

The Impact of English-only and Bilingual Approaches to EFL Instruction on Low-achieving Bilinguals in Cameroon: An Empirical Study

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Abstract—The aim of this paper is to investigate whether low-achieving bilingual EFL learners perform better in grammar and speaking when French, their first language of literacy, is used in the EFL classroom. A two-phase experiment involving teaching two grammar lessons and two speaking lessons to a control group in English only and to an experimental group with the use of French where appropriate was carried out for the purpose. Each group's mean percentage improvement after each phase of the experiment was compared to their respective scores in the baseline. The analyses of data revealed that the experimental group obtained the higher mean improvement in the two experiments, both in grammar and speaking tests. This led to the conclusion that the use of French in the EFL classroom does not hinder learning. Rather, French is an effective scaffolding tool in the EFL classroom in Cameroon.

Index Terms—low-achieving bilinguals, English-only approach, bilingual approach, EFL pedagogy, scaffolding

I. INTRODUCTION

Owing to its colonial legacy, Cameroon adopted French-English bilingualism as the official language policy. A consequence of this historical act is that Cameroonians born and cultured in the former British-occupied Cameroon learn English as a second language (henceforth L2) whereas those cultured in Eastern Cameroon, formerly administered by the French, learn English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL). However, the majority of Cameroonians are not fluent bilinguals. In fact, most Cameroonian EFL learners neither reach conversational fluency nor academic language competence. Those who are educated usually display a dominant French language and underdeveloped English language skills, which will likely decrease, resulting in the individual backward movement on the bilingualism continuum, passing from the stage of incipient bilingual to that of recessive bilingual (Baker, 2011).

In the context of secondary education in Cameroon where none of the two languages of the EFL learner is developed yet, there is very little chance to reach advanced proficiency in English. In fact, most learners do not have course materials, attend overcrowded classrooms and have poor attitudes and motivations towards learning English (Tegang, 1993; Esou, 2002; Owingo, 2005). Bilinguals who display limited proficiency in their two languages due to deficiencies in competences including size of vocabulary, correctness of language, degree of automatism, ability to create neologisms, meanings and imagery and mastery of the emotive and cognitive functions have been referred to as semilinguals (Hansegard, 1968 cited in Valadez et al., 2000). However, since the term “semilinguals” has received much criticism over the years (see Baker, 2011), we shall use the term low-achieving bilinguals (henceforth LAB) instead.

Looking at pedagogy, a point of controversy in EFL teaching is whether or not the learner's first language of literacy (henceforth L1) should be allowed in the classroom. There are different policies regarding this issue, as they range from encouragement, allowance, discouragement to total prohibition of code-switching in classrooms (Martin-Jones, 2000). While learners need maximum exposure to English in order to develop their language skills, it is also vital that they understand teacher talk and linguistic data addressed to them. If human beings learn systematically by relating new knowledge to prior experience, then, the learning of any additional language takes place within the framework of the L1, and, therefore, the L1 should have a place in the EFL classroom.

In the Cameroonian context, however, the majority of EFL teachers prohibit the use of French—the students' L1—in their classes, and teach in English only, even when some of them have a working proficiency in French. Very often, EFL learners are made to feel ashamed of themselves when they cannot produce the language structures required by their teachers, or when they fail to comprehend and follow instructions for various tasks. Such rejection undoubtedly affects learner motivation and is probably the cause of early fossilization that grips many learners before the end of their middle school years. In reality, many EFL students lack the motivation to learn English because their teachers do not make the input comprehensible. For instance, instructions in EFL tests are in English only, and, unfortunately, many students are not taught how to deal with various types of instructions on tests before they take exams. Without a well-developed cognizance of classroom instructions related to testing, and because testing always takes place in context-reduced environments filled with anxiety, most EFL students fail the English language paper in Cameroon. The

situation has become critical to the point that many students today believe that they need divine intervention to pass the English paper at national exams (Focho, 2011). There might be historical, cultural and political reasons behind the rejection of French, given that a considerable number of TESOL professionals in Cameroon are Anglophones, a term used to refer to English-speaking Cameroonians. Anglophones constitute a minority group that has always felt disenfranchised by the Francophone majority (Echu, 2004; Anchimbe, 2006). Most of these teachers adopt an interactionist approach (Krashen, 1982; Nation, 2003; Ellis, 2008), arguing that although Cameroon is officially bilingual, EFL learners are, in reality, exposed to English language input in the classroom only, thus the need to maximise target language (henceforth TL) use in the classroom. Meanwhile, French could be used judiciously as a scaffolding tool in the EFL classroom.

This paper investigates whether code-switching in the EFL pre-intermediate classroom hinders or facilitates learning. More specifically, the paper compares EFL learners' performances in specific grammar and speaking tasks when taught with the use of the L1 (French) and when taught with English only. Therefore, the following two research questions will be addressed:

- (1) Do LAB EFL learners perform better in grammar and speaking when French, their L1, is used in the classroom?
- (2) Does the use of French in the EFL classroom in Cameroon hinder learning or does it rather facilitate it?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on using English only or code-switching in the EFL classroom has been very rich and productive in the last three decades. Researchers in second language acquisition have succeeded in raising the awareness of classroom teachers that they must "understand the implications of language acquisition research so that they can provide the scaffolding necessary for their students to be successful in the classroom" (Herrell & Jordan, 2012, p.1). Scaffolding here refers to the assistance provided by the teacher to the learners so that they become able to perform on their own, at some future point in time, the tasks which they cannot do today. For optimal results, teachers should scaffold language acquisition within the learner's zone of proximal development (henceforth ZPD). According to Vygotsky's ZPD, language learning is a social process that occurs through collaboration and mediation between a novice (learner) and an expert (teacher or advanced learner). This means that interaction is an essential force in acquisition. Children learn better when there are adults or experts (including teachers) around who provide them with the assistance they need (Vygotsky, 1962). However, before they provide scaffolded assistance, teachers must know the level of language development of their learners (Shrum & Glisan, 2010). Also, they should understand that scaffolding is contingent on learner output and not on the expert's choosing, and know when to stop providing assistance to the learner (McCormick & Donato, 2000). In the language classroom, scaffolds, defined as "temporary supports, provided by more capable people, that permit learners to perform a complex process before they are able to do so unassisted" (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013, p. 114), are informed by two main factors: comprehensible input and input processing by bi-and multilinguals.

A. *Comprehensible Input*

Drawing from Chomskyan innatist theory of SLA, notably the idea that human beings are born with a language acquisition device housing a mental grammar which can be triggered in language-rich environments, Krashen (1982) proposed the Monitor Model, a "collection of five hypotheses which constitute major claims and assumptions about how the L2 code is acquired" (Saville-Troike, 2012, p. 47). Central to the Monitor Model are two hypotheses: the input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. The former hypothesis comprises two main points: (1) input must be comprehensible by the learner and (2) should contain language features a little beyond the learner's current level of competence (hence $i + 1$). In other words, learning and/or acquisition is effective when the learner is able to process linguistic data addressed to him successfully into intake. Meanwhile, the latter hypothesis holds that a low-anxiety learning environment with considerable learner self-esteem, motivation and self-confidence are unconditional variables for effective L2 acquisition. Though Krashen's claims have been criticized on the grounds that his theories are not the result of empirical research (Lightbown, 2004; McLaughlin, 1987), his perspectives are used in this work because of their remarkable influence on classroom practices.

Using a different approach from Krashen, Cummins (1981) devised a model to categorize the range of contextual support teachers ought to give in relation to the difficulty of the various tasks assigned to learners. The model, which consists of a diagram with four quadrants, categorizes tasks along two continua: on the vertical continuum, tasks range from cognitively undemanding to cognitively demanding while on the horizontal continuum, they range from context-embedded to context-reduced. Cognitively demanding tasks are, as the name suggests, more difficult for the learner to do than cognitively undemanding tasks. Context-embedded tasks are those that provide contextual additional information consisting of visual and/or oral cues (examples: diagrams, illustrations) to help the learner complete the task at hand. These visual and oral clues are scaffolds that facilitate instruction. Meanwhile, a context-reduced task is one in which the learner has access to fewer visual cues (examples: listening to a lecture or reading a text without illustrations), hence less scaffolding.

Cummins equally developed the linguistic developmental interdependence hypothesis (1978, 2000) to explain how bilinguals and multilinguals use and acquire additional languages. This hypothesis suggests that a learner's L2 competence is dependent to some extent on his/her L1 development. Therefore, the more developed the L1, the easier it

is to acquire additional languages. Meanwhile, when the L1 is underdeveloped, it becomes difficult for the L2 learner to achieve both conversational fluency and academic competence in the two languages.

The implications of Cummins' theories for EFL teachers are three-fold: first, teachers need to be aware of students' difficulties to understand academic language, the language of the classroom, in context-reduced tasks. Second, teachers should promote L1 development, given that conceptual knowledge in L1 is very useful in L2 acquisition insofar as it helps to make L2 input more comprehensible (Cummins, 2000). Third, teachers should always be prepared to scaffold instruction, that is, provide support to learners in terms of classroom practices, classroom language and content knowledge.

B. Language Processing by Bilinguals and Multilinguals

In this work, we follow Grosjean's (2010) theoretical framework on bilingualism, which places focus on the regular use of two or several languages, rather than fluency. Therefore, this work proposes an understanding of bilinguals and multilinguals within the bilingualism framework. In so doing, "bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives" (Grosjean, *ibid.*, p. 4).

Research on the bilingual and/or multilingual brain tells us that bilinguals and multilinguals are different from monolinguals in the way they process input (see Peregman, 1989; Cook, 1991, 1992; Kecskes & Papp, 2000; Bialystok, 2009; Bialystok et al., 2012). It is vital to start with the principle that bilinguals display a distinctive state of mind or competence, which Cook (1991) called multicompetence. This multicompetence, defined as the "compound state of a mind with two [or more] grammars" (Cook, *ibid.*, p. 112), or, as the knowledge of two or more languages in one mind (Cook, 2007), is distinguished from monocompetence, the knowledge of only one language, as found in monolinguals. Cook (2011) argues that L2 users (bilinguals) think differently from monolinguals, use their languages in different ways, have an increased awareness of language and a different brain structure. These differences between monolinguals and bilinguals do not necessarily suggest that bilinguals are two monolingual failures in one body (Cook, 1992; Grosjean, 1985, 1998).

Peregman (1989), Kroll (1993), Kecskes & Papp (2000), Bialystok (2009) and Bialystok et al. (2012) argue that the main difference between monolinguals and bilinguals is that the two language channels of bilinguals are constantly available during speech, and interact to some extent at all times, even when the context requires the use of one language only. The consequence of this joint activation is that bilinguals have an attention problem which monolinguals do not have: linguistic selection. Choosing a language depends on the knowledge of the context and participants, and requires that the bilingual mind inhibit the non-target language to some extent. However, the success of inhibition of the non-target language depends on the degree of fluency of bilinguals. Then, fluent bilinguals have better executive control at inhibition, either globally, i.e. by suppressing an entire language system, or locally, by suppressing a specific element of the non-target language, such as refusing to translate a concept from its original language to the target language (see de Groot & Christoffels, 2006). Meanwhile, low-achieving bilinguals have lesser executive control, which reduces their ability to inhibit the non-target language, leading to code-mixing, code-switching, and sequences of dominance of each language.

Establishing a link between multicompetence and emotions in the speaker's selection of languages, Dewaele & Wei (2014) argue that specific emotional states can either trigger code-switching or produce special effects in bilinguals' use of their languages. Then, the phenomenon of code-switching is common in bilingual and EFL classrooms where learner anxiety and lack of self-confidence can be very high at times. Ferguson (2003) illustrates the above when he argues that code-switching "is not only very prevalent across a wide range of educational settings, but also seems to arise naturally, perhaps inevitably, as a pragmatic response to the difficulties of teaching content in a language medium over which pupils have imperfect control. Moreover, because teaching is an adrenalin-fuelled activity, making numerous competing demands on one's attentional resources, much switching takes place below the level of consciousness. Teachers are often simply not aware of when they switch languages, or indeed if they switch at all" (p. 46).

As this work studies the use of French in the EFL secondary classroom, our target population consists of LABs who code-switch frequently. The work seeks to find out whether LABs who are taught in a context where conscious inhibition of the non-target language is rewarded perform better than those taught in classrooms where non-target language inhibition is not particularly demanded from them.

Studies of code-switching in the EFL classroom have led to the development of a theoretical framework that shall be called in this work the bilingual approach to EFL instruction. Developed by Atkinson (1987) and Auerbach (1993), this approach draws essentially from Cummins' (1978) linguistic interdependence hypothesis which holds that success in L2 acquisition depends on L1 development and competence. A key point in the bilingual approach is that human beings learn an L2 within the framework of the L1, and, therefore, the L1 should have a place in the EFL classroom. But first, we shall briefly review literature on the English-only approach.

C. The English-only Approach

The Monolingual approach or English-only policy is built around three points. First, the EFL teacher is not likely to know all his students' L1s in a multilingual classroom. Hawks (2001) argues that unless the teacher is capable of using all the L1s, she must not venture in such a difficult task lest she could compromise her authority in the classroom. Besides, a failed attempt to use the L1 in a constructive way only inhibits learning.

The second point opposes the idea that the L1 is an indispensable scaffold for teaching difficult language structures in the EFL classroom. Proponents of this argument (Pachler & Field, 2001; Willis, 1981) believe that visual aids, appropriate body language and modelling speech according to learners' level of language development can help teach in English even the most difficult aspects of language structure.

The third point is built around the idea that maximum exposure to the TL is the determining factor in SLA. Krashen (1982) holds that the TL should be used to the most in the classroom, given that most EFL learners are exposed to English only in the classroom. This point draws from the behaviouristic view that learner's language develops through imitation and habit formation.

D. The Bilingual Approach

Vigotsky, one of the earliest proponents of this approach, argued that "success in learning a foreign language is contingent on a certain degree of maturity in the native language" (1962, p. 110). In the same line of thought, Cummins' linguistic developmental interdependence hypothesis (1978) emphasized that success in L2 acquisition depends on L1 development and competence. However, the bilingual approach really garnered attention only after researchers provided a comprehensive outline of L1 use in the EFL classroom.

When Use the L1 in the English Classroom?

The first scientific attempt to define instances under which the L1 could fit in the EFL class was made by Atkinson (1987). He suggested nine instances under which the L1 could be used in the EFL classroom, including eliciting target language, checking comprehension, giving complex instructions to basic levels, co-operating in group work situations, explaining classroom methodology at basic levels, highlighting a recently taught item, checking sense, explaining testing instructions and developing circumlocution strategies. These points were later applied to several studies including Auerbach (1993), Macaro (1997), Franklin (1990), Cook (2002), Bradshaw (2006), just to name a few. A slight difference in approach was found in Balosa (2006) who suggested that the L1 be used in the English class as a self-esteem booster for shy students, a teacher strategy for clarifying complex instructions or language items, and as a method for promoting intercultural intelligibility among learners.

Why Use the L1 in the English Classroom

There are two main reasons for the use of the learner's L1 in the EFL classroom. First, the L1 facilitates both teaching and learning. For instance, "judicious use of the L1 can build an atmosphere of confidence and friendship in the classroom" (Balosa, 2006, p.31), develop harmony and cooperation, and provide learners with feelings of security and self-confidence that motivate them and make them feel more comfortable (Peregoy & Boyle, 2013; Schweers, 1999). Furthermore, the L1 saves teaching time and makes input much easier to understand (Cook 2002, Temple et al. 2005).

Second, the L1 contributes to the learner's cognitive and socio-professional development. At the cognitive level, the L1 prepares and stimulates the learner's brain to perceive and relate new knowledge to prior knowledge, with the aim of activating that prior knowledge (Paradowski, 2008; Caine & Caine, 1994). Auerbach (1993) highlights this point when she says: "starting with the L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experience, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English" (p. 29). Using the L1, therefore, is a means for teachers to build learner confidence and self-esteem. When learners' identities are not rejected, they do not feel as choosing between their own language habits and English (see Halliday 1968, Rinvulucrici 2001), and this makes learning a more enjoyable experience. Also, judicious use of the L1 in the EFL classroom sharpens the learner's metalinguistic awareness (Cook 2002) and "allows the fullness of the learner's language intelligence to be brought into play" (Rinvulucrici 2001, p.44).

From a socio-professional perspective, L1 use in the EFL classroom allows both teachers and learners to achieve some educational and occupational goals. For instance, L1 use in the English classroom can develop students' passion for translation – likely leading to careers in the areas of translation and interpretation – without necessarily hampering on the teacher's classroom objectives (Malakoff & Hakutta, 1991). Moreover, translation in the language classroom can contribute significantly to the promotion of bilingualism.

How to use another language in the English classroom

Supporters of the bilingual approach have proposed ways of using the L1 efficiently in the EFL classroom. These strategies include the L1 break to summarize content in the students' L1 either at the middle or end of the class (Reis, 1996), "sandwich stories", "bilingual vocabulary tennis" and "semantic flip-flops" (Rinvulucrici, 2001) which all consist in juggling English with the L1 regularly.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Setting and Participants

This study involved 22 EFL students enrolled in a private technical secondary school in Yaounde. In this school, French is the main language of instruction whereas English language is a mandatory subject. Participants were freshmen aged between 11 and 16 years old. Although French has been their main language of instruction since kindergarten, these students still lacked the academic language proficiency required to be considered as proficient French language users. Participants majored in professional courses including car engineering, masonry, carpentry, electrical engineering,

sewing and tailoring. Therefore, language proficiency courses (French and English) were minor subjects, looking at the weekly hour load (03) and the number of credits (03), which were smaller than the 05 hours and 06 credits assigned for major courses. Prior to this study, the participants were taught with the English-only approach. The informants of this study are pre-intermediate EFL learners who were introduced to the English language in primary school. They showed mastery of basic competencies such as reciting the alphabet, days of the week and months of the year, responding to greetings, information and yes/no questions, reading simple texts and performing other low level speech acts. Apart from French and English, all the participants used one or two more languages among the 247 indigenous languages spoken in Cameroon (Echu, 2004). From that perspective, participants were all multicompetent.

A technical secondary school was selected because the researcher observed that the majority of technical secondary school students in Cameroon have very low motivation and negative attitudes towards learning English. However, technical secondary freshmen were selected because their L2 learning experience up to that point was additive; they had not yet developed negative attitudes and low motivation towards learning English. Then, the researcher thought that a study carried out on such population could provide more reliable results on student performance in English-only and bilingual EFL classes.

B. Instruments

The Baseline

Prior to this study, the teacher opened a portfolio to document students' performances in grammar and speaking tasks. A portfolio, according to Tierney, Carter & Desai (1991), is a "collection of evidence used by the teacher and learner to monitor the growth of the learner's knowledge of content, use of strategies, and attitudes toward the establishment of goals in an organized and systematic way" (p. 41). Therefore, a portfolio provides reliability in data that cannot be obtained with a pretest. Because classroom activities were conducted in English only before this study, the researcher calculated each student's mean scores in the last three grammar tasks and last three speaking tasks. The mean scores obtained were then used to place students in two groups, namely the control group (henceforth CG) and the experimental group (henceforth EG), depending on individual performance. CG was composed of the first eleven students in the class whereas the remaining eleven students made up EG. The placement test scores of the students were later used as a baseline for the study.

Grammar and Speaking Tests

Participants were taught four lessons, among which two grammar and two speaking lessons. The four lessons were designed by the teacher himself, who used content material from the students' coursebook. The experiment was carefully designed: each grammar lesson was paired with a speaking lesson, so that by the end of both lessons, students acquire both proficiency and accuracy in the language items they were taught. Then, the first grammar lesson was on *using the present continuous* whereas the first speaking lesson was on *describing an event that is happening at the moment of speaking*. The teaching and assessment of the first grammar lesson and the first speaking lesson were referred to as Phase 1 of the experiment. Meanwhile, the second grammar lesson was on *asking information questions using wh- words* whereas the second speaking lesson was on *role-playing a conversation at the market between a seller and a potential buyer*. The teaching and assessment of the second grammar lesson and the second speaking lesson were referred to as Phase 2 of the experiment. Each lesson was taught in 55 minutes. While CG was taught in English only, EG was taught with the use of French following Atkinson's (1987) nine-point model.

CG students were taught separately from those of EG. After each lesson, the teacher administered a classroom test and students' performances were recorded as data for this study. The grammar and oral tests were structured following a prochievement format. Prochievement tests measure student proficiency and their achievement of the objectives of a particular lesson or thematic unit at the same time (Gonzalez Pino, 1989). Scoring rubrics were used to evaluate students' oral performances.

C. Method of Data Analysis

The method of analysis consisted in comparing each group's mean scores in each phase of the study with that group's mean scores in the baseline. Then, depending on the results obtained, three possible conclusions could be drawn. First, if EG obtained the higher improvement than CG in their mean scores of the experiment, then the researcher would conclude that EFL students perform better when code-switching is allowed in the classroom, and eventually that the use of French in the EFL class facilitates learning. Second, if EG mean scores were lower than those obtained in the baseline, then the researcher would conclude that the use of French in the EFL class hinders learning. Finally, if CG obtained the higher improvement in mean scores than EG, then it would be concluded that French does not matter in the EFL class.

IV. RESULTS

A. Placement Test Scores

Students' performances in their last three grammar and speaking tests before the start of this study were recorded on a scale from 0 to 100, and the researcher calculated each student's mean scores in grammar and speaking. Those mean

scores served to place students in either CG or EG. Figure 1 below shows CG's baseline scores whereas Figure 2 shows EG's baseline scores.

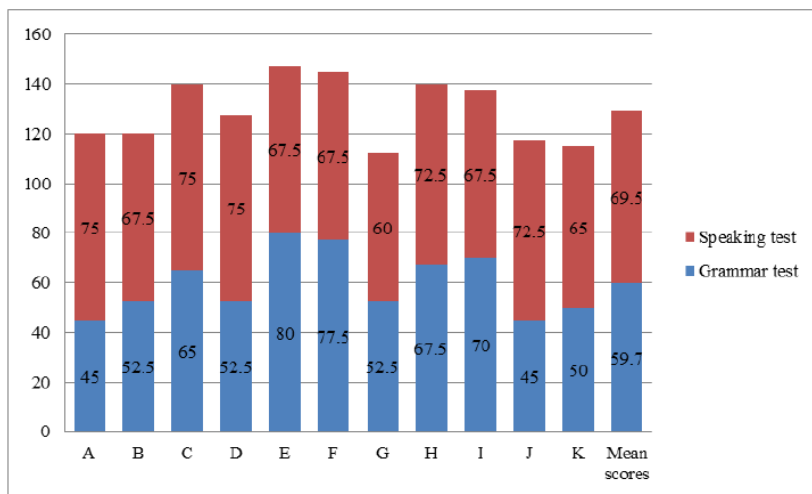


Figure 1: Control group placement test results

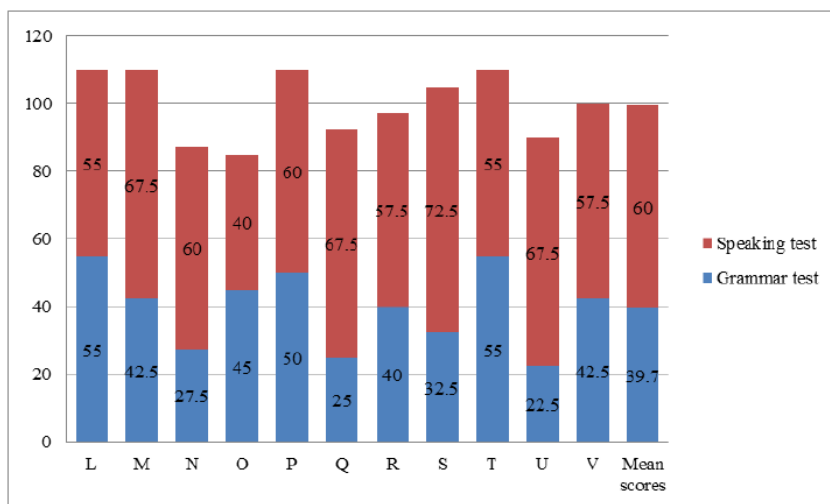


Figure 2: Experimental group placement test results

As the above charts indicate, there are 11 students in each group. Also, there are noticeable differences in the two charts. In fact, students of CG have higher mean scores in both grammar and speaking than those of EG. For instance, while CG's mean score in grammar is 59.7, EG's mean score is 39.7. In the same way, CG's mean score in speaking is 69.5, while EG's is 60. This makes a gap of 20 percentage points in grammar and 09.5 percentage points in speaking between the two groups.

B. Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Experiment

Phase 1 consisted in teaching and assessing student performance on using the present continuous and describing students' activities at school during the break. Meanwhile, Phase 2 of the experiment consisted in teaching and evaluating students on asking questions using wh- words and role-playing a conversation between a buyer and a seller in the market. Students' scores in both phases are shown in the appendices. Table 1 below presents mean scores obtained by the two groups in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the experiment.

TABLE I.
CONTROL GROUP AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUP MEAN SCORES IN PHASE 1 AND PHASE 2

	CG			EG		
	Grammar	Speaking	Mean	Grammar	Speaking	Mean
Phase 1	63.6	70	66.8	56.4	64.3	60.35
Phase 2	69.5	69.5	69.5	55.5	63.9	59.7

As the above table shows, CG performs better than EG in the two phases of the experiment. In fact, CG gets mean scores of 66.8 and 69.5 respectively in Phase 1 and Phase 2, whereas EG obtains 60.35 and 59.7 respectively. Also, we can infer from the table the gaps between the two groups in both phases of the experiment. For instance, the gaps

between CG and EG in Phase 1 are respectively 7.2 in grammar and 5.7 in speaking. Meanwhile in Phase 2, the gaps are 14 in grammar and 5.6 in speaking. Then it can be noticed that Phase 2 replicates the results obtained in Phase 1, with negligible differences.

C. Differences between Baseline Mean Scores and the Mean Scores Obtained in Phase 1 and Phase 2

In order to assess the impact of the bilingual approach to EFL instruction on student performance, it was necessary to compare baseline mean scores with Phase 1 and Phase 2 mean scores obtained by each group. The results consistently show three things: first, CG got higher mean scores in both grammar and speaking. Second, EG obtained higher improvement percentage points in all tests and all phases of the experiment. Third, while EG's progress in speaking was arithmetic, its progress in grammar was geometric. Table 2 below presents differences between baseline mean scores and Phase 1 mean scores of each group.

TABLE II.
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BASELINE MEAN SCORES AND MEAN SCORES OF PHASE 1

	CG			EG		
	Grammar	Speaking	Mean	Grammar	Speaking	Mean
Baseline	59.7	69.5	64.6	39.7	60	49.85
Phase 1	63.6	70	66.8	56.4	64.3	60.35
Improvement % points	+3.9	+0.5	+2.2	+16.7	+4.3	+10.5

The above table indicates that both groups performed better than they did in the baseline. However, it is clear that EG obtained the higher mean improvement percentage points in both grammar and speaking. While CG's improvement percentage points do not reach 4 per cent, EG obtains improvement percentage points above 10 per cent. Another important remark is that the EG got their most noticeable improvement in grammar, as they scored 16.7 percentage points more than they did in the baseline.

Table 3 below presents differences between baseline mean scores and Phase 2 mean scores of each group.

TABLE III.
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BASELINE MEAN SCORES AND PHASE 2 MEAN SCORES

	CG			EG		
	Grammar	Speaking	Mean	Grammar	Speaking	Mean
Baseline	59.7	69.5	64.6	39.7	60	49.85
Phase 2	69.5	69.5	69.5	55.5	63.9	59.7
Improvement % points	+9.8	00	+4.9	+15.8	+3.9	+9.85

The above table indicates that CG outperformed EG in grammar and speaking, as it obtained higher mean scores. However, EG obtained higher improvement percentage points in both grammar and speaking. Also, the magnitude of progress in the performance of EG is much higher in grammar than in speaking.

D. Student Performance in Grammar and Speaking Tasks

This study aimed at finding out whether students perform better in grammar and speaking when French is used in the EFL class. Figure 3 below compares CG and EG's performances in grammar while Figure 4 compares both groups' performances in speaking.

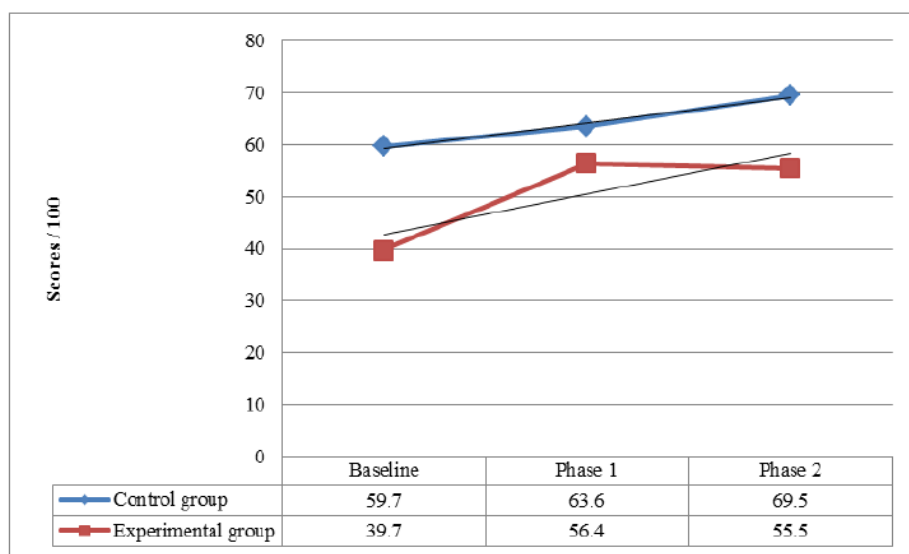


Figure 3: CG vs. EG grammar performances

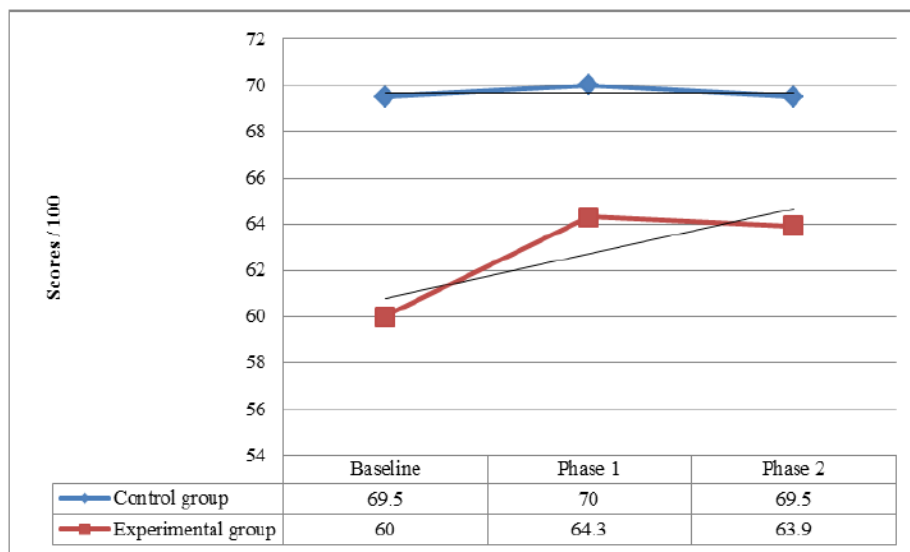


Figure 4: CG vs. EG performances speaking performances

As the above graphs indicate, there are significant changes between EG's baseline, Phase 1 and Phase 2 scores whereas the changes between CG's baseline, Phase 1 and Phase 2 scores are less significant. In fact, EG shows faster trend line growth than CG in both figures. This suggests that students perform better in English speaking and grammar when they are taught with the use of French.

V. DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine whether LAB EFL students perform better in grammar and speaking tasks when they are taught using French, their L1. The study started with a baseline, which consisted of mean scores obtained by each student in their last three grammar and speaking tests. Three tests were used to determine placement in either group for purposes of reliability in placement. A single test score is not reliable enough to reveal trends in student performance in a particular language skill or sub skill. As the researcher expected, CG got higher mean scores in grammar and speaking because it was composed of the best students throughout the school year.

Phase 1 of the experiment showed that CG still outperformed EG in grammar and speaking, although the latter obtained the higher mean improvement in percentage points. This is certainly not surprising, provided that the gap between both groups in the baseline was about 20 percentage points in grammar and 09.5 percentage points in speaking. However, both groups got better mean scores than they did in the baseline; while CG improved of 3.9 and 0.5 percentage points in grammar and speaking respectively, EG improved of 16.7 and 4.3 percentage points respectively. A closer look at the differences between the baseline and Phase 1 scores allowed us to infer that the gap between the two groups reduced to 7.2 percentage points in grammar and 6.7 percentage points in speaking. Another inference we could make was that EG's progress vis à vis CG after Phase 1 was about 12.8 percentage points in grammar against 3.8 in speaking. Progress is calculated by subtracting CG's mean improvement from EG's.

Phase 2 of the experiment produced similar results. For instance, CG still got better mean scores, whereas EG obtained higher mean improvement in percentage points. Here too, the scores obtained by the two groups were better than the baseline. Compared to the baseline, CG improves of 9.8 percentage points in grammar and 3.9 percentage points in speaking. Meanwhile, EG obtains 15.8 and 3.9 improvement percentage points in grammar and speaking respectively. From these numbers, we were able to infer that the gap between CG and EG narrowed from 20 percentage points to 14 in grammar and 09.5 to 05.6 in speaking. We could also infer that EG progressed of about 6.0 and 3.9 percentage points in grammar and speaking respectively vis à vis CG.

The fact that EG got higher mean improvement scores and made considerable progress towards CG's performance indicates that students perform better in grammar and speaking when code-switching is allowed in the EFL classroom. In all probability, switching codes constantly from English to French sharpened learners' cognitive abilities and metalinguistic awareness and lowered their anxiety, making them more disposed to comprehend linguistic input and respond to test instructions better. By using French in a judicious way, the teacher was able to scaffold linguistic input within learners' ZPD, resulting in better comprehension and improved performance in tests.

EG performed better in grammar than speaking probably because the transfer of grammar rules between two configurational languages — that “have bound word order governed by grammatical rules” (Kecskes & Papp, 2000, p. 92) — such as French and English is much easier to occur than the transfer of speaking skills from one language to another, as this type of transfer depends much more on pragma-linguistic and sociolinguistic competence than metalinguistic competence. Then, looking at the Cameroonian EFL learning context, it is possible to posit that the transfer of grammar sub-skills from French to English follows the following path:

English grammar rule → French grammar rule equivalent → English grammar sub-skill

From the above discussion, it can be inferred that there is consistency in the causal relationship, given that the cause—the use of French in the EFL class consistently produces the same effect (improvement) with a considerable magnitude of correlation. Therefore, French is useful in the EFL classroom.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

An experimental study requires controlling as many variables as possible. However, the researcher could not control a few variables including lesson difficulty, students' physical and mental dispositions on the day of the experiment and testing quality, probably because these are not quantifiable. Such variables could have affected the results in some way. Moreover, the study is not concerned with vocabulary, reading comprehension, listening or writing. Such areas need to be investigated before arriving at a comprehensive conclusion on whether French inhibits or facilitates learning in the EFL classroom in Cameroon.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR EFL PEDAGOGY

Given that most EFL students lose motivation in learning English when they do not understand what their teachers say, the National Inspectorate of English could amend the current teaching methodology so as to allow quotas of French use in the EFL classroom depending on learner level of study. However, officially allowing French use in the EFL classroom would imply that Cameroonian EFL teachers are bilingual, and that their level of proficiency in French is quite acceptable to permit them play between the two languages. This is not always the case. Nevertheless, it is our belief that a successful EFL teacher in Cameroon should be able to anticipate learners' errors resulting from French interference so as to better teach those areas of language that are likely difficult to learn (see Paradowski, 2008).

There is also a need to corroborate the role of French awareness in EFL pedagogy regarding course materials. EFL course materials should include activities that take into account the relationship between students' common background linguistic identity, culture and the TL. Thus, a truly foreign language pedagogical grammar should be contrastive, displaying with clarity and accuracy the relationship between the TL and the learner's L1.

Teachers should not ban the learners' L1 in the EFL classroom. Rather, they should encourage the use of TL (Willis, 1996). This implies that they should develop a systematic use of French alongside English, first as an aid to learning and teaching, and second, as a reflection of the ecological realities of the classroom. Furthermore, teachers should bear in mind that there is a clear-cut distinction between standards of L1, L2 and FL teaching. Then, EFL learners should neither be compared with L2 learners nor native speakers. Nonetheless, should a comparison be made, the models of EFL teaching should correspond to successful EFL users and not to low-level native speaker users or intermediate L2 users (Cook 2002).

VIII. CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that low-achieving bilingual EFL learners in Cameroon perform better in grammar and speaking when French is allowed in the classroom. Code-switching allows learners who lag behind to close the gap with their more advanced classmates. Also, students taught with the bilingual approach make much more noticeable progress in speaking despite fears that using L1 in the EFL classroom would reduce their exposure to English and subsequently inhibit oral language development. From the above, using French in the Cameroonian EFL classroom does not hinder learning. Rather, it facilitates learning, insofar as French appears as an effective scaffolding tool.

We fully understand the need to expose learners to rich linguistic data in TL as often as possible so that they rapidly acquire the appropriate patterns of interaction of their speech communities. However, L2 acquisition of English can be turned into a simpler and more enjoyable experience for learners if teachers choose to develop the new language on the conceptual base provided by the learners' L1. This study shows that a structured bilingual approach that takes advantage of the official bilingualism policy would likely improve Cameroonian EFL students' learning experience.

APPENDIX

PHASE 1 SCORES

Control group			Experimental group		
Student	Grammar	Speaking	Student	Grammar	Speaking
A	90	70	L	50	62.5
B	40	65	M	50	65
C	80	80	N	70	67.5
D	40	67.5	O	40	55
E	90	67.5	P	40	72.5
F	80	70	Q	10	65
G	60	62.5	R	80	50
H	60	77.5	S	60	77.5
I	50	70	T	50	52.5
J	60	67.5	U	90	75
K	50	72.5	V	80	65
Mean	63.6	70	Mean	56.4	64.3

PHASE 2 SCORES

Control group			Experimental group		
Student	Grammar	Speaking	Student	Grammar	Speaking
A	52.5	75	L	45	62.5
B	60	65	M	75	70
C	62.5	72.5	N	62.5	70
D	65	70	O	45	50
E	97.5	72.5	P	55	67.5
F	72.5	65	Q	50	67.5
G	77.5	57.5	R	45	52.5
H	60	77.5	S	50	70
I	95	72.5	T	52.5	60
J	50	70	U	70	65
K	72.5	67.5	V	60	67.5
Mean	69.5	69.5	Mean	55.5	63.9

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