentality which according to Dean (1999), identifies an approach towards thinking about the state and different mentalities of government. Three hundred and eighty (316) informants from the SBEP centres provided data for this study through Questionnaires, Interviews and Observations. The results revealed that: there is a SBEP where learners are partially immersed in their L2 with a shift in teaching approach from the Skill-Based Approach (SBA) to the Competency-Based Approach (CBA); learners, teachers and parents have a positive attitude towards the program; parents from Francophone homes had already taken the lead in fully immersing their children in the Anglo-saxon subsystem of education; and teachers and learners have made proposals to ameliorate and maintain the program. This article recommends that rather than stick to the Arts Series, the program should consider including learners from both the Arts and Science Series in the Second Cycle.

**Keywords:** Governmentality, bilingual education, immersion, partial immersion, content-enriched language program.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Met (1998), language programs are usually driven by stated curricular objectives and expected outcomes that describe what students should know and be able to do with language. These outcomes as per Met (1998) determine what teachers teach and quite often how they teach (them). The SBEP is one of the programs that the government uses to build citizens. The objectives of the SBEP which was introduced in secondary schools in Cameroon in 2009, are geared towards using content-enriched-language courses and language courses for the promotion of communication in learners' L2. Echu (1999)

recounts that two large cultural groups exist in Cameroon - the Anglophones and the Francophones - based on the official languages English and French which were inherited from their colonialists, Britain and France. This ushered in Bilingual Education from the 1960s when the two Cameroons joined. Thus, Cameroon's educational system is constituted of two subsystems - the French and the Anglo-Saxon subsystems. Cameroonians have to function in their official bilingual culture and multilingual indigenous cultures. Jikong (1999) as well as Ayafor (2005) present the complexity of the language situation in Cameroon as having not only two official languages but also lingua francas such as Pidgin English and Ffulde and between 250 and 300 home languages.

**Citation:** Judith Nkongho Ayuk (2022). The Special Bilingual Education Program: Pace-Setter for a Harmonized Educational System in Cameroon. *Glob Acad J Linguist Lit*; Vol-4, Iss-5 pp-169-174.

Essambe (2006) notes that, faced with this state of affairs, the government had to select a common language or languages for use both at the level of the administration and at the local community levels. So English and French made their way into the system first, in the university then the other schools. This article, acknowledges the enormous effort furnished by previous researchers, and goes further to evaluate the SBEP that was put in place to promote bilingual education and bilingualism in secondary schools. The SBEP program involves teaching/learning the L2 through partial immersion with the introduction of some content subjects and the Competency Based Approach.

### Research Problem

When the first set of learners enrolled in the SBEP programme in 2009, it was projected that a crop of very bilingual Cameroonians would emerge by 2016 but it has not been so as the number of students found at the exit is far less than at the entry. It has also been realised that the program has more learners from the Francophone background wanting to study in English than learners from the Anglophone background wanting to study in French. What could account for this trend? Why should there be a Special Bilingual Education Programme? Considering the present state of art, the SBEP would lead to a harmonized Cameroonian system of education if the courses were strategically selected if it cut across both the Science and the Arts Series.

### Frame of Analysis - Governmentality

Governmentality according to Dean (1999), identifies an approach towards thinking about the state and different mentalities of government. Government here is conceptualised in its general meaning as 'conduct of conduct', and not necessarily in political terms as we tend to understand government nowadays. To Foucault (1997:364): We pass from an art of governing whose principles were derived from the traditional virtues (wisdom, justice, liberality, respect for divine laws and human customs) from common skills (prudence, reflected decisions, care in surrounding oneself with the best advisers) to an art of governing that finds the principles of its rationality and the specific domain of its applications in the state.

Government here Lemke (2013) emphasises, is the "right disposition of things": helping to show in what ways individuals and social groups are governed by freedom and choice. What mechanisms are used by the government to educate and empower learners in order to minimise risks in the population?

### METHODOLOGY

Data for this research were collected through primary and secondary sources. The target

population were 316 learner-participants from six schools - 178 from the French subsystem and 138 from the Anglo-saxon subsystem (GBHS Etougebe; GBHS Mendong; GBHS Nkoleton; GHS Ngoaekelle; GHS Ngoussou Ngoulemekong; and some Bilingual II students of the Yaounde University I), 54 teachers from the above mentioned schools 2 Principals, 3 Vice Principals and 3 Focal Points, 3 National Pedagogic Inspectors.

The primary sources of data were Questionnaires, Observations and Interviews while the secondary sources were ministerial texts, sample examination papers, lesson plans, and syllabuses. Data from interviews were provided by school and ministerial authorities.

### Results and Discussion of Findings

With regards to responses from the Learners' Questionnaire, the results reveal that: All learners are recruited into the SBEP through a selection test; 52.7% of them had prior knowledge of the program while 47.3% had not; 40.67% indicate that the most efficient mode of publicity of the program is the family, 24.67 % say it is friends, 20.67% say it is the media, 04.67% say it is neighbours, and 04.67% say it is in primary school. This implies that the state should intensify the flow of information to families to reach more learners. It was revealed that, 72.46% of the learners who are not in the program would have loved to be in it if they had not failed the selection test while 27.54% would not want to be in the program. This calls for re-strategizing to give a chance to these learners who are sufficiently motivated to be in the program. It was also realised that 82.86% of Francophone parents voluntarily immerse their children in the Anglo-Saxon system of education while 17.14% do not. With regards to attitudes towards the program, 89.39% assert that the program has a positive impact on the bilingualism of the class while 10.61% do not. As per parents' attitude, 82.49% have a positive attitude towards the program contrary to 17.51% whose attitudes are negative. This positive attitude is buttressed by 88.82% learner-respondents who support the claim that the class is more than 50% bilingual due to the SBEP as opposed to 11.18% who do not think so. Even though 78.97% prefer to communicate more in French than English, contrary to 21.03% who prefer to communicate more in English than in French, there is still evidence of communication in both L2s among the learners.

It came to light that 66.87% learner-respondents find the Speaking skill to be the more challenging productive skill while 33.13% consider Writing to be more challenging. This calls for an augmentation of activities that will enhance

speaking to help the learners to overcome the difficulties in mastering the Speaking skills. With their certificates, 40.93% would like to go abroad to seek better openings 24.49% would like to work in the public service as bilingual language teachers, 23.93% would work in the public service as translators and 10.56% would like to be independent managers of their own private language centres. With a higher number desiring to leave the country, the government has to look for techniques to keep these citizens in the country. With regards to continuity, 83.34% against 16.66% of learner-respondents would like to continue in the program so they suggest areas where the program should be revisited thus - choosing the target language subject (32.03%), textbook content (15.16%), class of start of program (13.44%), creation of the program for the Sciences in the Second Cycle (13.44%) training teachers (12.96%) and type of learners selected (12.96%).

For the Teachers' Questionnaire, we gathered that 90.74% are trained against 9.26% untrained, with an average of 15 years experience in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and teachers for content subjects are more readily available in bilingual schools than in monolingual schools. 62.96% of teacher-respondents assert that they receive refreshers while 37.04% do not, 44.44% receive supervision from hierarchy contrary to 55.56% who do not and 11.11% receive incentives while 88.89% do not. As per challenges, ownership of textbooks by learners is the most recurrent challenge as 40.81% of the teachers record, followed by learners' oral production (31.81%) and availability of teachers (27.27%). To make teaching feasible, out of 54 teacher-respondents, they give their frequency of use of teaching aids thus: 5 (9.26%) - always; 6(11.11%) - often; 34 (62.96%) - sometimes; 8(14.81%) rarely; and 1(1.85%) never. They also rearrange the classroom when need be as revealed by - 8(14.81%) always; 10(18.52%) often; 27(50%) sometimes; 5(9.26) rarely; and 4(7.41) never. Pair and group work are carried out by 19(35.19%) always; 16(29.63%) often; 17(31.48%) sometimes; 2(3.7%) rarely; and 0% never. Teachers vary teaching activities 28(51.85%) always; 15(27.78%) often; 11(20.37%) sometimes; 0% for rarely and never respectively. Teachers appreciate learners with prizes (5/54), claps (9/54), marks (20/54), while 4/54 do nothing to appreciate learners. From responses, chalk is the item that all 54 teacher-respondents say the school administration provides, followed by teachers (26/54), prizes (9/54) the internet (6/54) and charts/posters (1/54) teachers. 87.04% of the teachers like to continue in the program 12.96% do not. 46/54 (85%) assert that the program has made the learners more bilingual as

opposed to 15% who do not agree. The teacher-respondents make suggestions for improvement as follows - train teachers (33.6%), check the textbook content (25.6%), choice of subjects (20.8%), type of learners (15.2%) and class of start of program (4.8%). They also make suggestions for the preferred target language for subjects - in the Anglo-Saxon subsystem, 28 counts went for subjects to be taught only in English, 14 counts for subjects to be taught only in French and 6 counts went for subjects to be taught in both English and French languages. In the French subsystem, 161 counts were recorded for subjects to be taught in English, 92 in French and 125 in both English and French.

It was gathered through interviews that in 2012, Pedagogic Inspectors met in Kribi to draw up a syllabus for the SBEP. A Ministerial Circular was signed implementing the new syllabus. It was also gathered that, Pedagogic Inspectors hold seminars to help teachers through the changes in the syllabus and teaching method. Observation in the field revealed that the teachers are implementing the new syllabus. An evaluation of the syllabus revealed that the CBA is strongly encouraged and some aspects of it were observed in the lessons.

It can be stated that, there should be a SBEP because parents, learners and teachers appreciate it. According to Echu (2005), Francophone parents had taken the lead by immersing their children in the Anglo-saxon subsystem of education for many years now. So the government is simply following the parents' lead. However since the government's program is not 100% immersion, it can accommodate more learners and better still be spread to involve all learners in bilingual schools.

### **Choice and Nature of the SBEP**

Several methods of bilingual education have been used by different countries worldwide, one of them is partial immersion which, the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) chose to include in the SBEP. The SBEP focuses on training bilingual learners from the first to the seventh year in college through their L2, English for Francophones and French for Anglophones, in linguistic and non-linguistic subjects. One of the objectives is to introduce some content through the learner's L2. National Inspector Mr Fouda says that the SBEP is lighter than the previous Man O War Bay model which required that the learners take courses of both the Anglo-saxon and the French subsystems. The form of bilingual education called immersion education that is used at Katoh is generally accepted to have started in Quebec, Canada, as per Botswick (1999). Botswick (1999) highlights that language immersion is an approach to foreign language instruction in which the usual curricular activities

are conducted in a foreign language. The new language is the medium of instruction as well as the object of instruction. The immersion students acquire the necessary language skills to understand and communicate in the subject matter set out in the school program of instruction. They follow the same curricular, and in some instances, use the same materials as those used in the non-immersion schools of their district. He refers to one of the world's leading authorities on immersion education, Fred Genesee (1997: 1) whose definition of immersion specifies that:

Generally speaking, at least 50% of instruction during a given academic year must be provided through the second language for the program to be regarded as immersion. Programs in which one subject and language arts are taught through the second language are generally identified as enriched second language programs.

Lyster (1998) adds that this form of bilingual education aims for additive bilingualism by providing students with a sheltered classroom environment in which they receive at least half of their subject matter through the medium of a language that they are learning as a second/foreign, heritage, or indigenous language. If the content received in the target language is not up to 50%, Met (1998) indicates that the program is considered a content-enriched language program. Thus the SBEP falls within the content-enriched language course appellation as it doesn't hit the 50% mark. However, the following core features which Swain and Johnson (1997:15) identified for immersion programs are equally found in the SBEP making the program worthy:

1. The L2 is a medium of instruction - in the SBEP, the L2 is the medium of instruction in Modules 2 and 3;
2. The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 Curriculum - The SBEP syllabus specifies that for the selected content subject, the teachers should confer the curriculum of the L1 so, the content is exactly the same;
3. Overt support exists for the L1;
4. The program aims for additive bilingualism - the goal of the SBEP is for the learners to be bilingual and the analyses reveal that these learners become bilingual;
5. Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom - exposure in the SBEP is both in (through Modules 1 and 2) and out (through Module 3) of the classroom;
6. Students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 proficiency -the SBEP selects learners through a competitive exam;
7. The teachers are bilingual - the SBEP has some bilingual; and

8. The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community - for the SBEP, the classroom culture is that of the L1.

Given that some core features can be traced in the SBEP, it can be said that the program is set for additive bilingualism. As content subjects are used as a medium of instruction, it is necessary for the designers to pay attention to the subjects which are selected for that purpose.

### **Choice of Content Subject(s)**

Content subjects are subjects that are taught through the learner's L2 where focus is to use the language as a medium for learning content and not the language. Being very sensitive for several reasons Met (1998), proposes the following guidelines for selecting content subjects for content-enriched language courses:

#### **i. The degree to which the Content is important:**

Select content that is accessible in light of the language proficiencies of students. SBEP learners receive instruction in content subjects in their L2 and are evaluated according to the curriculum of the L1. The SBEP learners are also evaluated in content subjects in the same way as they would have been evaluated if the content had been taught in their L1 because the curriculum is exactly the same as the curriculum for the L1 learners. Thus content instructions substitute for instruction in first language.

#### **ii. The Degree to which Content-Driven Instruction is the Sole or Primary Vehicle for the Development of Language Skills**

If the content is the major source of language development, it is important to select subject matter that will provide students with an opportunity to attain the range of language proficiencies they are expected to develop. The content subject in the SBEP is a supplementary source of language development - the main source being the subjects of the linguistic module, Intensive English and Literature Awareness.

#### **iii. The Extent of Content-based Instruction**

The more subjects and the greater the amount of time-spent learning contents in the L2, the greater the likelihood that a wider range of language skills will develop over time. For example in immersion programs, sufficient interactions between teachers and students (and among students) provide for the development of language function and vocabulary beyond those encountered in content itself. Learners in the SBEP use the target language with their content target language teachers. It was observed and gathered from interviews that, the learners of both subsystems feel

more comfortable communicating in French than in English. As a result of this, learners in the Anglo-saxon subsystem have an edge over those of the French subsystem as they develop their vocabulary and language functioning more in French than the Francophones develop in English (since the context in which they live is French-dominated).

#### **iv. The Proficiency of Students upon Entry into the Course or Program**

When students enter with some degree of language proficiency (as in the SBEP) and /or have sources of language input either in other language classes or outside the classroom, then concerns about the constraints of certain subjects may be addressed. In L2 content courses that presuppose intermediate or higher levels of proficiency prior to course enrolment, students will have had previous exposure and opportunities to develop language skills. Those gained through study of course content will complement the language skills already developed.

#### **Planning for Language Growth**

Every L2 content lesson should result in language growth. Snow (2013) refers to the benefit from content lessons as language objectives in content lessons. These objectives could be content-obligatory and content-compatible. For example, to describe your family in Citizenship, learners cannot discuss satisfactorily without knowing family names like father, mother, wife, nephew, or niece. In Sports, we can teach learners about weight, lengths or sizes in different games and learners can play games without mastering these details but they use the skill to measure other things. The SBEP plans to offer quality content to young Cameroonians and prepare them for smooth insertion into the job market.

#### **The Syllabus Changes**

Having opted for the program where the learners receive content in L2, the syllabus of the SBEP had to be adjusted in three areas with focus on:

A shift in teaching approach from the Content/Skill Based-Learning Approach to the Competency-Based Approach where the syllabus carries suggested competence indicators with examples; a shift from a school cut off from society to one that prepares citizens for a smooth insertion into sociocultural and economic activities; and a shift from an evaluation of knowledge to that of competences necessary for sustainable development. These shifts are expected to help learners develop problem-solving skills by providing solutions to problems that are raised.

#### **How the Modules could help to Advance the SBEP Learner**

According to (MINESEC 2014), the Linguistic and Literary Modules and the Non-Linguistic Modules have not been randomly selected. They have been selected with regards to the role that they would play in helping the SBEP learner advance. Fossi (2013) said that the linguistic module French will enable learners acquire and consolidate the base structures of the language - phonology, morphology, grammar, syntax, vocabulary - learners will be initiated on cultural rituals (such as polite forms, gestures, body language, mimicry and idiomatic expressions). Literature will be used to expose learners to the culture of the target language (such as songs, stories, poems, sketches). The Non-Linguistic Modules give learners the opportunity to be immersed in the culture of the target language thus serving a dual purpose: that of learning the culture and the language at the same time. Met (1998) adds that the rationale for integrating language and content-based courses or programs of language instructions are a natural concomitant of communicative approaches to second/foreign language instruction that emphasize the use of language to interpret, express and negotiate meaning.

#### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This article set out to find out why there should be a SBEP in Cameroon. Data gathered led to the conclusion that the program is worthwhile because the government considers it as a means by which internal risks of the economy are reduced through empowering the citizens. Immediate participants in the program all have a positive attitude towards the program. The parents from the Francophone background had already taken the lead by immersing their children in the Anglo-Saxon subsystem of education. It was gathered that some learners who are not in the program would love to belong especially as the program improves the bilingualism of the learners. This additive bilingualism factor makes many science-inclined learners to want to continue in the Second Cycle. Unfortunately, their desire is punctured by the absence of the program in the Second Cycle in the Science section. So for better results, the program should be extended to the Science Section.

From the analyses of data from Teachers' Questionnaire it can be concluded that there are trained TESL teachers who take refreshers from their supervisory Ministry to acquaint themselves with new developments in the education sector. Observation in the field revealed that some aspects of the CBA, the teaching method approved for the SBEP are practised by the teachers. Since Francophone parents had taken the lead in the

Anglo-Saxon subsystem and teacher and learner-respondents' responses point to using more English than French in teaching the subjects of the program the program could be revisited to:

Increase the number of subjects taught through the English language for an eventual harmonization of the two subsystems;

Identify subjects in both English and French that can best enhance additive bilingualism; and Accommodate the many willing learners who cannot be part of the program because they fail the selection test.

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