

Theoretical and Practical Teaching of National Languages and Cultures and the Perpetuation of Living Together

By

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Abstract:

Living together, the watchword for the Cameroon of tomorrow is closely linked to national languages. This article, therefore, addresses this theme. Since the introduction of national languages and cultures into school curricula under Law No. 98/004 of April 14, 1998, the Cameroonian government has advocated a new policy encouraging harmonious coexistence among the national languages across the country. Language, as the primary foundation of an individual's personality and cultural identity, is considered an indispensable instrument and medium for expressing thoughts, traditions, beliefs, arts, habits, and customs. In short, it represents all that remains when everything else has been lost. When a society accepts, without discrimination, the languages (mother tongues) that form an integral part of its development, it can address, in a concerted manner, the problems undermining its existence and hindering its growth. Unfortunately, members of society are increasingly neglecting their linguistic and cultural heritage in favor of modernism and foreign languages, which are not as conducive to their development as one might hope. Faced with this challenge, there is an urgent need to establish a teaching method that serves as a bridge between languages, cultures, and the concept of living together. To achieve this, we aim to sufficiently equip learners, teachers, and community members to promote their holistic development and ensure seamless integration without barriers. In a context marked by linguistic diversity, we are exploring the feasibility of fostering sustainable peace through practical approaches to linguistic knowledge in educational institutions. In this vein, we will clarify key concepts, analyze the impacts, and examine limitations, ultimately contributing to the development of a productive framework for living together.

Keywords:

Didactics, theoretical-practical, language, culture, living together



Introduction

National integration and coexistence are fundamental elements of sustainable development. Defined as the set of informal norms that structure community life with borderless solidarity (integration), it conveys values encompassing language and shared living. The development of a united and integrated people depends on respect for the general interest, solidarity among all citizens, and principles and values that include appreciation not only for one's own language and culture but also for those of fellow citizens.

Men and women are weary of being seen merely as objects of history; they now aspire to be actors in history. This necessitates the strengthening and entrenchment of their values through their languages and cultures. Consequently, culture must not only be theorized but, above all, practiced on a socio-cultural level. This approach ensures that humanity is viewed not solely as an object of history but also as a principal actor in shaping it.

It is for this reason that we advocate, if not for the teaching of practices, then at least for linguistic pedagogy capable of promoting and maintaining unity among the diverse peoples of the multilingual nation of Cameroon. To achieve this goal, we will analyze the contours of teaching national languages. This analysis will go beyond their contributions to examine their impacts and limitations, ultimately offering our recommendations for fostering a better way of living together.

2. The Benefits of Teaching National Languages and Cultures Today

In the academic context, a variety of languages are utilized across disciplines, forming one of the frameworks for conveying educational content. These include, if not mother tongues, at least national cultures. With this in mind, we now turn to the merits of teaching these languages in the modern world.

The Benefits of Language Teaching

Language, as a system of oral or written expression used by a group of people (a linguistic community) for communication, serves both as a primary cultural object and a medium for expressing culture. It is a vehicle for identity values that signify practices or reveal the customs and traditions of a community. In essence, it is the most vibrant expression of a people's autonomy and heritage.

Cameroon boasts a linguistic richness of approximately 250 languages. This heritage, conducive to both individual and collective development, necessitates teaching practices that acknowledge and embrace linguistic diversity. Linguistic diversity refers to the coexistence of multiple languages within a single territory or nation. In response, authors and researchers have developed the "Alphabet Général des Langues Camerounaises" (AGLC) to enable the transcription of all national languages. Similarly, Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979) outlined general principles to harmonize the transcription of Cameroonian languages. These include facilitating reading and writing, representing phonemes, differentiating between alphabets and orthographies, and unifying graphemes for practical utility.

DJIAFEUA (2010) proposed a national language teaching program for ENIEGs, focusing on:

Teaching reading and writing in national languages,

Teaching mathematics, science, and technology in national languages, and

Incorporating oral mother tongues as vehicles for cultural and artistic practices.

This program emphasizes hands-on learning guided by teachers, promoting integration between schools and society.

The Benefits of Teaching Cultures

Culture encompasses customs, habits, artistic expressions, religious beliefs, and intellectual manifestations that define and distinguish a group or society. It is, in essence, the soul of a people. If lost, it signifies the death of a community's identity. Culture plays a vital role in social life, allowing

individuals to articulate their worldview through the art of expression. It must be integrated into daily life, blending seamlessly without losing its unique identity.

The school, as the foremost institution for promoting national cultures, must preserve and anchor these cultures in local spheres. Teaching plans should reflect Cameroon's cultural diversity, ensuring that educational strategies foster the adaptation, assimilation, and appreciation of multiple cultures and languages.

3. The Impact of Theoretical and Practical Teaching of National Languages and Cultures on Living Together

The aim here is to highlight a pedagogical rationale that emphasizes the didactic relevance of action and a unanimous ethic of integration. This task involves both parents and teachers.

Teaching Practices and Their Impact on Living Together: Teachers' Roles and Parents' Responsibilities

The effectiveness of teaching practices depends on the attitudes and behaviors of both teachers and learners. Effective teaching coherently links theory and practice, ensuring better assimilation of knowledge. Teachers must instill confidence, enthusiasm, and, above all, a sense of citizenship in their learners. Learning to be a good citizen requires freedom guided by educators and instruments that promote the common good, such as class and management councils, teaching councils and seminars, correspondence books, and disciplinary and relational standards.

Each individual must contribute actively, avoiding resignation or demagoguery. As the school is an educational unit preparing children for their future, it trains them to assimilate axioms that will underpin their future responsibilities. For children to flourish and enjoy true freedom, they must adapt thoughtfully to the rapid changes of their time and use critical thinking to embrace modern practices and habits.

Roegiers (2008) points out that a skills-based program aims to ensure that knowledge functions as a tool for both action and thought. From this perspective, didactics is seen as a process in which the learner is the primary agent. The Competency-Based Approach (CBA), which is widely used today, seeks to develop global thinking in pupils and learners. Consequently, knowledge is no longer isolated from technical skills (know-how) or the interpersonal attitudes required to apply them effectively in context.

For training and retraining primary and secondary school teachers, Tadadjeu, Sadembouo, and Mba (2004) have created a guide titled *Pédagogie des Langues Nationales Camerounaises*. This manual emphasizes that teaching in the mother tongue fosters curiosity about the natural environment, having profound effects on living together.

Promoting national integration and living together through teaching practices also requires openness to the values of other cultures for collaboration. As Saint-Exupéry said, "If you differ from me, far from harming me, you enrich me." To this end, the TECHNO2LAP laboratory has developed strategies such as teaching and working methods, tools, trainer training, and course materials (physical, audio, video, and digital) in various Cameroonian languages. This laboratory emphasizes benevolence, acceptance, and generosity in the pursuit of shared truth. These are essential tools for fostering dialogue, consensus, and teamwork.

Every advocate of national integration and living together must embody dialogue, tolerance, and openness. Promoting Linguistic and Cultural Heritage through Education to promote the diversity of linguistic and cultural heritage, parents must instill values that shape children's behavior wisely. Teachers and parents, responsible for educating the younger generation, should help develop critical

thinking, solidarity, and a sense of service. They must teach attentiveness to the rights of every individual and foster attitude of tolerance and understanding to awaken creativity. This involves prioritizing the general interest over personal gain. This approach requires integrating multiple methodologies.

Approaches for Integrating Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

Several methods facilitate the integration of linguistic and cultural diversity: The Error-Based Approach: This approach identifies learning obstacles and devises strategies to address them.

The Participatory Approach: Interaction between teachers and pupils, as well as among pupils, fosters an environment of mutual exchange. It teaches learners the value of giving and receiving in society.

The Large Group Approach: This practice considers the characteristics of the linguistic and cultural knowledge being taught alongside those of the learners. Pupils are grouped across different languages and cultures to encourage collaborative learning and the sharing of distinct knowledge. This enables learners to build confidence, appreciate belonging, and complement one another.

Group work is preceded by individual work to identify difficulties and compare results. In the subsequent consolidation phase, advanced learners take on teaching roles to support their peers. Teaching aids must progress in complexity, enabling smooth multicultural learning and fostering the preservation of languages and cultures.

4. Pitfalls and Suggestions for Sustaining Languages and Cultures as Part of Living Together

In view of the challenges that hinder the stability and durability of national languages in daily life, several strategies have been proposed to address these obstacles. Despite these hurdles, a roadmap has been outlined to navigate this complex issue.

Obstacles to the Perpetuation of Languages and Cultures as Part of Living Together

The barriers to linguistic continuity are well-documented. These include a critical lack of textbooks, outdated teaching methods and technological tools, low levels of digitization, and insufficient recruitment of teachers in this field. Additionally, software solutions like Keyman and Galician, while designed for linguistic purposes, often require a high degree of technical skill to synchronize letters during text input—an approach that is not user-friendly for everyone. Furthermore, negative perceptions of local languages, perpetuated by terms like the pejorative "patois," discourage their usage among parents and children alike.

Another concern is the emergence of neologisms such as sardinards, sardinavie, and tontinards. For instance, the term tontinards, often used to refer to the Bamiléké people due to their traditional savings systems (tontines and associations), reflects an underlying discrimination and stigmatization. This has led to tribal, gender, and class antagonisms, resulting in exclusion and even rejection. Gabriel Mounnol highlights the issue of identity withdrawal in areas like Ndikinimeki and Makénéné, where the local populations—Bamiléké, Nyokon, or Banen—are both contributors to and victims of inter-ethnic clashes, often resulting in the tragic loss of life.

Given these significant challenges, it is essential to envision and implement measures that enhance national integration and the perpetuation of a cohesive society.

Suggestions for Sustaining Languages and Cultures as Part of Living Together

The perpetuation of languages and cultures, alongside fostering a sense of community, requires the construction of a robust pedagogical framework to address these critical needs. As Assoumou (2007) states:

"If African languages and cultures are not taught in schools, it is partly because there are very few textbooks setting out the guidelines and defining the didactics. A pedagogy of the spoken word, through integrated language/culture teaching, would fill this gap. It would not only legitimize

language and culture as educational subjects but also unify two closely related fields, developing the skills of teachers who are the primary beneficiaries of such an initiative."

Having multiple languages within a nation does not guarantee its development or the fulfillment of its citizens unless these languages are effectively utilized. However, multilingualism can serve as a remarkable asset for fostering global understanding. To achieve this, it is crucial to educate citizens to value their own culture while respecting others, thus promoting a harmonious balance. This approach emphasizes the common good, ethics, and the preservation of linguistic and cultural heritage.

Educational practices must promote the collective interest and the development of all citizens while eradicating discrimination and identity-based isolationism. This responsibility lies not only with the administration and affected communities but also requires individual accountability. It necessitates raising awareness among adults, youth, the elderly, and children, instilling values of unity, solidarity, and national indivisibility. The aim is to overcome tribal differences and foster peaceful coexistence for a united nation.

Since today's youth represent the nation's future, the education system must emphasize strategies that promote national integration and harmonious living. Teaching methods should instill cultural values of unity while addressing attitudes contrary to national unity, such as tribalism and regionalism.

As Assoumou (2007) further elaborates:

"The colonial education system was a project of deculturation in which the colonized were objects of education, molded in the image of the West. This approach sidelined African languages and cultures in favor of European languages. Today's education system continues this legacy, perpetuating colonial glottophagy and cultural genocide. To promote a language or skill, it must be included in schools. Conversely, excluding a language, culture, or knowledge system from education ensures its decline and ultimate disappearance."

To merely introduce languages and cultures into the education system is insufficient; the development of appropriate methods for transmitting this heritage, which respects the cultural context of the people involved, is paramount.

The realities of the country must be carefully considered when implementing educational strategies. While familial attitudes and cultural styles influence students, research indicates that the alignment between family culture and school culture significantly contributes to academic success. A society must remain open to innovation and peaceful coexistence between diverse peoples, cultures, and languages.

Regarding software for typing in African languages, there is an urgent need for technological solutions, including an African keyboard equipped with all the special characters of African languages. Such advancements are essential for preserving linguistic diversity and ensuring its integration into modern educational practices.

CONCLUSION

At the end of this study, it is essential that learners in schools and members of all communities in literacy training centers adopt appropriate and judicious teaching practices. Long experience in the field of teaching and the various teaching practices across disciplines, shared with learners in literacy centers, remain vital.

Teaching practices must be based on knowledge gained from experience or acquired knowledge. These practices should aim to consolidate values of living together, incorporating diversity,

complementarity, solidarity, fairness in justice, and equality for all, through a blend of theoretical and practical didactics.

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