

Linguistic Support and the Academic Integration of Anglophone Students in Francophone Universities in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This study explored English-French bilingualism among content lecturers as a key factor in the academic integration of Anglophone students in Francophone universities in Cameroon. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach and administered an online questionnaire comprising open-ended and closed-ended items to 277 respondents who had obtained the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level qualifications (GCE A Levels) and subsequently enrolled in Francophone universities. Descriptive statistics, chi-square test of independence, and mean comparison tests were employed to analyse quantitative data. Qualitative responses from the open-ended questionnaire items were analysed thematically using an inductive coding approach to identify recurring themes and patterns in participants' responses. The findings revealed that 67% of respondents identified difficulty in understanding French-medium instruction as the primary academic challenge they encountered. Furthermore, Anglophone students in public universities ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 2.60$) reported receiving significantly lower levels of instructional support than their counterparts in private institutions ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 2.60$), $t(259) = -3.62$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.82$. These findings suggest that government bilingualism policy continues to face substantial implementation challenges in Cameroonian higher education. It is recommended that Francophone universities offering bilingual programmes adopt Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as a pedagogical framework to support the academic integration of Anglophone students.

Keywords: bilingualism, CLIL, language integration, anglophone students, Cameroon, language acquisition, higher education

INTRODUCTION

This paper argues that English–French bilingualism among content lecturers is fundamental to the academic integration of Anglophone students (defined here as students from the English-speaking educational subsystem) in predominantly Francophone universities in Cameroon. The educational landscape in Cameroon is deeply influenced by its colonial history with France and Britain, with the country's educational system bifurcated into the English and French subsystems. However, there is a history of students switching between educational systems, especially when transitioning into higher education. In the past, research in the domain has been conducted predominantly in state universities, with findings consistently indicating limited institutional support for students holding GCE A Levels who made this kind of transition. This paper extends the sample to include private higher institutions and argues from a Vygotskian perspective that lecturer bilingualism can mitigate the linguistic constraints associated with this transition.

Study Context

The teacher is a key player in the student's mental development in academic settings, and through the use of language, impacts how the latter acquires, stores, and retrieves knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Put differently, language is an important aspect of human cognitive development. The importance of language in education has

been explored extensively, over the years, by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). For example, UNESCO (2003) argued that learning in a different language presents a double challenge because the learner tends to grapple not only with the new language but also with the concept or knowledge embedded in it. UNESCO further highlighted the cultural value of language by stating that it is not only a tool for communication but also “a fundamental attribute of cultural identity and empowerment, both for the individual and the group” (p.16).

Essentially, there are two broad educational pathways, English-speaking and French-speaking (Gonondo & Djiraro Mangué, 2016). Francophone schools are predominantly in the Francophone regions, and English schools are predominantly in the Anglophone regions, though many can be found in large urban agglomerations in the Francophone regions as well. From the basic level of education, English and French are taught as subjects in both subsystems. Thus, before university level, Anglophone students are already exposed to the French language for at least thirteen years. After obtaining the GCE A Level, Anglophone students have to make two important decisions about the kind of university to attend, the first being whether the institution is public or private. Eleven public universities exist in Cameroon as of 2026, and are characterised by lower tuition fees, larger student populations and a broader range of academic programmes. On their part, private universities, owned by individuals, religious bodies and organisations and often mentored by public universities, have higher tuition fees, smaller populations and a more restricted range of academic programmes. The establishment of private higher institutions is still gaining traction as they became popular only after the 1990s (Domladie, 2026).

The second decision concerns the language of instruction at the university. In Anglo-Saxon universities, various institutional safeguards are generally put in place to ensure that applicants demonstrate a minimum level of English language proficiency before admission. For example, at the University of Buea in the Southwest Region of the country, applicants from Francophone backgrounds are admitted only upon successful completion of the institution’s intensive English language programme or upon obtaining a satisfactory score in the English Language Proficiency Test. Eben (2023) noted that this policy has been replicated by other private higher institutions in the region. On the other hand, French-speaking universities generally admit students without much linguistic gatekeeping.

Research Problem

Higher institutions of learning in Cameroon operate within the framework of a broader bilingualism agenda aimed at promoting national integration and national unity. It is within this framework that students with A Level in the Anglophone subsystem of education can switch to the Francophone or French-dominant universities in pursuit of higher education. Existing studies, largely undertaken in state universities (Alobwede, 2023; Kouega, 2019; Njwe, 1999), indicate a disproportionately skewed implementation of the bilingualism policy, whereby most courses are predominantly taught in French (Gonondo & Djiraro Mangué, 2016; Kouega, 2019). The results of this issue include not only slow integration but equally low academic performance among students who use English as their first official language. Although significant attention has been given to the difficulties faced by Anglophone students in Francophone universities, there is a paucity of research investigating whether comparable challenges exist in private institutions of similar profiles. This study thus aims to examine the challenges encountered in content classrooms and to comparatively analyse the experiences of students in public and private universities.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do lecturers in Francophone universities address the language-related needs of Anglophone students in classroom settings?
2. Is there a significant difference between public and private universities in Cameroon in the provision of language support for students with a GCE Advanced Level background?

Objectives

1. To establish the extent to which lecturers in Francophone universities address the language-related needs of Anglophone students in classroom settings.
2. To establish whether significant differences exist between public and private universities regarding language support provided to Anglophone students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is a key element of learning, and research on the implementation of bilingualism in Cameroon's higher education has increasingly captured the attention of researchers since the 1970s. This literature review examines key concepts in not only Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory but also relevant literature on bilingualism in Cameroon's higher education. The review concludes with an examination of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and its implications for the country's higher education bilingualism needs. The key element here is that language serves as a primary index of culture, a medium through which cultural meanings are expressed and negotiated, particularly in educational contexts where it mediates access to knowledge and participation.

Theoretical and Conceptual Review

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory posits that higher-order mental functions are deeply rooted in social interaction and cultural context. The theory highlights the role of language and the teacher in facilitating the learning process in the classroom through concepts such as mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Kozulin et al. (2003) argued that, apart from the teacher, other stakeholders such as parents and peers shape "the types of interaction occurring between children and their environments" (p. 2).

Language emerges as one of the key signs of mediation in learning from Vygotsky's theory. He was very particular about what signs are and how they differ from tools. Signs are auxiliary psychological devices, like language, maps, formulae, mnemonics and diagrams, which enable us to solve problems. They enable us to carry out mental activities like remembering, comparing, selecting and communicating. On the other hand, tools, like pens, computers, cutlasses and phones are physical in nature and enable a person to control and interact with their physical environment.

Vygotsky (1978) challenged the claim that pre-verbal thinking was unrelated to language and continued into the later part of human life. Instead, he demonstrated that in pre-verbal thinking, the child's cognitive development resembles that of the ape, but the acquisition of language, together with the maturation of the child, supports higher-order thinking, highlighting the difference between superior human thinking and that of animals:

...the most significant moment in the course of intellectual development, which gives birth to the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence, occurs when speech and practical activity... converge. ... as soon as speech and the use of signs are incorporated into any action, the action becomes transformed and organised along entirely new lines. (p. 24)

This revelation played a significant role in establishing the link between language and cognitive development, demonstrating that language has a defining function in higher-order thinking.

Regarding the teacher, Vygotsky (1926/1997) maintained that the former does not really teach the child in the learning process. His pedagogic role is that of "...the director of the social environment in the classroom, the governor and guide of the interaction between the educational process and the student" (p. 49). Put differently, the teacher organises the learners' environment in order to enable the child to experience learning, forming the necessary reactions and adopting the behaviours defined in pedagogic goals. He compared the teacher to a gardener who cannot directly influence the growth of a plant by tugging it, but can do so indirectly by altering

the environment, such as the temperature, moisture, relative positions of neighbouring plants and using fertilisers.

One of the key tasks of the teacher is to identify the ZPD, which, according to Vygotsky (1978), “is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). After identifying students’ learning needs, the teacher provides an enabling environment for the students to solve problems through experience. In this light, students learn when solving problems slightly beyond their current ability, while receiving the right support.

In a cross-linguistic educational context such as that of A-level students in Francophone universities, where learners may encounter challenges with the language of instruction, scaffolding should include not only methodological but also linguistic support. From a sociocultural perspective, language serves as a primary mediational tool through which higher mental functions and learning processes are developed. This implies that teachers should possess both the capacity and the willingness to provide appropriate linguistic scaffolding.

Meaning of Bilingualism

Defining bilingualism is quite a daunting task, given that multiple variables, such as time of acquisition and level of mastery, come into play. In Cameroon, the definition is further complicated by public officials constantly associating the concept with the ability to communicate only in the two official languages. In reality, bilingualism generally refers to the ability to communicate in two languages. Gottardo and Grant (2008/2014) highlighted that bilingualism is not a binary, expressing the presence or absence of a language; instead, it is a continuum with different levels of mastery of the languages concerned, including varied levels of command of the subskills involved.

Research on the relationship between bilingualism and cognitive development has increasingly highlighted its positive effects. Researchers now believe that bilingualism has many advantages not only for cognitive development but also for personal development. One of the most cited benefits of bilingualism is that it is greatly associated with cognitive development and better academic performance (Safotso & Gamgne, 2024; Vaghela, 2024). Additionally, bilingualism improves language and cultural awareness, critical thinking and social harmony (Vaghela, 2024).

Bilingualism in Cameroon

Bilingualism is at the centre of Cameroon’s language policy (Echu, 2004; Domladie, 2026). Successive governments have adopted different strategies to improve the level of bilingualism in the country. Examples include the creation of bilingual grammar schools, the introduction of the Second Official Language (OL2) in both the Anglophone and the Francophone educational subsystems, and the establishment of a bilingual training programme with its training centres found in all ten regions to train both civil servants and citizens (Fon, 2019).

Cameroon's policy of individual bilingualism is frequently characterised as resource-intensive. For example, Constable (1977), while acknowledging the unique bilingual situation in Cameroon, noted that the country's model of individual bilingualism is comparatively more demanding than that of Canada, which shares English and French as official languages but adopts a largely institutional model — one in which institutions provide services in citizens' preferred language regardless of their OL2 proficiency. Cameroon, by contrast, pursues a language policy that promotes bilingual competence among individual citizens. Bilingualism in Cameroon is not merely a question of communicative competence in two languages; it is actively pursued by the government as a tool for promoting national unity and national integration (Nana, 2013). Educational planning in Cameroon is often framed in response to realise national goals (Nkemleke, 2024).

The State of Bilingualism in Higher Education

Language policy in Cameroon’s higher education sector aims to foster bilingual competence among learners (Kouega, 2019). However, several studies conducted in Francophone universities indicate that Anglophone

students often experience difficulties integrating into their academic and sociolinguistic environments. The fact that Anglophone students in Francophone universities encounter academic performance challenges has been explored from two main angles. While one school of thought attributes the challenges to the way courses are taught and assessed, the other attributes this situation to the linguistic background of the students.

Several researchers have established that many of the courses, especially in public universities, are taught in French with minimal assistance to English-speaking students. Lecturers generally teach in the language they prefer (Echu, 2004), and since a majority of them are French-speaking, most of the courses are taught in French (Kouega, 2019). This means English-speaking students have to invest additional effort to understand lesson notes, textbooks, and handouts. While Domladie (2026) suggests that private higher education institutions offer substantial linguistic and academic support to their English-speaking students, lecturers still have to deal with difficulties relating to the lack of didactic resources adapted for multilingual instruction.

In the same vein, assessment practices largely favour Francophone students at the expense of Anglophone students, leading to feelings of frustration and exclusion (Echu, 2004; Gonondo & Djiraro Mangué, 2016; Kouega, 2008, 2019). However, Domladie (2026) revealed that some private universities in the West Region have established measures to enable equitable assessment practices for Anglophone and Francophone students and to promote the use of both English and French in assessment. The first is to administer tests in both languages so that students can take them in their preferred language. Another strategy is to design examinations with sections in both English and French. The second strategy requires students to make an effort to use both languages in examinations, promoting the learning of English and French. While the efforts are commendable, the lack of harmonisation and standardisation poses another problem regarding the reliability of assessments.

Another school of thought attributes the challenges faced by Anglophone students to their linguistic backgrounds before higher education. Issues associated with this perspective include a lack of harmonisation between the two educational subsystems (Echitchi, 2020; Ngalim, 2014) as well as interference from indigenous languages and Cameroon Pidgin English (Njwe, 1999). Ngalim and Echitchi argued that the Anglophone educational system limits learners' exposure to French beyond the Ordinary Level, while Njwe contended that students rarely use their OL2 outside formal learning environments. This insufficient linguistic immersion, together with the presence of Cameroon Pidgin English, restricts students' exposure to the French language, a factor Pokrivčáková (2013) argued is key to the development of bilingual competence. The challenge of providing adequate linguistic support for students from exclusively Anglophone regions has also been highlighted by lecturers in private higher education institutions (Domladie, 2026).

Noteworthy is the fact that students with limited exposure to French can be found in both public and private universities. While this may impede the integration of Anglophone students into Francophone universities, lecturers with bilingual competence can mitigate these challenges through inclusive pedagogical practices. By providing appropriate linguistic and academic scaffolding, they can facilitate a more effective academic integration process. Although private universities seem to be better prepared to handle these challenges administratively, they are not immune to them. In fact, much still has to be done both in teacher development and the provision of suitable resources.

Content and Language Integrated Learning

Modern educational practices are gradually evolving from monolingual to bilingual and even plurilingual approaches. The shift is particularly noticeable in urban settings where language diversity has increasingly become the norm. An approach suited for such teaching in such contexts is the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which "involves embedding vocational content into language teaching and/or including language learning elements in the teaching of vocational content" (Chia, 2020). Urmeneta (2019) revealed that this approach gained prominence in Europe in the 1990s. It inherently facilitates the enactment of M. A. K. Halliday's triadic model of language learning, namely learning language, learning through language, and learning about language. CLIL can be a useful approach for the academic integration of students whose first official language is not the main language of communication in Cameroonian universities.

Integrating content and language learning offers numerous pedagogical and cognitive benefits, particularly in conceptualising language as a central mediational tool in cognitive development processes such as internalisation, scaffolding, and higher-order thinking (Vygotsky, 1978; Snow et al., 1989). Apart from providing a natural setting for language learning, CLIL allows learners to have more contact time with the target language, enhancing language learning (Urmeneta, 2019). As Snow et al. (1989, p. 202) stated, "...language is learned most effectively for communication in meaningful, purposeful, social and academic contexts." Šulistová (2013) equally revealed that this multicultural approach not only promotes intercultural communication but also emphasises the active participation of the learners in the classroom.

A key player in the implementation of CLIL is the lecturer, who is responsible for guiding and facilitating learning in the classroom (Vygotsky, 1926/1997). Lecturers may be meaningfully categorised along two intersecting dimensions—competence and disposition—yielding three pedagogical archetypes: those who are both willing and able, those who are competent but disengaged, and those who are well-intentioned yet pedagogically limited.

The first, and perhaps most fundamental, aspect of the lecturer experience is the ability to communicate effectively in English and to employ inclusive pedagogical approaches that address the needs of all students. When lecturers are unable to communicate in English or understand their Anglophone students, the achievement of pedagogical objectives becomes significantly constrained. In Cameroon, the reality is that many lecturers enter university teaching from research-oriented backgrounds without formal pedagogical training, while others teach in bilingual universities despite lacking functional proficiency in their OL2. These realities highlight the need for institutional administrations, in collaboration with government authorities, to develop structured programmes that integrate CLIL principles into seminars, conferences, and other forms of professional development.

Secondly, lecturers' willingness to engage with unfamiliar pedagogical approaches is equally important. Lecturers should be encouraged not only to improve their English communicative competence but also to adopt inclusive teaching practices that support linguistically diverse classrooms. The ideal archetype is the lecturer who is both willing and able to provide the necessary support for students to integrate into the academic environment easily, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds. University administrators should therefore take these archetypes into account when promoting the implementation of CLIL. Doing so would enable them to design appropriate motivational strategies and provide targeted professional development opportunities that enhance the effectiveness of CLIL implementation.

Suggestions on Implementing CLIL in Cameroon

According to Snow et al. (1989), the implementation of CLIL requires much attention to obtain meaningful results; it needs systematic planning and good coordination for language and content curriculum. One of the most effective and ironically most neglected strategies in Cameroon is to present lessons in both English and French. For example, lesson notes can be presented on PowerPoint in the classroom in both languages, despite the lecturer's struggles with the OL2. The comparison layout makes that easy. The lecturer could then conclude by summarising the lessons and presenting the key ideas in English. The following non-exhaustive strategies suggested by different researchers will facilitate the implementation of CLIL in Cameroon. For ease of presentation, they are classified into three categories: simplifying input, supporting student reflection, and promoting student interaction.

Simplifying strategies include not only using realia and concrete objects for manipulation, increasing visuals, demonstrations in classrooms, and nonverbal communication, but also stronger visual elements in textbooks as well as definitions, paraphrases, and oral examples of key concepts and vocabulary (Mohan, 1979; Short, 1993; Snow et al., 1989). On their part, reflection strategies facilitate comprehension, which goes with pre-reading strategies to ensure students understand background concepts and the necessary language and vocabulary. Equally, the strategy promotes the use of familiar situations, emphasises the use of graphic organisers and the development of critical thinking and study skills (Short, 1993). Regarding student interaction, lecturers should integrate group work and pair work into their teaching methodology, encouraging students of different linguistic

backgrounds to be in the same group. In the same vein, lecturers should encourage class participation during lessons, including asking questions, clarifying instructions, and summarising main points. Equally, assignments should be structured to make use of the four language skills, and feedback should be given in a non-verbal manner through drawings, diagrams, charts, among others (Mohan, 1979; Short, 1993).

In summary, language constitutes a fundamental tool for knowledge construction and the development of higher-order thinking skills. Consequently, the adoption of pedagogical approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which simultaneously promote content mastery and language development, can facilitate the academic integration of Anglophone students in Francophone universities in Cameroon.

METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methodology employed in the study, which includes the research approach, data collection, analytical procedure, ethical consideration and limitations.

Research Approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach aimed at examining the extent to which students with GCE A Level in Francophone universities received the needed support to promote academic integration in the universities. A survey research design was employed to collect data.

Data Collection

Data were collected via an online semi-structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended and open-ended questions administered to a sample of 277 respondents who had crossed over to Francophone universities after obtaining the GCE A Level. The study adopted a non-probability snowball sampling technique appropriate for the absence of a centralised sampling frame.

Analytical Procedure

The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise participants' characteristics, including frequencies and percentages. Associations between variables were also examined using the chi-square test of independence. Mean differences between groups were computed using the independent sample t-test and the Welch's test in situations where the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated. Qualitative responses were analysed thematically using an inductive coding approach.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the study's purpose. Data were used exclusively for research purposes.

FINDINGS

The findings established the extent to which the challenges of Anglophone students are addressed in the Francophone universities and the impact of the type of university on the kind of support received by students.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	119	43.0%
	Female	158	57.0%
Region of origin	Anglophone	70	25.3%

	Francophone	207	74.7%
Language used at home	French	153	55.2%
	English	124	44.8%
University type	Public	123	44.4%
	Private	154	55.6%

The sample (N = 277) comprised 57% female and 43% male respondents. Most participants were from Francophone regions (74.7%), with 25.3% originating from Anglophone regions. French was the primary home language for 55% of respondents, whereas 45% reported English as their primary home language. More respondents attended private universities (55.6%) than public universities (44.4%).

Qualitative Data on Students' Challenges

Figure 1 Challenges of Anglophone Students in Francophone Universities in Cameroon

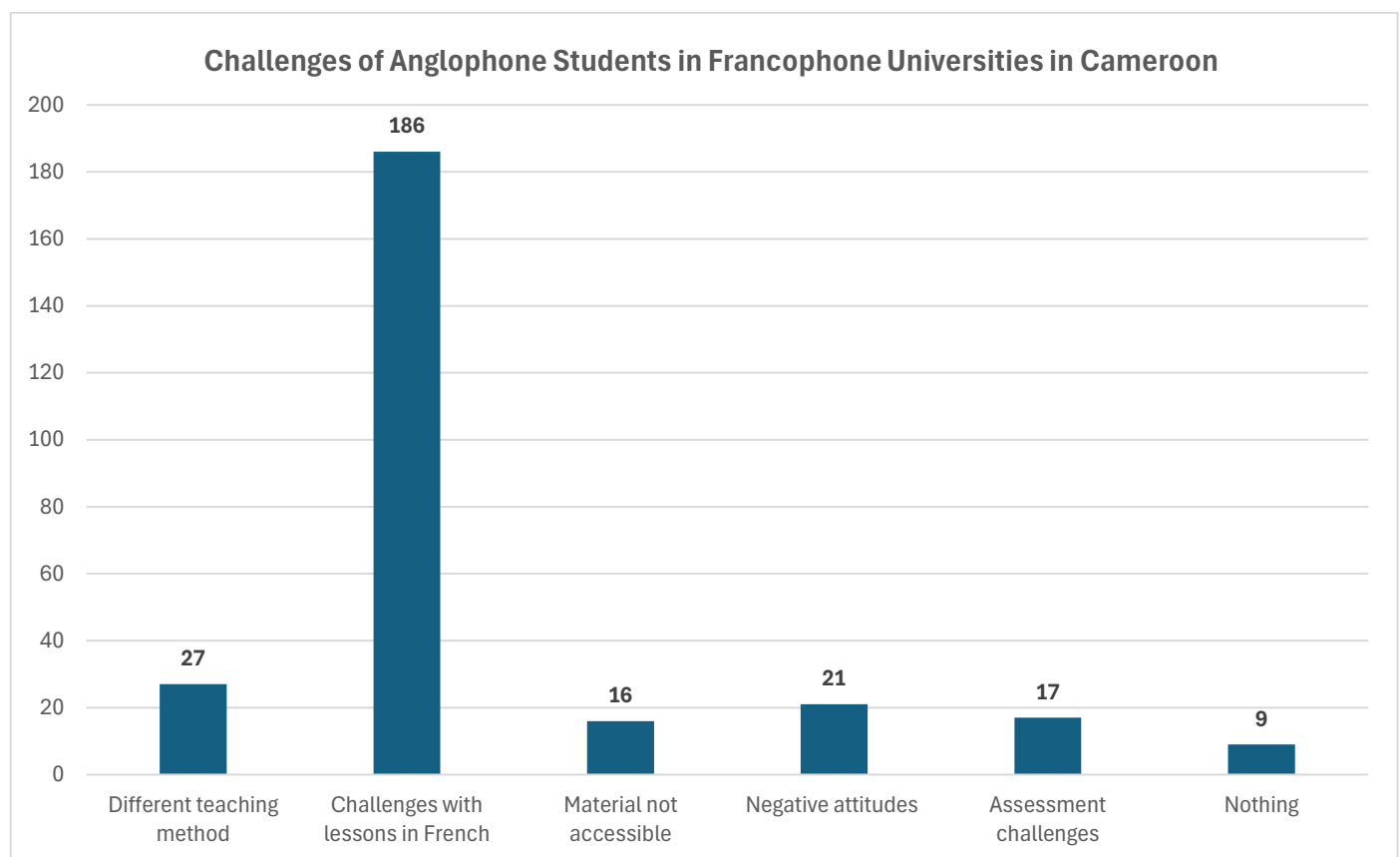


Figure 1 indicates that most of the challenges Anglophone students face in Francophone universities stem from lectures delivered predominantly in French.

Linguistic Barriers and Comprehension Difficulties

Most respondents identified language-related difficulties as the dominant challenge facing Anglophone students in Francophone universities, manifesting as difficulties in understanding lectures and participating in class.

French terms are very different from English ones. So, it's very difficult to catch up with lessons. Even with lessons one did in the past, the way of treating, interpreting, and working is very different. *(20-year-old male student from a private university).*

Lecturers don't often understand the students' questions and often give wrong explanations *(21-year-old female from a private university)*

Understanding the courses at first is very challenging since most lecturers can't speak English; so, we're forced to learn how to read and write French. *(22-year-old female from a private university)*

Teaching Methodology Differences

...for example, in Math, the method of solving questions in the French educational system is completely different from the method in English. It's also very difficult to really understand all the documents given to us for revision *(23-year-old female from a private university)*

Inaccessible Handouts

I had difficulties understanding and translating the handouts. *(40-year-old male who attended a public university)*

Anglophone students had to translate handouts before studying and writing exams. *(34-year-old female who attended a private university)*

Assessment Concerns

As Anglophones, we, the A-level students, face a problem of a language barrier; we ... take exams in French; all this hinders us from understanding, and we don't do well in exams. I, for one, had to retake level one because of the system. Most A-level students have this tendency to abandon after the first semester of school because their results are not encouraging. Even the brightest students abandon. *(25-year-old male from a public university)*

Also, the method of correcting our papers when we decide to write exams in the English language is questionable.... *(23-year-old female from a private university)*

Negative Attitudes

The Francophone students make a mockery of our efforts and referred to the English language as our mother tongue. That was so discouraging. *(age withheld, female from a public university)*

Many times, the English students do not understand the lectures, and if they ask, many lecturers will take it personally, even though some lecturers are patient enough to explain, many are not. *(42-year-old male attended a public university in 2003)*

I could barely understand some of the lectures. I couldn't even express myself properly in some offices. The worst was during pre-inscription processes; the people receiving students were mostly French-speaking, and they could utterly ignore you because you didn't understand French. *(42-year-old male who attended a public university in 2013)*

The findings suggest that language-related challenges go beyond vocabulary deficit and affect broader academic interaction. Language affects students' understanding of lessons, handouts and taking of examinations. Anglophone students also face problems of attitudes, not only from lecturers and members of administration, but also from course mates. Peer interactions constitute a critical yet often underestimated dimension of academic integration, functioning either as mechanisms of inclusion or as subtle reinforcers of social and linguistic isolation. Interestingly, 9(3%) of respondents claimed they did not face any difficulties.

Quantitative Data on Students' Challenges

Table 2 Level Of Understanding of Notes and Handouts

	Anglophones understood the handouts			
		Understood	Did not understand	Total

Which region did you grow up in?	Anglophone	29	41	70
	Francophone	114	93	207
	Total	143	134	277

Table 2 reveals the level of understanding of notes and handouts by Anglophone students in Francophone universities. In the aggregate, 143 (51.6%) indicated that they understood the lessons, while 134 (48.4%) indicated that they did not. A chi-square test further revealed that there was a significant difference in the understanding of notes and handouts between students who grew up in Anglophone regions and those who grew up in Francophone regions, $\chi^2 (1, N = 277) = 3.90, p = .048, V = .12$. Students from English-speaking regions experienced slightly greater difficulty understanding notes and handouts.

Students were asked whether their Francophone lecturers ensured that Anglophone students understood classroom lessons. Most respondents, 174 (62.8%), reported that lecturers did not adequately support Anglophone students' understanding of lessons, while 103 (37.2%) reported the opposite. A chi-square test of independence revealed a statistically significant association between lecturers' attention to students' understanding and students' perceived exclusion, $\chi^2 (1, N = 277) = 12.79, p < .001, V = .22$, indicating a small-to-moderate association. Students who felt the lecturer was not interested in helping them understand were equally likely to feel isolated.

The language used at home also influenced respondents' perceptions of efforts to solve their language-related problems. Welch's independent sample t-test revealed that students who communicated in French at home ($M = 5.03, SD = 2.72$) were more likely to be satisfied with their attempts to resolve their language-related challenges than students who communicated in English ($M = 6.35, SD = 3.12$), $t (246.02) = 3.73, p < .001, d = -0.78$, indicating a moderate-to-large practical effect.

In summary, the findings indicate that many students were dissatisfied with the efforts of lecturers in Francophone universities. Moreover, students from Anglophone regions and those who primarily communicated in English tended to experience more difficulties than other students. This suggests that linguistic background may influence students' ability to adapt to the predominantly French-speaking academic environment.

Differences in language support across public and private universities

The type of university attended equally influenced students' perception of the cross-linguistic problem. Welch's independent t-test revealed that lecturers in public universities ($M = 6.25, SD = 3.16$) were less likely to address students' language-related difficulties than their counterparts in private universities ($M = 5.12, SD = 2.77$), $t (248) = 3.21, p = .002, d = -0.78$. The finding suggests that lecturers in private universities are more attentive to problems of Anglophone students compared to lecturers in public universities.

A majority of the students, 174 (62.8 %), felt that their Francophone lecturers did not provide the necessary instructional support to ensure that Anglophone students understood the lesson. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the perceptions of students from public and private universities. Results showed that Anglophone students from public universities ($M = 4.31, SD = 2.6$) received far less support from their Francophone lecturers than did students from private universities ($M = 5.36, SD = 2.6$), $t (259) = -3.62, p < .001, d = -.82$, indicating a large practical effect. The findings indicate that Francophone lecturers in public universities are likely to ignore language-related concerns posed by Anglophones compared to Francophone lecturers in private universities.

It is important to note that when students were asked whether they regretted their decision to study at a Francophone university, most of them (179, 64.86%) reported that, despite the challenges cited, the decision was a good choice, whereas 97 (34.14%) said it was a bad choice. No significant inferences were discernible based on the type of university attended or the students' linguistic backgrounds.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that linguistic accessibility remains one of the greatest obstacles to the academic integration of Anglophone students in both public and private Francophone universities in Cameroon. The French-speaking lecturers generally do not provide the necessary scaffolded linguistic support to enable their Anglophone students to comprehend their lessons and handouts. Equally, assessments are reported to be carried out in French, leading to failure and eventual abandonment of studies by some students. The findings are consistent with previous research on the subject, indicating that Anglophone students face serious linguistic challenges in Francophone universities (Echu, 2004; Gonondo & Djiraro Mangué, 2016; Kouega, 2008, 2019). That some students eventually abandon their studies points to the severity of the problem and the urgency for a viable solution that responds to their needs.

However, students' linguistic backgrounds were also found to be significant predictors of comprehension. Specifically, Anglophone students who grew up in the Anglophone regions and those with limited proficiency in French experienced greater difficulties understanding lectures and handouts in Francophone universities than students from Francophone backgrounds. This is consistent with the findings of Domladie (2026). These results suggest that existing assumptions about the profile of the Anglophone student may be oversimplified. Broadly speaking, one category of GCE holders consists of students from the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, who generally have limited opportunities to use French outside formal educational settings. As a result, they are more likely to experience linguistic interference from their indigenous languages and Cameroon Pidgin English in their use of French, a phenomenon noted by Njwe (1999). A second category consists of students who live in French-speaking regions and are more exposed to French even outside the learning environment. The former generally faces more comprehension difficulties than the latter in Francophone universities. It is noteworthy that nine respondents reported experiencing no difficulties in the Francophone universities. This finding suggests that the experiences of Anglophone students are not homogeneous and may be more complex than has been reflected in previous studies. Further research is therefore needed to explore the factors that facilitate successful integration and adaptation among students. This is essential because even lecturers' scaffolding practices should take into account the diverse linguistic and academic profiles of learners, thereby facilitating the provision of nuanced support that is responsive to their specific needs.

The results also revealed that private universities provided comparatively more linguistic support for their students. This finding aligns with Domladie (2026), who documented initiatives undertaken by private higher education institutions in the West Region of Cameroon to accommodate Anglophone students. French-speaking lecturers were also more deliberate in ensuring that Anglophone students understood the lessons. Another plausible, though unverified, explanation is that public universities in Cameroon generally have larger class sizes, making it more challenging for lecturers to address students' individual linguistic needs. However, many of the recommendations already proposed for the application of CLIL — such as presenting PowerPoint slides in both languages, simplifying input, and promoting student reflection and interaction — can be useful in both public and private universities. Similarly, private universities, like Institut Universitaire Catholique Saint-Jérôme de Douala, have increased the recruitment of lecturers with English as their primary language of instruction with a view to improving the level of bilingualism in the university community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several concrete measures can be taken to facilitate the integration of Anglophone students in Cameroonian universities. Firstly, lecturers should practise CLIL. Practising CLIL will enable lecturers to deliver content more inclusively and anticipate the linguistic challenges faced by Anglophone students. CLIL implementation should be accompanied by simplification strategies, including translating lessons, handouts, and assessments. Lecturers should also promote task-based learning through group work and pair work, deliberately pairing students from different linguistic backgrounds to foster intercultural competence among them.

Additionally, administrators should promote teacher bilingualism and provide incentives for lecturers who meet bilingualism targets. In the same vein, bilingual competencies should be factored into recruitment and promotions in universities. Furthermore, administrators should develop a structured model for in-service training

for lecturers who find it difficult to facilitate linguistic integration among their students. Moreover, university administrators should formulate clear policies to support students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This can be achieved by administering diagnostic language assessments at entry and offering remedial French language classes to students whose proficiency falls below the required threshold.

In the same vein, policymakers in the Ministry of Basic Education, the Ministry of Secondary Education, and the Ministry of Higher Education should work together to prioritise bilingual education so that the bilingual practices expected in higher education would already be firmly established from the basic education level. This way, students would develop a clearer understanding of the problems they are likely to encounter in universities and take adequate measures to confront them. It would be analytically reductive to assume that students entering linguistically unfamiliar academic spaces are unaware of impending challenges; rather, the limitation lies in their inability to fully grasp the depth and multidimensional nature of those challenges before encountering them firsthand. Giving children early exposure to the French language can be a critical step towards mitigating what could otherwise be a linguistic shock in tertiary education.

On their part, Anglophone students in Francophone universities should endeavour to be more assertive in navigating their academic environment. Adopting a predominantly passive or complaint-oriented stance is unlikely to yield meaningful benefits. Rather, they should draw inspiration from senior students who have successfully overcome similar challenges, actively seek clarifications when necessary, share their unique experiences and perspectives in the classroom, and pursue appropriate administrative channels when issues arise. Contemporary educational paradigms have increasingly shifted from teacher-centred to learner-centred approaches, placing greater responsibility on students to take ownership of their learning. Consequently, students should develop a proactive approach to identifying and addressing the challenges associated with studying in a language in which they possess limited proficiency. Bilingual competence enhances employability and professional mobility, both locally and internationally; students should therefore regard the development of OL2 fluency not merely as an academic requirement but as a long-term professional investment.

CONCLUSION

The fact remains that the successful integration of Anglophone students into Francophone universities requires a collective effort. Not only do students need to be motivated, but lecturers also need to adopt pedagogical approaches that enable them to provide the scaffolded support students require. Furthermore, institutions and the state must enact appropriate policies and create an enabling environment for this integration to take place. Linguistic diversity, with both its challenges and opportunities, is increasingly the norm in contemporary education; well-implemented CLIL may offer an effective response to the challenges it presents. Educational systems that fail to recognise and cultivate linguistic and intercultural capital risk underutilising some of the most valuable competencies in pluralistic societies.

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