

Policy Around the Teaching of English in Technical Education in Cameroon: Achievements, Issues, and Prospects From the Perspectives of Pedagogic Inspectors

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Abstract

Examining the teaching and learning of English as a Second Official Language (ESOL) in Cameroon through language laws and other official documents (like the syllabi) in terms of their actual implementation is an important step in the development of ESOL education. Such investigations may contribute to the strengthening of the minority official languages and facilitate conversations on the current state of ESOL teaching and learning and on future strategies to improve its policy, especially in technical education, a field that has so far been grossly under-researched. Through interviews conducted with pedagogic inspectors, this study, unlike most studies mentioned above, investigates the ESOL education policy in place at the Ministry of Secondary Education and its implementation in technical education schools. The Ministry's determination to improve its ESOL programs shows the positive potential in the ESOL management in French Cameroon's technical education. However, new proactive approaches are needed in the future. One important recommendation made insistently was the need for an approach focused on reorienting ESOL programs and teacher training for technical education.

Plain Language Summary

Investigating the teaching and learning of English as a Second Official Language (ESOL) in Cameroon through language laws and other official documents (like the syllabi) may contribute to the strengthening of the minority official languages and facilitate conversations on the current state of ESOL teaching and learning and on future strategies to improve its policy. Through interviews conducted with pedagogic inspectors, this study investigates the ESOL education policy in place at the Ministry of Secondary Education and its implementation in technical education schools. The Ministry's determination to improve its ESOL programs shows the positive potential in the ESOL management in French Cameroon's technical education. One important recommendation made insistently was the need for an approach focused on reorienting ESOL programs and teacher training for technical education.

Keywords

English as Second Official Language, French-English official bilingual policy, technical education, pedagogic inspectors, English for Specific Purposes

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Introduction

This article is part of a larger comparative study of the practices, issues, successes, and current prospects available through the promotion of education initiatives and the attitudes of stakeholders toward the status of minority official languages in Canada and Cameroon, the only two countries that apply the English and French official bilingual policy. It presents and assesses the current situation of the teaching of English as a Second Official Language (ESOL) in technical education in Cameroon. The analysis of the teaching and learning of ESOL in Cameroon's technical education has so far been under-researched. Apart from Takam and Fassé (2018) which deals with language-in-education policy, no other published works, to the best of our knowledge, have so far dwelt on the teaching and learning of ESOL in Cameroon's technical education specifically. Most works we know of address the general teaching and learning of ESOL, whether in terms of policies or in terms of their actual implementation (for example, Belibi, 2018; Fassé, 2012; Nforbi & Siewoue, 2015; Njwe, 2016; Nkwetisama, 2012; Takam, 2007).

This article is a follow-up of a comparative policy-oriented study carried out by the same authors about the second official languages in education in Canada and Cameroon (Takam & Fassé, 2018) which spells out the policy adopted by both countries in this matter. This study, like the earlier one, was prompted by the results of a level test administered to two groups of newly admitted students into the Higher Teacher Training College for Technical Education (ENSET) of the University of Douala by Fassé (2017). Indeed, after administering part A of the Pearson Placement test to two groups of students, one from technical education (80 in number) and the other from general education (48), making a total of 128 students, to which was added a simple vocabulary task requesting testees to list 10 tools they use in their trade, the following results came out:

The placement test results indicated that up to 28.75% of technical students were below elementary level, 60% were just elementary and 11.25% below intermediate. Students from general education performed better, with only 12.5% scoring below elementary, 52% elementary and up to 35% below intermediate. Regarding the technical vocabulary exercise, it was quite surprising to see that up to 46% of technical education students could not even list one workshop tool of their trade with just 12% scoring above 5 out of 10. (Takam & Fassé, 2018, p. 21)

Two major conclusions could be drawn from those results: (1) that technical education students are particularly weak at English and (2), that technical English, in the sense of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is as

unfamiliar to many technical education students as it is to general education students. Furthermore, the same study shows that there is no difference in syllabi between technical education and general education just like no differentiation is made in the training of ESOL teachers in general education and technical education despite the specific needs of technical education students.

The authors then concluded that, in the case of Cameroon, "... basing (...) ESL teaching and learning in technical training programmes on the specific needs of tech-oriented students could increase academic as well as professional mobility of high school graduates in both countries [Canada and Cameroon]. *This preliminary paper thus paves the way for such works which are forthcoming* (our emphasis)." This paper is therefore one such work that aims specifically at investigating the teaching of ESOL in technical education from the perspectives of policymakers and policy implementers: pedagogic inspectors. It tries to answer the following two questions:

1. What are the possible reasons that may account for the poor performance of technical education students in ESOL?
2. What solutions can be proposed to remedy this situation?

The search for clear answers to our research questions places this article within the general theory of language policy and planning in the sense of Spolsky (2005, 2007), but more specifically of Cooper's (1989) acquisition planning which "is directed toward increasing the number of users—speakers, writers, listeners, or readers" (Cooper, 1989, p. 33) of ESOL in French-speaking Cameroon. Such planning is also viewed as the "efforts [made] to influence the allocation of users or the distribution of languages/literacies, by means of creating or improving opportunity or incentive to learn them, or both" (Hornberger 2006, p. 28). Thus, the theoretical approach adopted in this paper is more specifically grounded on language-in-education planning in the sense of Tollefson (2002), Ferguson (2006), May and Hornberger (2008), and Wiley and Garcia (2016), that is, language planning as it relates to the teaching and learning of a minority language in a bilingual or multilingual setting. Language in education (or acquisition) planning, as viewed by Wiley and Garcia (2016), "typically involves the formulation of policies that guide practice on a large scale [...]. Thus, acquisition planning has been centrally related to formation of educational language policies, both in historical and contemporary contexts" (p. 50). Therefore, as will be shown later in the methodology section, it was necessary to involve, in this study, such policymakers as pedagogic inspectors.

After briefly presenting the background of the study that outlines technical education from policy and training to practice as far as ESOL goes, the article moves on to briefly explain the theoretical approach and describe the methods used to collect and analyze data, after which the results of the study are presented and discussed before a conclusion is drawn.

Background Information on Technical Education in Cameroon

This section briefly presents technical education and how it differs from general education before examining the situation of ESOL in Cameroon's technical education. It starts with the policy, then moves on to programs, and closes with practice.

As developed by Takam and Fassé (2018), post-primary education in Cameroon forks into two types of secondary education: general secondary education and technical secondary education. The latter comprises two cycles: the first one lasts 4 years and culminates in an end-of-cycle examination best known by its French appellation, CAP (*Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle*); the second one, which lasts 3 years, leads up to an end-of-cycle examination called Baccalaureate or General Certificate of Education Advanced Level. Technical education is equally divided into two major fields: commercial studies and engineering studies. Technical education is administered by the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC). Vocational education, on its part, is separated from technical education. This type of education "lasts two years after primary education and aims at quickly producing a ready-to-serve and young labour force. Special training centres cater for vocational education under the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training" (Takam & Fassé, 2018, p. 26). In the framework of this study, we are only dealing with technical education. The MINESEC website lists 20 specialties available in this type of education: civil, electrical, mechanical, and industrial chemistry engineering, civil engineering-design, civil engineering-practical work, biological sciences, clothing industry, tourism and hotel management, beauty and hairdressing, administrative, commercial, and quantitative management techniques, economic sciences, home economics, hospital and biomedical maintenance, sanitary installation, medical secretaryship, assistant chemist and biologist, and medico-social sciences.

It would be pointed out that the ESOL policy in Cameroon's technical education is amply discussed by Takam and Fassé (2018). These authors indicated that there is no specific ESOL policy in technical education other than the broad official language promotion policy in education, which is prescribed by the 1998 Education

Orientation Law. This law rightly stipulates in its article 3 that the State prescribes English and French bilingualism at ALL levels of the education system. This Law is translated into reality through a weekly teaching load of the second official languages (SOLs) varying from 3 to 5 hours depending on the type of education (general or technical) and the majors of the students. It should be noted that Cameroon's technical education is separated from general education after primary school in Cameroon. It has two entry points: "the first is for those who opt to join technical education directly after completing primary education; the second is to continue in general education until the end of the first cycle (four years) and then join the second cycle of technical education to spend three additional years" (Takam & Fassé, 2018, p. 24). As a subject, the SOL is compulsory for all classes of all cycles.

Regarding the programs, ESOL classes in technical education follow the same programs with the same didactic material and the same syllabus as in general education. "The course books used in secondary technical schools are those meant for secondary general ones" (Nkwetisama, 2012, p. 519), which means that no specific syllabi exist for ESOL in technical education. Only a few well-inspired teachers try on their own to add some technical words specific to the trades they are handling in the vocabulary they teach to their students. It could not have been otherwise as no ESP training is provided to these teachers in teacher training colleges. The resulting competence of technical education students is reflected very well in the results of a diagnostic test conducted by Fassé (2017) on newly admitted students into the ENSET of the University of Douala, as mentioned earlier. The results of this test were very telling, as shown above. Such results clearly show that the minority official language teaching and learning in Cameroon's technical education is a serious cause for concern regarding both English in general (Belibi, 2018; Nforbi & Siewoue, 2015; Njwe, 2016; Nkwetisama, 2012) and ESP in particular (Takam & Fassé, 2018).

However, it is worth underscoring that some rather unplanned or purely teacher-related attempts at introducing ESP in technical education were recorded in the past. As a teacher-related initiative, one could mention the teaching of English for Mechanical Engineering by a British English Language teacher who served in Lycée Technique Douala Koumassi decades back. He used a book entitled *English for Mechanical Engineering* to teach his mechanical engineering students. As a poorly planned or unplanned initiative, the teaching of office and business English that lasted more than 10 years is worth highlighting. We could interview René Nkowap who co-authored with Célestin Tapa two books that were used in technical education for more than a decade: *Business and*

Office English for Africa (1987), and *Secretarial and Commercial English for Africa* (1989). The former book was used for students of *Terminale* (last year of high school) in commercial series and those in the programs leading to *Brevet de technicien supérieur* (BTS, equivalent of Higher National Diploma (HND) in the UK) and Bachelor students in higher education. Meanwhile, the latter book was introduced later for students of *Seconde G1* (secretarial duties), *G2* (accounting), and *G3* (marketing), and *Première G1*, *G2*, and *G3* series classes, respectively. Unfortunately, this experiment was discontinued for undisclosed reasons. But strange enough, no syllabi had ever been designed for business English in technical education, apart from those two books that were made official. Again, only one section of technical education was concerned, the commercial one, leaving out the industrial or technological section with no official attempt. Lack of follow-up and vast production of counterfeit copies of Nkowap and Tapa's books made the publishing house stop producing the books in 1997 and only photocopies were used here and there until early 2000 when the experiment stopped completely, and the Ministry of Education decided to use the same course books both for general education and technical education.

Concerning the current practice, the teaching of ESOL in technical education is hampered by a deeply enrooted prejudice the general public, including technical education students themselves, nurture about the place of languages in technical education (Kouega, 2018; Nkwetisama, 2012). Indeed, to most people, languages are just a useless burden to technical education students as their competencies and performance are reflected in their works and not their words. As such, language training is down at the bottom of students' priority list, and, as surprising as it may be, language does not seem to be the priority of the policymakers either. As aptly discussed by Kouega, one conspicuous cause of the Anglophone problem in Cameroon is the lack of focus on English in technical education: "Many of the francophone teachers posted to West Cameroon were not competent in English and so they taught in French or Pidgin, especially in technical education. This situation annoyed parents so much so that many transferred their children to government grammar schools, where at least pupils continued to be taught in English" (Kouega, 2018, p. 3). This situation, which is also felt in francophone technical education schools, automatically and expectedly leads to the lack of motivation for language classes on the part of students. Francophone students in technical education even have this popular saying: "English comes from Heaven," implying, as will be shown later, that one is born with a gift of learning English fast, else no amount of effort can lead to the mastery of this language.

Such is in a nutshell the situation of ESOL in technical education in Cameroon. This situation calls for action, the basis of which should be a sound diagnosis done by those to whom the government has entrusted the policy-making and policy-implementation supervision roles, that is, pedagogic inspectors. They are the key participants in the present study, six of whom were interviewed to collect part of the data for this article.

Methodology

To address the main objective of this article, qualitative data were gathered through language policy and pedagogic documentation, syllabi, and interviews with two National Pedagogic Inspectors at MINESEC and four Regional Pedagogic Inspectors. Three of the regional pedagogic inspectors were from the West Regional Delegation in Bafoussam while the fourth was from the Littoral Regional Delegation in Douala. One of the three Regional Pedagogic Inspectors of the West region was the Regional Coordinator Inspector of that region. It is not at all unimportant to note that Pedagogic Inspectors are seasoned or experienced classroom teachers themselves who have been appointed to their various positions for their seniority, their pedagogic skills, and their consummate knowledge of teaching and learning theories and practices. The missions assigned to national as well as regional inspectors indicate clearly that they are the right informants for this study. Furthermore, the presidential decree N° 2012/267 of 11 June 2012 to organize the Ministry of Secondary Education in Cameroon outlines 15 missions for national inspectorates of pedagogy among which the following:

- the supervision and coordination of the activity of National Pedagogical Inspectors;
- the monitoring, control, and permanent evaluation of programs, teachers, textbooks, and teaching materials;
- the implementation of research and educational innovation associated with experimentation;
- the monitoring of teacher training, in conjunction with the Human Resources Department;
- the issuance of technical opinions on the initial training of teachers and educational supervisors ... (Cameroon, 2012). [Our translation]

National inspectors supervise the work of regional inspectors who fulfill the missions of national pedagogic inspectorates at regional levels, and thus closer to schools. Their missions, as indicated in the same presidential decree, include the following:

- a permanent mission of educational supervision, animation, and control;
- a permanent mission of inspection and evaluation of teaching staff and programs at the level of Divisional Delegations of the Ministry and the heads of education establishments;
- the organization of training courses, seminars, and educational conferences;
- the design, production, and dissemination of educational documentation intended for the supervision of teachers and the various partners in the educational community;
- validation of documents produced by teachers, in conjunction with the General Inspectorate of Teaching;
- the popularization of experimental approaches and practices (Cameroon, 2012). [Our translation]

All those missions are accomplished as per the subject for Inspectors have been appointed to take care of specific subjects, in this case, English. The text organizing inspectors' missions does not differentiate between technical and general education.

Inspectors involved in this study, through convenience sampling, were interviewed in their respective offices by the authors of this article at a pre-arranged time. Before the interview itself, the reliability and validity of the protocol were tested on two regional pedagogic inspectors in the Littoral region, none of whom was finally selected as actual participants. This pilot test allowed us to get some important responses, both in terms of the quality of our two respondents' answers and the wording of the questions themselves. After this pilot test, our interview protocol was slightly revised before being administered to our intended participants.

Furthermore, it was necessary to include the official document information (syllabi, language laws, etc.) as a means of triangulation with the objective of examining multiple sources of evidence to reduce or eliminate, in the data analysis phase, the impact of potential biases that could arise from having information provided by a single source. These document sources, especially the syllabi and language laws, also provided supplementary research data, information, and insights as valuable additions to interview data and provided background and context to information from pedagogic inspectors (Bowen, 2009, cited in Takam & Gillis, 2021). Table 1 classifies the participants:

The interviews, based on language in education policy and planning questions, depicted the planners' attitudes toward, and perceptions of, the language in education policy as it relates to the teaching and learning of ESOL. Overall, the questions asked concerned the following: (1) problems faced by the teaching and learning of ESOL in secondary education in general and in technical

Table 1. Participants.

Participants	Gender	Number of years at the present position
National Pedagogic Inspector #1	Female	10
National Pedagogic Inspector #2	Female	10
West Regional Inspector #1	Male	15
West Regional Inspector #2	Female	10
West Regional Inspector #3	Female	10
Littoral Regional Inspector	Female	7

education in particular (see Questions 2 to 5 of the Appendix); and (2) potential measures that could urgently improve the current practices and policies of English Language teaching in technical education (see Question 6 of the Appendix).

Without this interview, it would have been impossible to learn from written reports or other official documents available, why ESP is not introduced in ESOL classes in technical secondary schools. The answers to such questions, as well as each education officer's perceptions, could only be obtained through an interview with National and Regional Pedagogic Inspectors, who, as can be seen in Table 1, are very experienced trainers.

The collected data were analyzed from the perspective of organized management (Nekvampil, 2016; Nekvampil & Sherman, 2015), the Ministry of Secondary Education of Cameroon in this case. The data collected were analyzed thematically around the following themes that emerged from the participants' responses and official document sources: the current ESOL policy and practice in technical education in Cameroon; the evaluation of the current ESOL policy and practice by pedagogic inspectors (including the obstacles to the smooth teaching of English in Cameroon technical education); the importance of ESP in technical education programs; ESOL teacher training, professional development, and pedagogical implications. Each of these themes plays its own important part in forming what could be regarded as the current and future state of ESOL in Cameroon's educational system, especially in technical education.

Results and Discussions

Possible Reasons for the Poor Performance of Technical Education Students in ESOL

To understand the reasons that may account for students' poor performance in ESOL in technical education,

an attempt is made in this subsection to examine the inspectors' assessments of the policy, the syllabi, and the practice of ESOL in technical education.

Concerning the policy specifically, all informants were unanimous on the fact that there should be some differences in the orientation of ESOL classes in technical education as compared to general education. This absence of differentiation between technical education and general education automatically appears in similar syllabi. Yet it is axiomatic that any language syllabus development is based on prior analysis of learners' needs and learning objectives. Technical education students are trained to be able to join the professional setting upon graduation from secondary education. Therefore, in an English and French bilingual country, being able to work with both languages increases employability. And for technical education graduates, working in English presupposes knowing a good deal of one's trade-specific language features, mostly in terms of lexicon.

The ills spotted in ESOL policy reflect in ESOL syllabi in Cameroon. There is, expectedly, no differentiation in syllabi as all informants have underscored. The teaching methods in technical education are not well defined since ESOL teachers are expected to just adapt their teaching strategies and their course content to suit the situation of their students. That, at times, creates frustration on the part of the teachers in technical education as compared to those in general education. One National Pedagogic Inspector, while insisting on the "lack of methodology for teaching in a technical field," drew some parallel with Israel where "all teachers in technical education are technicians. Those of the trades come to the pedagogy of technical education."

Regarding ESOL practice, Inspectors' assessment touches on the perception of languages in technical education, teachers' profiles and in-service training, didactic material, and ESOL evaluation at official exams. Participants decried the overall perception of ESOL as a second-class subject, the failure in which could be easily compensated for by good scores in trade subjects. This indicates that the weighting allocated to ESOL could be increased to further motivate students. In addition, students themselves do not seem to consider English as an important subject or, at least, they lack confidence in their potential in acquiring it. This is seen in their negative perception of this subject when they emphatically believe that "*C'est Dieu qui donne l'anglais* [English is God-given]." This implies that students do not need to try to learn English. Being good at English is viewed as possessing innate abilities, not acquired or developed skills.

Another major difficulty encountered nationwide is the lack of ESOL-trained teachers, especially in technical education schools. To circumvent this issue, part-timers

are hired to teach English in countless such schools throughout the country.

More to this, teachers who handle ESOL in technical education have received no ESP training to cater for the specific English Language needs of students of the more than 20 specialties offered in Cameroon technical education (Takam & Fassé, 2018). Inspectors indicated that it is left to teachers to develop ESP skills and knowledge on their own to introduce ESP vocabulary in their teaching activities. These teachers should also be given in-service training to help minimize their difficulties in adapting their teaching materials to suit students' needs. However, inspectors supposed to organize this training have indicated a serious lack of financial and human resources to achieve the task.

Ways Out of the Present Limbo

The diagnosis made by inspectors and presented above already indicates how ESOL teaching can be improved in Cameroon technical education. The solutions proposed touch on syllabi and pedagogic/didactic issues.

The Importance of ESP in ESOL Syllabi in Technical Education. One of the main conclusions of the National Education Forum held in 1995 was that, at the end of secondary school, a Cameroonian citizen should have a balanced personality through the acquisition of skills and attitudes that can enable them to adapt to their environment and transform it (Tsala Tsala, 2004). The ensuing Education Orientation Law advocates, among other things, the training of citizens rooted in their culture, but open to the world and respectful of the general and common interest, the development of creativity, the sense of initiative, and the spirit of enterprise. Therefore, the education policy should aim at adapting the school system to the demands of a constantly changing society which should no longer be a society where people are trained to mostly serve the administration (as has been the case since the colonial era), but a development-oriented society. Both official languages are supposed to help achieve such objectives. Moreover, the official bilingualism policy in Cameroon aims to achieve national unity and integration. To this end, the teaching and learning of the minority official languages should be done in such a way that "the final products should use the two languages with ease and consummate mastery" (Mbangwana, 2004, p. 22). After all, a major proponent of the French English official language policy in Cameroon stated in 1964 that, "the idea to aim at should be to produce citizens capable of handling both languages with consummate skill" (Fonlon, 1964, quoted in Mbangwana, 2004, p. 19). This objective shows the importance of the type and quality of the minority official language that

learners need to acquire to develop their sense of creativity, initiative, and the spirit of enterprise (Cameroon, 1998).

Unfortunately, ESOL teacher training in Cameroon does not differentiate between future teachers at different school types, as mentioned earlier. This “would logically result in the employment of similarly trained teachers, using similar teaching methods in different schooling contexts that involve students with different learning objectives, needs, and outcomes” (Takam & Gillis, 2021, p. 16). Presenting the same teaching strategies in classrooms with very different student populations may considerably impact on the Ministry of Secondary Education’s ability to offer differentiated education to all students. With the goal of differentiated teaching in mind, ESP may offer more appropriate instructional approaches in technical education schools. It may turn out to be much more effective in bringing English to this group of students with a similar focus on specific professional fields just as it is done in other commercial or technological subjects.

Including ESP in the ESOL program in technical education curricula will add yet another skill to students’ toolboxes. As both an official and international language, English may play an important role in their future careers. Making sure students are explicitly aware of this may be an important step in promoting English among students in technical schools, as the classes in these schools tend to be much more focused on professional prospects. ESP may speak to many of the students who choose to learn in this type of school. Graduates from such schools are badly needed in many sectors of the national economy and knowing the SOL well could make their skills more transferrable from region to region (see Takam & Gillis, 2021 for more details on this aspect).

ESOL Teacher Training and Professional Development. Given that it has become clear that ESOL in technical education should normally have specific syllabi which, for the most part, should be trade-specific, teachers should also be trained accordingly. Inspectors have unanimously advocated the training of technical education ESOL teachers rather in ENSET than in the current teacher training colleges dedicated primarily to general education. In this case, a Language Department could be created at ENSET to take care of will-be ESOL teachers for technical education. For ESOL technical education teachers who are already in the field, it would be interesting to send them to ENSET for some in-service training courses, especially ESP courses, if such a department is established. While waiting for this proposed policy to be implemented, ESOL teachers should probably be recycled before being sent to technical education schools.

This could be done in the form of seminars or ordinary workshops. National inspectors suggest that researchers in the field of applied linguistics, in the framework of their research activities, could carry out seminars with the technical education ESOL teachers to educate them on the importance of technical education in general and ESP in particular. This cannot be done, however, without input from the Ministry of Secondary Education as far as policy is concerned.

The Ministry of Secondary Education should also offer professional development opportunities to all teachers, with a focus on technical education, assessment, and differentiated teaching. These are important opportunities for teachers as they master their craft throughout their careers. It would be interesting to see the rate of ESOL teacher participation in such professional development programs, and how ESOL teachers feel about the support they receive for their instruction. West Region Inspectors #2 and #3 even told us that “Teachers do not always attend seminars (training) because it is the schools that fund them and, therefore, choose the teachers who would attend.”

It would also be critical to reinforce the collaboration between the Ministry of Secondary Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. As things currently stand, there is a serious communication gap between the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education: the former trains ESOL teachers (at higher teacher training colleges around the country), and the latter employs them in various secondary schools.

Other Pedagogical Implications. To improve the current practices and policies of ESOL in Technical Education as analyzed above, our participants insisted on a review of current programs, the elaboration of ESP teacher training schemes (as previously discussed), the design of more appropriate didactic materials and the awareness-raising on the role of languages in education as a whole and in technical education in particular.

Regarding the design of didactic materials, textbooks should be redesigned to be adapted to the needs of technical education students. Designing ESP textbooks should be based on the specificities of students’ trades. Those textbooks should cover the whole cycle. That means, one book could be used for the four classes of the first cycle and a second book for the three classes of the second cycle. Specialties could be grouped: commercial and business programs, technological programs, clothing industry programs, and so on. According to the West Region Inspector #1, the Ministry of Secondary Education once carried out a survey to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the textbooks that were used in English Language classes, but that did not work out

as no results came out of such a survey. This participant believed that a good beginning could be to have the inspectors in all regions select three books for English and let the Ministry decide among the three. The books should normally cater to the needs of technical education students. Such books could be designed and written by ESOL specialists. The most important thing is the policy, and if such books are evaluated on their technical merit, things will improve. Therefore, textbooks used in general education should be different from those used in technical education. Even in technical education, there should be different books based on specialties.

In terms of the pedagogic approach, competency-based language teaching and learning (CBLT) could be reinforced. CBLT was inspired by competency-based education (connected with the behaviorist tradition of the 1950s) that emerged in the mid-1970s in the USA and was almost exclusively used in vocational training programs. Competency-based education referred to “an educational movement that advocated defining educational goals in terms of precise measurable description of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors students should possess at the end of a course of study (Guskey, 2005, quoted in Ming Har Wong, 2008, p. 180). Applied to language teaching and learning, this approach was given robust theoretical groundings in the USA in the 1990s and has been surging in popularity around the world since the years 2000s (Griffith & Lim, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). CBLT chiefly focuses on the outcomes of language learning and thus, posits that language be learnt in a contextualized manner rather than being taught in isolation. Ming Har Wong outlined this approach thus:

[The CBLT] approach sees outputs very importantly rather than the learning process. This means, starting with a clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do, then organising curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens. [...] CBLT is based on a functional perspective on language teaching and its framework is often tailored to meet learners’ needs and the language skills they need can be fairly accurately predicted or determined. CBLT also has a notion that language form can be inferred from language function. That is, course designers should accurately predict the vocabulary and structures that are possibly [sic] to be encountered in that particular situation and they can be organized into teaching and learning units. (2008, p. 181)

It can be seen from the outline mentioned here that, encouraging language teaching and learning “in authentic situations [is] likely to be encountered outside the classroom. For instance, a student might have to fill out an application form, provide a personal medical history, or give directions on how to complete a specific task” (Griffith & Lim, 2014, p. 2). This also implies taking

students to workshops for ESOL lessons to make those lessons more practical and practicable. As suggested in the title of an article by Nkwetisama (2012), the walls that exist between the classroom and Cameroonian society must be pulled down.

It should be said that some versions of CBLT have been applicable in Cameroon secondary schools since 2012 (Belibi, 2018; Nforbi & Siewoue, 2015; Njwe, 2016) with some lukewarm results. Very little has changed in the teaching and learning of English in the Cameroonian classroom as the language is still taught out of context, and the learner remains a passive recipient of information which is still teacher-centered (Belibi, 2018). More clearly, in their study on the English teachers’ attitude toward CBLT, Nforbi and Siewoue (2015), through a questionnaire administered to 22 participating teachers, obtained the following results: (1) 45.45% of teachers had never attended a seminar on CBLT; (2) 63.64% found the new approach difficult to understand; (3) 68.18% thought that CBLT made lesson planning more difficult for teachers; (4) 54.55% claimed that CBLT made lesson delivery more difficult; (5) only 18.18% of respondents reported that they understand what CBLT entails; (6) 45.45% said that they had some smattering of CBLT. Similar results were obtained from a different study carried out a year later in a different area by Njwe (2016). Through a questionnaire administered to 91 teachers selected from 32 public and private schools in the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, the author arrived at the following conclusions: (1) 93.4% of teachers were aware of CBLT as a new approach adopted by the state of Cameroon; (2) only 17.6% believed they understood what this new approach entails; (3) only 25.7% of teachers felt ready to implement it (Njwe, 2016).

As can be seen from the foregoing, CBLT, though it has been officially adopted in Cameroon for some years now, seems to be unattractive, probably because the authorities have not yet done what it takes to get it effectively implemented. Belibi’s study proposes several measures that need to be taken to effect positive change, including giving a central role to school leaders in the implementation of CBLT, involving teachers in CBLT decision-making, effectively funding facilitators, and schools; training more CBLT experts who will train teachers nationwide on how to teach language following CBLT principles (Belibi, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, another important step in the right direction would be to raise awareness of the general public on the importance of technical education in a developing country. To understand this point, it should be recalled that technical education in Cameroon has traditionally been reserved for students who were not academically strong and were above the required age to

go to general education, that is fourteen years. This situation has essentially been institutional. The Cameroon education system, which is the continuation of the colonial education system, lays more emphasis on the training of civil servants rather than on the skilled workforce. Administrative professions have been strategically overrated and considered more important in society. It could not have been otherwise because, although formal education exists in Cameroon since the German colonization that started in 1884 (or earlier if we consider the establishment of the first missionaries, notably those of the Baptist Missionary Society, in Bimbia, Douala, and Victoria from 1841 onwards), the first technical courses were taught in 1945 in French Cameroon and 1952 in English Cameroon (Mballa Owono, 1986). The same observation was made in Che's article on technical and vocational education in Cameroon when she wrote:

For Cameroon in particular, a technical or vocational educational focus has not historically been a priority in formal, colonial schooling structures. Education in the Anglophone region of Cameroon was (and still is) heavily influenced by various Christian mission schools, whose primary purpose was to spread religious ideas. In the francophone region, the primary focus of education for colonized peoples was to groom enough administrative workers to fill the needs of the French government. (Che, 2007, p. 334)

After independence, the first secondary technical schools were created in Yaoundé and Douala in 1963 to enable pupils who have completed primary school to learn a trade that they could practice right after the end of short vocational training. In 1972, technical education accounted for only 22.6% of all secondary school students (Tsala Tsala, 2004). Institutionally, the intake age for the competitive entrance exam into a technical education school is higher than that in general education: the oldest pupils and those who failed in general secondary education were—and still are—systematically oriented to technical education. Additionally, graduates of technical education stand less chance than their general education counterparts to have options in higher education. Finally, a comparison between the number of public general and technical secondary schools shows the institutional lack of interest in technical education. According to official figures extracted from the database available at the Ministry of Secondary Education, Department of Projects, Cooperation, School Planning and Guidance/Planning Unit (DPCPOS), there were 1,113 public general secondary schools nationwide in 2001 against 108 public technical secondary schools. The private sector, which has been trying to fill the gap left by the public sector, owned 245 technical secondary schools, which is 70% of all secondary technical schools in the country. About ten years later, the number of technical secondary

schools decreased to 300, both public and private. This decrease was due to the crackdown on private secondary schools that did not conform to the official legislation. As a result, this figure corresponded to the number of public and private secondary schools holding a license testifying their legal existence and registered in the National Repository of Secondary Institutions. In the absence of more recent official figures, it seems as if these numbers mentioned earlier have skyrocketed to reach over 2,465 secondary schools, with 1,824 general secondary schools and 636 technical secondary schools (Schoolmap Cameroon, 2019). It was not clear whether all the 636 schools hold a license or not given the clandestine nature of many schools in the private sector in Cameroon. The Department of Projects, Cooperation, School Planning, and Guidance in the Ministry of Secondary Education could not confirm these figures.

The negative perception discussed above has not been evolving fast enough. West Region inspectors #2 and 3 even believed that almost nothing has changed as they revealed: “In parents’ opinion, those who go to the technical education are those who have failed to go to general education. There are some misconceptions about the importance of technical education.” Other researchers, including non-Cameroonians, observe the same negative perception in the general public. Che (2007, p. 334) for example mentioned the “continued and historic negative public perceptions of technical and vocational programs [...]” This American author went on to lament the fact that

There is little to no current empirical data which re-examines perceptions of vocational and technical education in Cameroon by various interested parties, including educators, parents, students, policy-makers, and employers to see whether a shift has occurred in perceptions and, if so, why a shift may have occurred. There is also little to no country-specific data which indicate the degree of success of vocational and technical education in achieving its goals and meeting the economic and employment needs of the society. (Che, 2007, p. 335)

In terms of languages, students themselves generally display negative attitudes toward English in technical education. The fact that ESOL courses are mandatory in all classes could serve as an important starting point for positively educating parents, students, and the general public on the central roles that languages play in education in general and in technical education in particular. This could further contribute to developing student motivation, which is a crucial factor in language learning in schools (Massey, 1994; Saindon et al., 2011). In the younger years, it may be beneficial for schools and teachers to advocate the many cognitive, social, and economic benefits of learning a second language or the other

official language. This may be done by ensuring that several aspects of student motivation are incorporated in the promotion of ESOL inside and outside the classrooms, such as Gardner and Lambert's (1959) instrumental and integrative motivations and Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System. Making both students and parents more aware of these benefits may be a crucial step toward the changing of perceptions of, and attitudes toward, English.

There is a need to work on the children's attitudes and perceptions to make sure that pupils and students welcome English, in other words, to make sure that students adhere to the project of the teachers to make teaching and learning easier. For example, according to the West Regional Inspector #1, "one of the teacher's roles is to break the ice by turning the teaching of his/her class into a project with teacher and students as partners." Unfortunately, the lack of trained teachers in many schools does not help in solving this pedagogic problem. In some schools, "it is not uncommon that students might not have had any English at all for the first two years of their secondary school education" (West Regional Inspector #1). This participant went on to emphasize the fact that so many schools do not even have a single trained teacher of English. Such schools rely on part-timers or trained teachers in other subjects to make do with ESOL. He believed that if things were based on policy rather than politics, English teachers should be made readily available in all schools. One step toward achieving functional bilingualism in Cameroon should then be to make sure that for the teaching of English and French, human resources be well-trained and made available in all public schools throughout the country. To this limitation, all our participants added the teachers' lack of motivation due to insufficient salary. Needless to mention that the performance of an education system partly depends on the amount of teachers' salary which leads to their own motivation. Teachers need to be motivated to more efficiently motivate their students.

Moreover, one inspector revealed that an English exam is completed for the *Certificat d'Étude Primaire* (CEP), but not for the competitive entrance exam into the first year of secondary school (*sixième*). Now, English is not taught in all primary schools and when it is, it seems inadequate most of the time. Our participant insisted that it would have been better not to teach those pupils any English at all than to teach them inadequate English: "Teachers usually know very little English in Primary education as there is no more '*Un maître d'anglais*' (Trained ESOL teacher in primary school), but each classroom teacher is supposed to teach English, whether he or she knows it or not" (West Regional Inspector #1). The solution he offered to remedy this

situation is that all the *Ecoles Normales d'Instituteurs à l'Enseignement Général* (ENIEG) [Training Colleges for General Education Teachers] should be well equipped to make teachers functionally bilingual.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the possible reasons, especially at the policy level, that account for the general neglect of ESOL in technical education and what can be done to reverse the current trend. As mentioned earlier, the State of Cameroon prescribes functional English and French bilingualism at all levels of the education system. The enacted official bilingualism, from its inception, was supposed to target, not just state bilingualism, "but individual bilingualism so that every child that passes through our educational system shall be able to speak and write English and French" (Fonlon, 1964, quoted in Mbangwana, 2004, p. 19). According to policy designers, the teaching of English to Francophones should be done in such a way that high school graduates "should be capable of handling both languages with consummate skill, capable of producing in English or French as they please, work of art or science of the highest merit" (Fonlon, 1964, quoted in Mbangwana, 2004, p. 19).

However, such an ambitious objective has never really been achieved. As analyzed in this article, many problems mar the teaching and learning of the second official languages in Cameroon's education system. The issue is even worse in technical education for such reasons as the absence of clear objectives pursued by ESOL teaching and learning in technical education, the absence of specific syllabi and didactic material for this type of education, inconsistencies of language policies, lack of trained personnel, and so on.

To remedy the current situation, important suggestions are made in this article, including (a) establishing a language department at ENSET to train ESOL teachers for technical education; (b) aiming at ESP in technical education; (c) carrying out in-service training and seminars/workshops to address the needs of teachers in technical education fields; (d) redesigning textbooks and syllabi to adapt to the needs and realities of technical education students; (e) effectively using a competency-based approach to teaching and learning in technical education; (f) increasing teacher motivation.

Finally, the quality of communication between the Ministry of Secondary Education, the schools, parents, and the general public would play a key role in increasing awareness of other possible instances within and around the school that may hinder student interest in English language courses in technical education.

As can be seen, this article dwelt on language management as regards the teaching and learning of ESOL in

technical education in Cameroon. It might be of interest, in subsequent works on langue-in-education policies and planning in this type of education, to investigate the other important stakeholders: students, parents, and ESOL teachers. Taking a close look at student, parent and teacher attitudes and motivation to, and practices of, ESOL in specific technical secondary and high schools in French Cameroon would undoubtedly complement the findings of this article and broaden their scope.

Appendix

Interview Questions for the National and Regional Pedagogic Inspectors in Charge of the Promotion of Bilingualism at the Ministry of Secondary Education, Cameroon

This interview falls within an on-going comparative study on the teaching of minority official language in technical and vocational education in Cameroon and Canada. In Cameroon, it has to do with English in Francophone Technical education and in Canada, it has to do with French in all other Provinces excluding Quebec. The overall objective is to see how both countries' policies and practices could be mutually informing and supportive. To have a broad picture of the current situation in Cameroon, we would be extremely grateful if you could provide us ample information on the following.

1. What is the hierarchical organization of your Inspectorate starting from your position right down to the English teacher in a technical school?
2. How do you assess the teaching of English in Technical education in Cameroon in general?
3. Is there any difference whatsoever made between the teaching of English in technical schools and that in General Education?
 - 3.1 If yes, at what level(s) stands the difference?
 - 3.2 If no, why?
4. In your opinion, why is it that there are no specific training programmes or courses for teachers of English in technical education?
5. What are the obstacles, if any, to the smooth teaching of English which are specific to technical education as compared to general education in Cameroon?
6. What do you think must be done to improve the current practices and policies of English Language teaching in Technical Education?

Thank you once more for your collaboration.


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Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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