



The impact of the Special Bilingual Education Program on the French Language Speaking and Writing Skills of Anglophone Students in Cameroon: A Case Study of the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French Paper

Ngala Bernard Ndzi^{1*}

¹Department of Sciences of Education, Higher Teachers' Training College of the University of Maroua

*Corresponding Author

Ngala Bernard Ndzi

Department of Sciences of Education,
Higher Teachers' Training College of
the University of Maroua

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Abstract: Since the reunification of the British Southern Cameroons with the French East Cameroon in 1961 which saw the birth of the Federal Republic of Cameroon, frantic efforts have been made to foster national unity through the promotion of English-French official language bilingualism policy in school. The latest effort in this direction is the creation in 2009 of a late partial immersion program dubbed, the *Special Bilingual Education Program (SBEP)*. The program aims to train bilingual young Cameroonians, capable of demonstrating mastery of English and French irrespective of their educational sub-system of origin. Drawing from the *outcomes level* of Spolsky, Green, and Read's (1976) model for the description, analysis and evaluation of bilingual education, this paper examines the impact of the Special Bilingual Education Program on the development of the French language speaking and writing skills of students at the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French. The analysis of data gotten from interviews with SBEP teachers and from GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French Subject Reports revealed that since 2016, the Special Bilingual education program has had a greater impact on the development of the French language speaking skills of Anglophone students than on their writing skills in French. In order to improve on learners' speaking and writing skills in French, a blueprint based on the collaboration between teachers of French and those of content subjects has been recommended, amongst other measures.

Keywords: French, Bilingual Education, Speaking Skills, Writing Skills, Impact.

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INTRODUCTION

Cameroon is an English-French bilingual country thanks to her Franco-British colonial history. Since the advent of the Federal Republic of Cameroon in 1961 following the reunification of the British Southern Cameroons with the already independent East Cameroon, *la République du Cameroun* in October 1961, the greatest concern of the State since

then has been the need to safeguard the national unity of Cameroon. In a context of linguistic diversity characterized by the existence of more than 250 national languages (Jikong, 1999; Ayafor, 2005; Echu, 1999; Echu, 2003; Echu, 2005), the State has since 1961 considered the promotion of the Franco-British linguistic heritage, English and French languages, as tools to foster national cohesion. In order to meet this

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objective, the school system has since 1961 become an experimental tool for the promotion of official bilingualism. Unfortunately, several initiatives aimed at promoting official bilingualism in school like the creation of the Federal Bilingual Grammar School Man O War Bay Victoria in 1963 have not been sustainable. The State has continued to scout for better options of promoting official bilingualism in school. The latest option taken was creation of the Special Bilingual Education Program in 2008, a late partial immersion experimental program reminiscent of the Man O War Bay Victoria bilingual education experience.

In terms of outcomes, the Special Bilingual Education Program created through a ministerial circular in December 2008, aims at “producing perfectly bilingual students who master English and French irrespective of their original education sub-system” [1]. (Fossi, 2013; Ngamassu, 2012; Ngala, 2012). The immersion program offers learners “greater opportunities of using the other official language, thereby contributing to its mastery” [2].

In terms of composition, the Special Bilingual Education Program comprises three modules. Module 1 is consecrated to the teaching of Intensive English to French-speaking students in the French sub-system of education and the teaching of Intensive French to English-speaking students in the English sub-system of education. The intensity of this linguistic module lies principally in the initiation of learners to literary studies, *Initiation à la littérature*, to Anglophone students and *Literature Awareness*, to Francophone students. Module 2 cross-curricular in nature and constitutes the basis of the immersion program. It is dedicated to the teaching and learning of the following three non-linguistic subjects: citizenship (to Francophone students), *Éducation à la Citoyenneté et à la morale* (to Anglophone students), Sports and Physical education (to Francophone students), *Éducation Physique et sportive* (to Anglophone students), and Manual Labour (to Francophone students), *Travail Manuel* (to Anglophone students). Finally, Module 3 handles co-curricular activities outside the classroom whose aim is to help learners practice the use of the two official languages during language clubs, excursions, debates, etc.

In the English sub-system of education, Anglophone students of the Special Bilingual

Education Program are being assessed by the General Certificate of Education Board, GCEB, both at the GCE Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) and at the GCE Advanced Level (GCE A/L). At the GCE O/L, candidates sit in for the GCE Ordinary Level Special Bilingual Education French while at the GCE A/L, they sit in for the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French.

Sixteen years (2009-2025) after the creation, opening, running and assessment of learners of the Special Bilingual Education Program (henceforth SBEP) at the General Certificate of Education Board, GCEB, this paper examines the impact of the SBEP on the development of the speaking and writing skills of Anglophone students in the French language. In turn, the paper examines the research problem, the theoretical framework, the methodological framework of the study, results and discussion of findings and recommendations.

1. Problem of the Study

When the SBEP was created in 2008 and went operational in 40 pilot schools across the national territory, the projected outcomes of the programs were to “produce perfectly bilingual students who master English and French irrespective of their original education sub-system” [3]. To go by yearly subject reports from the examination panel of the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French, the performance of Anglophone students in French language writing skills (French essay writing & translation from English into French) at GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French has been on the decrease since the 2016 session of the examination. Shortcomings of candidates in their writing skills in French over the years range from poor syntactical organization of essays to poor vocabulary in French:

Poor mastery of grammar, tenses, spellings, vocabulary, expressions and syntax; Poor introductions and conclusions; Inability to organize ideas and points; Aimless narration and irrelevant material; Poor presentation of material, Poor mastery of the literature syllabus, Scanty and sketchy answers/essays, Botched up essays (seemingly pre-prepared) (2024 Subject Report for GCE A/L 0746 Special Bilingual Education French, SBE French)

Conversely, the performance of the GCE candidates in the oral paper of the Advanced Level

¹ Bapes, Bapes (2000). Circular Letter N° 28/08 of 02 December 2008 to organize the implementation of the Special Bilingual Education Program in secondary schools.

² Bapes, Bapes (2000). Circular Letter N° 28/08 of 02 December 2008 to organize the implementation of the

Special Bilingual Education Program in secondary schools.

³ Bapes, Bapes (2008). Circular Letter N° 28/08 of 02 December 2008 to organize the implementation of the Special Bilingual Education Program in secondary schools.

Special Bilingual Education French has been on the increase since the 2016 session of the examination. What is the impact of the SBEP on the development of the French language writing and speaking skills of Anglophone students? What is the composition of the GCE A/L Special Bilingual Education French paper? What factors account for the decline in the development of the anglophone learners' writing skills in French as compared to the development of their speaking skills? How can the tides be turned?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Alobwede (2023) examined the implementation of bilingual education in secondary schools in Cameroon the aim of which was to train young Cameroonians who would be able who will be able to produce quality scientific and artistic works in English and French. He questioned the inability of young Cameroonians to demonstrate mastery of the two official languages through the production of quality scientific and artistic works sixty years after the implementation of bilingual education. Alobwede blamed this situation on the inappropriate curricula and methodology adopted in the teaching of English and French. Alobwede's work evaluates the linguistic outcomes of the teaching and learning of English and French in the English and French sub-systems of education in juxtaposed monolingual settings. This study seeks to evaluate the linguistic outcomes of the teaching and learning of the French language by English-speaking students within the context of an immersion or bilingual education incarnated by the Special bilingual education program.

Nkongho (2022) conducted doctoral research on the evaluation of the implementation of the Special Bilingual Education Program. She sought to identify gaps in the program's implementation. Her study which equally sought to evaluate the linguistic outcomes of the Special Bilingual Education Program revealed that the SBEP helped learners become bilingual. If Nkongho's (2022) work made a general assessment of the linguistic impact of the SBEP on learners, this study adopts a more specific approach to the assessment of the linguistic competences of the SBEP in the French language by comparing the speaking and writing skills attained in the language. Furthermore, instead of relying on the opinions of learners about their rate of bilingualism as did Nkongho, this study uses official results of the summative assessment of the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French Paper and subject reports as basis for the assessment of the speaking and writing skills of the learners in French.

Kouega and Dempowo (2022) examined the implementation of the Special Bilingual Education Program in some pilot schools in Cameroon. In terms of the linguistic outcomes of the SBEP, their study

revealed that the SBEP has fallen short of expectations given that it cannot produce bilingual young Cameroonians by the time learners exit from the program. The authors then proposed a bilingual program which could render learners more bilingual. If the study by Kouega and Dempowo (2022) evaluates the linguistic outcomes of the SBEP, the general evaluation is limited to the French sub-system of education. This study evaluates the linguistic outcomes of the SBEP learners in the English sub-system of education, specifically the impact of the program on the development of the speaking and writing skills of the learners in the French language.

3. Theoretical framework: Spolsky, Green, and Read's Model of Bilingual Education (1976)

Spolsky, Green, and Read (1976) propose a model that describes, analyses and evaluates the effectiveness of a bilingual education program. Their model serves as a tool for decision -making in the hands of bilingual education program administrators. Built around three hexagons, Spolsky, Green, and Read's model presents three levels of analyzing the functioning of a bilingual education program: the *situational level*, the *operational level* that informs administrators of factors affecting the program negatively or positively and the *outcomes or effects level* where the results of the program's implementation are analyzed. This study examines the implementation of the SBEP both at the operational level and at the outcomes or effects level. It analyses the performance of the SBEP candidates at the GCE A/L Special Bilingual Education French and the factors that are affecting the performance of candidates in their writing skills in French.

4. METHODOLOGY

Data for this study came from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data collection included a WhatsApp group discussion that involved ten SBEP teachers of *Français Intensif, Éducation à la Citoyenneté et à la morale, Éducation Physique et sportive*, and *Travail Manuel* in the English sub-system of education, each teacher representing a region in Cameroon. A purposeful sampling technique was used in the selection of teachers for the group discussion. During the group discussion, the teachers were presented the results trends at the GCE A/L Special Bilingual Education French in the speaking and the writing skills and were asked to justify, from their classroom experiences, the downward trends in the performance of anglophone SBEP learners in the French essay paper and translation as well as the upward trends in the performance of these learners in the oral part of the GCE A/L Special Bilingual Education French. Secondary sources of data collection included, SBEP syllabuses, circulars from the Ministry of Secondary

Education on the implementation of the SBEP, examination question papers and yearly subject reports of the GCE A/L Special Bilingual Education French paper.

5. Presentation of Findings

In turn, this section presents and discusses the results obtained from the analysis of the data collected: composition of the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French paper, candidates' performance in **communication orale** (paper 4) in

French from 2016 to 2024, candidates' performance in *Redaction & Traduction* (paper 3).

5.1 Composition of GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French Paper

The GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French comprises four papers (Table 1) : Paper 1: Multiple Choice Questions, Paper 2: *Littérature, Éducation Physique et Sportive /Éducation à la Citoyenneté et à la Morale*, Paper 3 : *Rédaction et Traduction* and Paper 4 : *communication orale*.

Table 1: Format and syllabus of the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French

Paper	Mode of assessment	Assessment objectives	Weighting	Duration
1	Written paper:50 multiple-choice questions in grammar, vocabulary and expressions, translation, literary texts and content subjects: <i>Education à la Citoyenneté et à la Morale</i> and <i>Education Physique et Sportive</i>	To assess students' ability to recall, apply, analyze, synthesize and assess concepts	20%	1 hour 30 minutes
2	<i>Littérature, Éducation Physique et Sportive /Éducation à la Citoyenneté et à la Morale</i>	To assess candidates' ability to recall, apply, analyze, synthesize and make judgments on literary techniques, concepts,	40%	3 hours
3	<i>Rédaction & Traduction</i> : Two sections. Section one, essay writing, proposes three (3) questions and the candidate is expected to answer just one	To assess the candidate's ability to communicate in writing in real-life situation contexts	30%	3 hours
4	Paper 4, Practicals: <i>Communication orale</i>	To assess the candidate's ability to read and understand, listen and discuss orally on a given topic in French	10%	20 minutes

Source: Ministerial order of 28th May 2015 to define the format and syllabus of the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French paper

As can be seen from the table above, paper 1 takes the form of multiple-choice questions. The intention of this paper is to test candidates' ability to recall, apply, analyze, synthesize and assess concepts in grammar, vocabulary and expressions, translation and literary texts as well as on the content subjects: *Education à la Citoyenneté et à la Morale (ECM)* and *Education Physique et Sportive (EPS)*.

Paper 2 comprises *Littérature, Éducation Physique et Sportive /Éducation à la Citoyenneté et à la Morale*. The objective of this paper is to assess the candidates' ability to recall, apply, analyze, synthesize and make judgments on literary techniques, concepts, themes, points of view, characters and their portraiture, plot, setting and organization of ideas in view of communicating and using literary knowledge. It equally assesses the candidates' ability to show understanding and demonstrate skills which can enable them to deal with citizenship, sports and physical education issues.

Paper 3 which comprises *Rédaction & Traduction* evaluates the writing skills of candidates in the French language in the areas of essay writing and translation. This paper has two sections. Section one, essay writing, proposes three (3) questions and the candidate is expected to answer just one. The basis of this paper is to assess the candidate's ability to communicate in writing. The candidate is thus given the opportunity to express themselves in French on one of three life situation contexts. Section two is made up of two passages for translation, one from English into French and the other from French into English. The objective here is to assess not only the candidates' ability to express themselves in French, but also the ability to understand meaning in one language and transferring it to the other.

Paper 4, *Communication orale*, constitutes the oral and practical part of the examination. This part paper aims to assess the candidate's ability to read and understand, listen and discuss orally on a given topic in French. The candidate chooses one of

four topics drawn from practical life situations, takes ten minutes to prepare and then discusses with a jury for about ten minutes. He/she is then assessed following set criteria on fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation and intonation, grammar and syntax and general aptness to communicate orally (see Appendix 1).

5.2 Candidates' Performance in *Communication Orale* from 2016 to 2024

SBEP candidates were assessed for the first time in the oral part of the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French during the 2016 June session of the examination. The Special Bilingual Education French paper (0746) was in its ninth year of evaluation in June 2024.

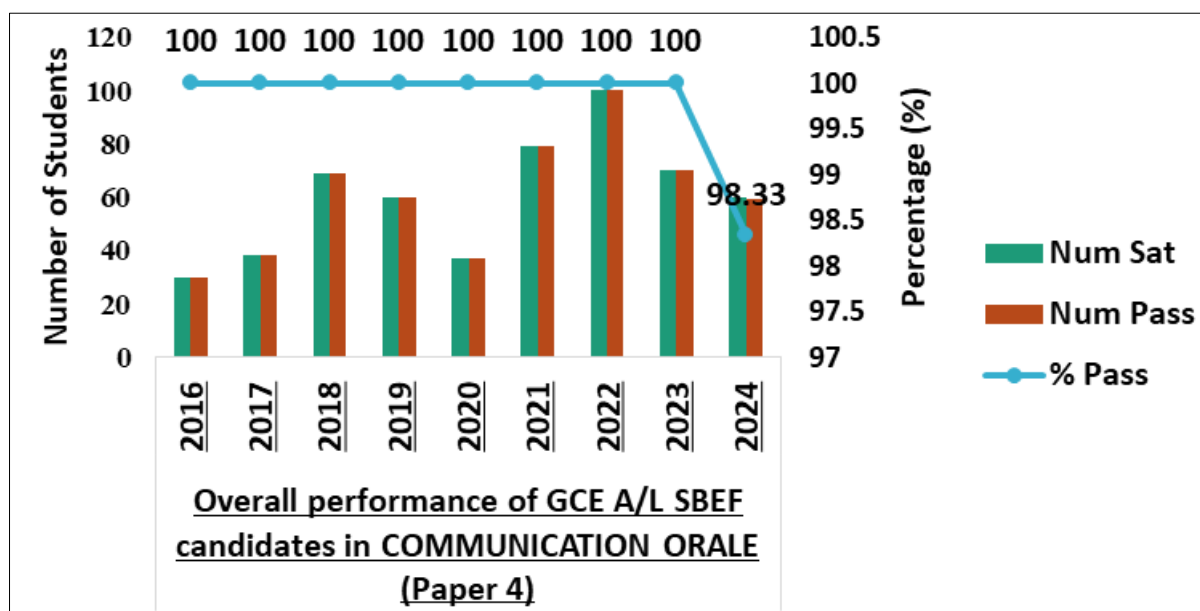


Fig. 1: Candidates' performance in *communication orale* from 2016 to 2024

Source: Subject Reports for 0746, GCE A/L SBE-French

After nine years of evaluation of the Special Bilingual Education French paper, yearly reports from the subject's examination panel reveal with excellent performance in candidates' oral skills in French. Fig 1 above indicates that from 2016 to 2023 examination sessions, SBEP candidates have

recorded 100% success rate in the oral part of the examination, *communication orale* (paper 4). In the June 2024 session of the examination, the candidates scored 98.83 %. These success rates have attracted positive remarks from the examination panel over the years (Table 2).

Table 2: Examiners' comments on candidates' performance in oral communication

Year	Examiners' remarks on the performance
2016	<i>Everybody passed! 27 of the 38 candidates, i.e., 71.05%, fall in the cream category. Candidates did exceptionally well with everybody having a pass mark. This lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written. The candidates can be said to be on the right track</i>
2017	<i>Everybody passed! 27 of the 38 candidates, i.e., 71.05%, fall in the cream category. Candidates did exceptionally well with everybody having a pass mark. This lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written. The candidates can be said to be on the right track</i>
2018	<i>Everybody passed! 13 of the 69 candidates (18.84%) fall in the cream category. Candidates did exceptionally well with everybody having a pass mark. This lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written.</i>
2019	<i>Everybody passed! 12 of the 60 candidates, i.e., 20%, fall in the cream category. Candidates did exceptionally well with everybody having a pass mark. This lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written.</i>

2020	<i>Candidates did exceptionally well with everybody having a pass mark. 04 of them, i.e., 10.81%, fall in the cream category. This lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written.</i>
2021	<i>Everybody passed! Nine of the 79 candidates, i.e., 11.84%, fall in the cream category. Candidates did exceptionally well with everybody having a pass mark. This lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written.</i>
2022	<i>Everybody passed! 21 of the 100 candidates, i.e., 21% fall in the cream category. Candidates did exceptionally well with everybody having a pass mark. This lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written.</i>
2023	<i>Everybody passed! 10 of the 70 candidates, i.e., 14.28 % fall in the cream category. Candidates did exceptionally well with everybody having a pass mark. This lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written.</i>
2024	<i>Candidates did very well (98.33%), though the percentage fell slightly short of the 100% of last year, with everybody having a pass mark except for one candidate who had below average while 20 of them distinguished themselves as cream candidates. This lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written</i>

Source: Subject Reports for 0746, GCE A/L SBE-French

5.3 Candidates' Performance in Essay Writing in French

The analysis of the data obtained from subject reports indicate a steady drop in the

performance of candidates in French language essay writing at the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilinguals Education French paper from June 2016 session to the 2024 June session of the examination (Fig. 2).

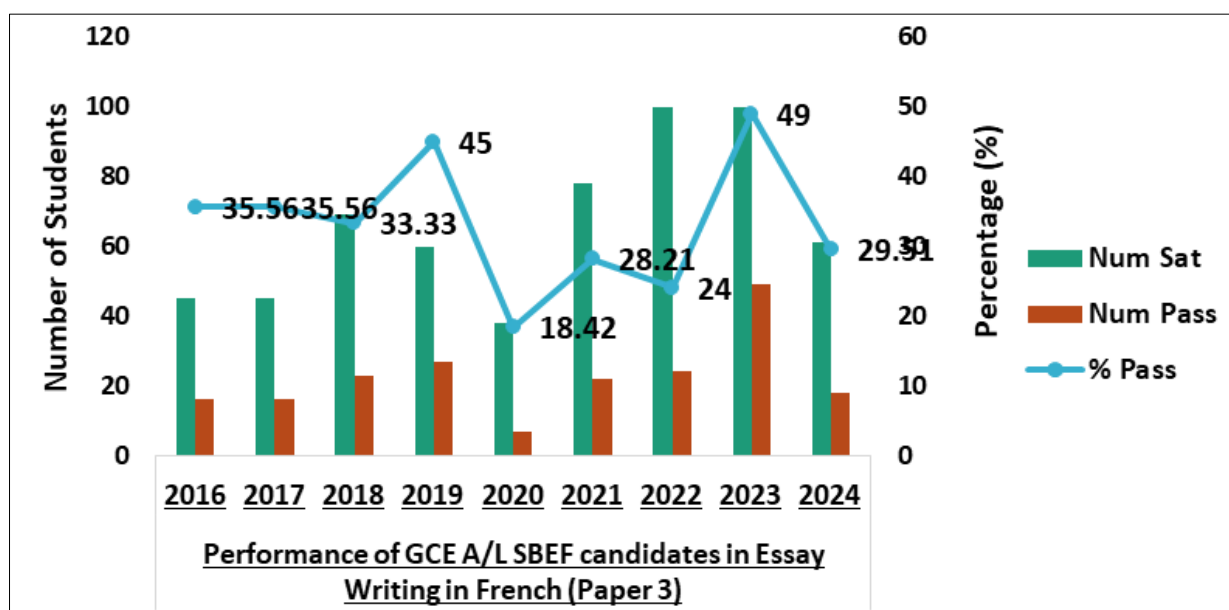


Fig. 2: Candidates' performance in Essay writing in French

Source: Subject Reports for 0746, GCE A/L SBE-French

Fig 2 above reveals that after nine years of evaluation of Paper Three, Essay writing in French has not registered a pass mark. The best performance came up during the June 2023 session when the candidates registered a 49 percent success rate in essay writing in French. The worst performance in essay writing was recorded during the June 2020

session with an 18.42 % success rate. Over the years, the subject panel for the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French has been identifying the shortcomings of candidates in the writing skills in French after each marking session of the examination (Table 3).

Table 3: Candidates' shortcomings in the writing skill in French

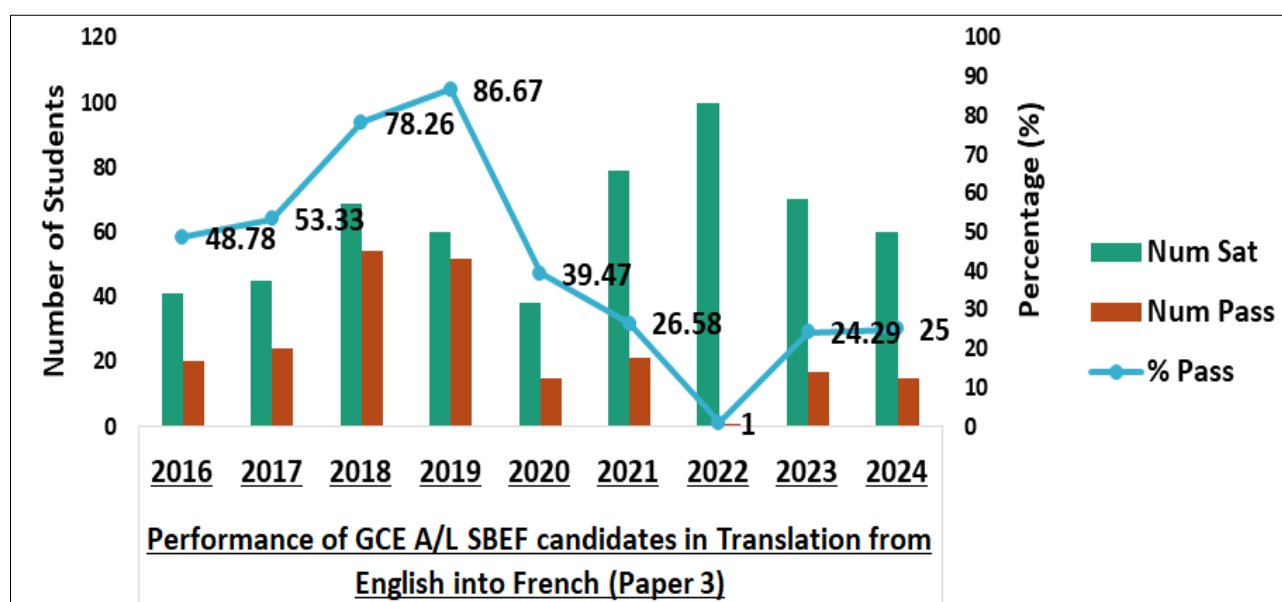
Paper N°	Title	Candidates' shortcomings in French identified by examiners
3	<i>Rédaction et Traduction</i>	Poor mastery of grammar, tenses, spellings, vocabulary, expressions and syntax; poor introductions and conclusions; Inability to organize ideas and points; aimless narration and irrelevant material; poor presentation of material; scanty and sketchy answers/essays; Botched up essays (inappropriate use of memorized phrases, expressions, etc.).

Source: Subject Reports for 0746, GCE A/L SBE-French

As evidenced in table 3 above, candidates' problems in essay writing and translation are morphosyntactic in nature. They have limited vocabulary in French and are at times forced to memorize irrelevant sentences and expressions which they carry to the examination hall. They also lack a sense of logical presentation of their materials which results in sketchy, incoherent essays. Their problems in translation stem from poor mastery of French grammar, tenses and spellings.

5.4 Candidates' Performance in Translation from English into French

Like in Essay writing in French, the analysis of data obtained from yearly subject reports reveal a steady drop in the performance of candidates in Paper Three, in the section involving translation from their first language official language, English, into their second official language, French (Fig. 3)


Fig. 3: Candidates' performance in translation from English into French

Source: Subject Reports for 0746, GCE A/L SBE-French

From 2016 to 2019, candidates' performance witnessed an upward movement from 48.78 % in 2016 to 86.67 % success rate in 2019. From the 2019 June session of examination, the section involving translation from English into French witnessed a downward trend in success rate from 39.47 % in 2020 to 25% in the June 2024 session.

A comparative analysis of candidates' performance in Essay writing and Translation (paper 3) revealed a downward trend in success rates recorded in the French language writing skills of Special Bilingual Education French candidates (Fig. 4).

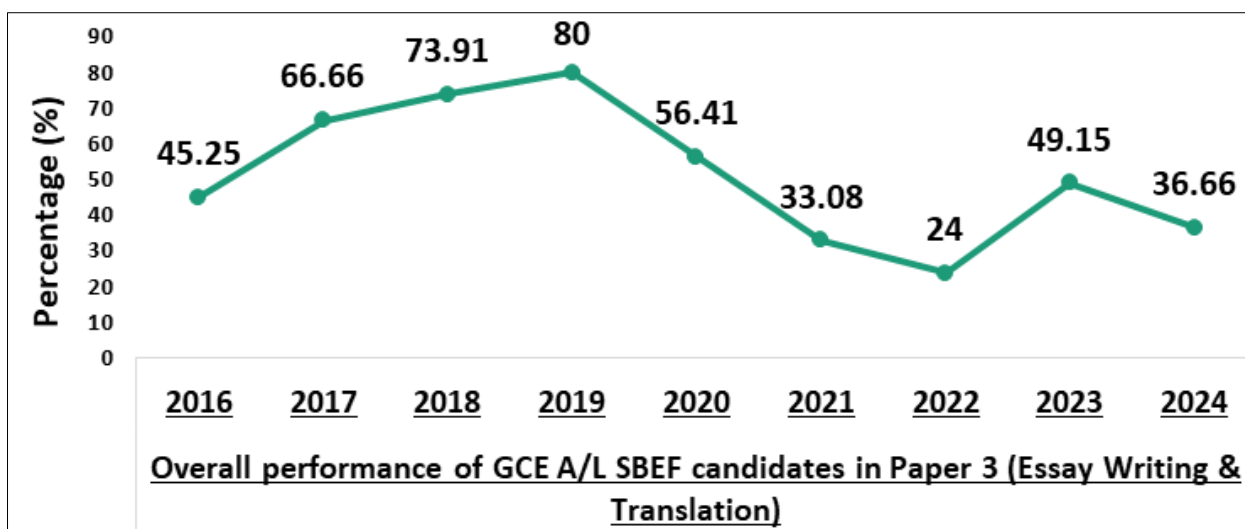


Fig. 4: A comparative analysis of performance in Essay Writing & Translation

Source: Subject Reports for 0746, GCE A/L SBE-French

5.5 Candidates' Performance in Paper 3 and Paper 4 French Compared

In the analysis of data gotten from subject reports, an attempt was made to compare the

compare the performance of candidates in the oral part, *communication orale* (paper 4) and in the written part, *Rédaction & Traduction* (paper 3) of the Special Bilingual Education French (Fig. 5).

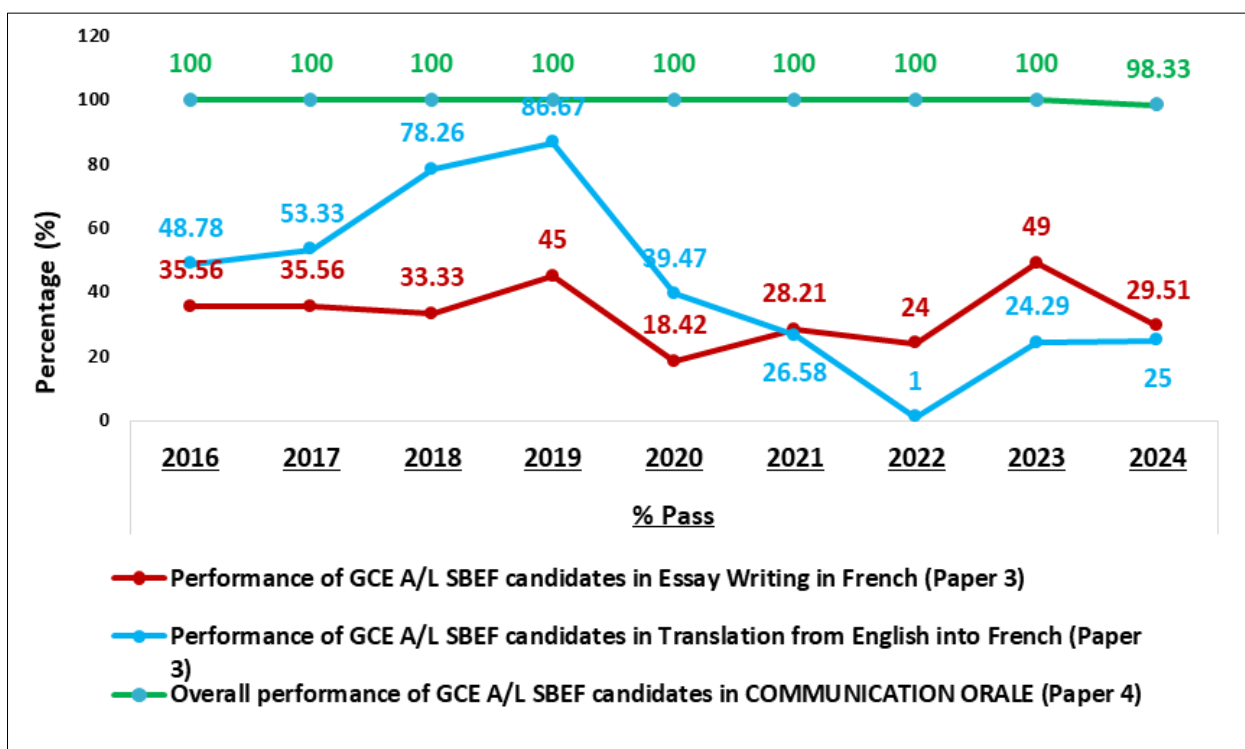


Fig. 5: A comparative analysis of performance in Essay writing & Translation and Oral Communication in French

Source: Subject Reports for 0746, GCE A/L SBE-French

As evidenced in Fig.5 above, a comparative study of candidates' performance in essay writing in French, translation from English into French and oral communication, revealed a steady increase in success rates in the oral part of the examination and a downward movement in success rates in Essay

writing and Translation from English into French. The best performance rate in Essay writing stood at 49 % in 2023. The best performance in Translation from English into French stood at 86.67 % in 2019. From 2019, the success rates in Translation from English into French witnessed a downward curve.

5.6 Understanding Current Trends in Candidates' Performance in the Writing and Speaking Skills in French: The Opinions of SBEP Teachers

After the analysis of the performance of candidates in the writing and speaking skills in French at the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French, the opinions of SBEP teachers were sought on the factors responsible for the dismal performance recorded in the writing skills compared to the high success rates registered yearly in the oral part of the examination. The SBEP teachers identified two factors that were responsible for the excellent success rates in oral communication: (1) the leniency of the French oral examination panel with candidates and (2) the favorable French-speaking background of most of the candidates doing the English sub-system of education. Here are some of the excerpts from focus group discussions:

- “When I used to conduct interviews with the pedagogic inspectors, they used to instruct us that they were not there to make students fail. At times, when a candidate is unable to say anything in French on the topic chosen, the pedagogic inspector can divert and ask the student to say anything in French so that the student can at least have a mark. The inspectors argue that the essential thing is for the student to say something in French orally. That is why the marks are always good when it comes to oral communication. But when it comes to the written part, the candidates don't have those options. The questions are there. They must answer them and pass” [4];
- “For those candidates in the French-speaking regions, they live in the speech community. At least, they live where French is spoken. To them, oral communication in French may not be a problem but the written part will be a problem. You know that French-speaking students also face difficulties when it comes to writing French. They face similar problems in written French like English-speaking students. Writing French is at times a problem even to French-speaking students. They may communicate well when it comes to oral communication in French, but with the written part, they too may have problems.
- “Furthermore, candidates' good performance in oral French could be explained by the fact that many of them come from French-speaking backgrounds even though they are studying in the English sub-system of education”;

As far as the factors responsible for the dismal performance in essay writing and translation are concerned, SBEP teachers blamed the situation on the complex nature of the French language and the insufficient number of teaching hours allocated to the teaching of French in the SBEP classes. Here are some of the excerpts from focus group discussions with teachers:

- « *On ne peut pas sous-estimer la complexité de la langue française. One cannot underestimate the complex nature of the French-language (Our translation)*”;
- “*Je trouve le nombre d'heures de cours de français insuffisant pour les classes bilingues*” To me, the hours allocated to French in the bilingual classes are not enough (Our translation)”;

On their part, the GCE examination panel of the Special Bilingual Education French paper argues that excellent success rates in French oral communication “lends credence to the fact that a candidate may perform poorly in the written part of the exams, yet perform well in the oral part, or vice versa. Language is first of all spoken before it is written” (2024 Subject Report for SBE-French, P.3). The subject panel in her reports blamed the dismal performance of candidates in essay writing and translation on the non-coverage of syllabuses by teachers and the non-use of the competency-based approach (CBA) by teachers.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Special Bilingual Education Program (SBEP) in Cameroon that went operational in 2009 is in its sixteenth year of experimentation. Its creation in December 2008 raised a lot of hopes regarding the training of a cream of young bilingual Cameroonians who would be able to demonstrate mastery of the two official languages irrespective of the sub-system of education to which they belong. Sixteen years later, the outcomes and objectives of the creation of the SBEP are far from being met, to go by the analysis of yearly subject reports of the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French paper. The SBEP has had a greater impact on the development of the French oral skills of English-speaking learners than on the development of their writing skills in French. If the oral skills of the candidates in French have been witnessing an upward movement in results trends in terms of high success rates in paper 4 of the examination, *communication orale*, the biographical profiles of the candidates being assessed and the general conditions of the conduct of the oral part of the examination could play on the validity of the assessment. SBEP teachers hold that the majority of

⁴ Views gathered during focus group discussions with teachers in December 2024.

the candidates hail from a sociolinguistic background of French-speaking homes even though they are enrolled in the English sub-system of education. The downward trends in the results of candidates in essay writing and translation have been blamed on the complex nature of the French language and the insufficient number of teaching hours allocated to French, the non-coverage of syllabuses as well as the non-use of the competency-based approach (CBA) by teachers.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper set out to evaluate the impact of the Special Bilingual Education Program in Cameroon on the development of the speaking and writing skills in French of candidates of the GCE Advanced Level Special Bilingual Education French. The analysis of data collected from a focus group discussion, ministerial texts and yearly subjects reports of the Special Bilingual Education French revealed that the SBEP has so far had a greater positive impact on the development of the French oral skills of English-speaking learners than on the development of the latter's writing skills in French. The writing skills of English-speaking learners in French are being marred by several shortcomings including, amongst others, poor mastery of French grammar, tenses, spellings, vocabulary, expressions and syntax.

In order to improve on the French language oral and writing skills of English-speaking SBEP learners, there is need for a close collaboration between teachers of non-linguistic subjects taught in French like *Éducation a la citoyenneté et à la morale* (citizenship in English) and *Éducation Physique et Sportive* (Sports and Physical education) and teachers of *Français intensif* (Intensive French) (Duverger, 2009). The French language teacher and the content subject teacher could plan their lessons together at the beginning of the week. The two teachers can plan pedagogic sequences and jointly teach lessons in a classroom where the two teachers are physically present. For example, they jointly choose an authentic text from the coursebook of *Éducation a la citoyenneté et à la morale*. The joint lesson can take two sequences.

In the first sequence, for example, the teacher of *Éducation a la citoyenneté et à la morale* teaches a lesson on an aspect of the syllabus: *Droits et devoirs des enfants* (Rights and duties of children). In the second sequence, the French teacher, after having identified French language structures used in the authentic text in the previous lesson taught by their colleague, comes up and drills learners on the use of vocabulary, grammar, etc. In terms of the practice of oral communication in French, the French language teacher can create opportunities for discussion and debates in the French language class, around topics

taught by their colleagues of *Éducation a la citoyenneté et à la morale* and *Éducation Physique et Sportive*. Learners would feel at ease to discuss orally in French because they would already have come across the technical vocabulary in the nonlinguistic subjects. In terms of the practice of writing skills in French, the two teachers can jointly evaluate learners on the lesson of the day. Learners are given a writing task jointly prepared by the two teachers. The task in French is being jointly marked by the two teachers, using a marking guide which should seek to assess not just good French language usage but also the understanding of the content subject by learners.

Furthermore, teachers are strongly advised to use the Competency-based Approach in teaching. They should use indirect teaching methods like exposés, debates, discussions, dramatization, projects, etc. They should adopt an inductive method of teaching essay writing in French. That is, by first introducing learners to different text types and their characteristics: *textes narratif, argumentatif, explicatif, injonctif, etc.* After this exposure to different text types, learners would be able to reproduce the text types by creating their own texts in French.

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