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English Medium Instruction in an English-French bilingual setting: issues of quality and equity in Cameroon

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Despite its multilingual nature Cameroon's educational system provides for full immersion into either French medium or English medium education from the first year schooling. Following political tensions in the early 1990s the country decided to reaffirm its *commitment to promote bilingualism in the educational system 'with* the outcome being the implementation of various forms of bilingual education models across the country, including, in recent years, a *dramatic rise in the number of children from 'Francophone' homes* enrolling in English medium schools. This paper examines this rising interest in EMI in a country where French is still the language of political power and administration and where there is still very little *evidence that even 'Anglophone' children sufficiently benefit from EMI.* Drawing from an analysis of data collected from school children, parents, teachers and a school inspector, this article reveals existing complexities, challenges and possibilities arising from the current trend and presents a holistic picture of the realities of EMI in this immensely multilingual country

Keywords: bilingual; multilingual; immersion; quality; equity; socioeconomic; English medium instruction

Introduction

At the end of the last century, the case was made that research about development had paid remarkably little attention to the issue of language-in-education (Institute of Development Studies 1998, 1). In recent years, however, and owing in part to the

perceived links between education and development on the one hand and the role of language in facilitating education on the other (Mulumba & Masaazi 2012), there has been a large amount of intellectual discussion and research, in Africa (as elsewhere), on language-in-education and development issues (see for example Batibo 2015; Brock-Utne 2010; Williams 2006) with researchers highlighting the different roles of African and European languages in facilitating or impeding cognitive, social and economic development in multilingual Africa. Yet as Cleghorn & Rollnick (2002, 348) point out, 'insights from such research have failed to be incorporated into language-in-education policies or included in teacher education programs' in many of these countries. This is particularly the case in multilingual Cameroon[i] where, it has been argued, (e.g. by Echu 2004; Kouega 1999) the existing language policy lacks clear-cut objectives and orientation. Kamdem & Trudell (2011) note that the attainment of knowledge and skills within an educational system is largely dictated by the medium of instruction. The medium of instruction has the potential to promote, stagnate or stifle the acquisition of skills necessary for individual and societal development (Mulumba & Masaazi 2012, 436). International organizations like UNESCO (2003, 2005, 22) and the African Union (2006), among others, have taken positions based on a recognition of the benefits of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in education (Chumbow 2013) with a strong consensus on the importance of instruction through the medium of a local familiar language particularly in primary education. In fact, underpinning the Education for All movement (UNESCO 2000) is not only the notion of an educational entitlement for all children (McCowan 2010) but also a discourse of justice, equity and quality embedded in mother tongue education (MTE) in the early years of schooling. This notwithstanding, many countries in sub-Saharan Africa such as Cameroon still continue to promote educational policies based on foreign languages.

The literature on language-in-education in developing world contexts discusses the complexities involving the use of foreign/global languages as mediums of instruction from three main perspectives. Firstly, from a rights-based perspective, it has been argued that children have fundamental rights not only to education but also rights within and through education (Tomasevski, 2003). Some scholars posit that one of such rights is that of experiencing learning in the mother tongue or in a language that is most familiar to the learner (UNESCO 2007). Skutnabb-Kangas (2009, 304) argues that teaching children through the medium of a language which is not their home language

violates their human right to education and that policies and actions which promote this form of subtractive education can best be described as 'crimes against humanity' (Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas. 2008, 30). Secondly, there is the post-colonial perspective (Tollefson 1995; Pennycook 1995; Chiatoh 2014) which argues for the dismantling of attitudes and policies that have promoted the hegemony and subsequent globalization of the languages of colonial powers as well as the underdevelopment of the indigenous languages of former colonies especially within educational systems. Thirdly, there are arguments based on the perceived economic benefits of global languages and English language in particular. Such arguments (e.g., Dearden 2014; Pinon & Haydon 2010) suggest that proficiency in English language is perceived to be a key indicator for economic development particularly in developing countries. These three perspectives tend to be based on a transnational and reductionist view of the impact of macro level policy decisions on learners and communities and do not fully take into account the particular complexities, dynamism and multi-layeredness of language-in-education perceptions and practices of the various stakeholders in multilingual Sub-Saharan Africa. This paper argues that there is a need to move beyond simplistic dichotomisations of social justice and instrumentalism/utilitarianism and to acknowledge greater complexity in the medium of instruction discussions particularly in countries with a dual colonial and linguistic heritage such as Cameroon. Such complexity can only be unravelled when we take into consideration the perspectives and experiences of the many different actors involved in decisions for EMI in this predominantly Francophone country.

The paper reports on an exploratory case study designed to investigate the diverse experiences and perceptions of Francophone school children attending English medium schools in Cameroon. It also reports on the views of selected teachers and parents, as well as a school inspector in order to ascertain a holistic picture of the challenges and possibilities of English medium instruction in Cameroon. In line with the aims of this Special Issue, the current paper seeks to better understand the relationship between learning through the medium of English and learning outcomes for different groups of young learners in a country where French is still the language of political, administrative and economic power (Abongdia & Willans 2014; Nana 2013) and where there is still very little evidence that even their 'Anglophone' peers sufficiently benefit from EMI.

Languages-in-education in Cameroon: a historical background

Despite its multilingual nature, the history of languages-in-education in Cameroon is marked by an institutional exclusion of Cameroonian languages from the mainstream and formal education system. Unlike in some African countries where teaching and learning in the early years of primary education are conducted, at least in principle, through the medium of one or more local languages with a transition to a global language at a later stage, Cameroon opted for a full immersion into either French or English medium education right from the first year of basic education. The historical relationship between Cameroon and two former colonial powers, France and England and the resultant adoption of English and French as 'neutral' languages and consequently the languages of official business and education has been well documented (see for example Fonlon 1969; Nana 2013; Wolf 2001). This relationship is today manifested in the bilingual[ii] identity of Cameroon, an identity which, far from being a symbol of peaceful co-existence of two politically distinct parts of the country, as suggested by Fonlon (1969), has been the cause of strong divisions. As Ayafor (2005, 124) points out, 'although multiculturalism in terms of ethnic diversity is unexpectedly not yet a problem for national unity, ethnicity along the Francophone-Anglophone dichotomy is, and has drawn such attention that it threatens national unity more than anything else in the country.' Political turbulence in the last few decades has mainly been due to the dominance of a French political system and the feeling of marginalization amongst Anglophones (Dicklitch 2011; Konings & Nyamnjoh 1997). For example, a constitutional provision in 1984 clearly made the French version of the constitution the only authentic version over the English version, confirming suspicions that English and Anglophones were being assimilated into a French political system. Following political unrest and growing discord between Anglophones and Francophones in the early 90s, a constitutional revision gave both languages 'the same status' and pledged the state's commitment to the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country.

On 15 May 1996, a ministerial order No. 21/E/59 was passed mandating 'every primary school teacher [to] henceforth teach every subject on the school syllabus including the second official language subject' (i.e., French to Anglophones and English to Francophones). This was followed two years later by the promulgation of Law No

98/004 laying down guidelines for education in Cameroon. While retaining the distinct features of the English and French medium sub-systems of education in the country, the general provisions of this law, amongst other things, reaffirmed the commitment of the State to 'institute bilingualism at all levels of education as a factor of national unity and integration (my emphasis). In February 2001 Order No. 62/C/13/MINEDUC/CAB of the MoE introduced English language as a compulsory subject from the first year of Francophone primary schools and French as a subject in Anglophone schools and on 4 January 2002, a presidential decree (No. 2002/004) created a General Inspectorate for the promotion of Bilingualism to oversee the teaching of the second official language in both the Anglophone and Francophone sub-systems of education. The desperation to restore 'national unity and integration' in a country divided along its official bilingual identities failed to provide practical recommendations as to how bilingualism will (not) be implemented in the school system, hence giving room for various types of bilingualism in schools to emerge. In the Francophone parts of the country, these include (a) French medium schools in which English is a compulsory subject, (see Order No. 62/C/13/MINEDUC/CAB of the MoE above) (b) English medium schools with children from Anglophone and Francophone homes being exposed to the same (Anglophone) curriculum, pedagogies and assessment and (c) 'dual Immersion' bilingual schools with children from Anglophone and Francophone homes studying all school subjects from both English medium and French medium curriculums in both languages but deciding in the final year of primary school whether to pursue English or French medium education[iii]. State schools generally fall into one of the first two categories while the third category is still a reserve of a few elite private schools. This paper focuses mainly on the second and third categories of bilingual schools, namely English medium schools/classes and explores the motives, challenges and possibilities of EMI for Francophone children attending such schools.

EMI in bilingual Cameroon: A complex web of ideologies and forces

As was seen in the previous section discussions on EMI in Francophone Cameroon are embedded in the discourse of bilingualism in two colonial languages rather than in the country's many local languages. Researchers (e.g., Chiatoh 2014; Nana 2013) have argued that this is a result of the pervasive influence of colonialism on Cameroon's educational system. Chiatoh (2014, 32) suggests that 'decades of educational colonization and [colonial] language dominance have produced inferiority complexes so

that the local or indigenous languages [...] because of their unofficial status, are perceived as liabilities rather than assets', especially within formal education. As a result, despite compelling research evidence in different parts of the country (Gfeller & Robinson 1998; Tadadjeu 1990) that primary level children who learn school subjects in their mother tongue perform significantly better than their peers learning in the medium of a foreign language, there is yet no institutional commitment to MTE at any level of education. This perspective might explain the place of EMI to Anglophone Cameroonians but it does not account for the rising number of children from the majority Francophone[iv] part of the country with a French colonial heritage, now attending EMI (Anchimbe 2007; Fonyuy 2010; Kouega 2003)..

Recent studies on EMI in Francophone Cameroon (Anchimbe 2007; Kuchah 2013; Mforteh 2008) have identified the important role of parents' perceptions of the economic and instrumental value of EMI on their decisions to send their children to English medium schools. Mforteh (2008) argues that EMI is particularly popular in urban Francophone areas where younger parents perceive bilingual education in English and French as the basis for progress, educational opportunities and social mobility. It is also claimed that the choice of EMI in Francophone Cameroon is a result of parents' awareness of the international spread of the English language (Kouega 1999, 329). Studies that examine the economic advantages of EMI (e.g., by Casale and Posel 2011; Dearden 2014; Pinon & Haydon 2010) hold that the driving force behind the significant growth in the use of EMI, particularly across the global south, is mainly an assumed relationship between proficiency in a 'global' language and the economic development of a country. However, studies that have examined the current interest in EMI in Francophone Cameroon (Abongdia & Willans 2014; Anchimbe 2007; Fonyuy 2010) have pointed to the instrumental benefits to individuals, rather than for national development. Pinon & Haydon (2010) provide evidence from recent employment trends, especially within the private sector in Cameroon, which show that being bilingual in official languages is an essential prerequisite for the job market. The special economic dividends of EMI to Francophones in Cameroon has also been examined from the perspective of identity hybridity. Anchimbe (2007) for example refers to the phenomenon of identity opportunism amongst Francophone adults who constantly fluctuate their linguistic identities and allegiances in order to reap benefits from different cultural[v] and linguistic contexts in the country. A large scale survey on the

motives of Francophone students enrolled in English language centres in Yaounde (Mforteh 2005) revealed that none of these learners was driven by an interest in working in the Anglophone parts of the country or in communicating with the English-speaking community. Instead, their principal motivations were related to national and international job opportunities, as well as intentions to migrate to the US, UK and South Africa.

EMI for Francophone children in multilingual/bilingual Cameroon: Challenges and possibilities

While instrumental motives may be clearly identifiable in adult learners of English, the same cannot be said of children who, because of decisions taken by their parents rather than by themselves, enrol in English medium schools irrespective of the linguistic orientations of their homes and communities. What is more, apart from the limited time given to the teaching of French (see ministerial order No. 21/E/59 above) EMI schools strictly promote a policy which proscribes languages other than English (Alobwede 1998; Kouega, 2001). Such a policy poses significant barriers to the quality of learning (Ampiah, 2008; Opoku-Amankwa 2009; Sawamura & Sifuna, 2008) especially for children with limited access to, and understanding of the language of instruction. The situation gets even more complicated when children are required to learn in the medium of English in a context like the Francophone parts of Cameroon, where several home languages and languages of wider communication (Sala 2009; Ubanako & Muyia 2014) are in conflict with French and where English, their sole language of access to the curriculum is only remotely accessible outside the classroom.

Research in Second language acquisition and English language pedagogy in multilingual contexts highlights the importance of drawing from the existing linguistic resources of learners to facilitate second language learning. Proponents of contrastive analysis in language pedagogy (e.g., Swain 1985) hold the view that translation activities in the second language classroom stretch learners' linguistic resources resulting in pushed output which is essential for consolidating new language. Cummins (2007) has argued that drawing attention to similarities and differences between a learner's familiar language and a second/foreign language is more likely to achieve efficient learning than monolingual teaching. Recently, proponents of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jenkins 2007; Seidlhofer 2011) and translaguaging (Canagarajah

2012) have recognised changing use and usage of English as a global lingua franca and have suggested that language pedagogies need to take account of the macro and micro levels of interaction is an expanding English language world. Studies in multilingual contexts have suggested empirically proven practices, such as translation (Hall & Cook 2013), code-switching (Madonsela 2015), translanguaging (Little and Kirwan forthcoming) and functional plurilingualism (Sierens & Van Avermaet 2013) in English language teaching and learning. Given the lack of commitment to MTE in Cameroon, it seems appropriate to suggest that EMI needs to draw from practices promoted in other multilingual contexts so that state school children with limited access to English are given a fair chance of experiencing learning in ways that meet the goals of quality and equitable education for all (UNESCO 2000).

Methodology

The study reported in this paper was designed as an exploratory case study (Yin, 2014) making use of qualitative methods of data collection with the aim of gaining insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of Francophone children in year six of English medium education, as well as the perspectives of their parents, teachers, and a pedagogic inspector in charge of the promotion of bilingualism, in relation to EMI. The data presented and analysed here were collected between September and December 2015 from participants in two primary schools in Yaounde, the capital city of Cameroon. The first school (CamEng) was a state EMI school (Type 'b' above) with 87% of its 124 year six pupils from Francophone homes; the second (CamBil) was an elite private 'dual immersion' school (type 'c' above) with 80.9% of its 32 year six pupils coming from Francophone homes. The two schools were selected because of their structural and functional similarities with emerging models of, and trends in bilingual education in Cameroon, but also because of the typicality of the socioeconomic dynamics of the families who send their children to these schools, although, it must be said, the primary goal for choosing these schools was not to achieve representativeness. Rather, the choice was guided by the potential for learning about the lived experiences of Francophone school children, which these schools provide.

As a state school, CamEng offers free education and, as a result, enrols pupils from various socioeconomic backgrounds and therefore faces the same problems that are typical of state schools[vi] (see Kuchah & Smith 2011; Smith and Kuchah 2016).

CamBil, on the other hand, is a private school which charges very high tuition fees and, consequently, enrols only children from economically advantaged homes. Unlike state schools, CamBil requires parents to buy all textbooks before their children are enrolled; it also provides its teachers and pupils with supplementary resources including a library, a computer laboratory, a school restaurant and a transportation facility. My relationship with both schools goes back as far as 2005 (for CamEng) and 2006 (for CamBil), when, as a national pedagogic inspector in charge of the promotion of bilingualism at the MoE, I visited and supported language pedagogy in both schools on a regular basis. As familiar sites therefore, it was easy for me to gain access to these schools and to obtain the consent of parents, school authorities, teachers and pupils to collect data.

Data from adult participants were mainly collected through 30-45 minutes interviews with four parents and an inspector. Parent-participants were approached both for consent to interview their children and themselves, but only four of the many parents who consented to their children being interviewed agreed to be interviewed themselves. Because my intention was to match parents' perspectives against those of their children, this meant that I could only interview four children. One of the four parents (CamBilP), had a daughter in CamBil. He was a former permanent secretary of a Ministry and currently worked for a private mobile telephone company. The other three parents whose children attended CamEng included a taxi driver (CamEngP1), a police constable (CamEngP2), and a hairdresser (CamEngP3). Data from two teachers from each of the two schools (CamBilT and CamEngT) were collected over several informal conversations between 2009 and 2015. Data from pupils in CamEng were collected through child group conversations based on recommendations in the literature (e.g., Pinter, Kuchah & Smith 2013; Lewis 1992; Mayall, 2008) for interviewing children in friendship groups but also because of the potential for friendship group participatory interactions to dissipate power differentials between adult interviewers and children (Kuchah & Pinter 2012). These participants are represented here as CamEngS1, CamEngS2, and CamEngS3, corresponding to their respective parents. Because only one of the 30 parents contacted in CamBil agreed to be interviewed, it was not possible to interview his daughter (CamBilS) in a group; she was therefore interviewed alone. This notwithstanding, the data collection procedure was the same for all child participants. The participatory component of child group conversations included involving children in decisions about the day, time and venue for the conversations as

well as the use of activities, such as a language card game (see Esch 2012), as bases for our interactions. I also drew from my knowledge and understanding of the discourse of children (Pinter 2011), from more than 15 years' experience of working with primary level pupils and teachers, to formulate my questions in ways that were accessible to the children and I was willing to shift between English and French where necessary.

Apart from the interviews with parents, which were conducted in French, all other interviews were conducted in English, although, as shall be seen later, there were several instances when child-group conversations shifted between French and English. The various data sets were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated (where necessary), analysed and interpreted thematically, following a combination of analytical considerations, techniques and procedures recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006), Attride-Stirling (2001), Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006) and Kvale (1996). Data from the two teachers was only used to expatiate issues raised by child participants.

Discussion of findings

Socioeconomic and sociocultural benefits of EMI to Francophone Cameroonians.
A resounding theme that emerged from interviews with all four parents, was in relation to the opportunities for better jobs, which EMI offered their children nationally and internationally. To these parents, EMI is not just about English language alone; it encompasses an additional language and identity for their children and places them in better positions for the job market. Parents felt that EMI offered their children an added advantage not only over their siblings in French-medium schools, but also over their Anglophone peers in EMI schools because Francophones pursuing EMI were better bilinguals. CamEngP2, for example, explained that in relation to his other children CamEngS2 was more likely to be:

> '…better off in future because I have noticed that to have better
>
> opportunities in Cameroon today, you have to be perfectly bilingual. […]
>
> Because Francophones are many in this country, the chances of having a
>
> job for them is limited…their inability to adapt to English is low because

they have a superiority complex, so they cannot compete in a bilingual

country like Cameroon.

This line of thought was echoed in interviews with all other parents. CamEngP1 highlighted the sociocultural and political dimension explaining that, due to corruption and gender biases within the country, chances of a female child succeeding in life were limited and so being perfectly bilingual was the only means of ensuring that she would find a job. CamBilP's perspective was much more grounded on government policy of 'regional balance' (see Mbuh 2000). He explained that as a Cameroonian from the Francophone North of the country, his daughter, CamBilS, was unlikely to gain admission into a professional school for medical doctors in Cameroon because of the large number of students from her part of the country competing in French. However EMI gave her the added advantage of an Anglophone identity and an additional language which put her above here 'monolingual' Francophone or Anglophone peers. Being a Northerner and a product of EMI also offered her an institutionalized advantage (Mbuh 2000) in gaining admission into her dream professional school in the future. This is because she would be competing with fewer Anglophone northerners (rather than with thousands of Francophone Northerners) and so would have better chances of being successful. Parents' perspectives were corroborated by the inspector who explained that 'since the creation of the inspectorate of bilingualism in the basic education sector, there had only been one national inspector with experience of teaching French to Anglophones, as opposed to six English language inspectors'. To him, this suggested political underpinnings in the discourse of bilingualism 'designed to favour the promotion of English to Francophones over the promotion of French to Anglophones' thus preparing Francophones for jobs that would otherwise be performed by Anglophones.

The different views expressed above tend to emphasise the instrumental benefits of EMI for individuals rather than for the nation-state. These perspectives suggest that although French continues to be the language of political and administrative power in Cameroon (Abongdia & Willans 2014) the socio-economic dynamics of the country impose a growing need for English language proficiency as well. As Pinon & Haydon (2010) explain, more and more, multinational companies in the country are demanding

proficient English speakers who are also capable of doing business with the majority Francophone populations. As a consequence, the best equipped for the job market are Francophones who also speak English, rather than 'monolingual' Anglophones. English medium education has therefore become, for Francophones, a tool for greater opportunities and identity opportunism (Anchimbe 2007). It enables Francophones, because of their bilingual competence, to gain better access to jobs than Anglophones and hence, further marginalizes 'monolingual' Anglophone Cameroonians.

Home Support mechanisms for EMI

The generally positive discourse of parents in relation to the socioeconomic advantages of EMI for their children was not generally matched with the perspectives expressed in terms of the support they provided for their children at home. In all four homes, the dominant language of interaction was not English; it was predominantly French and mother tongue. CamBilP and CamEngP2 made up for this by employing home teachers and providing their children with all their school needs. Both parents had also previously sent their children to EMI nursery schools for two years prior to their being enrolled into EMI primary schools. CamBilP also provided his daughter with supplementary learning resources and lived in a neighbourhood where his daughter could interact with children of educated Anglophone parents. CamEngP1 and CamEngP3 were both unable to afford extra language support classes for their children. This was not unexpected, given the socio-economic levels of these parents. CamBilP explained how as part of the policy of CamBil, he had to create time every weekend to learn from his Anglophone children to know more about what they were doing. Although this was most often in French it offered opportunity to engage with the children's learning. CamEngP1 and CamEngP3, on the other hand, lived in relatively modest neighbourhoods, where the dominant language was French and where Anglophone families mostly spoke pidgin or broken French. This meant that there were little or no opportunities for their children to be exposed to English language outside the school environment.

Although parents were generally very satisfied with the school performances of their children, interviews with children revealed huge disparities in their school performances. CamBilS and CamEngS2 were consistently amongst the top five in their class, whereas CamEngS1 and CamEngS3 often performed just around the average

mark. In particular, there were significant issues with CamEngS3's school performance that had made her mother consider removing her from EMI. CamEngP3 explained that '…at one point, I wanted to change her school…she was really struggling, but I had no choice, it was too late. So I told myself that if I transfer her to a Francophone school, she might be discouraged.' Some of the challenges faced by her daughter were mainly based on her CamEngP3's inability to provide all her school needs: 'to be honest, in class four she did not have any textbooks…I don't have enough money to buy her textbooks, but sometimes when I have money, I buy her English and mathematics books.' This difficulty was also expressed by CamEngP1, who explained that being an only child in an Anglophone school, it was not possible to pass down textbooks to CamEngS1 as her other Francophone siblings had done to each other. In terms of other forms of support provided to their children, both parents claimed that they encouraged their children to work hard in school by advising them on the benefits of working hard. The socio-economic realities of these two parents (CamEngP3 and CamEngP1) stand in contrast with CamBilP and CamEng2 who are able to provide extra material support to their children. The differences between the economic and educational levels of these parents seems to impact on the affordances for learning which they provide for their children.

Children's experiences and perspectives

Choice of language for interview

Prior to child interviews, I gave each child participant five cards on which I had written the name of a language. Three cards were labelled English, French, Pidgin, for each child, the fourth card was labelled English & French and the fifth card had the name of the mother tongue of their parent. Each child was asked to tear off and bin the card with the language they least wanted to use in our conversation, without showing their choices to their peers. I collected the remaining four cards from each child to note the languages that had been removed and consistently it was the mother tongue. The interview later revealed an attitude to local languages as not being appropriate for educational conversations. This was consistent with Esch's (2010) reference to 'epistemic injustices' in the language situation in Cameroon which promote the belief that local languages have no educational value. I returned the cards to each participant, this time asking them to each give me the card that had the name of the language they were most comfortable to be interviewed in. CamBilS selected English, CamEngS1 and

CamEngS3 selected French, while CamEngS2 selected English & French. Then I collected and jumbled up the remaining cards from each participant and this time, I placed them on a table and asked them to discuss amongst themselves to select one language which would represent their collective second choice. As CamBilS was interviewed alone, her choice of French was individual; the other three participants all agreed on French as well. Clearly, apart from CamBilS, English was not the language of choice for these children, although they had all been in EMI for a minimum of six years. What is more, this activity suggested a link between the socioeconomic backgrounds of these children and their preferred language. CamBilS from a very elite private school had benefitted from high quality instruction and further support in the form of a home teacher, supplementary materials and interaction with English speaking families. CamEngS1 and CamEngS3, on the other hand, came from homes where support for English language and education in general was very minimal, and where parents were very often unable to buy basic textbooks for their children. As a result, these children were still unable to select English language as their preferred language of interaction.

Challenges of EMI to pupils

Although all four parents expressed satisfaction with the level of bilinguality and English language proficiency that EMI was affording their children, it was clear from child interviews that EMI was challenging. During the interview, CamEngS1 spoke very little and displayed visible knowledge gaps, even when I switched the conversation to French, his preferred language. For example, he could say the name of his village, but was unable to situate it in the correct region of the country, a content covered in the third and fourth years of primary school. Also, both CamEngS1 and CamEngS3 had failed in promotion examinations and repeated a class in the course of their studies. Amongst the challenges identified by both children was their inability to access content in other subject areas, as can be seen from the following conversation:

> **CamEngS3:** Je ne comprends pas bien l'anglais et je ne peux pas bien lire. (I don't understand English very well and I cannot really read)
> **Kuchah:** Ah bon? (Really?)
> **CamEngS3:** Oui (yes)
> **Kuchah:** Et tu pense que les Anglophones dans ta classe n'ont pas ce même problême? (And do you think Anglophones in your class do not have the same problem?)
> **CamEngS3:** Quelques Anglophones ont le meme problême mais leurs ainés les aident à la maison. (Some Anglophones have the same problem, but their older siblings help them at home)

> **Kuchah:** Et cela te frustre parfois? (And does that frustrate you?)
> **CamEngS3:** Oui Parceque j'essaie (.) comme on vient souvent au cours, nous sommes à deux. L'autre aussi ne sais pas bien lire mais moi je sais écrire mieux qu'elle […] mais comme je ne sais pas lire, je ne comprends pas les cours dans les autres matières quand je lis. (Yes. Because I try my best. My other friend with whom I come to school, she too does not know how to read but I know how to write […] but since I cannot read well, very often, I do not understand the other subjects when I read.)

Looking at the home support mechanisms for EMI and the lived educational experiences of child-participants, there were significant disparities between their proficiency levels, despite having all been exposed to at least six years of EMI. These disparities were, in a sense, also related to the socioeconomic backgrounds of their parents with CamBilS clearly more proficient and more predisposed to succeed because of the quality of education and support systems provided both at school and at home. On the contrary, children from poorer families (CamEngS1 and CamEngS3) showed both linguistic and knowledge gaps, mainly due to their inability to access curriculum content through reading. Clearly, their parents could not support their learning, as they themselves were unable to understand English. While the discourse of all four parents was vested mainly in the instrumental advantages of EMI to their children, there were huge differences in terms of the environmental, institutional, cognitive and material support that parents were providing to their children and this favoured socioeconomically advantaged children over their socioeconomically disadvantaged peers. This finding is consistent with research evidence elsewhere which show that EMI can be a barrier to learning not only for children in communities where English is not spoken outside the school (Brock-Utne et al. 2010; Madonsela 2015; Williams, 2011) but also for children from poor homes (Akyeampong et.al. 2007; Probyn 2006) and hence can further widen the gap between the rich and the poor.

School-based support for EMI

Informal conversations with teachers highlighted language proficiency challenges for children as the main factors militating against quality learning in EMI. Both teachers stated that French and popular youth varieties such as Camfranglais (Sala 2009) were principally responsible for children's inability to develop proficiency in English necessary for effective EMI. However these teachers maintained that the English-only policy in EMI was the best way to help these children improve their English since, for

the majority of children, school was the only site for exposure to the language of instruction. CamBilT felt that his school had sufficiently catered for language challenges through various policy and practical procedures, including reduced class size for maximum individual attention, the recruitment of a special supplementary literacy teacher to support individual students in need, the inclusion of a special 'free-reading' period on the time table, and closer parent involvement in the monitoring of learning at home. CamEngT, on the other hand, decried class sizes and the inability of many parents to buy basic textbooks for their children adding that 'sometimes we even see children who come to class without a pen or pencil.' For her, the most challenging task was to 'get these children to read when they do not even have the textbook.'

Responding to a question about the possibility of using children's existing linguistic resources to facilitate learning, both teachers, as well as the inspector insisted that this was counter-productive and inconsistent with policy recommendations. The different arguments raised to support their resistance to the use of French (apart from during French lessons) and Camfranglais in class confirmed arguments by Chiatoh (2014) and Esch (2010) that colonialism and colonial languages still have a strong impact on the conceptions of formal education of professionals in this context. The proscription of languages other than English in classrooms (Alobwede 1998; Kouega, 2001) fails to take into consideration the linguistic configuration of current EMI classrooms in urban areas. As explained earlier, the political desperation to establish a unified nation, embedded in an official bilingual vision which makes use of 'neutral' languages, has seen national languages relegated. As a result, assumptions, mainly promoted by discourses of communicative language teaching, abound amongst teachers and trainers. Such discourses promote an English-only approach to language and education as the only possible and valuable option. But from interviews with the children, it was clear that occasional shifts from English to French and back helped facilitate interaction and the generation of perspectives. Current research (e.g., Cummins 2007; Hall & Cook 2013) suggest that the use of mother tongue or a familiar language in the second or foreign language class can be beneficial to learning. As was shown above, the literature on language pedagogy in multilingual contexts is increasingly demonstrating that multilingual approaches to language and education, such as code-switching (Madonsela 2015), translanguaging (Little and Kirwan forthcoming) and functional plurilingual learning (Sierens & Van Avermaet 2013) are more realistic and valuable options to

achieving learning outcomes. The evidence from my conversation with these children and from their accounts of playtime language use shows that EMI would benefit considerably from adopting a multilingual perspective at least in relation to French in Francophone parts of Cameroon.

Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate (a) the experiences and perceptions of Francophone school children pursuing EMI in Cameroon and (b) the perspectives of selected teachers, parents and a school inspector in Cameroon on EMI for Francophone learners, with the aim of gaining insights into the ideological and practical realities of this rising trend in education in the country. Findings suggest that the local dynamics around EMI in Cameroon, a Francophone dominated political and linguistic country (Abongdia & Willans 2014; Nana 2013), is complex and multifaceted with conflicting ideologies and realities. At the root of this is the postcolonial linguistic heritage and the ensuing language planning and language-in-education policies which have promoted two colonial languages (English and French) while relegating national languages to the home environment. As a result, while MTE remains an important condition for quality and equitable education for all children (UNESCO 2005), language-in-education policy in this country is still strongly driven by ideologies rooted in the vision of a nation-state built on two 'neutral' European languages.

As the evidence presented in this study shows, educational authorities, teachers and even pupils have shared notions of the superiority of these two foreign languages over national languages in educational settings. Under the current circumstance, being bilingual in French and English is crucial and those best placed for the job market are Francophones who are proficient in English. However, to be a competent English-speaking Francophone probably depends on having educated and/or privileged parents. The evidence reported in this small study suggests that the privileged child (CamBilS) is the most likely to achieve quality EMI over her less privileged peers (CamEng1 and CamEng3) whose parents are unable to support them both materially and educationally. This raises questions of equity which need to be addressed through pedagogical practices which are rooted in the linguistic realities of the context.

Given the persistent socio-political discourses of national unity and integration built around English and French, MTE might not be a viable alternative to EMI in Francophone Cameroon. Policy rhetoric on language-in-education in Cameroon often invokes challenges such as multilingual classrooms especially in urban communities, lack of financial and basic material resources and parental endorsement of EMI to justify government position on medium of instruction. Instituting MTE requires overcoming material challenges in developing curriculums, textbooks and teacher training to respond to quality imperatives. At the moment, there seems to be no political will to institutionalise MTE. What might be possible now are stronger research-based strategies to enable successful learning outcomes in EMI for all learners irrespective of their particular context of learning and socioeconomic circumstances. For children in Francophone contexts, the fluidity of interactions between Anglophones and Francophones should be seen as a resource for encouraging pedagogic practices that promote both languages simultaneously. The evidence from interactions with the three children in CamEng shows that translation and code-switching could be appropriate strategies for enhancing learning in EMI in a multilingual/bilingual country like Cameroon. A paradigm shift in policy and teacher education, from obsolete English-only policies to more multilingual-friendly forms of pedagogy could eventually dissipate some of the challenges faced by parents and learners from socioeconomically disadvantaged strata of the population.

[i] With a total population of 22,253,959 in 2013 (World Bank 2015) representing approximately 2% of Africa's total population, Cameroon has a diverse and multilingual population with 286 local languages (Ethnologue 2009) representing 13.5% of Africa's total languages and possibly the highest population-languages ratio in Africa. Three of the four main linguistic phyla of Africa are represented in Cameroon: Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Kordofanian (of which Niger-Congo is the largest family). Only the Khoisan phylum is absent. (Ethnologue 2009)

[ii] Cameroon is officially known as a bilingual country because of its two official languages (French and English) rather than in reference to its many home languages.

[iii] The end of primary education in Cameroon is sanctioned by two types of exams, the Common Entrance Examination into secondary schools ('Concours d'entrée en sixième' in the Francophone sub-system) and the First School Leaving Certificate ('Brevet d'etudes Primaires' in the Francophone sub-system). Because both sets of examinations take place on the same days in both Francophone and Anglophone schools, it is not possible for children in the 'dual immersion' schools to sit both. They have to either sit for the Anglophone or Francophone exams depending on which of the two sub-systems of education they will pursue beyond primary education.

[iv] Cameroon is made up of 10 administrative regions (formally called provinces) eight of which are Francophone owing to their being a French colonial protectorate after the defeat of Germany in 1919 and two of which are Anglophone originally known as British Southern Cameroons. Historically, the term 'Francophone' and 'Anglophone' were used to refer to Cameroonians from the former French (East Cameroun) and British (Southern Cameroons)

protectorates respectively. More recently, these terms are increasingly being used in relation to those who pursue French and English medium education respectively (Simo-Bobda 2001).

[v] Alongside the official linguistic difference between Anglophonism and Francophonism is a strong sense in which people see themselves as culturally Anglophone or Francophone. It is therefore usual to hear people talk about their culture in relation to these official languages, rather than to their native languages and cultures.

[vi] UNESCO institute of statistics figures show that in 2012 the average number of pupils per reading and mathematics textbook in Cameroon was 12 and 13.9 respectively.

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