

# Linguistic Diversity and Official Language Education in Cameroon

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the place of linguistic diversity, (through the integration of local languages) in official language instruction in multilingual Cameroon as it determines if it is encouraged by policy, censors English language instructors' opinion towards its implementation, identifies challenges and explores prospects (methods). It is informed by the Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) and Vygotskian sociocultural theories and uses a survey research design and collected data through a questionnaire administered to 68 English language instructors from three regions in Cameroon through a Google Form link. The findings indicate that majority of teachers do not integrate elements of linguistic diversity into their official language instructional material because they are not encouraged by policy to do so and as such have never received training on the concept. Majority of the target instructors are of the opinion that official languages should not be the only medium of instruction in official language classrooms, official textbooks should incorporate elements of the local languages and equally hold that language instructors have the responsibility to promote linguistic diversity since it provides opportunities for students to share their own linguistic backgrounds and experiences in the classroom, enhance learning and local language maintenance. Instructors are unanimous that incorporating plurilingualism during instruction is a daunting task. The study highlights the necessity for policymakers and educators (policy makers, textbook writers, material designers and official language instructors) in Cameroon to adopt an integrated official language instruction that embraces linguistic/cultural diversity and give the local languages the pride of place in the educational circles through recommendations. This study is a novelty by focusing on secondary education and provides practical methods of integrating local culture into English and French official language classes.

**Keywords:** Linguistic diversity, official language education, national language integration, implementation, opinion

## INTRODUCTION

For a long time now, African policymakers have been deeply concerned with the issue of teaching in indigenous languages. However, despite the clear benefits of mother-tongue instruction, attempts to realize this dream have not yielded notable results because most nations still use languages of their colonial masters at all levels of education. Even nations that have demonstrated genuine political will in this direction have not advanced the initiative above the primary school level, adding to the difficulties faced by language learners who must switch at the post-primary level of education. Policymakers have offered a variety of explanations for why it is challenging, if not impossible, to completely implement education in indigenous languages.

Upon independence, Cameroon, like most African nations, chose foreign languages as its official languages over its native tongues to avoid linguistic conflicts on the one hand and unwarranted material and financial costs on the other thereby relegating its indigenous languages to the background. Since French and English

became the official languages of Cameroon, the government has always encouraged official bilingualism despite the multiplicity of local languages spoken in the country. The state promotion of English and French in academic circles with several derogatory inscriptions discouraging the use of national languages has led to negative attitude towards the use of such languages by the educational community and more especially the youth who mock at mates and peers who attempt to use their local languages in school and social gatherings to the extent of even considering their local languages as lower languages. If such negative attitude continues to grow, it will let to continuous language switch and in a long run language dead if nothing is done to arrest the situation.

It was only in the May 1995 Education Forum in Cameroon saw the proposition of many reforms to enable Cameroon have an authentic educational system and among which was one that indicated that the teaching of national languages should occupy an important place so that a Cameroonian citizen should be trilingual, mastering French and English which are the official languages, and at least one national language. These reforms were ratified both in the 1996 constitution [Law No. 96/06 of 18 January 1996] and in the 1998 law on the orientation of education [Law No 98/004 of 14 April 1998], calling for a country with citizens who are 'rooted in their culture but open to the world'. A concrete act of implementation of the said reforms in secondary education was however taken only in 2008 by the decree No 08/0223 MINESUP/DDES of September 3, 2008 on the creation of a Department of National Languages and Cultures at the Higher Teachers' Training College of the University of Yaoundé I to train teachers of this discipline for secondary and high schools. Following the above decree, the official syllabuses (Arrêté No. 263/14/MINESEC/IGE of 13 AUG 2014, Arrêté No 419/14/MINESEC/IGE of 09 DEC) designed for the first cycle were validated in 2014 by the Ministry of Secondary Education which align with the spirit of UNESCO (1953, 2003) which states that the transmission and acquisition of knowledge in a learner's mother tongue has many advantages.

The creation of the National Languages Department in some higher teacher training colleges did not stop the abandonment of local languages and did not correct the negative attitude as most of the teachers are not actively teaching the local languages in the schools where they were posted and school administrators do little to insist on the teaching of the national languages and turn to impose that such teachers should rather teach the official languages.

The failure of this policy in Cameroon can be attributed to the country's relatively high level of linguistic diversity, the general unwillingness of the populace to accept a shift away from English and French instruction to mother-tongue instruction or a blended approach, and the lack of a strong political will to enforce the policy out of concern for the safety of the nation.

It is worthy to note that indigenous languages are a pride of every nation in terms of its cultural identity especially as the world has become a global village. However, when people have failed to esteem them, they are bound to fall. Mufwene explains that "languages do not kill languages; their would-be speakers kill them, by shifting away from them to others that they find more advantageous" it becomes like a community whose members refuse to produce off-springs (2006:1). This shows that in a multicultural classroom, the socio-linguistic background of learners necessitate consideration. Their languages, therefore, are not supposed to be neglected in favour of singular national second or foreign languages prescribed by the language policy of the nation. Nforteh (2008:37) has claimed that the historical, anthropological, literary and to some extent the intellectual asserts of most countries are concealed in the languages used by the different peoples that make up the nation. In Cameroon, however, these languages are either neglected or given very limited attention in classrooms. The neglect of these languages has also denied Cameroonian students the chance to demonstrate their linguistic identity. According to Jaffe (1996:818), "European political ideology of language" maintains that "political stability and cultural identity depend on linguistic identity. Additionally, culture must be deriving from, if not constituting, indigenous communication and language practices if it is to be vocal and immediately comprehensive. If globalization means a melting-pot of

local/national cultures; one identity fed by numerous sources, then Cameroon, with English and French as its official languages, is a pseudo-representation on the global market place of national languages (Burbules and Torres 2000). This situation pushes me to wonder how Cameroon language classroom can be a true-representation of its linguistic diversity and further question how to encourage linguistic diversity by integrating the local languages in the official language classrooms as a way of maintaining, protecting and supporting local languages as it is essential to provide education that reflects the local context and caters for the needs of all learners. This can create a dilemma in the mind of the official language teachers reason why this study explore the possible integration of local languages during the official language classroom in Cameroon as a way of giving the target languages the protection and prestige they deserve.

With the above issues in mind, this study aims at investigate the place of linguistic diversity (local languages) in official language education in Cameroon. The aim is broken down to the following objectives: To determine if linguistic diversity through the integration of local languages is encouraged in official language education in Cameroon, to censor the opinion of English language instructors towards the implementation of linguistic diversity in English language instruction in Cameroon, to identify the challenges encountered by English language instructors in integrating linguistic diversity (local languages) in English Language classroom in Cameroon and to explore the prospects (methods) of integrating linguistic diversity in English Language education in Cameroon.

The following research questions guided the study: Is linguistic diversity (through the integration of local languages) encouraged in official language education in Cameroon? What is the opinion of English language instructors towards the implementation of linguistic diversity during official language instruction in Cameroon? What are the challenges and prospects (methods) in integrating linguistic diversity in official language education in Cameroon?

Following the above research questions, this paper is based on the premise that, linguistic diversity (through the integration of local languages) is not encouraged during official language education in Cameroon despite the fact that English language instructors have a positive opinion towards its implementation. Also, official language instructors however will encounter challenges in the said drive and there are prospects (methods) in integrating linguistic diversity in official language education in Cameroon.

This paper is divided into five portions namely the introduction that states the problem, presents the objectives, research questions and hypotheses; literature review that portray the scholarship and uniqueness of the study, material and methodology, results and discussions and conclusion.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This section reviews related literature on the importance of linguistic diversity in language instruction and instructional practices available in teaching in plurilingual classrooms. It equally brings out the uniqueness of the study by indicating how this paper relates and departs from previous studies. Linguistic diversity has become an increasingly important topic in applied linguistics and a critical and crucial aspect of language pedagogy, particularly in multilingual societies. Cameroon, a multilingual country hosting around 280 local languages and two European languages (English and French) plus Pidgin English make the country unique in its linguistic landscape. Despite the multiplicity of local languages, European languages (English and French) have been given preference at the official circles over its indigenous languages to achieve territorial merging.

Studies on linguistic diversity on language education have been directed towards effective strategies for promoting linguistic diversity in the classroom and understanding the role of linguistic diversity in language education. By understanding how linguistic diversity impacts language learning and teaching, educators can better support students from diverse linguistic backgrounds and create more inclusive learning

environments. This implies that in contexts where monolingual practices are encouraged in education, other languages need to be considered as well. The importance of linguistic diversity in language education have been emphasised by some researchers worthy of review. Galante, Okubo, Cole, Elkader, Carozza, Wilkinson, and Vasic (2020) looked at the adoption of plurilingual practices at the university level. The authors claim that despite numerous demands in the literature for a shift toward plurilingualism, most teachers are unaware of how to implement this strategy. The seven co-researchers, who had no prior training in plurilingual approaches, conducted interviews and observed each other's teaching techniques. According to their account, the classrooms were split among those that followed plurilingual techniques and those that strictly imposed English-only education. The authors found that the students in the classes that emphasized plurilingual instruction exhibited greater engagement with material and showed stronger self-confidence. Moreover, *Portolés and Martí (2020)* examined the impact of teacher education on the views regarding multilingual instruction held by preschool and primary teacher candidates in Valencia using a comprehensive set of questions developed as pre- and post-tests. Findings showed that teacher candidates notwithstanding their schooling, still had false assumptions about second language pedagogy, such as the necessity of English-only instruction and the influence of age on second language acquisition.

Despite the fact that is current study is related to the previous studies in terms of conceptual similarity, it departs from them in the sense that it is rather advocating for the incorporation of linguistic diversity in official language classes in Cameroon where colonial languages have been given the pride of place at the educational circles over indigenous languages.

Studies on instructional approaches on integrating linguistic diversity have been conducted at the international scene. Busse, Cenoz, Dalmann, and Rogge (2020) conducted an experimental study with English-foreign-language primary school pupils from various linguistic backgrounds in Germany and discovered that using one's native language as a resource can result in considerable vocabulary learning benefits. Using an experimental and a control group and a pre and post testing, findings revealed that, the experimental group made significant progress more quickly and showed higher levels of motivation and self-confidence than the control group. Corcoll (2021) described a sequential method that promotes student identity enhancement, instructor flexibility, and making teaching plain and visible. The author suggests structuring classroom treatment options into three stages that create explicit connections between them, allude to the many languages used in the classroom, and highlight their practicality in daily life. Corcoll and González-Davies (2016) suggest two instructional approaches to combat the widely held unsubstantiated claim that plurilingual practices lead to language interference, a decline in student motivation, and a loss in exposure to the target language. They recommend the designing of classroom projects that foster the deliberate use of many languages while seeing and comprehending their differences and similarities. The authors contend that these tactics are frequently very successful. Llompart, Masats, Moore, and Nussbaum (2019) concentrated on information gathered in Catalan multilingual schools. They contend that the use of plurilingual practices impact how student participation evolves over a period of time thereby gradually portraying linguistic diversity as resource to cognitive language development. They support this claim with classroom observation based conversation analysis by studying kids who were taught to engage in meaningful target language practice through an explicit "didactic" explanation of plurilingual principles that encouraged the use of their first language resources. Nagai (2020) suggests a series of classroom activities by examining how Japanese learners comprehend the building of passive structures in multilingual instructional class (English and Japanese). He opines that such activities would assist students have a better understanding of cross linguistic similarities and differences and emphasize metalinguistic awareness and the ways in which passives are used in regular usage. Ortega (2019) emphasised on the use of "transcultural *linguación*" practices of explicitly comparing linguistic and cultural variation during classroom activities using one teacher's use of translanguaging concepts to address social justice issues, to value the diversity of student origins, and to address problems areas. According to Stunell's (2021), a multilingual school community can foster a positive attitude in the neighbourhood by utilizing its language diversity. Focusing



on primary student teacher candidates in France, he insisted that their attitudes are to be altered to stress the values of inclusivity and interculturality in pre-service education.

Integration linguistic diversity in official language education in Cameroon is essential as it enables learners to communicate effectively in different contexts. The use of bilingual education is one method that has been used in Cameroon to integrate linguistic diversity into language education. At independence, Cameroon, like most African nations, adopted the languages of its colonial masters as the medium of instruction at the expense of indigenous languages; similarly, the issue of introducing indigenous languages as media of instruction has become a major concern in recent years. The question of the place of indigenous languages started to arise during the early years of independence in Cameroon. A lot of local researchers like Neba, Chibaka, and Atingdogbe (2006), Anchimbe (2011a, 2011b, 2013 and 2006b ), Anchimbe and Jannay (2011), Owusu, 2017, Echu (2003 and 2004), Echu and Tanjong (2018), Chiatoh and Akumbu (2014), Fontem and Oyetade (2005) is connected to Chiatoh (2006, 2012 and 2013), Ndille (2015 and 2016), Tadadjeu, Mba and Chiatou (2001), Kouega (2017 and 2018) etc. have carried out studies in relation to linguistic diversity in Cameroon and while some see it as a blessing, others see it as a curse. However, studies on how linguistic diversity can be implemented in language education in Cameroon getting opinion from instructors on why and how it can be palpable are not yet available. That is why this current research gains its place as it advocates for linguistic integration of local languages/cultures in official language education by suggests a holistic approach that considers all the linguistic/cultural areas within the learning environment and the school curriculum for better promotion of multilingualism education in Cameroon. Also, a lot of studies on linguistic diversity in Cameroon are limited to the elementary level of education meanwhile this current study focuses on secondary education and provide practical methods of integrating local culture into English and French official languages classes.

By censoring opinion of official language teachers toward integrating local languages and shaping their instructional approaches, this study uncovers the nuances of official language education and its impact on local language switch, identity and educational experiences. It delves into the ways in which linguistic diversity, can either foster inclusive and supportive learning environments or perpetuate biases and inequalities. By understanding the complex dynamics this study contributes to the development of more culturally responsive and effective official language education strategies in Cameroon. It offers valuable insights for teacher training programs, curriculum development, and policies that promote an inclusive educational landscape where students' language backgrounds and identities are respected, maintained, protected and valued.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY**

The researchers used a survey research design for the study. Both the qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted to explore the opinions and suggested strategies by seasoned ESL teachers in the field on the integration of linguistic diversity in the classroom and have a general overview of their attitudes towards the concept under study.

A questionnaire research instrument including a psychometric scale was chosen and designed for this study. Through it, the researcher used a Google forms to locate respondents and obtained data from them.

Informants for this study were randomly selected ESL teachers in Cameroon. Those who responded were 68 ESL teachers who came from the Northwest, Southwest and West regions of Cameroon. Among the respondents, 28 (41.18%) originated from the North West region, 22 (32.35%) from the South West and 18 (26.47%) from the West.

As for the age distribution of informants, most teachers 30 (44%) fall under the age bracket 31-40, 21 (31%) of respondents fell under 26-30 years, 13 (19%) were above 40 years and 4 (5.88%) were between 21-25

years.

As regards teaching experience, 27.94% (19) of the teachers have taught between four to six years, 27.94% (19) seven to ten years, 25% (17) have taught for more than 15 years, 16.18% (11) of teachers have taught between one to three years and 2.94% (2) have taught for less than a year. The researcher, as the data indicates, was therefore engaged with majority of respondents who have spent more than four years in teaching. Their opinions on linguistic diversity in official language education, thus, result from accumulated classroom experiences.

The present study is informed by the Critical Applied Linguistics (CAL) and Vygotskian sociocultural theory to facilitate the designing of instrument, data collection and interpretation. One of the central aims of CAL is to problematize given truths, by revisiting their relevance and efficacy cited in Pennycook (2001) and Samy and Penacook (2007). This theories explores aspects of our educational reality that have been taken for granted and are identified as “naturalized” assumptions to be questioned (Spolsky, 2004).The proponents of the said theory argue that all the language practices, beliefs, and management decisions of a community or polity are driving forces for language choice. Vygotskian sociocultural theory (cited in Wertsch, 1985) is adopted to conceptualize the types of educational support that teachers need to provide in the inclusion of local languages in their classrooms. This theory assumes that learning is socially mediated. In other words, the development of a higher mental process is a cultural process given that it has social origins and cultural procedures involving a transformation of the external sociocultural plane into the internal psychological plane via meditational mechanisms.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results and generates discussions based on the data collected from some English (official language) instructors in Cameroon. The data obtained from the questionnaire based on both open-ended and closed-ended questions, provided answers to the different research questions and provided useful information which cannot be provided from directly observation. This portion is divided based on subheadings related to the objectives of the study and types of questions.

### Encouraging Linguistic Diversity through the Integration of Local Languages in Official Language Education in Cameroon

The following first ten open-ended questions on the questionnaire focused on teacher’s opinions on the consideration of linguistic diversity in the official English language classroom in Cameroon and equally based on encouraging linguistic diversity in official language education for instructors to either strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree or disagree. The following results were obtained and are presented on table 1 below.

Table1: Encouraging Linguistic Diversity in Language Education

Questions	Total	Strongl Agree	%	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Strongl Disagree	%	Total
Question1	68	3	4%	28	41%	28	41%	9	13%	100%
Question2	68	6	9%	17	25%	41	60%	4	6%	100%
Question3	68	10	15%	42	62%	14	21%	2	3%	100%
Question4	68	34	50%	30	44%	2	3%	2	3%	100%
Question5	68	17	25%	40	59%	10	15%	1	1%	100%
Question6	68	14	21%	44	65%	9	13%	1	1%..	100%
Question7	68	26	38%	35	51%	6	9%	1	1%	100%

<b>Question8</b>	68	42	62%	26	38%	0	0%	0	0%	100%
<b>Question9</b>	68	35	51%	29	43%	3	4%	1	1%	100%
<b>Question10</b>	68	33	49%	33	49%	2	3%	0	0%	100%

Results from the above table of question 1 to 10 are presented in the forthcoming chart to picture the situation before discussions.

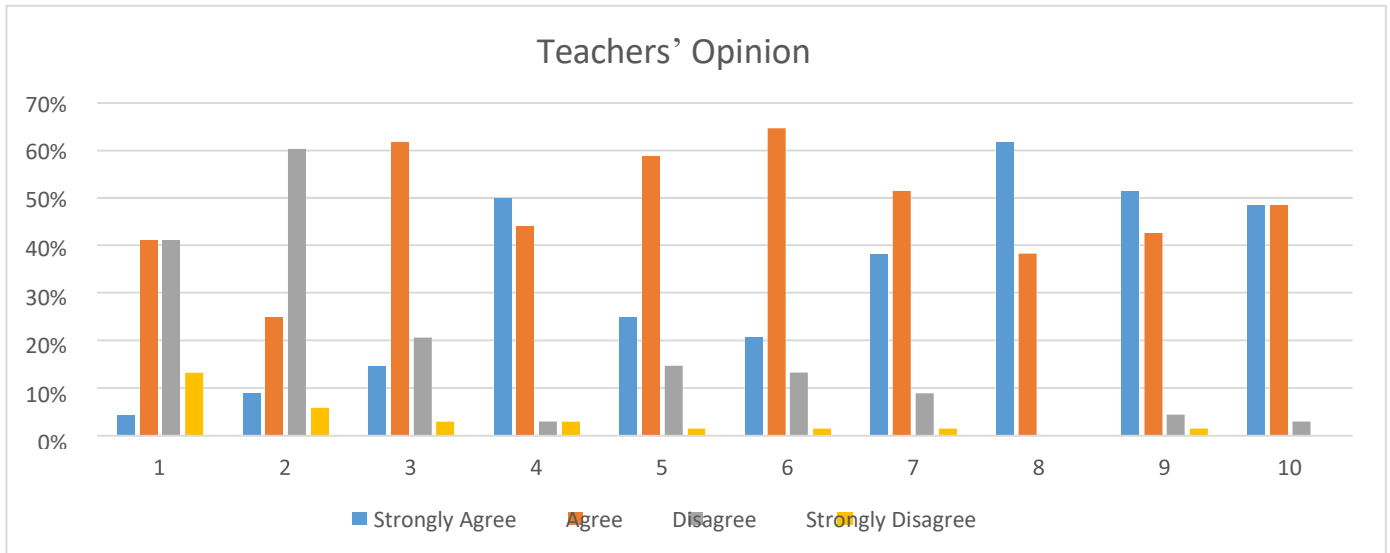


Figure 1: Instructors Opinion on Integrating Linguistic Diversity

**1. The curriculum considers the multilingual nature of students.**

On this question, out of the 68 teachers that responded, there is divided attention on the issues, since 41% of teachers both agree and disagree that the Cameroonian constitution considers the linguistic diversity of students. However, summing up from the two extremes of the Likert scale, only 4% further strongly agree while 13% strongly disagrees. Taking from this, the bottom line is that 54% teachers think that the multilingual nature of learners is not considered by the curriculum. Generally speaking, during this study, the search for a policy document indicating incorporating linguistic diversity during official language instruction were not found.

**2. In an English/French as Second Language Classroom, English/French should be the only language of instruction.**

Here, 60% of teachers disagree and 6% strongly disagree English/French should be the only medium of expression in an official language class. Their opinions counteract those of 25% of teachers that agree and 9% that strongly agree. We can deduct from these data in an official language classroom, it can be beneficial to incorporate the students' native language into the instruction to provide support and make connections between the two languages. This corroborates with Chiatoh and Akumbu (2014) who opines that knowledge of English language studies can best be enhanced by integrating local language into education. This can also help students feel more comfortable and confident in their learning. However, it is important to balance the use of the native language with English instruction to ensure that students are developing their English language skills as well.

**3. You incorporate materials or activities that reflect linguistic diversity in your lesson planning.**

Many teachers (62%) agree that they incorporate materials that reflect students' linguistic backgrounds.

Only 3% strongly disagree. Thus, they predominantly accept that incorporating materials or activities that reflect linguistic diversity is important in promoting a culturally responsive and inclusive learning environment.

#### **4. Language teachers have a responsibility to advocate for linguistic diversity in their schools.**

Since in (3) above, the teachers claim that they incorporate materials from learners' backgrounds, their responses on teachers' responsibility to advocate linguistic diversity in the schools was also positive, with a score of 94% against 6% that did not agree with the statement.

#### **5. You provide opportunities for students to share their own linguistic backgrounds and experiences in the classroom.**

On whether teacher permit students to share ideas from backed up by their linguistic background, 59% of them agreed while 25% strongly agreed. On the contrary, few teachers representing 16% disagreed.

#### **6. Students face challenges when they are presented materials that do not incorporate their local languages.**

If learning material is presented without consideration of learners' diversity, it does not help them. The large percentage is an indication that such a case promotes a culturally responsive and inclusive learning environment. When teachers acknowledge and value the linguistic diversity of their students, they create a welcoming and inclusive classroom that celebrates different cultures and languages. Also, it helps students develop their official language skills more effectively. By building on their existing language skills and knowledge, teachers can help students make connections between their native language and official languages. This can lead to a deeper understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

#### **7. Linguistic diversity should be a priority in language education.**

On question 7, 51% of teachers agree and 38% strongly agree that in valuing linguistic diversity can encourage students to maintain and develop their native language skills while also learning new languages. This can lead to greater multilingualism and more opportunities for communication and cultural exchange.

#### **8. Students should be encouraged to maintain and develop their home language alongside the language being taught in the classroom.**

As regards question 8, all the respondents (100%) agree that students should be encouraged to maintain and develop their home language alongside the language being taught in the classroom.

#### **9. Teachers should be trained in cultural and linguistic competence to effectively teach diverse groups of students.**

Question 9 on the need to trained teachers on linguistic diversity received 95% of positive responses. Their agreement concords with the idea that teachers need to understand the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students to create an inclusive and welcoming learning environment. By being trained in cultural and linguistic competence, teachers can better understand and appreciate the diversity of their students, and tailor their instruction to meet their unique needs. This is probably why Galante, Okubo, Cole, Elkader, Carozza, Wilkinson, and Vasic (2020) revealed that most instructors are unaware of how to implement a shift towards plurilingualism thereby emphasizing the role of teacher training for the successful implementation of linguistic diversity during instruction.



**10. Language textbooks and materials should reflect linguistic diversity.**

Lastly, question 10 focused on the link between textbooks and linguistic diversity. Here, 97% of teachers’ responses favoured textbooks and materials that reflect linguistic diversity, since they are crucial for promoting cultural awareness and understanding, enhancing language learning, encouraging multilingualism, and fostering inclusivity and equity in the classroom.

**Teachers Opinion of the Use of Instructional Practices that Promotes Linguistic Diversity**

Teachers’ opinion as to whether they use instructional practices that promotes linguistic diversity during official language instruction were interrogated in the questionnaire administered presented in the next set of questions 11 and 12 through the yes/no/unsure criterion. They were:

**11.** Do you incorporate elements of students’ native languages into your teaching materials?

**12.** Do you incorporate French in your teaching of English?

Results obtained from question 11 and 12 are presented on table 3 below.

Table 2: Use of Instructional practices that incorporating linguistic diversity

Options	Q11	%	Q12	%
Yes	29	42.65	46	67.65
No	39	57.35	22	32.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>

The data demonstrates that majority of teachers (57.35%) do not incorporate elements of students’ native languages into their teaching materials. This contradicts their strong agreements with the idea that they consider learners’ diversity. Again, because Cameroon is officially bilingual with French and English as the main languages question 12 focused on whether teachers incorporate French in their teaching. Here, 67.65% of them that form the majority of the respondents agreed that they incorporate French. The incorporation of French by English language instructors during classroom instruction further indicates that French is given pride of place over indigenous languages even in areas where it does not belong (Anglophone Cameroon) thereby relegating and isolating the local culture of the learners.

**Teachers training on incorporating linguistic diversity**

Teachers’ training on use of instructional practices that promotes linguistic diversity were interrogated in the questionnaire administered to teachers presented in the next set of questions 13 to 14 using the yes/no/unsure criterion. They were:

**13.** Have you received training on teaching language to linguistically diverse students?

**14.** Do you think additional training in linguistic diversity would be beneficial for language teachers?

Results obtained from question 13 to 14 are presented on table 3 below.

Table3: Teachers’ training on incorporating linguistic diversity

Options	Q13	%	Q14	%
Yes	18	26.47	64	94.12

<b>No</b>	50	73.53	1	1.47
<b>Unsure</b>	0	0	3	4.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>

Results attest that, 73.53% of teachers have not received training on linguistic diversity. Further, on whether they think additional training in linguistic diversity would be beneficial for language teachers, 94.12% teachers said yes, 1.47% said no while 4.41% were unsure. In same direction, Portolés and Mart (2020) pointed out that multilingual teacher education training programmes which are often ignored has a positive role in shaping instructors misconceptions and attitude incorporating linguistic diversity in multilingual settings.

### Challenges in Implementing Linguistic Diversity during Instruction

Challenges encountered by teachers in implementing linguistic diversity were the focus of the next question.

**15.** Have you ever faced challenges in teaching due to linguistic diversity in your classroom?

**16.** In your opinion, does linguistic diversity in the classroom lead to increased cultural awareness and understanding?

Results obtained from question 15 are presented on table 3 below

Table 4: Challenges in Incorporating Linguistic Diversity

Options	Q15	%	Q16	%
<b>Yes</b>	54	79.41	68	100
<b>No</b>	14	20.59	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>

Results of question 15 show that, a large majority of teachers (79.41%) attested that they face difficulties in teaching due to the diverse linguistic background of students and just a small portion (20.59%) claim not to encounter the said challenges.

Results of question 16 show that, all the teachers opined that linguistic diversity during classroom instruction increases cultural awareness and understanding. In Cameroon, learners come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, making it essential to integrate linguistic diversity into language education. By incorporating local languages into language education, learners can relate to the content better and feel more connected to their culture. Linguistic diversity also promotes language proficiency and enhances language acquisition as learners can compare different languages and above all, integrating linguistic/cultural differences in instruction is a true representation of Cameroon in the global market arena of national languages.

Question 17 was ‘*Can you describe any challenges you have faced when teaching students from linguistically diverse backgrounds, and how you have addressed them?*’ This addressed the second research questions and the respondents’ answers show that poor class participation, learning difficulties, communication barrier, teacher difficulties, concentration issues, time consumption and mockeries were the major challenges in a linguistically diverse class. They also provided the strategies they use to overcome the challenges when teaching students from linguistically diverse backgrounds such as using simple language, visual aids, and gestures to help students understand the content, using a variety of instructional strategies to

accommodate different learning styles and incorporating cultural diversity into the curriculum.

### **Diversity in linguistic background of learners**

Question 18 focused on the average number of languages spoken by students. The following options a) 1-2, b) 3-4, c) 5-6 and d) 7 or more were provided and results were obtained. The statistics indicate that 50% of teachers said their students speak 1-2 languages. The next set representing 29% of the responses believed that learners speak 3-4 languages. The categories 5-6 and 7 or more languages received 2% and 1%.

Looking at the results, it is clear that each official language class constitute multilingual/multicultural learners and failing to recognise the classroom linguistic/cultural diversity during teaching is being unfair and this corroborates with Torres (2000) opinion that failing to recognise linguistic/cultural diversity during instruction in a multilingual context does not reflect a true representation of the national on the global market place of national languages.

### **Teachers' confidence in addressing linguistic diversity**

Question 19 related was how teachers would rate their confidence in addressing linguistic diversity in the classroom. The table below shows their answers.

Table 5: Teachers' Confidence

<b>Options</b>	<b>Number of Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Very confident</b>	5	7.35
<b>Confident</b>	18	26.47
<b>Neutral</b>	30	44.12
<b>Not confident</b>	12	17.65
<b>Not confident at all</b>	3	4.41
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>

Overall, 44.12% of teachers are neutral on their confidence in addressing linguistic diversity. 17.65% are not confident and 4.41% are not confident at all making a total of 66.18% negative confident. Conversely, 26.47% are confident while 7.35% are very confident giving a total of 33.82% positive responses. Their silence and negativity overshadowed their confidence insinuating that much is expected to be done to instil confidence in teachers through training and workshops on addressing linguistic diversity in official language education in Cameroon.

### **Inclusive teaching method that promotes linguistic diversity**

Inclusive teaching practices that encourages linguistic diversity during classroom instruction and instil in the learners a sense of belonging and recognition was of interest to the researcher. That is why the subsequent open-ended question 20 and 21 focus on the linguistically diverse nature of English language classrooms.

Question 20 was *'how do you ensure that students from linguistically diverse backgrounds feel included and valued in your language classes?'* And question 21 was *'Can you share any strategies you use to address linguistic diversity in your lesson planning and instructional strategies?'*

Some 23 respondents out of 68 (33.82) provided approaches they use to ensure and address linguistic diversity in the classroom while 45 (66.18%) of them did not provide answers for question 20. The strategies were translation, interaction, permission for students to use mother tongue and other languages,

using cultural elements/materials, encouragements, inclusive lessons, using bilingual games, sign language, group work, and using cognate words. Some of the respondents said that they had no consideration for linguistic diversity as an inclusive strategy given that the use of inter-language is discouraged during official language classes.

As concerns question 21, some insignificant number of teachers (10 out of 68, 14.70%) consider learners' background in their classroom and include diverse cultural elements and use varied methods that can consider learner diversity. These category of teachers understand that when teachers are culturally and linguistically competent, they can establish positive relationships with their students, which can lead to better communication, trust, and engagement in the classroom. In addition, their answers show that textbooks and materials that reflect linguistic diversity can encourage students to maintain and develop their native language skills while also learning new languages. This can lead to greater multilingualism and more opportunities for communication and cultural exchange.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, the researcher investigated if linguistic diversity (through the integration of local languages) is encouraged in official language education in Cameroon by inquiring on its practice by English language instructors, the opinion towards the implementation of linguistic diversity in official language instruction, challenges and prospects in integrating linguistic diversity in official Language education in Cameroon. The following findings were obtained:

- Majority of official language teachers do not integrate elements of linguistic diversity (through the integration of local languages) into their instructional material because they are not encouraged by policy to do so.
- There is no policy on encouraging linguistic diversity (through the integration of local languages) during official instruction.
- The official language curriculum and classroom is not a true representation of nation on the global market place of national languages and culture.
- The official language textbooks do not emphasis issues of multilingual Cameroonian situations.
- Official language teachers have never received training on the incorporating linguistic diversity during instruction.
- Majority of official language instructors are of the opinion that official languages should not be the only medium of instruction in official language classroom.
- Most official language instructors opines that they have the responsibility to promote linguistic diversity during instruction to correct the negative attitude of learners towards their native language; to maintain, protect, promote and give the home languages the prestige and pride of place they deserve in language education Cameroon.
- The target instructors are of the opinion that incorporating linguistic diversity can yield positive stride in learning, increase cultural awareness and tolerance among Cameroonians.
- Incorporating linguistic diversity is challenging for instructors as they express lack of confidence, communication barrier, poor class participation, learning difficulties, teacher difficulties, concentration issues, time consumption, mockeries given that Cameroonian students are from diverse linguistically background and above all, lack of training on the concept.

Some recommendations are required to be made to language policy makers, official language instructors, textbook writers and official language instructional material designers. Policy makers should bring up guiding principle for an integrated language curriculum which will pave the way for the possible incorporation of linguistic diversity (through the integration of local languages) during official language classes to bring the indigenous languages from the periphery at the centre of language education in

Cameroon. It is recommended that official language instructors be trained through seminars on teaching in plurilingual classes and also vital for textbook writers and material designers to readjust in producing teaching support that is responsive to linguistic diversity. Teachers are also expected to address challenges they might encounter while attempting to incorporate linguistic diversity by using instructional practices that are responsive to diversities, such as hands-on activities, group work, use simple language, visual aids, gestures, learning about their students' cultures, using materials that reflect the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students such as the use of oral literature, storytelling, folklores, music, dance (traditional methods of instruction), minor translation, and other resources from different cultures, use of variety of instructional strategies to accommodate different learning styles and preferences such as hands-on activities and provide opportunities for students to practice their national language skills outside of the classroom. Multimedia resources will also be helpful to present cultural diversity.

In all, recognizing and embracing linguistic diversity in Cameroon's official language education can lead to more inclusive learning environments and effective language education policies that promote multilingualism, lead to better language proficiency and increased opportunities for social, cultural, and economic growth. By acknowledging the various languages and dialects used by different communities, educators can create an integrated language curriculum that better reflects the linguistic diversity of the country and do justice to the identity of the country in the global scene, redress the negative attitude of the youth towards the use of mother tongue, promote and give the local languages their rightful pride of place in Cameroon. Also, using instructional practices that encourage linguistic/cultural diversity in classrooms can be beneficial for multilingual Cameroon as it will help in fostering mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance among learners of different linguistic backgrounds and peaceful co-existence.

It is hoped that the findings and the conclusions arrived at in this study will motivate action by policy makers to rethink the instructional strategies of official languages to encourage linguistic diversity through the integration of local languages and culture through an integrated curriculum that reflect a true representation of the Cameroonian identity in the global market place of national languages. Findings will equally help to open the mind of official languages instructors to see the importance of acknowledging linguistic diversity during instruction. More importantly, the findings will hopefully push official language textbook writers to incorporate plurilingualism and cross-cultural issues in their writings and spur-up further research actions on linguistic diversity in Cameroon.

Given that this current study did not cover a large population of official language instructors, and given that the instrument of data collection was administered only to English language instructors in some few parts of the country, further studies can be done with a more representative population. More studies can be carried out with policy makers, curriculum designers and students to censor their opinion on the incorporation of linguistic diversity into official language classes since this study censored just the opinion of teachers. Attitudinal studies and longitudinal studies on the integration of linguistic diversity can equally be carried out to give another picture of the situation.

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