

Research Article

EFL Teachers' Perceptions of the 2014 Curriculum in Cameroon French-medium Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores English foreign language teachers' perceptions of the 2014 English language learning programme in Cameroon French-medium secondary education. It considers aspects such as the quality of the programme of study, the teaching of skills and competencies in the instructional materials selected, the teaching and testing approaches, the challenges encountered, and teachers' personal and professional growth. Hall and Hord (1987, 2001) theoretical paradigm was chosen to conduct this research and the method of data collection was quantitative in nature. A total number of 80 English foreign language teachers were surveyed and administered a 38-item questionnaire. It came out of the findings that the vast majority of teachers deemed the new curriculum innovative and a developmental tool for bilingualism. Also, the majority of the respondents appreciated the skills and the competencies taught in the textbooks selected as they met with real-life situations. Further, these teachers in their great number claimed that they had a good knowledge of the Competence-Based Approach (CBA) and had grown cognitively and pedagogically while implementing the reforms of the new learning programme. Finally, they wish the implementation of the curriculum continued. Among the pitfalls of the curriculum, the testing approach and the exposure of learners to other learning sources revealed themselves limited. The overcrowded nature of classrooms impeded the unfolding of lessons and personalised pedagogy and above all obstructed the effective and efficient implementation of the Competence-Based Approach. Ultimately, teachers frowned at the filling of pedagogic documents which in their perspective was too bureaucratic. Some recommendations were made at the end of the investigation in order to improve the curriculum.

1. Introduction

This study enquires about Cameroon English foreign language teachers' beliefs of the 2014 French-speaking secondary education English language programme reformed six years ago. In other words, it investigates on teachers' viewpoints on the quality of the new curriculum, the teaching of skills and the competences presented in the official textbooks selected, the teaching and testing approaches, the challenges encountered, and teachers' personal and professional growth, to predict the outcomes of the curriculum innovations.

Curricular reform in education is a multi-faceted and highly complex process including institutional and personal factors (Lami, 2004) and teachers' beliefs are fundamental in the implementation of changes. The new English language curriculum for the teaching of English to French-speaking students of secondary education schools in Cameroon shows a significant paradigm shift from the previous ones particularly in the conceptual framework, the content, the teaching approach and learning, the evaluation process; this shift has had profound implications on teachers' behaviour, their cognition and teaching

practices. The 2014 curriculum came with innovations which need to be explored by teachers, agents of change, who may develop feelings of acceptance or rejection.

The following research questions were raised to enquire teachers' viewpoints on the curriculum:

- a. What are teachers' perceptions of the quality of the curriculum?
- b. What are teachers' perceptions of the teaching of skills and competences taught in the instructional materials selected?
- c. What are teachers' perceptions of the teaching and testing approaches recommended?
- d. What are the challenges faced by teachers while implementing the curriculum?
- e. What have teachers gained personally and professionally from the 2014 curriculum?

The research narrows its scope to the 2019/2020 academic year focusing on the above-mentioned aspects.

This study is significant for many reasons. First, it provides a feedback of how the planned curriculum is perceived and implemented by teachers. Secondly, it helps curriculum developers to see how their decisions are interpreted and practised by teachers in the classroom. Thirdly, it helps to identify the problems encountered in reaching the goals of the present curriculum from the perspectives of teachers so that the authorities may consider these issues in their attempts to improve on the current programme of study. Lastly, the results obtained from the present implementation strategies, the difficulties faced and suggestions made are expected to provide useful information to curriculum developers in their future endeavour.

The work is structured into eight sections: Section 1 introduces the work, section 2 reviews literature; section 3 describes the research design, section 4 presents the results of findings, section 5 discusses the findings, section 6 makes recommendations, section 7 works out the limitations of the study, section 8 makes suggestions for further research and section 9 concludes the study.

2. Literature Review

This section describes the 2014 EFL curriculum conceptual framework, discusses the importance of considering teachers' voices while designing and implementing a curriculum and reviews research works carried out on the teaching of English as a foreign language in Cameroon.

2.1. The 2014 EFL curriculum conceptual framework

The rationale for changes and innovations brought in the current curriculum reform form the components of this part.

2.1.1. Rationale for changes

Conscious of the fact that in today's fast world, English language is an important communication tool in politics, economics, science, education, technology and in the media, the French-speaking English language learning programme has been reformed to respond to the needs and interests of the time. Shifting away from the 2003 curriculum which was linear and skill-based, a new curriculum was designed and trialed in 2012 then reformed in 2014 subsequent to the inadequacies noted during the teaching-learning process. The following arguments drawn from various programmes of study were considered as the major reasons which prompted the authorities in charge of education to move steps towards new pedagogical orientations:

To start, the authorities in charge of education buttressed that the change of curriculum was necessary because 'every system, be it in Education, Public Administration or other, must be upgraded to suit innovations in scientific knowledge.' (Programme of Study (Anglais) 6e, p.7).

Another argument, not the least, was the reduction of the shortcomings observed in the previous syllabus (2012) so as to prepare Francophone learners of English to use the language successfully in real-life situations (Programme of Study (Anglais) 6e, p.16);

Further, the objective was 'to train citizens within the framework of an emerging Cameroon in the year 2035 who will have a good mastery of the two official languages (English and French) deeply rooted in their cultures but opened to a world in search of sustainable development and dominated by Information and Communication Technologies.' (Programme of Study (Anglais) 6e, p.16).

Ultimately, the authors claimed that the change of the curriculum was done to be in line with the major guidelines for education in general and secondary education in particular the 1998 Law to lay down the guidelines for education in Cameroon and the implementation of the provisions of Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (DSCE) which, by the year 2020 specifies the minimum amount of knowledge which each Cameroonian is supposed to possess. The secondary education sector faces many challenges. It should offer quality training and education to most young Cameroonians within a

context marked by large classes in primary education; prepare them for smooth insertion into a more demanding job market worldwide, through pertinent teaching/learning process (Programme of Study (Anglais) 5e, p.3)

On balance, the inception of the 2014 EFL curriculum was prompted by the country's policy of bilingualism, the scientific and technological advancements of the time, and the emergence of the country envisaged for the year 2035.

2.1.2. Innovations of the new curriculum

The changes presented below contrast with the 2003 and 2012 learning programmes. The nomenclature of the 2014 curriculum departs from the previous curricula as follows:

- The introduction of 'learning outcomes' instead of 'objectives' as it featured in the 2003 syllabus. Learning outcomes are the expected knowledge, know-how, and attitudes learners should possess to solve their problems in real-life situations;
- A shift from a skill-based approach to a competence-based approach through real-life situations;
- The existence of new 'areas of life' in the curriculum taught through families of situations distributed as follows:
 1. Family and Social life (national integration and diversity acceptance, etc.).
 2. Economic Life and Occupations (consumption habits and how they impact economic and social life, etc.).
 3. Environment, Well-being and Health (maintaining hygiene and sanitation, climate change, etc.).
 4. Citizenship/Human Rights (the quest for excellence, gender issues, democracy, etc.).
 5. Media and Communication (utilities of modern technology, etc.).
- 'Areas of life' are broken into families of situations that learners encounter in their daily life. Each family of situations is in turn broken into real-life situations from which categories of actions are derived and the related competencies built. Previous curricula broke knowledge into skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and sub-skills (vocabulary and grammar).
- A shift from a school cut off from society to one that prepares citizens for a smooth insertion into socio-cultural and economic activities;
- A shift from an evaluation of knowledge to that of competences necessary to sustainable development;
- The introduction of 'cross-curricular competencies' in the teaching of competencies. The new curriculum breaks down barriers between school subjects, that is, it gives English its rightful place as an essentially cross-curricular discipline. (Programme of Study (Anglais) 1ère, p.7)
- The definition of curricular competencies for students at different levels of teaching, which include general competencies to be developed throughout the first cycle (*Sixième, Cinquième, Quatrième, Troisième*) and the second cycle (*Seconde, Première, Terminale*) as well as specific competencies related to a given subject and discipline areas;
- the existence of students' exit profile.

All things considered, the innovations occurred in the 2014 EFL curriculum were insightful and chiefly conceptual, methodological, pedagogical based on knowledge, skills, know-how, and attitudes which facilitate users' integration in this global era which requires qualified, multi-skilled, competitive and multicultural individuals. However, the current curriculum does not devote a space for non-curricular tasks like 'project work' which promotes collaboration among teachers.

2.2. Considering teachers' voices during curricular reforms

Considering teachers' voices in the process of curriculum reform is necessary for its successful implementation. Teachers' beliefs are a key factor which influences the change process (Gregoire, 2003). These are some parameters to be considered before, during, and after the implementation of a new learning programme:

a) Awareness, preparation, and training of teachers

Teachers' awareness of the imminence of a new learning programme helps them prepare their mind for the paradigm shift. This will spark cognitive development, ease adaptation and appropriation of the new teaching practices and avoid disruptive attitudes. Preparation passes through seminars and workshops; educational actors are tutored on the shortcomings of the previous curriculum and exposed to the novelty of the newly intended learning programme. Failing to provide awareness, pedagogical and training support to teachers may lead to the misunderstanding likely to create conflict and resistance from

the part of the teachers (Gess-Newsome et al., 2003, Smith and Southerland, 2007, Bantwini, 2010). The change of a curriculum requires good knowledge because lack of cognition would impact negatively on the implementation process. Teachers' voices should be considered during the planned and implementation process but not only met as mere technicians whose role is to apply what has been established. Supporting this position, Shower (2010) opined that when teachers are included in the decision-making process, such as the designing of curriculum, they are more likely to enable the success of new changes in any education system. Therefore, teachers' consultation during curriculum designing is necessary and cooperation between the actors concerned is imperative.

b) Collaboration, cooperation and patience

A bottom-up approach is advisable while devising a new educational programme. Teachers should be involved uphill and downhill the process, that is, from the planning to the implementation, and they should be given enough time for its implementation. As to the importance of patience, Bantwini (2010, p. 89) had this to say: 'introducing curriculum reforms should not be the end of the reform process but the beginning of a long journey to the desired success.' From this view, it is evident that time is important in the implementation of a reform thus reformers should be patient as some teachers might be slow in the assimilation of the process while others would be versed with it rapidly. In addition, teachers' work should be monitored and supervised to help them meet the expected learning outcomes.

Conversely, the use of a top-bottom approach would create conflicts between curriculum reformers and teachers. When teachers' voices are ignored during curricular reforms, they may develop sentiments of incompatibility such as resistance, apathy, and rejection towards change. Concerning that point, Orafi and Borg (2009, p. 244) cautions that "curriculum innovations that conflict with teachers' beliefs are less likely to be adapted as planned in the curriculum". Therefore, it is obvious that curriculum developers should collaborate with field practitioners and technicians who are teachers.

c) Feedback

Feedback in this context stands for teachers' reactions to the nature and the challenges encountered during the implementation of the new learning programme. This is the last stage of curriculum implementation. Follow-up activities should be carried out by administrators such as inspectors, principals and heads of department in order to monitor teachers' work. Teachers should be given opportunities to voice out their difficulties while implementing the change. Teachers' perceptions would help curriculum developers to bring some amendments to the educational programme based on teachers' perspectives. Teachers in this condition feel very motivated and confident while implementing the new educational programme.

2.3. Review of previous works

Research works reviewed in the framework of this study focused chiefly on the implementation of the competency-based approach in Cameroon secondary education classrooms since no critical work was found on the evaluation of the curriculum.

To begin with, Nforbi and Siewoue (2015), investigated on the application of the competence-based approach by teachers of English in *Menoua* Division, an administrative unit of the West Region of Cameroon. He administered a questionnaire to 22 teachers and the results of the findings revealed that 45.45% of the surveyed teachers claimed they had never attended a seminar on CBLT, that 63.64% of them found the new approach difficult to understand, that 68.18% thought that CBA made lesson planning more difficult for teachers, while 54.55% claimed that CBA made lesson delivery more difficult. Also, only 18.18% of respondents were confident that they understood what CBA entailed, whereas 45.45% claimed they knew it to an extent. Looking at some key features of CBLT, 65% of teachers claimed that it was almost impossible to personalise instructions due to large classes and insufficient allocation of teaching time, 72.72% said it was almost impossible to avoid paper-and-pencil tests, and 86.36% did not evaluate their students at the end of the module.

In addition, Njwe (2016) explored teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the competence-based approach in Cameroon secondary schools using a questionnaire piloted to 91 teachers selected from 32 schools both private and public spread across the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon. The researcher came out with the findings that 93.4% of teachers were aware of the paradigm shift while only 17.6% believed that they understood what CBA entailed. Further, only 25.7% of teachers felt ready to implement CBA, while about 82.4% did not feel confident implementing the new approach at that time. The study further hinted that teacher training and professional development were deficient, given that about 42.9% of teachers claimed that they had not received training on the application of CBA, while about 15.4% of teachers had never attended any seminar or workshop on the application of the CBA.

Lastly, Belibi (2018) examined the implementation of competency-based English language teaching in a low-resource context, namely the Cameroon Francophone secondary education sub-system. Particular interest was placed on the Cameroon model

of competency-based language teaching challenges and possible solutions for a better implementation. Using ethnographic research methods, the research revealed inconsistencies between the Cameroon model of competency-based language teaching and western models in the domain of assessment and instructional approach. Also, teachers' cognitive and professional development, inadequate education infrastructure and teaching resources, a different school culture, the weak role of school leadership, the non-integration of technology in English language teaching and the continuous rejection of L1 in the EFL classroom were identified as challenges to CBLT implementation. Among the solutions proposed, he suggested an effective funding scheme to support schools, listening to teachers' voices, continuous professional development programmes for teachers nationwide, and supervision by school administrators.

The above-mentioned works focused essentially on the implementation of the competency-based approach in French-speaking Cameroon secondary education schools and less interest was put on the study of the curriculum at large. Extensively, the results obtained in their findings might have changed with time. The current research departs from theirs as it looks into teachers' perceptions of the quality of the curriculum, their perceptions of the instructional materials selected, their perceptions of the teaching and testing approaches, the challenges encountered in the teaching of skills and competencies in classrooms and teachers' perceptions of their personal and professional development while implementing the new curriculum.

3. Research design

The theoretical framework, informants, the sampling technique, the instruments of data collection, the validation and administration of instruments are discussed here.

3.1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework selected for this study is Hall & Hord (1987, 2001). The following six explicit assumptions form the basis of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) established for observing and facilitating the process of policy and curriculum change and implementation.

1. Change is a process, not an event and it takes time to institute change;
2. Individuals accomplish change. The individuals must be the focus if change is to be facilitated and institutions (such as schools) will not change until their members' change;
3. The change process is extremely personal experience and how it is perceived by the individual will strongly influence the outcome;
4. Change involves developmental growth, that is, individuals experiencing new practice progress through various stages regarding their emotions and capabilities resulting to the innovation;
5. Change is best understood in operational terms. The availability of a teacher-centered diagnostic approach can enhance the individual's facilitation during curriculum implementation or/ and staff development; and
6. The focus of facilitation should be on individuals, innovations and context. In addition, people responsible for the change process need to be monitored constantly.

Overall, the Concerns-Based Adoption Model addresses three basic assumptions. First, the theory focuses on the individual's concern about the innovation or change. In the case of this study, it refers to EFL language teachers in Cameroon secondary education schools. Second, it addresses the particular manner in which the innovation is delivered or implemented, how the 2014 EFL curriculum is seen and implemented by teachers. Lastly, the CBAM looks at the adaptation of the innovation to the individual teacher. In the case of this study, it acts as a basis in understanding what teachers benefitted from this learning programme while implementing it and challenges encountered in the process of change.

3.2. Informants

Informants qualified for this study were English foreign language teachers of grammar secondary education schools. The eighty teachers pooled were selected from thirty-four public and private schools located in four regions of the country such as the Centre, the West, the Adamawa and the East. 53 (66.25%) teachers out of eighty were female while 27 (33.75%) of them were male. The age-range of these teachers was between 25 and 40 years old and above. Those who answered the questionnaire were distributed as follows: 24 teachers (30%) were aged between 25 and 30, 32 (40%) aged between 30 and 35, 20 (25%) aged between 35 and 40 while 4 (5%) were aged between 40 and above.

3.3. Sampling technique

A random sampling technique was employed where the researcher, based on the age, sex, and the teaching experience, selected teachers who started implementing the curriculum at its early stage, that is, since 2012. The teaching experience is very important here because teachers who witnessed the implementation of the curriculum at its early stage accumulated much knowledge and experience when the programme was in progress.

3.4. Instruments of data collection

The method of data collection used for this study was quantitative essentially based on the use of questionnaire to survey teachers' opinions on the 2014 EFL curriculum. Thus, a 38-item questionnaire was devised and piloted to teachers using Likert's four-scale. The questionnaire was divided into five sections described as follows: Section A dealt with teachers' profile where they had to indicate their gender, their age, their teaching experience, their school, the classes taught and their qualifications. Section B comprised thirteen questions which sought what teachers thought of the quality of the curriculum. Section C consisted of thirteen questions which looked into teachers' perceptions of the skills and competencies taught in the instructional materials selected. Section D made up of nine questions examined teachers' perceptions of the teaching approach and testing approaches while implementing the reformed programme. Section E entailed two questions on teachers' challenges while implementing the curriculum while the last part, section F, made up of one question, measured what teachers gained personally and professionally while implementing the new curriculum.

3.5. Administration and validation of the instruments

To ensure the validity of the instrument used, a pilot test was conducted in January 2020. The questionnaire was administered to a small group of seven teachers to see if the questions were answerable. The pilot study revealed that some questions were loose; others were unanswered as a result some suggestions were made by the respondents. Subsequent to the results obtained, some questions were either reworded or removed. The second phase of the administration of questionnaire happened in early March 2020 and enlarged to a pool of 80 teachers. They were asked to provide objective answers and many took them home to fill them. Assistant researchers were solicited for the administration of the questionnaire. The administration of questionnaire was not easy as some teachers complained that the questions were long. The results of the survey are presented in tables quantified into figures and statistics.

4. Results of the Findings

The results of the findings are descriptive and presented in statistical tables following the linear structure of the questionnaire.

4.1. Teachers' perceptions of the quality of the curriculum

Thirteen questions sought teachers' opinions on the quality of the curriculum. The findings are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of teachers' perceptions of the quality of the 2014 curriculum

Items	Responses				Total
	Strongly agree	agree	Strongly disagree	disagree	
The new English language curriculum is innovative	11 (13.75%)	66 (82.5%)	-	3 (3.75%)	80 (100%)
I like the new curriculum	11 (13.75%)	69 (86.25%)	-	-	80 (100%)
The learning goals of the curriculum match with learners' needs and interests	11 (13.75%)	69 (86.25%)	-	-	80 (100%)
The modules of learning match with learners' context	-	80 (100%)	-	-	80 (100%)
The use of technology in the classroom is obligatory in classrooms	-	-	80 (100%)	-	80 (100%)
I cope with the requirements of the new curriculum	-	59 (73.75%)	13 (16.25%)	8 (10%)	80 (100%)
I have received good training to	16 (20%)	32 (40%)	16 (20%)	16 (20%)	80 (100%)

cope with the competence-based approach					
I have received much support since its implementation	6 (7.5%)	47 (58.75%)	7 (8.75%)	20 (25%)	80 (100%)
The curriculum is a developmental tool for bilingualism	8 (10%)	48 (60%)	-	24 (30%)	80 (100%)
The volume of work has	Increased significantly	increased	decreased	did not really change	80 (100%)
	24 (30%)	56 (70%)	-	-	80 (100%)

As shown by Table 1 above, question 1 required teachers to say whether the curriculum was innovative and the results revealed that 82.5% of them agreed, 13.75% strongly agreed whereas 3.75% of them disagreed. The obtained results showed that most teachers welcomed the 2014 English Foreign language programme positively.

Question 2 checked whether teachers liked the new curriculum and it came out that 86.25% of the respondents agreed and 13.75% of them strongly agreed.

Question 3 searched whether the learning goals of the curriculum matched with learners' needs and interests and the same results were yielded. 86.25% of the surveyed teachers agreed while 13.75% of them strongly agreed.

Question 4 sought whether the modules of learning matched with the learners' context and all teachers (100%) unanimously agreed.

Question 5 enquired whether curriculum designers made the use of technology obligatory in classrooms and it turned out that all of them (100%) strongly disagreed.

Question 6 asked teachers if they coped with the requirements of the new curriculum and their answers proved that the majority (73.75%) agreed, a few (16.25%) strongly disagreed and very few (10%) disagreed.

The same teachers in question 7 were required to indicate whether they received good training to cope with the competence-based approach then the majority (40%) agreed, 20% of them strongly agreed whereas 20% disagreed and 20% strongly disagreed.

Asked if they received much support since the implementation of the competence-based approach (Q8), the findings showed that more than the half (58.75%) agreed, a quarter (25%) disagreed while 8.75% strongly disagreed and 7.5% strongly agreed. Teachers acknowledged the fact that they had received support from various sources such as inspectors, their principal, their head of department, and colleagues.

Teachers' beliefs on whether the curriculum was a developmental tool for bilingualism (Q9) revealed that the great number (60%) agreed, 30% of them disagreed, and 10% of them strongly agreed.

About the volume of work (Q10), 30% of teachers opined that the volume of work increased significantly and 70% stated that it merely increased.

The same teachers answering question 11 on what has been done to support them during the implementation of the new curriculum provided the following answers: First, they attended seminars where clarifications and practical aids were given. Secondly, follow-up inspections were carried out by regional pedagogic inspectors. Finally, inspectors multiplied pedagogic workshops to support them, to discuss methods of teaching, of evaluation, and drawing of the scheme of work.

Question 12 focused on personal and professional strategies taken by these teachers to cope with the change of the curriculum. Here, they stated that they did internet and library research; they were documented to be versed with the new curriculum requirements. They also met their inspectors or colleagues when they were blocked.

As regards Question 13 on what teachers thought they could change in the curriculum, answers varied. Some teachers put forward the argument that the number of teaching hours per week and per class be increased to meet the expected learning outcomes of the programme of study while others suggested that the syllabus and the scheme of work be cut down to reduce teachers' work load. Also, other groups demanded the reduction of the categories of actions. To end, they suggested that more focus should be put on vocabulary and grammar.

4.2. Teachers' perceptions of the teaching of skills and competences in the instructional materials selected

Thirteen questions were devised to gauge teachers' perceptions of the skills and competencies taught in the official textbooks selected. The findings are summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of teachers' perceptions of the teaching of skills and competences in the instructional materials selected

Items	Responses				Total
	Strongly agree	agree	Strongly disagree	disagree	
The official textbook (s) reflect (s) all the modules presented in the new curriculum	24 (30%)	40 (50%)	8 (10%)	8 (10%)	80 (100%)
The listening activities are very interesting for students	24 (30%)	48 (60%)	-	8 (10%)	80 (100%)
The listening activities are relevant for real-life situations	16 (20%)	56 (70%)	-	8 (10%)	80 (100%)
The speaking activities are very interesting for students	40 (50%)	40 (50%)	-	-	80 (100%)
The speaking activities are relevant for real-life situations	40 (50%)	40 (50%)	-	-	80 (100%)
The reading activities are very interesting for students	71 (88.75%)	9 (11.25%)	-	-	80 (100%)
The reading topics are up-to-date	80 (100%)	-	-	-	80 (100%)
The writing activities are very interesting for students	7 (8.75%)	73 (91.25%)	-	-	80 (100%)
The writing activities are relevant for real-life situations	7 (8.75%)	73 (91.25%)	-	-	80 (100%)
The vocabulary activities are interesting for the students	24 (30%)	56 (70%)	-	-	80 (100%)
The grammar activities encourage the improvement of students' speaking skills	16 (20%)	40 (50%)	8 (10%)	16 (20%)	80 (100%)
Students can apply the knowledge of the textbook in real-life situations	-	49 (61.25%)	17 (21.25%)	14(17.5%)	80 (100%)
The textbook used develops cross-curricular competencies (teaches English and other subjects)	Sufficiently	fairly	slightly	not at all	100(100%)
	-	54 (67.5%)	26 (32.5%)	-	100(100%)

In compliance with Table 2, question 14 aimed at finding out whether the textbooks used in classrooms reflected all the modules presented in the new curriculum showed that half (50%) of the teachers agreed, 30% strongly agree while 10% strongly disagreed and 10% disagreed.

Question 15 sampled the opinions of teachers to know whether the listening activities were very interesting. It turns out that 60% of the surveyed teachers agreed, 30% strongly agreed whereas 10% disagreed.

Question 16 about the relevance of the textbook listening activities with real-life situations indicated that 70% of teachers agreed, 20% strongly agreed while 10% disagreed.

To know whether the speaking activities were very interesting for students (Q17), teachers' opinions on the issue were positive as half of them (50%) strongly agreed and the other half (50%) agreed.

The same results were obtained in Question 18 where teachers had to indicate whether the speaking activities were relevant for real-life situations. 50% of them strongly agreed and 50% agreed.

Concerning the appealing nature of reading activities (Q19), 88.25% of the teachers pooled strongly agreed that they were very interesting and 11.25% agreed as well.

Still on reading, teachers were to react on the topics treated (Q 20). All the surveyed teachers (100%) strongly agreed that the topics presented in the textbooks used were up-to-date.

Regarding the appealing nature of writing activities (Q.21), a great deal of teachers (91.25%) agreed that they were very interesting for students and 8.75% strongly agreed on the matter.

The same results were recorded when these teachers were asked to indicate whether writing activities were relevant to real-life situations (Q22). Thus, 91.25% of the surveyed teachers agreed and 8.75% of them strongly agreed.

In question 23, where teachers had to scrutinise the types of vocabulary activities offered, the respondents in their majority (70%) strongly agreed that they were very interesting for students and 30% agreed.

Looking at the grammar activities (Q 24) whether they encouraged the improvement of students' speaking skills, half of teachers (50%) agreed, 20% of them strongly agreed. On the contrary, 20% of the teachers disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed.

Teachers were to say whether the students could apply the knowledge of the curriculum in real-life situations (Q25), a big number (61.25%) agreed whereas the minority represented by 21.25% and 17.5% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively.

Question 26 sought to what extent the textbook used developed cross-curricular competencies. It turned out that the majority of teachers (67.5%) stated that the book blended English and other subjects fairly whereas the little group (32.5%) believed that cross-curricular principles were slightly integrated in the manuals.

4.3. Teachers' perceptions of the teaching and testing approaches

Nine questions were asked to teachers to survey their opinions on the methodology of teaching propounded by the curriculum designers and the testing approach. The results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of teachers' perceptions of the Competence-Based Approach and the testing approach

Items	Responses				Total
	Excellent	very good	good	poor	
My level of knowledge of the competence-based approach	17 (21.25%)	6 (7.5%)	57 (71.25%)	-	80 (100%)
My level of motivation while applying the competence-based approach	2 (2.5%)	76 (95%)	2 (2.5%)	-	80 (100%)
The competence-based approach fits the Cameroon context	Strongly agree	agree	Strongly disagree	disagree	80 (100%)
	-	60 (75%)	-	20 (25%)	
The implementation of the competence-based approach should continue	-	56 (70%)	24 (30%)	-	80 (100%)
There is a particular way of treating students' scripts	80 (100%)	-	-	-	80 (100%)

and test scores					
All the skills are tested during summative evaluation	-	-	80 (100%)	-	80 (100%)
I evaluate listening during formative evaluation	Always	sometimes	hardly	never	80 (100%)
	-	-	-	80 (100%)	80 (100%)
I evaluate students orally during formative evaluation	-	-	-	80 (100%)	80 (100%)
I make students rewrite assignments to help them achieve high grades	-	-	-	80 (100%)	80 (100%)

In accordance with Table 3, teachers in their majority deemed their level of knowledge of the competence-based approach (Q27) as good (71.25%) while others judged them as excellent (21.25%) and very good (7.5%).

As far as the teachers' level of motivation while applying the competence-based approach (Q28) is concerned, the overwhelming majority (95%) said they were fairly motivated meanwhile the minority of respondents said they were very motivated (2.5%) and a little motivated (2.5%).

Teachers' opinion on whether the competence-based approach fitted the Cameroonian context (Q29) demonstrated that 75% of them agreed while 25% of them disagreed.

Question 30 requested teachers to indicate whether the implementation of the competence-based approach should continue. They agree in their great number (70%) while the minor group (30%) strongly disagreed.

Teachers had to indicate (Q31) whether there was something original in the treatment of scripts and test scores. All of the respondents (100%) strongly agreed. Concerning the changes, teachers reported that students had to show their scripts to their parents for them to make observations and sign to testify that they have seen them. Besides, students' test scores were rated using scales as 'acquired', 'not acquired', 'on the process of acquisition', to appreciate their level of performance.

Asked if all the skills were tested during summative evaluation (Q32), all the surveyed teachers (100%) strongly disagreed. They stated that listening and speaking were neglected.

Also, they were asked whether they evaluated listening during formative evaluation (Q33) and all of them (100%) said they never did it. They justified this by the lack of digital devices.

In the same light, teachers were asked to indicate whether they evaluated their students orally (Q34) and all of them said 'never'. The arguments brought forth were that they taught large size classes and it was time-consuming.

Lastly, teachers were to indicate whether they made students rewrite assignments to help them achieve high grades (Q35). On this point, all of them (100%) honestly replied that they never did that. Again, they accused time.

4.4. Teachers' challenges while implementing the new curriculum

In the course of the implementation of the 2014 English language educational programme, teachers faced challenges related to the teaching of competencies and skills in their classrooms while using the competence-based approach (Q36), the assessment of students and the management of pedagogic documents (Q37).

Looking at the skills and competencies related problems, teachers complained about the overcrowded nature of classrooms which hindered the unfolding of lessons and personalisation of teaching. More specifically, most classes outnumbered sixty students, rendering it difficult to organize group work activities. Also, textbooks did not include digital devices like Cds and DVs to boost the teaching and learning of English. As a result of this, listening activities were dropped or if administered, texts were read orally by teachers for students to complete the tasks provided.

As regards the assessment of students, teachers indicated that students' proficiency in English was low as a result of this they did not cope with evaluation. Again, they argued that students performed so poorly in reading and writing that teachers were embarrassed on what to set and how to set.

With regard to the management of pedagogic documents, teachers figured out the following problems:

To begin with, they spent more time handling administrative documents than actually working with learners;

Next, writing departmental reports was a hard nut to crack because they had so many documents to fill in;

Further, the record of workbook had many entries. It took too much time to enter all the expected outcomes. Teachers at the end of their lesson had to fill in a long list of issues which to their opinion is non-essential such as the module title, the domain of life, real-life situation, the objective, category of actions, examples of actions, essential knowledge, bilingual game, attitude, resources, homework, etc. The details were too much and they did not have enough time. "Teaching is what is important, not filling in literature, may be of which you did not teach!" a teacher reported.

They reported that the scheme of work was already pasted in the logbook. Thus, asking teachers to write down every single item taught in a lesson was too demanding and unfortunately the record of workbook had limited pages.

Lastly, the filling in of report cards was also a problem. Some schools had computerised students' progress reports while others were yet to do so. In the schools where progress reports were still filled in manually, teachers complained that they had a very little or no time between the time students wrote the test and the time they were expected to receive their report cards.

4.5. Teachers' personal and professional growth

The advent of the competence-based approach in the sphere of Cameroon education has overthrown EFL teachers' pedagogical practices and mentalities. In question 38, where teachers were required to say what they personally and professionally gained while implementing the new curriculum, the following findings emerged from their responses: The new curriculum enabled them to explore larger scopes in terms of vocabulary; they learnt a lot on practising what is being taught and even while preparing lessons since it is based on daily life and experience; they learnt how to make children use the knowledge acquired in class by trying as much as possible to make them practise role-plays in class after certain speaking activities; they increased their level of English language; the new curriculum helped teachers better interact with their students thereby making them a better teacher; they acquired some competences and skills; they better knew students' needs and their level as well and how to solve their problems.

5. Discussion of the findings

The purpose of this study was to explore EFL teachers' perceptions of the 2014 curriculum. The study involved 80 English foreign language teachers drawn from thirty-four public and private schools. It drew from Hall and Hord (1987, 2001) theoretical framework and the method of data collection used was quantitative. Teachers were administered a 38-item questionnaire. At the outset of the investigation, five research questions were devised. It is worth indicating that the statistics of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were added up and subsumed under 'agree' while 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were subsumed under 'disagree' during the discussions of findings as presented below:

1) What are teachers' perceptions of the quality of the curriculum?

The first research question on the quality of the curriculum produced significant results. The overwhelming majority of teachers (96.25%) held a positive view on the new curriculum. They agreed that the 2014 curriculum was innovative, an attitude which shows that previous curricula were somehow deficient. This one seems internally well-structured and likely meets with the challenges of real-life situations. The same percentage of teachers (96.25%) agreed that they liked this English language programme.

In the same light, a vast number of teachers (96.25%) agreed that the learning goals of the curriculum matched with students' needs and interests.

Further, they unanimously agreed (100%) that the curriculum modules of learning matched with the learners' context. 67.5% of them claimed that the textbooks selected fairly dealt with cross-curricular competencies. It can be deduced from teachers' opinion that the instructional materials used to teach English to French-speaking secondary education students are good though improvements should be done at the level of content and language integrated learning. Another positive note is that 70% of them said the curriculum was a developmental tool for bilingualism.

These same teachers agreed (90%) that they coped with the requirements of the new curriculum. Many of them (60%) agreed that they received much support from inspectors, principals, and colleagues since the implementation of the new curriculum. Seminars, workshops, and departmental meetings were organised to acquaint them with the principles of the new curriculum. Teachers also developed cognitive strategies to cope with the change of the curriculum such as internet and library research.

Conversely, all the surveyed teachers (100%) disagreed that the curriculum made the use of technology obligatory in classrooms. This gap in the specifications of the curriculum limits students' exposure to other learning sources such as computers, smartphones, Cds and Dvds. As a result of this, it is left to teachers to take personal initiatives during teaching situations to fill in that vacuum. These same teachers agreed (100%) that the volume of work had increased. It is essential to indicate that the weekly teaching load per level compared to the previous curriculum was reduced to three hours per week in the classes of *Sixième* (Form I), *Cinquième* (Form II) and *Quatrième* (Form III) rather than four as it was specified in the 2003 curriculum. If teachers complained that the volume of work increased whereas the weekly load decreased, it simply means that materials to cover might have increased.

2) What are teachers' perceptions of the teaching of skills and competences taught in the instructional materials selected?

The second research question also yielded considerable results summarised as follows:

The majority of teachers pooled (80%) agreed that the modules of learning of the textbook used in classrooms reflected the specifications of the curriculum. As regards the skills and the competencies taught in the selected textbooks, teachers in their great number agreed that listening activities (90%), speaking (100%), reading (100%) and writing (100%) were very interesting for students. Still, they argued that listening, speaking, and writing were relevant for real-life situations and reading topics were up-to-date, that is, they reflected learners' linguistic and cultural background. Another worthy note is that, a big number of teachers agreed (70%) that grammar activities encouraged the improvement of students' speaking skills. A great deal of them (61.25%) agreed that students could apply the knowledge of the curriculum in real-life situations. 67.5% of them agreed that the book used for the teaching of English developed cross-curricular competencies, that is, they taught English and other subjects to span students' knowledge in literary, scientific, economic, social, cultural, environmental, and technological disciplines.

3) What are teachers' perceptions of the teaching approach and the testing approach?

The third research question on the teaching approach professed by the curriculum and the test format revealed the following results:

Teachers' viewpoints on their level of knowledge of the competence-based approach showed that 71.25% claimed to have a good knowledge of it, a result which contrasts with Nforbi & Siewoue (2015) outcomes who found out that 45.45% of teachers claimed to know it to an extent. In the same vein, Njwe (2016) conclusions do not match with the current findings where the researcher discovered that only 17.6% of the teachers believed that they understood the competence-based approach. As far as the level of motivation of teachers is concerned, 95% of teachers were fairly motivated while implementing the 2014 curriculum, a point which corroborates with Belibi's (2018) findings. The reason might be that the implementation of the competence-based approach is tedious in terms of preparation and implementation in the Cameroon system of education. Nevertheless, 70% of the teachers stated that it fitted the Cameroon context though it is an imported approach (Belibi, 2018). Despite the fact that these teachers were not very motivated while implementing the competence-based approach, they were in favour (70%) of its continuation meaning that the approach is efficient and it is likely to produce better results than previous ones.

The survey on the testing approach revealed a number of pitfalls. All the surveyed teachers (100%) strongly agreed that not all the skills were tested particularly listening and speaking which have been neglected in the evaluation components for years. They acknowledged that they did not evaluate listening during formative evaluation, this in violation of the curriculum specifications which underscore that "Apart from paper-and-pencil tasks such as written tests or worksheets, oral presentations and portfolios should be included in the assessment of students" (Programme of study *Première*, p. 26). Again, these teachers confessed that they did not give opportunities to students to rewrite assignments to help them achieve high grades though the curriculum advises them to 'give [students] multiple opportunities to achieve a high grade. For example, learners can also be given opportunities to rewrite papers or redo assignments to achieve a higher grade or demonstrate a higher level of competence" (Programme of study *Première*, p. 26). It is high time formative and summative evaluations in Cameroon EFL classrooms met the exigencies of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages which require the assessment of all skills, namely the oral production, the spoken production, the reading and writing production of learners to determine their real language proficiency. However, innovations were brought as far as the treatment of

students' scripts is concerned. Students had to show their scripts to their parents for them to sign and then make observations to approve that they had seen them. This approach helps parents monitor the studies of their children and give them support when necessary. Additionally, a new codification is used to rate students' performance or test scores using the scales 'acquired', 'not acquired', 'on the process of acquisition', to determine students' level of acquisition of the subject assessed.

4) What are the challenges faced by teachers while implementing the 2014 curriculum?

From teachers' perspectives on the fourth research question, these are the difficulties encountered while implementing the new curriculum.

From the pedagogical point of view, students' apathy in classrooms did not favour a good unfoldment of the programme of study including their poor performance during tests and their low proficiency in English as well. Teachers worked under pressure and much was expected from them in terms of learning outcomes.

Talking about the filling in of pedagogical materials, teachers' complaints revealed that the system was too bureaucratic. The filling in of the record of workbook was too demanding and time-consuming as there was a lot of information to fill such as the module title, the domain of life, real-life situations, the objectives, category of actions, examples of actions, essential knowledge, bilingual game, attitude, resources, homework, etc. The filling of report cards in some schools was still manual therefore teachers hardly met up with deadlines and the handing over of progress reports in time.

5) What have teachers gained personally and professionally from the 2014 curriculum?

The last research question on teachers' personal and professional development proved that teachers enlarged their scopes cognitively in terms of vocabulary and proficiency. Pedagogically, they learnt more about lesson preparation, teaching experience, and concepts related to the competence-based approach and classroom interactions considering students' needs and interests.

6. Recommendations

On the basis of the findings arrived at, the following recommendations were made:

- The increase of teaching hours to six per week in all levels to enable teachers to cover the programme and learners to have a good level of proficiency in English.
- Information filled in the record of workbook should be summarised in four points. The date, the duration of teaching, the learning outcomes and the competencies covered.
- Official textbooks used in classrooms should include digital devices like Cds and Dvds to boost the learning and practice of the language in classrooms though some schools in the country are short of electricity. In schools where is no electricity, teachers may download programmes in English on their phones, smartphones, computers, etc to upgrade their students' listening skill and supplement their teaching.
- More efforts should be made to blend English and other subjects sufficiently in the instructional materials selected to impart English.
- English foreign language teachers should work in collaboration with science and arts teachers of their school to design a good scheme of work which integrates knowledge of various domains for a better implementation of the competence-based approach.
- All schools should be endowed with a computer unit in charge of the computerisation of students' marks to alleviate teachers' work.
- The new curriculum should be upgraded by including the following subjects in English such as literature, citizenship, biology and physics to speed up the bilingualism of French-speaking secondary school students in Cameroon.
- The Special Bilingual Education Programme ongoing in pilot schools in Cameroon which promotes the teaching of literature in English, citizenship, physical education, drawing and music in English should be enlarged to all schools but physical education, drawing and music should be dropped and replaced with mathematics and biology in English to prepare learners for literary and science studies.

7. Limitations of the study

One of the limitations of this investigation is that some teachers took away the questionnaire home to fill in but did not return them, what compelled the researcher to limit the informant pool to eighty participants.

8. Suggestions for further research

For future studies, other researchers may explore the EFL curriculum in Cameroon French-speaking elementary education.

9. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to enquire about EFL teachers' perceptions of the 2014 curriculum implemented six years ago. The result of the findings revealed that the vast majority of teachers held a positive view towards the quality of the programme of study, the instructional materials selected and the teaching approach, which in their opinion is a developmental tool for bilingualism. Interestingly, they are in favour of its continuation despite the challenges encountered. Another positive note is that they grew cognitively and pedagogically. However, the testing approach is not holistic and it should be updated to fully meet the prescriptions of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Teachers among other things evoked a number of challenges which precluded the success of pedagogy such as large size classrooms, students' apathy, the filling in of pedagogic materials, which from their perception is too demanding and time-consuming. A number of recommendations, which move from the improvement of time allocation per level to the improvement of the curriculum content, were made to ensure the success of this new programme. If these proposals are considered, the bilingualism wished and promoted by the Cameroon government will be effective and sustainable.

About the Author

Walter Yepdia Leundjeu was born in Obout, Cameroon, in 1980. He obtained the B.A. degree in Bilingual Studies (English and French) from the University of Yaounde I, Cameroon, in 2002, and the Maîtrise, DEA and Ph.D. degrees in English Language from the University of Yaounde I, Cameroon, in 2004, 2007 and 2014, respectively. Further, he is holder of the Secondary and High School Teacher's Diploma in Bilingual Studies from ENS Yaounde in 2005. In 2020, he was recruited as assistant lecturer of English language and linguistics in the Department of English language, University of Ngaoundere. His current research interests include sociolinguistics (Bilingualism and multilingualism, language teaching and learning, language testing), materials development and evaluation, discourse analysis.

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Appendix

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EFL TEACHERS

This anonymous questionnaire is devised to get your views on the implementation of the 2014 EFL curriculum. Answer all the questions. Your answers will be used only for research purposes. Your cooperation is much appreciated.

SECTION A: TEACHER'S PROFILE

Gender: Male Female

Age: 20-25 25-30 30-35 35 -40 40 and above

Teaching experience: _____

School: _____

Classes taught: _____

Qualifications: _____

SECTION B: Teachers' perceptions of the quality of the 2014 curriculum

1. The new English language curriculum is innovative
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
 2. I like the new curriculum
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
 3. The learning goals of the curriculum match with learners' needs and interests
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
 4. The modules of learning match with learners' context?
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
 5. The use of technology in classrooms is obligatory
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
 6. I cope with the requirements of the new curriculum
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
 7. I have received good training to cope with the competency-based approach
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
 8. I have received much support since its implementation
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
- If you agree, from whom?.....
9. The curriculum is a developmental tool for bilingualism
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
 10. The volume of work has
increased significantly increased decreased did not really change
 11. What has been done to support teachers during the implementation of the new curriculum?
.....
 12. What personal and professional strategies have you taken to cope with the change of the curriculum?
.....
 13. If you were asked to change anything in the curriculum, what would it be?
.....

SECTION C: Teachers' perceptions of the teaching of skills and competencies in the selected instructional materials

14. The official textbook (s) reflect (s) all the modules presented in the new curriculum
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
15. The listening activities are very interesting for students
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
16. The listening activities are relevant for real-life situations
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
17. The speaking activities are very interesting for students
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
18. The speaking activities are relevant for real-life situations
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
19. The reading activities are very interesting for students
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
20. The reading topics are up-to-date
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
21. The writing activities are very interesting for students
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
22. The writing activities are relevant for real-life situations
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
23. The vocabulary activities are very interesting for the students
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
24. The grammar activities encourage the improvement of students' speaking skills
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
25. Students can apply the knowledge of the textbook in real-life situations
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree
26. The textbook used develops cross-curricular competencies (teaches English and other subjects)
Sufficiently fairly slightly not at all

SECTION D: Teachers' perceptions of the teaching and testing approaches

27. What is your level of knowledge of the competence-based approach
Excellent very good good poor
28. My level of motivation while applying the competence-based approach?
Very motivated fairly motivated a little motivated not motivated
29. The competency-based approach fits the Cameroonian context?
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree

If disagree, why?

.....
.....

30. The implementation of the competence-based approach should continue
Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree

If disagree, why?

.....
31. There is a particular way of treating students' scripts and test scores?

Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree

If agree, what is it?
.....
.....

32. All the skills are tested during summative evaluation

Strongly agree agree strongly disagree disagree

If disagree, which skill (s) is/are neglected?
.....

33. I evaluate listening during formative evaluation?

Always sometimes hardly never

If never, why?
.....

34. I evaluate students orally during formative evaluation

Always sometimes hardly never

If never, why?
.....

35. I make students rewrite assignment to help them achieve high grades.

Always sometimes hardly never

If never, why?
.....

SECTION E: Teachers' challenges while implementing the 2014 curriculum

36. What are the problems encountered in the teaching of competencies and skills in your classrooms using the competence-based approach?
.....
.....

37. What are the problems encountered in the assessment of students and the management of pedagogic documents (record of workbook, departmental reports, report cards, etc)?
.....
.....

SECTION F: Teachers' perceptions of their personal and professional growth

38. What have you gained personally and professionally while implementing the new curriculum?
.....