A Prospective Survey of Native Population’s Attitude towards Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) and Fulfulde as Medium of Instruction in the Far North Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to investigate the attitude of native peoples of the Far North Region of Cameroon towards the prospects of a MTBMLE and the use of Fulfulde as a medium of instruction (MOI) in the primary school of the region. The data were collected through a survey using a set of close-ended questions in a questionnaire administered to more than 467 informants. Some interviews were also conducted to gain more insight into the opinion of the population toward this educational paradigm. The findings show there is some support for the use of mother tongue and French in a transition model and there is stark support for primary school education in mother tongue and French but not Fulfulde as a substitute for French. In fact, there seems to be strong opposition to the idea of using Fulfulde as MOI in nursery school with natives of other ethnic groups. There is a mixed opinion regarding the use of ethnic language from year one to three and the use of the mother tongue to teach maths. This research points to the fact that indigenous languages still suffer some stigma.

Keywords: Ethnic language, Fulfulde, LIEP, medium of instruction (MOI), MTBMLE, national languages.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education stakeholders in Cameroon are still reluctant to fully conform to the advice of using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction (MOI) in primary schools. This state of affairs is in ignorance of the UNESCO recommendations on the matter. In fact, UNESCO’s view of the language of education is summarized in the UNESCO’s World Declaration on Education for All (1990) as follows:

Primary education must be universal, ensure that the basic learning needs of all children are satisfied, and take into account the culture, needs, and opportunities of the community. [...] Literacy programmes are indispensable because literacy is a necessary skill in itself and the foundation of other life skills. Literacy in the mother tongue strengthens cultural identity and heritage. (UNESCO, 1990: 6)

The above declaration supports the principle that education has to be provided to primary school starters in the language which they speak at home because it is already known to them, rather than in a foreign language. This view was recently reiterated by Yao Ydo in an interview granted Radio France International (RFI)¹, in which, he, the director of the UNESCO International Bureau of Education, advocated a remodeling of school curriculum to adopt an indigenous curriculum that should rely on the use of mother tongue (MT) as MOI. He argued that approaching education from this perspective will help reduce the gap between children in rural and in urban communities of Africa. Furthermore, the education that is culturally relevant (indigenous curriculum) to the children will contribute to fostering their sense of identity.

Language in education policy has never been in favour of indigenous languages since colonial times. African countries in general and Cameroon, in particular, have reproduced the English/French-only language in education policy. In Cameroon, this ideology was continued under the pretext of the preservation of national unity and integration. In this perspective, the way out is a decolonisation of Africa through a reform of the curriculum. Besides the aspect of the indigenous curriculum, which is advised and advocated, there is the issue of the language to be used as MOI. The model prescribed is that of MTBMLE.

At a time when more voices are pushing for a reform of the educational system to give more space for national languages, to the detriment of foreign languages, it is wise to survey the opinion of the population about

¹ Interview granted on June 5, 2022. Available at https://web.facebook.com/RFI.Afrique/?_rdc=2&_rdr

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MTBMLE. The Far North region of Cameroon is the least empowered, education wise. Every year, the performance of the students leaves much to desire, and the region always stands at the bottom of all official exams. From observation, most children even in the town of Maroua speak Fulfulde in their daily conversation with each other and with their parents. Sometimes, there is French, and their mother tongue.

A. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

A number of key concepts form the base of this study: they include language policy, language in education policy (LIEP), multilingual education (MLE), and mother tongue based multilingual education (MTBMLE).

1) Language policy and planning

Language policy and planning have been consecrated term in the domain of the politics of language. The notion came into scholarship in the early 19th century along with the concept of a nation-state, “when one language one nation ideology” was prominent. Many definitions are proposed to refer to language policy. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) define it as “… a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules, and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the societies, group or system” (p. xi). According to McCarty (2011), it is “a complex sociocultural process [and as] modes of human interaction, negotiation, and production mediated by relations of power. In summary, language policy englobes transnational, national, regional, or local laws regulating the official use of languages in a variety of contexts, such as government offices, schools, etc.”2 The ‘policy’ in these processes resides in their language-regulating power; that is, the ways in which they express normative claims about legitimate and illegitimate language forms and uses, thereby governing language statuses and uses” (p. 8). Unlike language policy of which it is a part, Language planning (later called language management (Spolsky, 2009) is often associated with government planning and means a deliberate effort to influence the function, structure or acquisition of languages or language varieties within a speech community. While language policy deals primarily with the legal framework, language planning focuses on procedures.

2) Language in education policy (LIEP)

Many expressions are used by researchers to refer to the same concept in literature: “language-in-education” policy, “language education policy,” “language policy in education,” or “educational language policy”. They all refer to how language policies in education are understood and analytically approached (Johnson, 2013). These concepts are used to describe language practices in educational institutions, the mechanisms that create them (Shohamy, 2006:76) and their consequences or effects. Within a nation state, LIEP is concerned with issues such as: which language(s) to teach and learn in schools. When (at what age) to begin teaching these languages? For how long (number of years and hours of study) should they be taught? By whom, for whom (who is qualified to teach and who is entitled or obligated to learn) and how (which methods, materials, tests, etc.)? (Shohamy, 2006:76).

3) Multilingual education (MLE)

Multilingual Education refers to “first-language-first” education,3 or ‘the use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction (UNESCO, 2003:17)’. It is schooling that begins in the mother tongue and transitions to additional languages.

4) Mother tongue based multilingual education (MTBMLE)

According to Malone (2007:1), “MT-based MLE refers to the use of students’ mother tongue and two or more additional languages as Languages of Instruction (LoI) in school.” The number of languages involved depends on context and national language policy. It may refer to bilingual education across multiple language communities — each community using their own mother tongue plus the official school language for instruction or learning and using multiple languages in school as in other context MT-based MLE may involve four languages — the students’ mother tongue or first language, a regional language, the national language and an international language (Malone, 2007:1).

B. Rationale for MTBMLE

Having discussed the key concepts, there is a need to discuss why the place of the mother tongue in education is a critical issue. Trudell (2016) argues that there is a clear link between language education policy and quality education. She adds that successful learning is determined by features of quality education such as the use of appropriate curriculum, teacher capacity, effective school leadership and most importantly language of instruction (Trudell, 2016). Language of instruction seems to be crucial in the first years of education. Experts are unanimous on the fact that MTBMLE is instrumental in achieving early-grade literacy. “Children who learn in their mother tongue do better in school and are less likely to drop out. They become proficient readers more quickly when learning in the language they speak at home than when using a language that is only used in school. Children also learn subject matter better when they do not have to simultaneously decipher a new language.”

https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/the-critical-language-reflection-tool/101902
https://www.k12academics.com/education-issues/multilingual-education
https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/fr/node/5494

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Therefore, a strong foundation of reading and learning in the mother tongue even improves the acquisition of second language literacy and fluency and contributes to a student's long-term success.

“Using the mother tongue in the classroom enhances students participation, decreases attrition, and increases the likelihood of family and community engagement in the child’s learning. Using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction also enhances the child’s cognitive learning. Effective learner-centred learning requires that learning take place in the language a child speaks.” (Trudell, 2016:3). When the home language is not used as LOI, the parents’ understanding and participation in their children’s education becomes limited. The Kom language project in Cameroon as an example of successful MLE programs reports parents testifying that they were not only able to communicate but their knowledge was also valued.

Despite the proven advantages of MLE, very few countries implement it fully. According to the Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2022), out of about 2.5 billion children in the world ranging in age from 0 to 19 (potential early learners), an estimated 1.65 million have access to education in their first language (L1), while more than 890,000 (30%) do not have access to education in their L1. The Middle East and North Africa are the two regions with less than 70% of children having education in their mother tongue. In sub-Saharan Africa, the second region, the percentage is about 50%. Over 75% of the world’s out-of-school girls are ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities (The Ethnologue by Eberhard et al., 2022).

C. Pilot Studies

About 40 years ago some projects on the use of African languages as MOI in the formal education system experimented in some countries on the continent with the support of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in collaboration with local initiatives.

SIL’s Kenyan partner organization, BTL, operated a pilot multilingual education project in Kenya (Graham, 2010; Schroeder, 2004); SIL’s Burkinabé partner organization, ANTBA, managed 20-30 centres à passarelle, sponsored by the Trømme Foundation Burkina Faso (Trudell & Konfe, 2010) to help school dropouts and non-school going teenagers catch up with other children in French based education. A more robust project was conducted in a number of communities in Ethiopía (Trudell et al., 2011). In Senegal, some initiatives were carried out and ongoing (Trudell & Klaas, 2010). In Nigeria, the IFE project of Nigeria has yielded satisfactory results (Afolayan, 1976).

Cameroon has also experimented with pilot mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTBMLE) programmes in some communities since 1981 (Tadadjeu, 1997; Trudell, 2005; Tadadjeu 1990). SIL Cameroon began a partnership with the University of Yaoundé I’s Departement de Langues Africaines et Linguistique (Department of African Languages and Linguistics), to provide MTBMLE to children in grades 1-4 in a program called PROPELCA (Projet de Recherche Operationnelle Pour L’Enseignement des Langues au Cameroun, Operational Research Project for the Teaching of Cameroon Languages). The National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees (NACALCO) later joined this partnership. The programme was quite successful but was suspended due to the cessation of funding. The Kom Education Pilot Project (KEPP) uses Kom, the mother tongue of children, as the language of instruction in the classroom. Children begin school in their mother tongue and then add English and French, gradually building competency in all three languages. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of MLE, SIL has been conducting studies in the Northwest Region of Cameroon.

The above experimental researches have demonstrated indisputably that children learn some subjects (like Mathematics, Environmental Sciences, History etc.) better when they are taught in the mother tongue or first language (Chumbow forthcoming, 2022). From the results of a number of studies carried out about literacy, Trudell et al. (2011:23, 20³) also conclude that “Language of instruction is a key component of successful early-grade learning”.

Improvement in educational achievement for Africa’s children is only going to happen when those children can learn the language they speak. In addition, the use of the child’s mother tongue for learning has been shown to accelerate the learning process significantly beyond the normal rate for schools using the official language as a medium of instruction (MOI). Acquisition of these skills is allowing African children who have dropped out of the official school system to return to their studies, often gaining 3 school years or more in the process (Trudell & Konfe, 2010).

Many countries already implement MTBMLE. Some world countries have successfully implemented MLE; they include the Philippines, Ethiopia, India, Papua New Guinea, Uganda, Namibia, South Africa, Ghana, Eritrea, and Serbia. In Africa, apart from Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa, most countries are still at the stage of piloting MLE (The Ethnologue, 2022).

As many countries are reluctant to fully implement MLE, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in its Resolution Ref.: A/74/396, of 18 December 2019, proclaimed the years 2022–2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL 2022–2032). It emphasises the need for countries to implement MLE. As a follow-up strategy, the African Union through the ACALAN in conjunction with the UNESCO (UNESCO-

³ https://www.sil-lead.org/education
ACALAN 2021) under the IDIL (2022–2032) is pressing for reform of language in education policy to give
primacy to education in children’s mother tongue (first language) because that would yield more benefits for
the child-learner. Following the recommendations of IDIL, Chumbow (forthcoming) suggests the implementation
of the MTB- MLE in Cameroon as part of the implementation of UNESCO’s proposals for the IDIL 2022–2032
in the Africa Region (UNESCO-ACALAN 2021).

Although informed about the above conclusions, most decision-makers in African countries still prefer
to provide education to their children principally in the ex-colonial masters’ languages years after her independence,
and most MTBMLE projects are just experimental. They have remained entangled in the colonial mindset which
tends to accord (give) more importance to Western values. The superposition of Western cultural paradigm on
the African culture is seen as the way to go.

The following section looks at the language policy of Cameroon from colonial time to the present time,
to show how indigenous languages have been excluded from the educational system. As UNESCO is suggesting
remodeling of the school curriculum, eliciting the population would help understand the possible path to go.

D. Contextual Background

1) Language Policy in Cameroon and the Far North region

Cameroon, a country of 475 440 km² with roughly 25 million inhabitants situated in Central Africa, is
characterised by extreme multilingualism with more than 270 (or 280) indigenous languages. No national
language is used formally as the language of instruction in primary schools across the country as none has official
status. French and English, ex-colonial masters’ languages are official languages and only prescribed languages
for media, education, administration, etc.

Cameroon owes her language policy that gives no room to indigenous languages (IL) to her colonial past. The
language policy since colonial times has always been repressive towards indigenous languages in education
(Ndille, 2017; Stumpf, 1979; Gwanfogbe, 1995; Dupraz, 2015).

After the German colonial period (1884–1916), the British and French took over Cameroon and modified the
language policy to the detriment of indigenous languages. In the British Cameroons territories that were
administered under Nigeria, the British ideology promoted a more decentralized and demand-driven colonial
education system (Garnier & Schafer, 2006 cited by Dupraz, 2015). They entrusted education to religious
missions (financed through a system of grants-in-aid). Local languages were more often used (at least in the first
grades) and British missionaries, who prioritised conversion, tried to reach as many children as possible, and
more local teachers were employed.

The French had an assimilationist perspective and saw education as the means to enforce their model and push
their agenda. They sought to impose their languages in the newly acquired territory both in the areas of education
and administration. To ensure full diffusion of the French language in its territory, the French provided heavy
incentives and legally banned the use of other languages in the school system. Unlike the British, the French
emphasized a public, free, nonreligious network of schools (Gifford & Weiskel, 1971 cited by Dupraz, 2015).
French colonial administrators were adamant that instruction be undertaken only in French. As a result, French
colonial schools employed more European teachers than British schools. The goal of French colonial education
was to train a small administrative elite. The French language was instituted as the only language of the schools
that were expected to benefit from institutional support. The Order of Brazzaville of 28 December 1920 by
Gouverneur General A.F.E Victor Augagneur prescribed that: No school shall be authorised if teaching
requires the state to “guarantee the promotion of bilingualism” (IL) to her colonial past. The
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more local teachers were employed.

Even after the independence in 1960, the successive constitutions of 1960, 1961, 1972, and 1984 did not
change much about the place of indigenous languages in education. Recently, however, the legal framework has
slightly evolved in favour of national languages, general and in education but for reasons of national unity the
language policy is still largely in favour of French and English. The Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon
(1996) (Law Number 96-06 of 18th January 1996) requires the state to “guarantee the promotion of bilingualism
at all levels of education as a factor of national unity and integration” (WERN 2021)7.

As a logical follow-up to the constitution, Law Number 98/004 of 14th April 1998 to lay down guidelines on
Education in Cameroon in Article (section) 4 provides that the state emphasizes bilingualism at all levels of
teaching (education) as a factor of unity and integration. Missions assigned to education provide the ‘promotion
of national languages’ (Cameroonian Ministry of National Education, 1998). Other articles such as articles
(section) 5, 11, 15, 16, and 17 deal with the teaching of national languages and/or official languages (French and
English).

As seen above, government policies are gradually evolving towards a better consideration of indigenous
languages in education. For about 10 years now, the Government through the Ministry of Basic Education
(MINEDUB) has embarked on the preservation of the country’s cultural and linguistic diversity by instituting

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7 https://wenr.wes.org/2021/04/education-in-cameroon
their teaching in primary schools, as some 43 schools pilot schools throughout the country are providing early education in national languages under the Francophonie ELAN project, with five languages involved (Ewondo, Bassa, Douala, Ghomala and Fufulde). Furthermore, some elementary teachers have been instructed and trained to teach the local languages in the areas where their schools are found (WERN, 2021; Henry, 2017).

However, the pace is slow and shows some reluctance on the part of the government. Moreover, the settings where the projects are inappropriate as they are in cities (with students with multilingualic backgrounds) rather than in the rural areas. The idea of having an indigenous language as MOI remains a wish.

While the government is considering the option of generalising MTBMLE, it is important to survey the populations’ attitude towards the reform so as to take comprehensive measures, either through sensitisation campaigns or attitude engineering. The issue at stake is the attitude of the target population group towards MLE?

E. Research Questions and Research Objective

1) Objective of the research

This paper seeks to elicit the attitude of the populations of the Far North region of Cameroon towards mother tongue based multilingual education. Attitude is understood here as ‘a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor’ (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993:1).

The paper, therefore, examines whether the populations (who are the recipients of this policy) would support an educational reform aiming at providing education to their child or sibling in the primary school in their ethnic language or Fufulde, instead of the established French or English only education. This would entail on the one hand suppressing foreign languages, and on the other hand promoting local languages in education.

2) Research questions

(1) Does the language practice in the home domain sustain intergeneration transmission of the mother tongue so as to justify MTBMLE?

(2) Would Cameroonian people based in the Far North of Cameroon be in favour of a curriculum reform in primary school in favour of MTBMLE?

(3) Would they support the use of Fufulde to substitute the mother tongue in MLE in the Far North? Would they accept Fufulde instead of their mother tongue as the language of instruction in primary school?

(4) Would the populations support the use of the mother tongue for the teaching of mathematics and sciences in primary school?

(5) Would they support transitional MLE with mother tongue?

3) Why focus on the Far North region?

The focus of this survey is the Far North region of Cameroon.

The Far North region is Cameroon one of the country’s 10 administrative regions. It is also one of the most diversified in terms of linguistic demography (Barreteau & Dieu, 1984) with close to 60 languages for a population of about three million inhabitants in a surface area of 34,263 km², divided into 6 administrative divisions. The density is 74.52 inhabitants/km². Fufulde, Arab Shwa, Hausa, and Wandala are some of the vehicular languages of the region, but Fufulde is by far the one with wider use in the Northern Regions of Cameroon (three of Cameroon 10 administrative regions which include the North and the Adamawa regions). In this multilingual melting pot, Fufulde has taken the place of lingua franca. French is almost absent from most homes (even more in the rural areas) although it is the language of administration (Barreteau and Dieu, 2005) in Seignobos, Lyébi-Mandjek, 2005). The issue now at stake is which language(s) the children master better than the others. In the Far North region, Fufulde is used by most people for interethnic communication, and ideological issues (fuelled by the dominance of Islam) have caused Fufulde to become the first language (and mother tongue) of most children, including those who are from non-Fulani background.

According to Barreteau and Dieu (2005), Fufulde is the dominant language, particularly in the Diamare and its expansion is only contained by some languages such as Wandara, Arab shwa, Tupuri or in the rural areas where there are little intergroup contacts. It is fast spreading to places of intergroup communication settings such as schools, towns and market places. Newly populated areas and migration poles, areas of agricultural development (Maga, Makalingay, Kourgui, Koza). For religious reasons, Fufulde is also very important as most Fulbes are both Fufulde speakers and Muslims. Fufulde is well known among the Mundang people. In the Tupuri land, Fufulde is spoken by men in markets, but not by women. The Tupuri have always resisted Fulbes and islamisation (Barreteau & Dieu, 2005).

From the educational perspective, the Far North region of Cameroon (along with the North, the Adamaoua and East regions) is one of four of the Priority Education Zone (PEZ) (Kana, 2019; Mouafo Djontu, 2013, Beche, 2020). School completion rates are poor for girls and rural children in particular, whose exclusion rates are 29% and 31% respectively (MINEDUB 2018 in Beche, 2020). Inequalities also exist in terms of Cameroon’s geographical distribution of schools, which is unfavourable to the country’s three northern regions (Kana, 2019; Mouafo Djontu, 2013; Beche, 2020). The main criteria for the characterization of a PEZ are low school enrolment for children under 9 years, the education of the girl-child and rates of school dropouts. In this respect, the Far North fits into the hole. It comprises the Logone and Shari division which has the lowest rate of the school.
Moreover, environmental factors (drought and floods) and security problems (Boko Haram insurgency) have made the situation even worse. Despite all these, parents aspire to have their children come out of poverty and the best way is through education. Since education is provided solely in French, it would be wise to investigate the attitude of parents towards educational reform. Observations and previous research have revealed that the attitude of indigenous people towards MTB-MLE is always mixed and mitigated. This is due to the long-lasting language policy that has given primacy to ex-colonial languages as the language of education, media, administration, etc.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This paper is the research report of a survey aiming at eliciting and discussing the attitude of people of the Far North Region of Cameroon towards MTBMLE and Fulfulde as MOI in primary school.

A. Research Context and the Sample Population

1) Sample population

The informants were drawn from the six divisions of the region. The major ethnic groups are the following: Kotoko Shwa Arab, Musgum in the Logone and Shari; Mundang, Tupuri, Masa in the Mayo Danai and Mayo Kani; Mafa and Kapsik in the Mayo Tsanaga; Giziga and Fulbe in the Diamare; Mandara and Guemzék-Zulgo in the Mayo Sava. The total number of people who filled out the questionnaires is 467, residents of the Far North region in Cameroon. The majority of the respondents have a university level of education. A few were self-employed while a good number were university students. Their representation in the sample is as follows: Diamare (56), Mayo Kani (105), Mayo Tsanaga (96), Logone-Shari (6), Mayo Sava (43), and Mayo Danai (69).

B. The Research Methods and Instrument

This research used a quantitative survey design with the questionnaire as the data collection method. The main instrument was a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions, all close-ended multiple-choice questions, some with 5-Likert scale (absolute disapproved, disapprove, indifferent (or don’t know), approve, strongly approve). In each question, the respondent was presented with the item followed by the five alternatives. In some questions, the respondents were to choose between yes or no, or between the proposed languages (sometimes they were allowed to tick more than one language where it was applicable, particularly with language use domain and choice).

There were questions on their ethnolinguistic background (village of origin, language, as well as sociocultural and education factors (religion, education level, profession, marital status, etc.). Background information about gender, age range, religion, profession, and level of study was also elicited.

Two major objectives of the questionnaire: elicit language choice in family and the language best known by the respondents. Also, the place of Fulfulde and French in the family was also elicited. It was important to elicit this information to establish whether the mother tongue or some other languages are used in the family, hence whether there is (inter)generational transmission of the ethnic language. If the parents, and or the respondents spoke the ethnic language in the family, this indicated that there is the possibility to envisage mother tongue education with children. Otherwise, there is no need. The presence of Fulfulde in the family was also elicited to find out whether Fulfulde could be envisaged as a substitute for mother tongue in education eventually since it is a language of wider communication in the Far North region.

C. Questionnaire Administration for Data Collection

Since the Far North region is made up of close to 60 ethnolinguistic groups, we aimed at getting most people represented in the sample, but since the sampling was random, we ended up having only those whom we could reach through the help of research assistants. Each research assistant (about 60) received 5 questionnaires to be administered to people of their ethnic groups. The participants were chosen randomly. Eventually, we got most participants from ethnolinguistic groups as Tupuri, Mundang, and Mafa. The other questionnaires were given to specific target groups of teachers because they are decision-makers in educational issues.

D. Data Analysis

The questionnaires that were collected were analysed using Sphinx, a statistical computer software. Tables and graphs were easily drawn by the programme.

III. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

A. Quantitative Analysis

1) Monolingualism/Multilingualism within the family circle

A major condition for MTBMLE is the (inter)generational transmission of the language that results in children knowing their mother tongue. To that end, the traditional and natural domain for ethnic language transmission is
the home.

In this study, the informants were asked to confirm if the ethnic (first) language was the main language of the home and whether it was the only language used at home, and eventually they had to list all the languages used in the home domain (as shown in Table I).

Q1: Is your ethnic language the main language used at home?

| TABLE I: ETHNIC LANGUAGE AS MAIN LANGUAGE USED IN FAMILY |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-----|---|---|---|---|
| Count                          | Missing | Yes | No | Total |
| Count                          | 44      | 270 | 153 | 467  |
| Percentage                      | 9.4%    | 57.8% | 32.8% | 100% |  |

Q2: Is the ethnic language the only language used in family?

| TABLE II: ETHNIC LANGUAGE AS ONLY LANGUAGE USED WITHIN THE FAMILY CIRCLE |
|----------------------------------|----------|-----|-----|-----|---|---|
| Count                          | Missing | Yes | No | Total |
| Count                          | 14      | 151 | 302 | 467  |
| Percentage                      | 3.0%    | 32.3% | 64.7% | 100% |  |

Q3: Which language do you speak in your family? (Choose more than one if applicable)

| TABLE III: LANGUAGES USED IN FAMILY |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----|-----|---|---|---|
| Count                          | Missing | Ethnic language | Fulfulde | French | Other | Total |
| Count                          | 190      | 306 | 190 | 164 | 41 | 467  |
| Percentage                      | 70.3%    | 65.5% | 40.7% | 35.1% | 8.8% |  |

Q4: Which language do you speak with siblings or children (you can choose more than one)

| TABLE IV: LANGUAGES SPOKEN WITH SIBLINGS OR CHILDREN |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----|-----|---|---|---|
| Count                          | Missing | Ethnic language | Fulfulde | French | Other | Total |
| Count                          | 190      | 263 | 190 | 150 | 18 | 467  |
| Percentage                      | 70.3%    | 56.3% | 40.7% | 32.1% | 3.9% |  |

Q3 and Q4 offered the possibility to select a maximum of 2 and 3 languages respectively; that is why the counts and percentage are above the total number of informants.

Tables I-IV present the answers to Q1-4. In Q1, the ethnic language was reported as the main language of the family domain (57%), and only 32% selected it as the only language used in the family. This shows that there is multilingualism in families.

In Q3 we notice that although the ethnic language is not the only language spoken in the family, it is the most used language (65%), it is followed by Fulfulde (40.7%), and French (35%).

The data in Q4 also show that the ethnic language is used in the family (and among siblings or children) by 56% of the informants, as such (inter)generational transmission of the ethnic language can be said to be sustained by the fact that the ethnic language is used in the home domain. At the same time, Fulfulde has encroached on the home language’s territory. While the mother tongue is used more often (56%), Fulfulde is the second most used language in the family domain (40%), just like French (32%).

Other questions elicited language competencies. They include Q5: Knowledge of the ethnic language (EL) (Do you know your ethnic language?); Q6: Minimal communicative knowledge of EL (Do you know your EL such that you can maintain minimal communication?); Q7: Good Knowledge of Fulfulde (Do you know Fulfulde), and Q8: Knowledge of ethnic language by children (Does your child know the ethnic language?).

| TABLE V: INFORMANTS’ LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----|---|---|---|---|
| Count                          | Missing | Yes | No | TOTAL |
| Q5: Do you think you know your ethnic language quite well? | 5.4% (25) | 79.9% (373) | 14.8% (69) | 100% (467) |
| Q6: Do you think you have minimal knowledge of ethnic language to be able to communicate without problem? | 6.4% (30) | 80.7% (377) | 12.8% (60) | 100% (467) |
| Q7: Do you think you have good knowledge of Fulfulde to be able to communicate? | 18.0% (84) | 60.4% (282) | 21.6% (101) | 100% (467) |
| Q8: Knowledge of EL by child/sibling | 2.4% (11) | 75.8% (354) | 21.8% (102) | 100% (467) |
| Total                          | 6.9% (162) | 69.2% (1616) | 23.9% (557) | 100% (2335) |

Table V above provides a summative presentation of the data relating to language competence and multilingualism. It shows that 79.9% of the informants have some knowledge of their ethnic language, and 14.8% have not. 80.7% claimed to have at least minimal knowledge of their ethnic language, while 12.8% do not. Also, 60% of the respondents have enough knowledge of Fulfulde. The informants also reported on their child and
sibling and 75% of them claimed that their child or sibling had some knowledge of the mother tongue. Q7 (Do you think you have good knowledge of Fulfulde to be able to communicate?) helped to confirm that the knowledge of Fulfulde is also rife. 60% of the respondents reported having good knowledge of it, but fewer than 50% claimed to be literate in the language.

The table show that in each division of the region, the percentage of the informant who reported knowing their ethnic language ranged from 75% to 84%. The Diamare and the Mayo Sava have lower percentages because of the presence of Fulfulde and Wandala respectively; they are vehicular languages in those divisions.

Q9 sought to elicit the informants’ assessment of their level of proficiency in ethnic language. The above figure helps to visualize the percentage of respondents per their reported competence in their mother tongue. It stands clear that most respondents have at least a fair knowledge of it, with the majority claiming to know it very well. The above chart showing the level of speakers’ proficiency in ethnic languages implies that there is potential for language reproduction (transmission) to the younger generation. The regular use of the language at home also plays an instrumental role in this transmission.

B. The Attitude of Respondents towards MTBMLE

The series of questions from 10 to 21 used a Likert scale to elicit the informants’ attitudes towards a variety of models of the language of instruction in primary schools.

Q10: Currently teachings are not provided in ethnic languages in school: what is your opinion about that?

When asked how they feel that their ethnic language is absent from the educational system, a cross-section of informants (45%) expressed their disapproval; 34% approve of the situation, while 18% expressed indifference.

Q11: The state suggests starting primary education in the ethnic language (mother tongue) with the transition to French. What advice to your junior or child?

Q12: If in the nursery school teachings are provided entirely in ethnic language with little French. What is your opinion?

10.7% totally disapprove and 27.0% disapprove for a cumulative of 37% who are opposed to the use of the ethnic language for instruction (with little French) in nursery school.

57% would support primary education where the EL and French are used. 26% disapprove of it. More than 55% support the use of EL in a transitional mode.

Q13: if in the nursery school teachings are given in Fulfulde to your child (who understands it though he is not a native). What is your opinion?

A bit more than 50% disapprove of the perspective of having their children taught in Fulfulde. About 35% are in support of it (28% of approval and 7% of absolute approval. About 15% of the respondents constitute the swing proportion.
Two questions (Q14-15) were concerned with the use of EL as MOI. Q14: What is your opinion if in the primary school your ethnic language (mother tongue) is used INSTEAD OF FRENCH in teaching from year 1 to 3 in primary school? The results show some ambivalence in the opinion of the informants. About 30% disapproved and about 10% absolutely disapproved of both proposals, while about 30% approved and 10% absolutely approved. Some 15% of the respondents in both cases were indecisive.

Q16: If teachings are provided first in the ethnic (mother tongue) language with the introduction of French/English in year 2: What is your opinion? The results show some ambivalence in the opinion of the informants. About 30% disapproved and about 10% absolutely disapproved of both proposals, while about 30% approved and 10% absolutely approved. Some 15% of the respondents in both cases were indecisive.

Q17: If the Grand North region. Fulfulde is to become the language of education instead of French. What is your opinion? 57% of the informants support the eventuality of having the EL as MOI in the first year with a gradual transition to English/French. About 30% are not in support of the idea.

Questions 17 and 18 sought to elicit the opinion of the informants about the contingency of using Fulfulde as the MOI instead of French or in a dual mode with French.

For Q17: If the Grand North region. Fulfulde is to become the language of education instead of French. What is your opinion? More than 60% of the informants are opposed to the idea of substituting French with Fulfulde as MOI in primary school. 26% of informants support the eventuality (with 15% approval and 10% strong approval). That is about half of those who reject it.

Q18: Would you accept that Fulfulde and French are used (equally) to teach in primary school? As concerns the dual model (concurrent use of Fulfulde and French), 46% approved and 38% disapproved it.

Q19: You would agree that your ethnic language and French would be the LOI in primary school. For this question (Q19), 35% are opposed while 53.5% support the eventuality of having EL and French as languages of instruction in primary school.

Q20 and Q21 investigated the opinion of the informants towards the place of Fulfulde in education.

To Q20: (Would you agree that your child would learn Fulfulde and not ethnic language (mother tongue) in school?), there is a stark opposition to the proposition that the children should learn Fulfulde and not the EL in school. In fact, only 14% support the proposition against 74% of informants who are against it.
To Q21: (It is suggested that here Fulfulde becomes the language of instruction instead of French/English), more than 70% are opposed to the idea of using Fulfulde as MOI in primary school in replacement of French or English. Only 18% approve of it while 9% are indifferent.

Finally, Q22: (Does it disturb you that your child does not learn the ethnic language (mother tongue) in school?), 48.8% of the informants responded positively (they are disturbed) while 36% seemed to be undisturbed. This implies they find the situation alright. About 14% seemed to be indifferent.

Q23: How do you feel about the non-inclusion of your ethnic language (MT) in school?

| TABLE VIII: FEELING OF THE INFORMANTS ABOUT THE NON-INCLUSION OF EL IN SCHOOLS |
|-----------------|--------|---------|
|                 | Count. | Per.   |
| Missing         | 6      | 1.1%   |
| I'm disturbed   | 189    | 36.0%  |
| Indifferent     | 74     | 14.1%  |
| I'm not disturbed | 256  | 48.8%  |
| TOTAL OBS.      | 525    | 100%   |

The data show that about half of the informants (49%) express concern that their ethnic language is not learned in school. The percentage of people who are indifferent (14%) and the missing ones added to those who do not feel bothered to represent another half. This means that the general opinion is indecisive and or indifferent towards the situation of not having their EL as MOI.

IV. DISCUSSION

A. Summary of the Findings: Answering the Research Questions

RQ1: Does the language practice in the home domain sustain intergeneration transmission of the mother tongue so as to justify MTBMLE?

According to the data collected, the ethnic language is used at home very often, although it is not the only and main language. Fulfulde is also present in homes, just like the French. The data show that 79.9% of the informants have some knowledge of their ethnic language. 80.7% claimed to have at least minimal knowledge of their ethnic language. 60% of the respondents have acceptable knowledge of Fulfulde. The informants also reported on their child and sibling and 75% of them claimed that their child or sibling had some knowledge of the mother tongue. The knowledge of Fulfulde is also ripe. 60% of the respondents reported having good knowledge of it, but fewer than 50% claimed to be literate in the language.

RQ2: Would Cameroonian people based in the Far North of Cameroon support a curriculum reform in primary school in favour of MTBMLE?

It is difficult to decide from the data whether the population would fully support a reform of the educational system in favour of MTBMLE. There is mixed feeling regarding the use of EL to teach in the first to third year, just as to teach mathematics in the first to third year of primary school. On the other hand, they would probably accept a dual mode with French/mother tongue as MOI. People are likely to approve of primary education with French and their ethnic language as a medium of instruction.

RQ3: Would they support the use of Fulfulde as a replacement of the mother tongue in MLE in the Far North? Would they accept Fulfulde instead of their mother tongue as the language of instruction in primary school?

As Fulfulde is the lingua franca in interethnic communication of the three Northern regions of the country, it would have been expected that such a language with regional unofficial status would receive consensus as a medium of instruction or major language in education. However, according to the findings, the majority of the population would be opposed to the idea of having Fulfulde either in a dual mode with French or in replacement of French as MOI. More than 70% disapprove of the use of Fulfulde instead of the ethnic language as MOI in primary school. This shows some sense of ethnocentrism as people are opposed to the institutionalization of Fulfulde as a regional language of education (60% are against this idea). They would rather have their EL as MOI than Fulfulde the lingua franca. At the same time, they seem to approve the use of French as MOI.

The respondents are against the use of Fulfulde as the language of education in the Grand North; they are not in favour of Fulfulde being used as a language of instruction in primary schools of the Grand North, even if their children understand it.

RQ4: Would the populations support the use of the mother tongue for the teaching of mathematics and sciences in primary school?

The findings show that the populations would very likely support that their ethnic language (mother tongue) is used to teach Mathematics and sciences. The above data show that there is (mixed) opinion regarding the use of ethnic language in teaching in year one to three and using the ethnic language to teach mathematics from year one to three.
RQ5: Would they support transitional MLE with their mother tongue?

There are some data that point to the fact that the population would support a transitional mode of MTBMLE whereby the mother tongue is used in the first and second years with a gradual introduction of French.

Finally, the informants seem not to be disturbed by the non-inclusion of their ethnic language in the school system.

B. Conditions for Successful MTBMLE

MTBMLE is only relevant nowadays if it concerns those children who live in rural areas and who only master the ethnic (local) home language at the time of starting school. In monolingual communities or communities where a local language is dominant, the use of ethnic language as MOI in primary schools can be justified.

MTBMLE can not be justified in urban areas where there is a multilingual classroom. Two recent studies in two contexts could help highlight what doubts the parents would have towards MLE within the ELAN Afrique project supported by IFEF (2017, 2018) (Henry, 2017; Ndione, 2021).

C. MLE in Urban Centres

Henry (2017) noted from his study of the use of Ewondo in teaching in Yaoundé that the difference between the expectations and the reality of the project has proven significant. His study could not demonstrate any linguistic and pedagogical benefits to using Ewondo, unlike socio-political and cultural benefits ones. Due to a lack of didactic materials, no cognitive benefits were observed.

MTBMLE should only be implemented if these perceived cognitive (sociological and pedagogical) benefits are real, that the children’s home language is actually the one being used in education; otherwise, it would be better to maintain the system as it is. In Maroua, only schools found in some areas and having only students who speak Fulfulde better than French should be enrolled. In case of multilingual practice at home where the child is proficient in both Fulfulde and French, it would be advised either to envisage a bilingual education (Fulfulde and French) or simply leave the child in the French /English medium school, since the transition in MLE is towards the majority international language.

D. Primary Schools and the Promotion of Local Indigenous Languages

The teaching of local languages should remain the responsibility of the councils and regions that will promote their teaching and learning in the areas where they are spoken as their mother tongue. They could be taught either in a MTBMLE model or as heritage languages in specific schools where the pupils are given incentives and didactic materials to learn them.

E. Endogenous Education: Community Driven Endogenous Education

Given that parents’ attitudes would likely be in favour or foreign languages, the preservation of indigenous languages through a sustained mode of formal teaching may be implemented through a scheme which gives more place to the communities and local government. In this regard, we advocate the creation of schools with an indigenous curriculum in every council, and in towns.

The experience of Koranic schools shows that parents and local communities through local initiatives can actively create a separate educational mechanism for their children. In the town of Maroua, children attend public schools, but also koranic schools every Wednesday evening, every Saturday and Sunday morning.
V. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at investigating the prospective opinion of native populations of the Far North region of Cameroon towards an educational reform in favour of MTBMLE and also the use of Fulfulde as MOI in replacement of French and/or English.

The findings show there is some support for the use of mother tongue and French in a transition model and there is stark support for primary school education in mother tongue and French but not Fulfulde as a substitute of French. In fact, there seems to be strong opposition to the idea of using Fulfulde as MOI in nursery school with natives of other ethnic groups. There is mixed opinion regarding the use of ethnic language from year one to three and the use of the mother tongue to teach maths.

This research points to the fact that indigenous languages still suffer some stigma. The language in education policy reproduces the ideology that local languages are second class languages, unlike foreign languages which have the capacity to empower someone. One of the main challenges (even if the government decided to finally implement it) will be language ideologies.

Moreover, if the rationale for using the mother tongue instead of French or English and MOI is supported by the claims of socio-cognitive benefits for the learners, what is the case in the area where children probably do not master their mother tongue?

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There has not been any form of conflict of interest whatsoever regarding the research team or the participants in the conduct of this study.

REFERENCES


