

# Eurocentric or Indigenized Educational Curriculum: What Possible Option between Foreign Languages and National Languages (Fulfulde) in Education in the Far North Region of Cameroon?

Herbert Rostand Ngouo

## ABSTRACT

This study explores populations' evaluation of the relevance of foreign languages in education, as well as their opinion about the option of their replacement with Fulfulde, a lingua franca of the Northern regions of Cameroon.

The data were collected using a quantitative approach through a questionnaire administered to 525 informants, all residing in the Far regions of Cameroon. They originated from the three northern regions but the majority (90%) are native of the Far North. The multiple-choice questions (with 5 scales ranging from absolutely agree to absolutely disagree) aimed at eliciting the opinion of the respondents regarding the reformation of the LIEP by suppressing the prevalence of foreign language over national languages, while upgrading the status of the latter in the secondary schools.

The findings reveal an attitude inclined in favour of foreign languages as the perspective of the substitution of foreign languages by Fulfulde as subject is not opted for. Foreign languages are perceived as being important. As a result, their presence in the Francophone education curriculum is seen as relevant and pertinent. Logically, it is suggested that their teaching be extended to the Anglophone system of education. As concerns instrumentality in social mobility, German is highly rated among foreign languages, and Italian is underrated. English and French are perceived as being more important than these foreign languages. Fulfulde is not perceived as relevant enough to replace FLs in education, however, national languages are seen as deserving a place in the school system.

**Keywords:** curriculum indigenisation, education, foreign languages, Fulfulde, language in education policy (LIEP), national languages.

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**H. R. Ngouo\***

Department of Bilingual Letters,  
University of Maroua, Cameroon.

(e-mail: rostandngouo2000@yahoo.fr)

*\*Corresponding Author*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As globalisation sweeps through the world's communities causing cultural and identity changes, Africa is confronted with the challenge of adopting a more Afrocentric paradigm to reverse a longstanding Eurocentric mind-set inherited from colonisation. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013:5) remarked that:

*One of the strategies that have sustained the hegemony of the Euro-American-constructed world order has been its ability to make African intellectuals and academics socially located in Africa and on the oppressed side to think and speak epistemically and linguistically like the Euro-American intellectuals and academics on the dominant side* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:5).

There is a need to decolonise the mindset (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986), and the critical domain where this has to start is the educational system. At the centre of this problem is the language problem as many African countries are still hesitant to invest in African languages, as suggested by Ouane *et al.* (2010). In fact, African countries remain entangled in the polemic about language policy in education, particularly regarding which languages are to be used in schools, for how many hours and for what aim. While there is the urge for the implementation of (indigenous curriculum and multilingual education (MLE) or mother tongue based multilingual education (MTBMLE), there is the issue of other foreign languages (apart from ex-colonial languages used as medium of instruction) being taught as subjects. In Cameroon, it is a fact that foreign languages are promoted even more than indigenous languages. By foreign languages in Cameroon, we do not mean French or English, but the German, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese and Italian languages. This paper seeks to measure the acceptability, by populations of the Far North region of Cameroon, of a reform of the educational curriculum that would substitute FLs teaching with Fulfulde in the secondary school.

Foreign languages are understood in this context as non-national (usually dominant) languages without official status in the country. For instance, English is a foreign language in a country like Japan and in many countries of the expanding circles (Kachru, 1985). In Cameroon in our consideration, English or French cannot be considered foreign languages in the educational system for two reasons: (1) French is an official language; (2) it is used by a cross-section of the population as their only and first language; (3) there is an indigenised form of French spoken in Cameroon. For the above reasons, when taught to Anglophones, we cannot be considered French as a foreign language because some of the students in the Anglophone system of education come from families where French is the home language, even when there are cases where they would use their ethnic languages as well.

In the same vein, English cannot be considered as a foreign language for Francophone Cameroonians for the following reasons: (1) it is one of the official languages, and even if only 20% of the population is considered Anglophone, many people of Francophone extraction use it daily as their working language and in their environment. (2) Many people claim that most Anglophone do not speak English but Pidgin English; it does not cancel the fact that most if not all of them discover literacy only in English first. They had not been literate in another language before starting school.

Many countries, including those whose languages have become international, provide foreign languages in their school curricula. EU countries invest between 5 and 15 percent of their total education budget on second language teaching (Grin, 2003) and compulsory foreign language teaching accounts for 5 to 10 percent of total teaching hours in primary education and for 10 to 20 percent in secondary education (Eurydice, 2017:117 cited by Hahm & Gazzola, 2022). These countries plan the acquisition of foreign languages for their citizens as a “means of promoting cooperation and mutual understanding with neighbouring countries, broadening the cultural horizons of pupils and students, reducing communication costs in trade and in productive activities, as well as facilitating the international mobility of labor (European Commission, 2008; European Commission, 2012b cited by Hahm & Gazzola, 2022).

The Council of the European Union considers foreign language skills as one of the eight “key competences for lifelong learning” together with literacy, and numerical, scientific and engineering skills (among others) (Council of the European Union (2018) cited by Hahm & Gazzola, 2022).

While France emphasises the teaching of Spanish and English as optional ‘*langue vivante 2*’ foreign living languages, in Germany, English language skill is highly value in general and is associated with a 13% higher wage on average. Education is the main determinant of English language acquisition in Germany. In many other European countries, foreign languages are taught right from the primary schools (Hahm & Gazzola, 2022). The trend does not apply only to European countries.

In many countries of Africa, instead of promoting the teaching of indigenous (national) languages even as subjects, not to say as medium of instruction, the preference is given to languages of the ex-colonial powers. For instance, French is taught in Ghana, in South Africa, in Nigeria, and other countries as foreign languages.

Even if African countries would want to reproduce the policy, there is a need to consider giving a place of their indigenous languages in the education in order to shift to a more Afrocentric paradigm. It is difficult to tell whether African countries provide foreign languages in their education for the same reasons. While the developed countries have their ethnic (national) languages as medium of instructions, most formerly colonized countries have adopted their ex-colonial languages and educational philosophy in education, predisposing their citizens to develop an extrovert and Eurocentric perspective in life. Therefore, the sector where a decolonised paradigm should be reflected is the education (Ndille, 2014). In Africa, the knowledge of a second language is assumed to be a better asset for social mobility and migration.

#### A. *Language in Education Policy in Cameroon*

Cameroon’s educational system remains trapped in colonial entanglements, and its language policy or language in education policy still carries residues of the ostricisation of indigenous language, from the German time to the post-independence period, through the French and British ruling time (Stumpf, 1979; Gwanfogbe, 1995; Ndille, 2016, 2014; Dupraz, 2015; Chumbow, 1980, 1985, 1996, 2009; Echu, 2003). Two systems cohabites in Cameroon as a result of its past. In fact, after the scramble for Africa, Cameroon fell in the dominion of the Germans, who administered the territory as their protectorate until 1916, when they lost the WWI. The territory was therefore divided into two parts between the French and the British (3/4 and 1/4 of the territory respectively). The French applied the direct rule in as attempt to assimilate the populations in order to produce ‘French people in a black skin’ (Ndille, 2016). The British administered Cameroon using the indirect rule as a semi-autonomous territory annexed to their colony Nigeria. While French and English became the languages of each part of the territory. During these successive periods, the colonial powers administering the territories applied language in education policy.

In 1961, the British Southern Cameroons obtained independence by reunifying to French Cameroon which had become independence on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1960. The successive constitutions of 1961, 1963 and 1972 consecrated a bi-jural and bilingual (bicultural) country with French and English as official languages. Two

judiciary and educational systems were also established. The indigenous identity languages and culture were ignored. Although Cameroon is characterised by multilingualism (about 270 indigenous (national) languages counted today (Eberhard, 2022), the emphasis has always been put on bilingualism. Therefore just like it was the case with the German language during the German colonial rule, the English and French languages were prescribed as medium of instruction (MOI) to the detriment of the indigenous languages.

The nascent postcolonial Cameroonian state opted for the French as official language, following the terms of reunification in 1961; bilingualism with English and French as official languages was established as the national language policy. As such, the promotion of the two official languages became the major concern of the Cameroonian Government as they are symbol of national integration and unity (Echu, 2003).

The successive constitutions of La Republique de Cameroun (1960), the constitution of the Federal republic of Cameroon (1963), the constitution of the United Republic of Cameroon (1972) have reproduced the colonial linguistic paradigm, and more than sixty years after independence (by 2008), the policy had remained the same despite some attempts since 2010 to give more place to local languages. Instead, more foreign languages were taught. Foreign languages are given preference as subjects in the educational curriculum in Cameroon. Beside French of English used as MOI, in either the Francophone or Anglophone subsystems of education, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese and Arabic have been taught in the secondary schools of the Francophone subsystem across the country. One of them is a compulsory subject in all secondary schools as well as a subjects in official exam (BEPC). All universities offer FLs as fields of study and research right up to the doctoral level. Therefore, there are more opportunities to learn them.

This is unlike national (indigenous languages) which are taught in a few pilot schools for two hours a week. Fewer universities provide the opportunity to students to study African linguistics, and even when it is the case, there is no specific course for a particular national language. As a result of this most parents perceive FLs to be better assets for social mobility.

Since 2008, the Ministry of Secondary Education and the Ministry of Higher Education have been readjusting their policy to provide a place for national languages alongside foreign languages. This change is supported by a legal framework established in 1996 which is in favour of the promotion of national languages in all social institutions, including education. Article 1, and paragraph 3 states that *'The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour to protect and promote national languages.'* Article (section) 4 provides that the state emphasizes bilingualism at all levels of teaching (education) as a factor of unity and integration. The Constitution also mentions national (indigenous) languages for the first time ever (Tadadjeu, 2003).

The Government's efforts to encourage bilingualism have since been sustained primarily by the education system. The missions assigned to education provide on point four of section 5: promotion of national languages. The constitutional law also provides that the government shall promote and protect national languages. Furthermore and in accordance with the constitution, Law Number 98/004 of 14th April 1998 to lay down Guidelines on Education in Cameroon, articles (section) 5, 11, 15, 16 et 17 deal with the teaching of national languages and/or official languages (French and English) and listed 'promote [Cameroonian] national languages' as one of its nine educational objectives (Cameroonian Ministry of National Education, 1998).

As it can be seen from the above legislation, there are explicit prescriptions regarding the teaching of national languages, but no explicit law about foreign languages in the Francophone system of education in Cameroon. However, the discriminatory language practice of teaching FLs has been going on unperturbed since the early years of independence in the 1960s, the continuation of a policy dating back to the early years of colonial domination.

#### *B. Cameroon's Language Policy in Education in Relation to Foreign Languages in Francophone Secondary Education*

The presence of FLs in the curriculum seems to be part of the colonial legacy. In fact, information about when the Francophone system of education instituted the teaching of foreign languages is hard to find. According to some reports (Toumba Haman, 2020), it dates back to 1957 and was due to the French education curriculum that was passed on to Cameroon. As German and Spanish were taught in France, their teaching were also instituted in Cameroon. In the curriculum, foreign languages are given preference in teaching hours: 3hours in 4e (grade 9) and 3e (grade 10), 3 hours and 4 hours in high school. (in Seconde (Grade 11), Première and Terminale (grade 12 and 14)). In 2000, the minister of national education had to take an order banning the teaching of foreign languages from Grade 7<sup>th</sup> (first year of secondary schools), a practice that was prevailing in some confessional schools. The order emphasized that those languages must be taught only as from the third year of secondary education.

#### *C. Cameroonian Languages as Subjects in Francophone Secondary Schools*

Before 2008, some confessional schools had taught national languages, but were forced to abandon the practice. In fact, in 1966, Catholic secondary school such as College Libermann in Douala started teaching

indigenous languages. The programme was replicated in other catholic schools as Chevreuil, Retraite, Mimetala and Le Sillon. As Echu (2003) remarked. The languages taught were Duala and Basaa at College Libermann in Douala, Ewondo at College de la Retraite in Yaounde. Furthermore, from 1970 to 1977, the Department of African Languages and Linguistics of the University of Yaounde started teaching Duala, Basaa, Ewondo, Bulu, Fulfulde and Fe'fe'. As Echu (2003:10) comments,

*This laudable initiative was suppressed for fear that those Cameroonians whose languages were not chosen for teaching at the university will revolt (Chumbow 1996: 7–8). And in order to put an end to issues of precedence in terms of which language(s) is more important than the other(s) and thus give the impression that they are equal in status, it was unanimously recommended that the term 'national language' be used henceforth to refer to all Cameroonian vernacular languages. This decision was taken during the inaugural meeting of the National Council for Cultural Affairs in Yaoundé from 18 to 22 December 1974.*

Since 1996, some developments in language policy in general and language policy in education, are equally worth noting. Following the *Etats Généraux de l'Education* (General Conference on Education) held in 1995, and brought together school authorities from the public and private sectors, as well as educational experts in Cameroon one major recommendation was the teaching of national languages in schools. Since then, the teaching of foreign languages in secondary schools in Cameroon has become one of the objectives of the Cameroon government, which has published a series of laws and decrees to make the teaching of national languages a reality.

- a) Decree no2002/004 of January 2004 reorganising the then ministry of national education that creates create pedagogic inspectorates for mother tongues which are presently operational.
- b) The government's position of MT promotion in Cameroon is also in an official letter No. 370/d-94/S/SG/PM of 14<sup>th</sup> June 2005 from the prime minister's Secretary General (SG) to the Minister of Culture on the reflection for the teaching of national languages in schools and universities.
- c) "Decision No. 05/035/MINESFUP/SG/DPRC/CRU/CEAZ/Mac of 24<sup>th</sup> June 2005 creating a committee of experts charged with the reflection leading to the teaching of national languages in state Universities".
- d) The letter set up within the Ministry of Higher Education as part of the objective No. 6 of the action plan of MINESUP, a committee of experts charged with the brainstorming on the teaching of national languages in state Universities.
- e) The Ministerial decree No 08/0223 NINESUP/DDES of 03 September 2008, creating a department and a laboratory of Cameroonian languages and cultures in the Higher Teachers' Training College of the University of Yaounde1.
- f) Circular No 5001/06 MINESEC of 27<sup>th</sup> August 2006 creating the post of the National Inspector of National Languages and Culture.
- g) Decree n° 08/0223 Minesup/DDES of 03 September 2008 creating a Department and Laboratory for Cameroonian languages and cultures in the Higher Teachers' Training College (HTTC) of Yaounde and more recently the at HTTC of Bertoua and of Maroua.

This last decision aimed at providing professional training to teachers so that they can start teaching indigenous languages in schools. Since 2011, this has been effective in some pilot schools across the country. Because of insufficient teachers and lack of didactic material, and lack of institutional support by school authorities, the teaching of national languages has not been effective as that of foreign languages. They are provided as optional papers in official exams (just like subjects such as manual labour and drawing).

As the government attempts to push for some education reform to adopt a more Afrocentric education curriculum — the Competence based approach in Cameroon has as objective to train citizens who are rooted in their culture, but open to the world — this first objective is still neglected as there are visibly no concrete pedagogic innovations in that directions. While the teaching of FLs continues unabated and unperturbed, national languages have not been granted the same attention. The project to fully include indigenous languages, even as subjects is still lagging behind. While the teaching of FLs has been systematic and generalised (using sophisticated languages materials and sufficient trained teachers), that of national languages has remained marginal, in a pilot phase using rudimentary teaching materials and insufficient teaching staff.

While the government (despite a seemingly favourable legal framework) is reluctantly envisaging the option, it would be wise to gauge the attitude of the populations towards a reform that would give more place to indigenous languages in education, to the detriment of FLs. The Far North region where a lingua franca is attested seems to be a good place to start such a survey.

Researches on Fulfulde as a majority and major language in the Northern regions abound (Metagmo-Tatou, 2019, Ngouo & Matakou, 2021). Other researches focus on the perspective of the institutionalisation



and use of Fulfulde in the religion (Ngouo 2022, and educational system (Tasah, 2019, 2021). Metagmmo-Tatou (2019) specifically analyses the potential of Fulfulde as an instrument of development through widespread communication and in the educational sector. She surveyed some primary schools teachers' on the dual education in French and Fulfulde. Most respondents opted for the dual model (French and English).

In this study, we are investigating the concurrence between Fulfulde and foreign languages.

#### D. Research Questions and Objectives

##### 1) Research questions

This research is driven by the following research questions:

1. What perception do the populations of the Far North region have about the value and importance of foreign languages?
2. Would the populations support an educational reform that would subvert the importance of foreign languages and give more space to Fulfulde and national languages in secondary school?
3. Do the population of the Far North region find foreign languages more instrumental than French and English in the achievement of their future plans?

##### 2) Research objectives

The focus of the paper is to make a survey of the attitude the population of the Northern region (who are the recipients of this policy) towards a curriculum reform that would on the one hand suppress foreign languages, and on the other hand, promote Fulfulde specifically, and national (indigenous) languages in education. It attempts to examine how the generalised teaching of the foreign languages like German, Spanish, Chinese, Italian and Arabic in the Francophone sub system of education is perceived by people in the Far North region of Cameroon.

- a) The paper specifically seeks to elicit the population's possible adherence to a reform that would institute Fulfulde as the main language to replace foreign languages in a bit to give the educational system a more endogenous and Afrocentric touch.
- b) The study seeks to examine whether the population would support the substitution of Foreign languages by Fulfulde (the regional lingua franca).
- c) The study surveys opinion regarding the perception of the population about the value of foreign languages in education.

## II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research report is part of a larger study aiming at investigating the attitude of the population of the Northern regions of Cameroon towards the prevalent language policy in education in Cameroon and eventually their opinion regarding a possible reform to make it more inclusive to national languages (and mainly Fulfulde).

#### A. The General Context and the Place of Fulfulde in Communication

In this research, Fulfulde is a key factor in our analysis. As mentioned earlier, Cameroon has more than 270 indigenous languages (Eberhard *et al.*, 2022), and apart from French and English, the official languages, Fulfulde is alongside Ewondo, Basaa, Duala, Hausa, Wandala, Kanuri, Arab Choa, and Cameroon Pidgin English the main languages of wider communication in Cameroon (Breton & Fohlung, 1991: 20; Dieu & Renaud, 1983).

Fulfulde is a language of wider communication in a territory covering 162,107 km<sup>2</sup> or 34.8 % of the total area of Cameroon, comprising three administrative regions, namely the Adamawa, the North and the Far North. In terms of demographic strength, Fulfulde is spoken as a second language by close to 3 million out of a total population of 4,379,789 people; it is spoken natively by more than 350,000 people in Cameroon (Echu, 2003).

At the continental level, Fulfulde is still a major language. It is the native language of the Fulbes (Fulani) a cross border ethnic group found in a Sahelian window comprising African countries such as Senegal, Guinea, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Sudan. It is claimed that their population is about 13,000,000 in all countries.

This Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Atlantic, Northern (Ethnologue, 2022), Fulfulde Adamawa (001) is SVO in terms of linguistic typology. In terms of development, Fulfulde Adamawa in Cameroon has a dictionary, 2 grammars (Maroua, Ngaoundere dialects). An entire Bible has existed in the language since 1983, the NT since 1963-1964, and Bible portions since 1919-1966. There are about 5% to 15% literate (Ethnologue, 2022).

As a language of wider communication, it is the trade language in northern Cameroon. It is a major language of oral communication and in the radio. It is used in radios and TV, informally in the administration (Ngouo & Matakou, 2021; Metagmo-Tatou, 2019). Voice of Africa (VOA) reporter Moki

Edwin Kindzeka relayed Fabienne Freeland<sup>1</sup> on February 21, 2020 who claimed: “French and English have limits on development in this country; when there was a cholera outbreak in the Far North, it is only when the information started coming in Ffulde that people started changing behavior and the cholera was stopped.”

Islam is another factor contributing to the dominance of Fulfulde in the Northern regions of Cameroon and beyond. Most Fulbes are Muslim because as far back as the 17th century it served as the language of Islam through Islamic conquest lead by Ousman Dan Fodio. Islam has become the dominant religion in the northern regions due to the cultural and political domination of the Fulbe. Those ethnic groups who resisted the Fulbe conquests and forced Islamisation are collectively referred to by the pejorative term Kirdi (“pagans”), though they are not culturally homogenous and do not necessarily identify as a group (Njeuma, 1978).

The research design is therefore a survey. The target population of the study are populations of the Far North region and the Mayo Louti (North region) of Cameroon.

### B. The Informants' Profile and Sampling Design

A survey questionnaire was designed and administered to the target group using a random sampling design. Some 50 research assistants helped in reaching out to their ethnic members. More than 700 questionnaires were sent out and about 525 questionnaires were returned. Most of the respondents are natives of the Far North regions and a few from Mayo Louti of the North region.

### C. The Research Instrument and Questionnaire Administration

The questionnaire consisted of three main sets of questions: the first set for background information on ethnic and demographic variables; the second set on the perception on the importance and utilitarian value of FLs; and a third set of 8 multiple-choice questions (with 5 scale ranging from absolutely agree to forcefully disagree) to elicit the population's inclination between FLs and Fulfulde in secondary schools. It was a pilot study in view of a large-scale survey on ethnolinguistic vitality and attitude towards heritage languages.

### D. Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire were collected and analysed using the statistics' software Sphinx.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### A. Quantitative Analysis

Before analysing the data from the survey, we present the statistics of students' enrolment in two departments of the Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social sciences of the University of Maroua. The two departments concerned are the Department of foreign languages, and the Department of African languages, literature and culture. The data show an obvious preference for foreign languages.

#### 1) The enrolment of students in the faculty

TABLE 1: STUDENTS' ENROLMENT IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES /AFRICAN STUDIES (YEAR 2020-2021)

	Department of Foreign languages				Department of Cameroonian languages, literature and culture		
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
German	90	91	64	245	30	40	40
Chinese	80	77	41	198			
Spanish	41	122	82	245			
Arabic	53	35	43	131			
<b>Total</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>819</b>			

More than 800 students were enrolled in the Department of Foreign Languages of the University of Maroua, for the academic year 2020-2021, as against 100 in the Department of African Languages, Literature and culture. The higher rate of enrolment in foreign languages is also motivated by the job market in Cameroon. In fact, there seems to be greater chances for a graduate in those subjects to find a job as teachers through admission into the HTTC in the Universities of Maroua, Bertoua, and Yaoundé 1. These opportunities are not available to graduates in African/Cameroonian languages who can only hope to have a few places in the HTTC of Bertoua and Yaoundé 1. The reform that was brought by the Ministry of Secondary Education in the year 2008, creating a special series for Cameroonian Languages and Cultures, is still to be implemented.

As Fulfulde is the lingua franca of the three Northern regions of the country, it would have been expected

<sup>1</sup> Director General of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) which helps Cameroon in promoting the teaching of its national languages, in Yaoundé.

that such a language with regional unofficial status would receive consensus as medium of instruction or major language in education.

The above data speak volume about the people's preference. As we hypothesised, this preference for FLs is the result of the language policy which facilitates the acquisition of FLs rather than national languages. The following section analyses data of the survey to measure the possible adherence to a curriculum reform enhance the inclusion of national languages.

### B. Survey Data

In this first series of questions, the informants were to indicate the FL which they prefer or would advise their child to choose because of its utilitarian value.

Q1: Which Foreign language would you advise your child/sibling to study?

TABLE II: INFORMANTS ADVISED/ PREFERRED FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Advised preferred foreign language	Count	Per.
German	150	28.6%
Spanish	126	24.0%
Chinese	119	22.7%
Arabic	98	18.7%
Italian	17	3.2%
Missing	14	2.7%
TOTAL OBS.	525	100%

Out of the four languages taught as subjects, (28%) of informants pointed the German language as their first choice, it was followed by Spanish (24%) and Chinese (22%). At the bottom we have Italian (3%).

TABLE III: MORE IMPORTANT FOREIGN LANGUAGE

More important foreign language	Count	Per.
Missing	29	5.5%
German	138	26.3%
Chinese	128	24.4%
Spanish	110	21.0%
Arabic	97	18.5%
Italian	22	4.2%
NONE	1	0.2%
TOTAL OBS.	525	100%

Q2: Which foreign language seems more important?

Again, when asked which language is more important, 26% selected German and 24% Chinese. In this variable, Spanish comes third with 21%, followed by Arabic (18%), and finally Italian (4%)

Q3: Which languages seem more important for your child/ sibling future plans? (You can choose a maximum of 2 languages). In these questions, English and French were added alongside the FLs taught in schools. The reasons for including French and English was to elicit their perception of the importance and utilitarian value of all non-Cameroonian languages.

TABLE IV: FOREIGN LANGUAGE MORE USEFUL FOR FUTURE PLANS

Foreign language useful for future plan	Count	Per.
Missing	14	2.7%
English	287	54.7%
French	123	23.4%
Chinese	106	20.2%
Arabic	66	12.6%
German	55	10.5%
Spanish	40	7.6%
Italian	10	1.9%
Total	525	

The data for this variable show that English was selected by more than 54% of the respondents as the most useful language for their future plans (for them or child). French was identified as the second most important language by 23.4%, followed by Chinese and Arabic. Italian still towed the line. The informants seem to base their perception on the Cameroonian context --where French and English are the official languages-- or even the global picture.

Q4: Choose three languages in order of importance among the following languages (German, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, French, and English).

TABLE V: LANGUAGES IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE

Cite languages in order of importance	Count	Per.
English 1 <sup>st</sup> choice	266	50.7%
French 2 <sup>nd</sup> choice	204	38.9%
English 2 <sup>nd</sup> choice	174	33.1%
French 1 <sup>st</sup> choice	137	26.1%
German 3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	104	19.8%
Chinese 3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	98	18.7%
French 3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	90	17.1%
Spanish 3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	76	14.5%
Arabic 3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	54	10.3%
Chinese 2 <sup>nd</sup> choice	46	8.8%
English 3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	46	8.8%
Arabic 1 <sup>st</sup> choice	44	8.4%
Chinese 1 <sup>st</sup> choice	33	6.3%
Spanish 2 <sup>nd</sup> choice	33	6.3%
Arabic 2 <sup>nd</sup> choice	26	5.0%
German 1 <sup>st</sup> choice	21	4.0%
German 2 <sup>nd</sup> choice	20	3.8%
Italian 3 <sup>rd</sup> choice	18	3.5%
Spanish 1 <sup>st</sup> choice	12	2.3%
Italian 1 <sup>st</sup> choice	7	1.3%
Italian 2 <sup>nd</sup> choice	4	0.8%
TOTAL.	525	

The above table shows that English and French, when place in concurrence with other foreign languages are perceived as more important by the informants. More than 50% of informants have selected English as first most important, followed by French in second rank and German in third position. There were very few people who selected any foreign languages as the first most important: these are 8.4% for Arabic, 6.3% for Chinese and 4% for German.

### C. Measuring Inclination towards FLs or National Languages

In the second set of questions, a series of 8 questions with Likert scales were asked to elicit the opinion of informants concerning what reform would be acceptable: would they support the replacement of FLs by Fulfulde or English?

In response to Q5: 66% of the respondents would approve it if the teaching of FLs was to be extended to the Anglophone subsystem of education; barely 16% of respondents are opposed to the suggestion.

Logically, the response to Q6 showed that, 51% of the informants would be opposed to the suppression of FLs from the Francophone subsystem. They are therefore not supportive of a curriculum reform. However, 27% would approve it, while 17% are indifferent.

However, concerning Q7, 43% of the informants would approve the suspension of FLs so as to provide more hours for the teaching English; 41% disapprove it, while 13% have no opinion. Although less than 50% of the informants go for this choice, this information is coherent with Q4 in which the informants selected English as their first choice instead of one of the FLs.

Coming to Q8 which sought to find out whether the informants would support the replacement of FLs by Fulfulde in 4e (Form 3), 49% of the respondents disapprove it, while 45% approve it and about 14% are indifferent.

Q9 (Ethnic language and or Fulfulde should be used as well as FLs): 55% of the respondents would approve that Fulfulde and FLs be used together in the school system. About 30% are opposed to the idea, while 12% remain indecisive.

Q10: (What if the teaching hours of foreign languages are curtailed to add (more) hours of Fulfulde (local languages) in the secondary). For this question, about 46% disapprove the idea, while about 38% would support it. About 14% have no opinion.

In Q11, the informants were to react to the suggestion: “There is the urgent need to institute a series for Cameroonians languages and cultures in high schools.” About 80% of the respondents approve, while 12% oppose the proposition; 5% reported indifference.

This result shows that there is unanimity amongst respondents regarding the need for a series in national languages and culture in high school. So far, the series has been created but is not yet functional in Cameroonian high schools.

Q12 suggested that ‘The teaching of local languages is more important than that of foreign languages (German, etc.)’



TABLE VI: SUMMARY TABLE OF OPINION TOWARDS THE CONCURRENCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND NATIONAL LANGUAGES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

	Missing	Totally disapprove	Disapprove	Indifferent	Approve	Absolutely approve	TOTAL
Q5: Should Foreign languages be introduced in Anglophone subsystem	2,8%	4,9%	11,6%	14,8%	49,9%	16,1%	100%
Q6: Foreign languages to be removed from the francophone sub system	2,6%	14,8%	36,2%	17,6%	19,9%	9,0%	100%
Q7: Should FLs be removed from Francophone subsystem to have more teaching hours for English?	2,4%	11,6%	29,3%	13,7%	31,0%	12,0%	100%
Q8: Would they replace foreign languages in 4e with Fulfulde as subject	1,7%	20,1%	29,3%	13,9%	23,6%	11,3%	100%
Q9: Ethnic language and or Fulfulde should be used as well as foreign languages	1,7%	10,3%	20,6%	12,6%	37,3%	17,6%	100%
Q10: What if they suggest reducing hours of foreign languages for some(more) hours of Fulfulde (local languages) in the secondary	2,6%	15,2%	30,6%	13,9%	24,4%	13,3%	100%
Q11: There is the urgent need for a series for Cameroonians languages and cultures in high schools	2,4%	3,4%	9,2%	5,6%	43,3%	36,2%	100%
Q12: The teaching of local languages is more important than that of foreign languages (German, etc.)	1,3%	5,6%	18,8%	14,8%	36,8%	22,7%	100%

To this proposition, 59% of the informants approve, meaning that they consider local languages more important than foreign languages. This is in stark contradiction with the opinion in previous questions which showed that the informants tended to disapprove that FLs be removed to be replaced by Fulfulde. May be they would support the inclusion of Fulfulde in education but not to the detriment of FLs.

Q13 (You have to advise your child on the choice between foreign languages and national languages as minor in the university), what would you suggest?

To the above question, 55% would advise their child or sibling to choose national languages, 40% would suggest FLs. These statistics are coherent with the previous statistics which suggested that the teaching of local languages is more important than FLs.

TABLE VII: CHOICE BETWEEN FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND NATIONAL LANGUAGES AS MINOR IN THE UNIVERSITY

National languages Vs foreign languages	Count.	Per
Missing	23	4,4%
National languages	289	55,0%
Foreign languages	213	40,6%
TOTAL OBS.	525	100%

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The objective of the current study was to elicit the perception of the population of the Far North region about the usefulness of FLs in the educational curriculum and to measure their level of support for an eventual reform that would give the curriculum a more Afrocentric touch by replacing FLs by Fulfulde or national languages. The data collected and analysed provide the following answers to the research questions.

RQ1: Would the populations support an educational reform that would substitute foreign languages with Fulfulde and national languages in the secondary school curriculum?

The findings regarding this question show that the informants are not supportive of the suspension of foreign languages from the francophone educational syllabus; they are even in favour of its extension to the Anglophone subsystem of education. Fulfulde is not rated higher than foreign languages; that is why not many would support the replacement of foreign languages by Fulfulde.

RQ2: What is the perception that the population of the Far North region have about the importance of foreign languages?

Of all the four foreign languages being taught, German is seen as the most important, followed by Spanish and Chinese. Italian is underrated.

RQ3: Do the populations find foreign languages more important than French and English in achieving their future plans?

In concurrence with official languages like English and French, the informants consider French and English more important than the foreign languages. When in occurrence French and English, informants

rated English and French higher than all foreign languages; that is why they would also support that more hours be dedicated to the teaching of English, and to the detriment of foreign languages.

Foreign languages may be important for Cameroonian citizens, but their teaching/learning must be wisely planned so that they should be asset of development and not instruments contributing to the alienation of the population. Their usefulness for social mobility is questionable. Ngouo (2022a) suggests that all the foreign languages, and more specifically, Spanish and Italian be removed from the curriculum because their instrumentality in international education migration is relatively low. The Government has not yet considered the possibility of decolonising the curriculum. In fact the colonial paradigm decried by Brock-Utne (2009:10) who stated that “The purpose of schooling in colonial times seems to have been to make children familiar with the cultural heritage of the colonial powers as a way to convince them of Europe's superiority”. The prevailing language ideology inherited from the long period of colonisation suggests that African languages cannot be instrumental in social mobility. They are only important as elements of identity. It is not only the language policy and language ideology that needs to change, it is the entire mindset that have to be remodelled.

Foreign languages will always be highly rated if the entire curriculum philosophy is not revisited to give it a more culturally relevant touch. On the other hand, the attitude of the population towards FLs and national languages shows some ambivalence. The government should not be promoting African languages just for the sake of responding to the Afrocentric and decoloniality urge –even if this might be another reason. The government has to discern which Cameroonian and African languages ought to be promoted. Swahili should be taught because it is a language of the African Union. Putatively, there is a need to decolonise, indigenise or africanise the curriculum for rationale of cultural nationalism (Fanon, 1963) to counter linguistic and cultural imperialism (Ndille, 2014).

## V. CONCLUSION

The current study aimed at investigating the attitude and the perception the populations of the Far North region of Cameroon have towards the importance of foreign languages in secondary education and their eventual replacement by Fulfulde, a regional lingua franca, in case of curriculum reform. Guided by three research questions, the survey has helped to make the following findings.

Foreign languages are perceived as being important languages. As a result, their presence in the Francophone education curriculum is seen as relevant and pertinent. Logically, it is suggested that their teaching be extended to the Anglophone system of education. As concerns instrumentality in social mobility, German is highly rated among foreign languages, and Italian is underrated. English and French are perceived as being more important than these foreign languages. Fulfulde is not perceived as relevant enough to replace FLs in education, however, national languages are seen as deserving a place in the school system.

The implications of this study are double-fold. While it is clear that although Fulfulde has an undisputable place as language of wider communication in the Far North region, and is used informally in administration, it is not yet certain that the population will accept it as a replacement of FLs in the educational curriculum in the region. Therefore, education policy makers will have to carry out some attitude engineering campaign in order to change the popular mindset that supports a language ideology more favourable to Western languages.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

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