Teacher-Based Assessment of Speaking in Cameroonian Secondary Schools: The Impact of Teacher Training

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT

Speaking is an important language skill that deserves a place both in English language teaching and English language assessment. However, the assessment of speaking in Cameroonian secondary schools is still neglected in many teacher-based English language tests. Often, attempts made to assess the skill are done either almost always indirectly or informally, leaving a wide gap between tenets professed in the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) to English language teaching and practice in the field. In 2012, the government of Cameroon officially introduced the CBA as the pedagogic paradigm for the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL), and by extension, assessment in secondary schools. Eight years down the line, little seems to have changed concerning the way speaking has always been assessed, even though the CBA requires that learners practically demonstrate knowledge, skills and values in testing situations. This article set out to evaluate the contribution of teacher training to the assessment of speaking. Data was collected through qualitative and quantitative methods. A total of 259 questionnaires were administered to examiners of the June 2019 marking session of the Cameroon General Certificate of Education (CGCE) as well as members of the Cameroon English Language and Literature Teachers' Association (CAMELTA). Also, four interviews were conducted with the maximum variation principle in mind. The findings revealed that teacher training, both pre-service and in-service, is a major factor responsible for the neglect of speaking in assessments. It was recommended that teacher-training institutions introduce or expand courses on testing to include direct assessment of speaking and that opportunities be created for in-service teachers to acquire certification on assessment within the framework of the CBA to English language teaching.

1. Introduction

Speaking is an important skill in English language teaching (Luoma, 2004; Egan, 1999; Underhill, 1987). An assessment of the skill plays an important role in second language education by providing information on the effectiveness of teaching methodology, learner comprehension, students competencies and could be very useful for taking administrative decisions. Meanwhile, effective teacher training is necessary to guarantee quality assessments as it impacts not only teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and self-efficacy but also assessment practices in the classroom. Much of the research on second language education in Cameroon has focused, until recently, on English language teaching, paying very little attention to assessment and even lesser attention to the assessment of speaking specifically. But observation has shown that most tests of English in Cameroonian secondary schools are teacher-based and sometimes have very minimal influence from colleagues and school administrators. This article set to examine the impact of teacher-training on the assessment of speaking in Cameroonian secondary schools.

1.1 Teacher-based assessment of speaking

English language teachers in Cameroonian secondary schools have varied profiles. Many researchers have admitted that not all teachers in these settings are trained (Chu, 2019; Monono et al., 2008), and even many trained teachers are not conversant with the CBA, the new approach to teaching (Nkemleke & Enama, 2019). Tambo (1995) noted that in teacher-training colleges in Cameroon, learning is more theoretical than practical. Speaking is one of the most neglected skills in teacher-based tests and examinations in Cameroon; when a little attention is given to the skill in assessment situations, it is either an indirect or an informal assessment. Researchers, however, admit that the speaking skill is not only different but also challenging to assess and must also be assessed differently (Luoma, 2004; Underhill, 1987; Egan, 1999). "The feature of interactive role-switching distinguishes good oral tests from other language tests; listening, reading or writing tests which present a set of questions and elicit a set of answers are clearly not interactive in this way" (Underhill, 1987, p. 2). Although the assessment of speaking has often been neglected in previous research in Ordinary Level classrooms in Cameroon, this trend should no longer continue with the coming of the CBA. Inattention to a direct assessment of speaking in English tests is, within the framework of competency-based education, a brutal misunderstanding or savage neglect of a major tenet of the approach. The current paper set out to investigate the training of teachers of Ordinarily level English in Cameroon with the firm belief that an understanding of the nature and quality of this training is an important milestone in proffering solutions to the problem of formally and directly assessing speaking.

1.2 Background to secondary education in Cameroon

The educational system of Cameroon is based on English and French, two exoglossic languages inherited from the country's complex colonial past with Britain and France respectively. The two English-speaking regions colonised by the British are dominated by the English subsystem of education and its official examinations are managed by the Cameroon General Certificate of Education Board (CGCEB). The eight other francophone regions are dominated by the French subsystem; examinations here are managed by the Cameroon Baccalaureate Board, known in French as L'Office du Baccalauréat du Cameroun (OBC). Thus, assessments practices at the secondary are somewhat distinct, although they are both carried out under the auspices of the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC). The current article is about teacher-based assessments of speaking in the anglophone subsystem of education. It is necessary to point out that although schools operating this system are principally in the English-speaking regions, there are also many such schools in the majority francophone regions. Institutions training teachers to teach in these schools are functional in both regions too; this is line with the government's policy of national integration.

Teacher education in Cameroon is managed by the government which has created three specialized institutions to train secondary school teachers of general education. The first of these institutions, École Normale Supérieur (ENS) Yaounde I, was created by presidential decree on Sep 03, 1962 (École Normale Supérieur, n.d.) and its annexe was created in Bambili in 1967 (Chu 2019). The most recent of the three was created in Maroua in 2007 (Chu, 2019). There exist other training centres for technical and primary education. Teachers of English language receive a training of two years after obtaining a first degree in English, modern letters or related fields and obtain a DIPES II. They are certified to teach both in the Ordinary level and high school programmes. Candidates trained with Advanced level certificates spend three years to obtain their certificates, DIPES I. Initially, they teach only Ordinary level classes, but can teach in the Advanced level programme with experience and longevity in service. Other teachers in the system are those who do not have formal training in these specialised training centres. They either have Advanced level certificates, first degrees, master's or PhD degrees. Such teachers are not automatically integrated into the teaching corps like their government trained counterparts. Chu (2019) noted that the law requires teachers not only to be teachers, educators, researchers but also to carry out assessments and be of moral rectitude. Teachers of Ordinary level English in Cameroon certainly have different levels of exposure, training and education, and this reflects their teaching and assessment practices, despite the prescriptions of the Ministry of Secondary Education for strict implantation of the Competency-Based Approach to English language teaching.

2. The Competency-Based Approach

The Competency-Based Approach (CBA) was officially introduced in Cameroonian secondary schools in 2012 (Ntongieh, 2016). She continued that the Competency-Based Approach was the fourth approach introduced in the educational system after Grammar-Translation, Direct Method, and Communicative Language Teaching. But Nkemleke and Enama (2019) have acknowledged that the first two years were only a trial period and that the CBA was preceded by the Skills-Based Approach, which focused on the acquisition of knowledge.

O'Sullivan and Burce (2014) opined that the CBA has three main components which are a knowledge component, a behavioural component and a value component. Thus, a competent person possesses the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours necessary to perform a particular task. Put simply, teaching with the CBA in mind means teachers need to take into account understanding, demonstration of this understanding practically by the students as well as the frame of mind to espouse in a particular context. The CBA was introduced in Cameroonian secondary schools because the government believed that, in

addition to acquiring knowledge, it would enable students not only to interact out of the classroom but also to be able to solve real-life problems (Nkemleke & Enama, 2019). O'Sullivan and Burce (2014) noted that the most important characteristic of the CBA is that it measures learning rather than time; put simply, a student is allowed to move to a higher level with more challenging competencies if they demonstrate that they have mastered competencies at a lower level, irrespective of how much time is involved.

Regarding assessment in the CBA, tests are seen as criterion-referenced tests rather than norm-referenced tests (Abramowitz, 1980; Stapa, 2016). This implies that objectives are clearly spelt out and assessment rubrics are unambiguous. Burns (1972) noted that the CBA places much emphasis on evaluation when he stated that, "In competency-based education, evaluation may be, in some respects, more vital to the system than in traditional teaching-learning situations" (p.39). Many other researchers placed assessment and related concepts at the core of the Competency-Based Approach. Weddel's model (as cited in Nkwetisama, 2012) for example shows that teaching in the CBA starts and ends with evaluation:

1. Assessment of learners needs
2. Selection of the competencies
3. Targeted instruction
4. Evaluation of the competency attainment.

Important questions about teacher-based assessment within the framework of the CBA are not only about the value of evaluation but also about the way the evaluations itself is conceived and the purpose of it. Burns (1972) observed that in testing within the CBA, testees are placed within a certain situation so well contrived that the testee cannot attempt or complete the process without revealing information about the traits the tester is interested in. He also noted that other factors such as the skill of the teacher, whether the trait is overt or covert are determinant factors on whether the contrived situation attains its objectives or not. Stapa (2016) believed that assessing speaking within the framework of the CBA means involving an interactive element in the assessment:

> The CBET [Competency Based English Test] is a criterion referenced proficiency test of oral communication. This means that as long as a candidate fulfils the basic criteria of communicative competence as defined by the test framework the candidate will be given a score to reflect their proficiency at the point of time. The test which is focused on the speaking competency which is seen as situated social practice which involves reciprocal interaction with others, as being purposeful and goal-oriented within specific context. Being competent, in other words, involves not just production, but also interaction.... (p.15)

The interactive aspect is both an important element of speech (Luoma, 2004; Underhill, 1987) and a necessary rubric in assessing speaking within the CBA.

2.1 Teacher training and language testing

One of the concerns of assessment, especially foreign language assessment is teacher education. Teacher education is generally construed from two perspectives, pre-service formal education from recognised bodies and organised in-service activities to recycle, improve or upgrade teacher competencies (Tambo, 1995; Woodford, 1980; Olakulehin, 2007). The overall goal of teacher education is to assure a better quality of education (Chu 2019, 126). But more specifically, (Tait-McCutcheon & Drake, 2016, as cited in Ma et. al., 2018) noted that professional teacher development does not only enable teachers to develop expert knowledge in the curriculum and instruction but also empowers them to assess student learning more effectively, with the overall goal of boosting students' educational outcomes. Neil (1986) noted that in-service teacher education has come with many names including, "in-service development, in-service training, curriculum innovation and implementation, organisational renewal, staff development, personnel education, continuing teacher education, and professional development" (p.58). Teacher development approaches are multifaceted and include instruction from experts, ICTs, colleagues and personal development instruction. Mayher (2012) expressed the view that traditionally, teacher education has often been based on specialisation and compartmentalisation of knowledge and that this approach to language teacher education needs to shift towards a more integrative approach where commonalities are found within the various sub-disciplines involved if teachers must continue to cater to the diverse needs of students today.

But what is the place of assessing speaking in language teacher education? In Cameroon, much of teacher training effort is often directed at teaching practices, and content (Fontem, 2013). Teachers seem to lag as far as knowledge about testing is concerned. However, this seems not to be a situation unique to Cameroon as Woodford (1980) lamented that many teachers are not versed with language testing issues:

> Indeed, the vast majority of decisions regarding placement, promotion, and final grades in foreign languages are based upon the results of these teacher-made tests. Many foreign language teachers are completely ignorant of the principles

of test development and test interpretation. They do not know how to design a test, how to develop exercises to measure each of the four skills, and how to analyse the results of the test. (p.99)

To him, even in university programmes, measurement courses dealing with statistical matters hardly involve foreign language testing. Thus, many foreign language teachers become defensive with their home-made tests because they know they are flawed instruments.

But the CBA places a premium on the formative character of assessment, the use of authentic tasks, the provision of useful feedback and the involvement of learners in assessment (Chu et al., 2018). It is important to highlight the fact that the formative character of assessment within the framework of the CBA does not mean informal assessment, nor does it mean unreliable or invalid assessment. Instead, formative assessment has to do with an assessment which aims at improving students' understanding, and by extension, teaching methodology. Woodford (1980) stated that "The improvement of classroom teachers' foreign language testing skills should be focused in two areas; in teacher training institutions and in-service training programs" (p.101). This emphasis on pre-service and in-service training of teachers on testing does not only guarantee that trained teachers get adequate knowledge in schools but also ensures that this knowledge is dovetailed with their experiences in the field and that there is a continuing upgrade of knowledge to meet the challenges of our ever-growing information age.

2.2 Technology in teacher training
Apart from knowledge in test design and administration, teachers need to be versed with technologies that can facilitate their testing practices and how they can be easily integrated into language testing to reduce the burden of and to speed up the process of assessment. It is now established that any teacher training that ignores the use of computers in its theory and practice does not only fail its students in their current learning but also ignores the huge challenges they face in the field upon graduation.

According to Garret (1991), computer testing refers to the computerised administration of conventional tests. In her view, the computer may collect the responses or may equally judge them. However, computer-assisted testing has evolved to include many aspects of assessment previously reserved for teachers. Computers are not only useful in designing tests, administering tests and distributing test scores but are also useful in scoring, giving appropriate feedback and increasing engagement and interaction among students. But this is easier said than done as many teachers are still unprepared to use computers in their teaching and testing activities (Khan, 2014; Ngoungouo, 2017). Similarly, Chia (2020) highlighted low ICT competence, power failure, and poor internet connectivity as some factors that stood in the way of teachers of English implementing an online teaching experience during the Covid-19 lockdown in Cameroon. Recommendations that ICT be included in different sectors of education, including the training of teachers, is no longer the talk of a limited few; it is now a universal requirement:

> Integration of ICTs enhances the quality of education by helping teachers to do their job and by helping students to learn more effectively…. consequently, schools of teacher education play a crucial role in preparing future teachers to become proficient in the integration of ICTs into the curriculum. They need to help prospective teachers understand how ICTs can be used to teach content in rich and meaningful ways. (Goktas et al. p. 193)

However, Khan (2014) stated that the instruction of ICT into teacher training programmes is a challenging task that is not limited to acquiring tools and throwing them at the classroom. Instead, he recommended that teachers be skilled at the use of the tools as well:

> … the mere adoption of new or innovative technology is not enough
> to meet the students' learning needs and opportunities. Technology alone could not sufficiently bring about the desired changes in students' competencies and behavior. It is the teachers' competencies to integrate ICT in their instructional tasks that can facilitate these desired changes to the maximum level. (p.21)

Different interesting, and sometimes competing, models have been proposed on how teacher-training institutions could integrate the use of ICTs in training programmes. One of such interesting models is described by Khan (2014) is based on the TPCK model of Koehler & Mishra (2005). According to this model, teachers need to acquire knowledge (K) in three areas to be successful at integrating technology in their educational activities, namely technology(T), Pedagogy(P) and Content(C). Thus the TPCK Model has to do with knowledge of technology, pedagogy and content. Khan (2014) maintained that these elements are not supposed to be mutually exclusive. Citing his Bangladesh context, he stated that few teachers have technical knowledge on the use of computers; most of them use their knowledge to do administrative work and remain incompetent when it comes to integrating technology in the classroom. In this wise, he suggested that teacher training programmes not only teach trainees how to use computers, but how to effectively integrate technology in their classroom. In the area of assessment, therefore, teacher training programmes must teach trainees how to assess with computers and also let them have first-hand and hands-on experience in assessing students with the aid of technologies.

The development of speech recognition technology is a great step towards effectively scoring spoken test, a possibility that was not available a few years back. According to Cos & Davies, (2012) speech recognition technology may even be a cheaper option compared to human raters. However, (O'Shaughnessy, 2008, as cited in, Cos & Davies, 2012) warned that Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technology is not yet reliable in rating spontaneous speech.

Other technologies being developed involve computer-mediated peer assessment. In this case, the computer collects samples of speech from identified students, anonymises the voice and redistributes students' responses for other students to rate, based on mutually discussed and practised rubrics. Although peer assessment is not yet recognised globally for summative assessment, it could be exploited in Cameroon for formative assessment, and this is compatible with the CBA. Peer review could be a viable solution to the question of overcrowded classrooms decried by many Cameroonian researchers (e.g. Ntongieh 2016; Fouda, 2014; Nkwentisama, 2012) Indeed, some researchers believe that peer evaluation has many benefits including quicker and personalised feedback (Gielen et. al. 2010). Ho and Savignon (2007) also noted that peer review could raise awareness and foster collaboration among students. No evidence exists yet that research in these areas is on-going within the Cameroonian educational system. Instead, a study conducted by Ngounhouo (2017) in four primary and six secondary schools in Yaounde revealed that only 14.28% of teachers were trained to teach with the aid of computers. This implies that there is a world of opportunities to be explored. This is feasible if colleges of education reach agreements with computer science departments in universities and other stakeholders to sign memorandums of understanding to reach such goals. Similar technologies being developed elsewhere, are not always adaptable to local linguistic realities and have the propensity to be problematic as far as the assessment of speaking is concerned. When these technologies are developed, they must be made available to both pre-service and in-service teachers:

> For education to reap the full benefits of ICTs in learning, it is essential that pre-service and in-service teachers have basic ICT skills and competencies. Teacher education institutions and programmes must provide the leadership for pre-service and in-service teachers and model the new pedagogies and tools for learning. (UNESCO, 2002, p. 13)

Investing in technology for education has its benefits, and these benefits come at a price worth paying.

3. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach which, according to Dornyei (2007), allows for a multi-level analysis of complex issues, improves validity and increases the acceptability of findings to more audiences than those done exclusively quantitatively or qualitatively. More specifically, the study combined the survey design and interviews. Surveys are useful in studies that have to do with attitudes, opinions, behaviours, emotions and other characteristics of a population (Creswell, 2012; Nana, 2012).

3.1 Participants

The sample for the questionnaire included Ordinary level English language teachers marking the June, 2019 session of the Cameroon General Certificate of Education (CGCE) exams and teachers of the Cameroon English Language and Literature Teachers' Association (CAMELTA). With the maximum variation principle in mind, four teachers were purposively selected and interviewed by phone, taking into consideration gender balance, linguistic diversity and the geographical spread of Cameroon.

Table 1:Teacher Profiles

Interviewee 1	Female, École Normale Superior (ENS) Yaounde, francophone region, second cycle teacher
Interviewee 2	Male, Higher Teacher Training College (HTTC) Bambili, Anglophone region, first cycle teacher
Interviewee 3	Female, École Normale Superior(ENS) Maroua, francophone region, first cycle teacher
Interviewee 4	Male, University of Buea, the first Anglo-Saxon university in Cameroon, untrained teacher.

Three out of the four teachers were trained in three different teacher training colleges and one had only a university degree. Two had had their studies mainly in the English-speaking regions and two in the French-speaking regions. Two were female and two were male. All teachers were young teachers who started their teacher training programme or university education as from the year 2012, when the CBA was already officially introduced in secondary schools in Cameroon. It was believed that this group would give original and illuminating insights on how the testing of speaking is taught in teacher-training institutions and universities. The interviews sought to find out how teachers were taught to assess speaking and how important the CBA was in the training.

3.2 Instruments

The instruments used for the collection of data were interviews and questionnaires. Interviews are natural and socially acceptable ways of collecting information and could yield in-depth data on diverse topics (Dornyei, 2007). Questionnaires allow researchers to take a sample and generalise for a population (Dornyei, 2007; Nana, 2012).

3.3 Data collection procedure

Concerning the questionnaires, 259 of them were randomly administered to teachers of Ordinary Level English marking the 2019 session of Cameroon General Certificate of Education (CGCE) and members of the Cameroon English Language and Literature Teachers' Association (CAMELTA). Teachers marking the GCE come from all ten regions of the country. Targeting the marking session was an attempt to get the views of teachers that are representative of the various regions of Cameroon. An online version of the questionnaire was created via Google Forms and was filled voluntarily by CAMELTA teachers. Targeting GCE examiners and the Cameroon English Language and Literature Teachers' Association was, therefore, a cost-effective method to achieve representativeness of findings. The questionnaire had close and open questions and sought to find out whether they had had in-service training on testing speaking, the place of computers in the training and how confident they were regarding their ability to test speaking.

3.4 Data analysis procedure

The data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The interviews were analysed through an iterative thematic process. On the other hand, basic statistical descriptive analyses and correlations were computed for the questionnaires on version 21.0 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

4. Results

The teachers interviewed concerning their pre-service training reported different levels of satisfaction with their training. However, only two (Interviewee 1 and interviewee 2) acknowledged and showed evidence that their training paid any attention to the assessment of speaking. Interviewee 1 was satisfied, but the other was quite dissatisfied with the attention training in his institution attributed to assessing speaking.

The first teacher to be interview was female. She stated that she was 70% satisfied with her training and claimed she did not expect that teacher trainers in her institution would anticipate every challenge they were to meet in the field. She stated that what they did in their training was elicitation techniques such as calling students to answer questions, making presentations, dramatizing among others. She noted that her training was oriented towards formative assessment. Equally, she admitted that her training acknowledged the problems of large classes and therefore encouraged group work as a teaching strategy. However, she left the impression that the strategies taught in their training were for theoretical purposes than techniques to be used in class when she stated the following:

…. They never told us we could evaluate them on sequence tests based on speaking marks. We weren't stopped from doing that, it is just that I could say we are, we think that a lot of speaking is being done during lessons. So sometimes we don't see it too necessary to have a whole summative assessment on speaking. Nevertheless, we have a given section attributed to pronunciation, sounds, which will enable us test their ability to detect various sounds which falls under the speaking skill.

When the second teacher was asked about his level of satisfaction towards training in his institution, he was not quite satisfied with their training on how speaking should be assessed. Speaking was clearly neglected:

Not satisfied; I'm not satisfied. What happened is this: in terms of what we were actually taught in terms of testing speaking… the way the course was handled didn't exactly put too much of an accent on speaking. Speaking wasn't really prioritised. Generally, the orientation was really on issues of grammar and vocabulary. So speaking and also listening didn't receive too much attention really, so that is why if we were talking about language testing in general, my answer might have, been, you know "fair", in terms of how satisfied I am, I'd say "fairly satisfied". But since we are talking about speaking in particular, speaking didn't receive quite an amount of attention during the teaching of that course. So that is why I say "not satisfied"

When asked how the course was taught, he noted that it was mostly through presentations from students and that strategies to be used to assess speaking were more of sound identification than exercises that required actual speaking on the part of the students:

Basically, they indicated a few ways of crafting an evaluation exercise that evaluates speaking and it was mostly oriented toward articulation, pronunciation. But the funny thing is most of the exercises were not actually sort of speaking exercises, but they actually needed the students to write; that is, to be able to make sure they can identify sounds; they did not require them to say those sounds. So if you have two vowels written down on a piece of paper and you ask the students to identify which word contains a particular sound, if the student is able to identify them, then you have tested speaking. I just want to give you an idea

of what they presented. But if it in terms of ways of testing speaking, that is, we actually see the students speak, no, we didn't have that. I can say it was exam-oriented.

He also stated that the CBA was not one of the theoretical approaches used and taught to them in school even in a course in which theories of language teaching were taught. He, however, acknowledged that in their final year of training the CBA was introduced although they basically had to work independently to know what the approach was all about.

The third and the fourth teachers provided similar information about their pre-service experiences; they both initially agreed that they had been taught how to test speaking; this turned out to be a face-saving strategy as they were unable to talk about any strategies used to assess speaking they learnt from school. When they were further quizzed, the admitted that there was no specific course in which assessing speaking was taught. The fourth teacher who had just a university degree was not even aware of the teaching approach (CBA) that had been in place since 2012, an indication that even after his university education, there was very little in-service training to upgrade his knowledge of teaching methodology.

Statistical information revealed that many teachers had attended some form of training on the assessment of speaking; however, teachers' confidence levels' to assess the skill was still very low.

Figure 1: Respondents' years of teaching experience
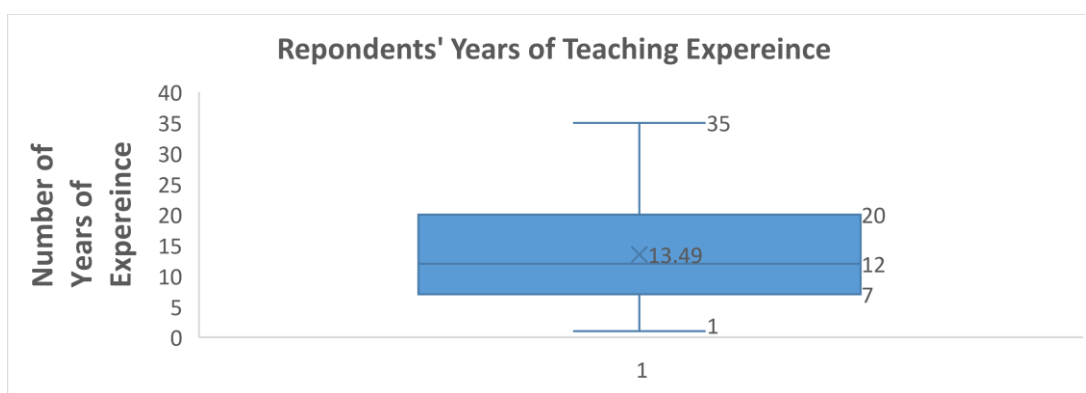
The measure of central tendency and measures of dispersion were computed for the respondents' years of experience and the following results were obtained: N=244, M=13.49, SD=8.01. As seen in Figure 1, respondents had a wide range of years of experience, but the least experienced teacher had one year of experience while the most experienced had been teaching for 35 years. The average number of years of experience was 13.5. This means that most of the teachers in the sample were experienced teachers.

Figure 2:Number of teachers who have attended seminars and workshops on testing speaking
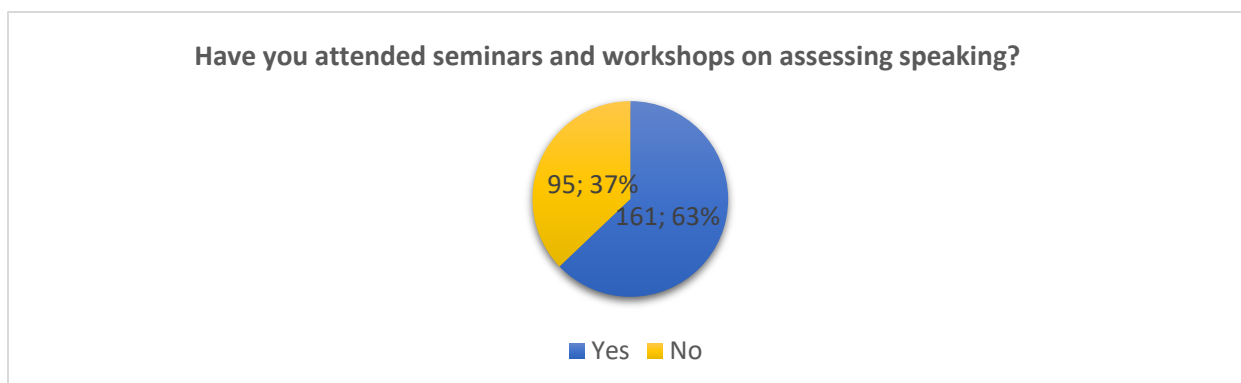
As indicated in Figure 2, a good number of the respondents, 161 (63%) stated that they had attended, at least, a seminar or a workshop on the testing of speaking. Less than half 95(37%) of the respondents admitted that they have never attended a seminar or workshop on the testing of speaking.

Table 2:Training on testing (speaking) using computers

| | | Have you had any training on computer-assisted language testing in general? | | Total |
		Yes	No	
Have you had training on how computers could be used in assessing the speaking skill?	Yes — Count	20	7	27
	Yes — % within Have you had any training on computer-assisted language testing in general?	40.8%	3.4%	10.6%
	No — Count	29	198	227
	No — % within Have you had any training on computer-assisted language testing in general?	59.2%	96.6%	89.4%
Total	Count	49	205	254
	% within Have you had any training on computer-assisted language testing in general?	19.3%	80.7%	100.0%

As shown in Table 2 above, a vast majority of the respondents 205(80.7%) had never attended any kind of training that had to do with English language testing with the use of computers in general while less than one quarter 49(19.3%) accepted that they had done such a training. An even bigger proportion of 227(89.4%) had never been in any training on how computers could be used to test speaking. In general, the training of teachers to use computers in testing is inadequate and even much lower is their training to use computers in the testing of speaking.

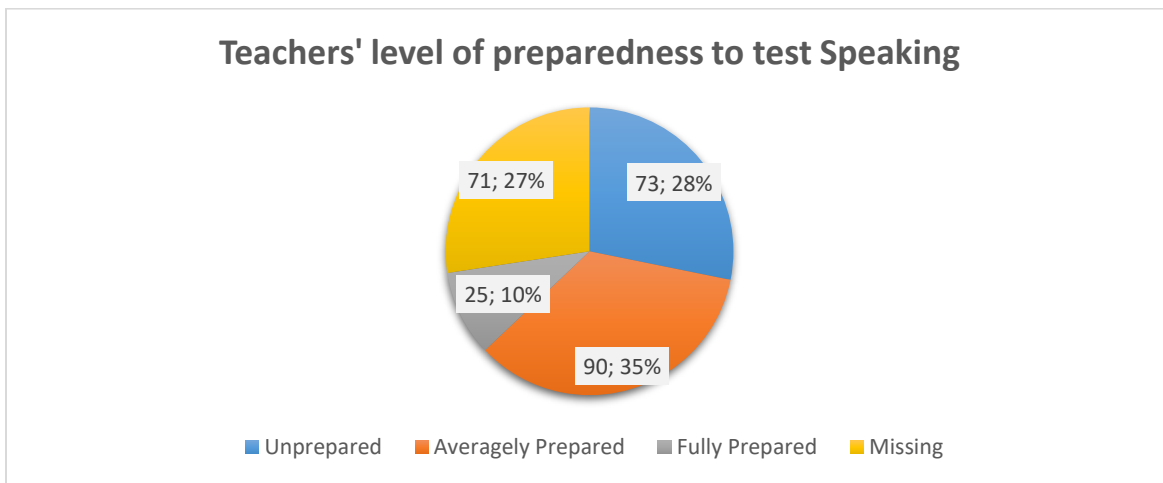*Figure 3:Teachers' self-rated level of preparedness to test speaking:*

Figure 3 reveals that a majority of the teachers were either averagely prepared 90(35%) or unprepared 73(28%) to test speaking. Very few teachers 25(10%) claimed they were fully prepared to assess speaking. The question on self-rating registered the highest number of missing values, as the teachers refused to respond. On the aggregate teachers were not very confident in their ability to test speaking.

Table 3:A Spearman correlation between teachers' preparedness to test speaking and various variables

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	Spearman Correlation	Sample size
You have taken part in seminars and workshop on assessing speaking	rs=.211	p=.004	n=186
You have taken part in some form of training to test with computers	rs=.200	p=.006	n=186
You have taken part in some form of training to test speaking with computers	rs=.151	p=.039	n=187
Went to a teacher-training school	rs=.070	p=.345	n=184
The highest qualification of respondents	rs=.029	p=.695	n=183
Number of years of teaching experience	rs=.225	p=.003	n=178

A Spearman correlation was run for teachers' self-rated level of preparedness to test speaking against several factors associated with it. The analysis revealed that the number of years of experience, whether they have attended any seminars, conferences and workshops as well as whether they had had some form of training on testing speaking with the use of computers had significant positive correlations with teacher's preparedness to test speaking than other factors. Teachers who had had any of these experiences tended to be more confident about their preparedness to test speaking. Ironically teacher training and level of education did not have any significant positive correlation with teachers' preparedness to test speaking. This means teacher-training colleges and educational systems tend to neglect the assessment of speaking and teachers only get to receive training and gain confidence in testing speaking rather from in-service training.

5. Discussion and recommendations

The results of this study reveal that pre-service training on the assessment of speaking is still very negligible, both for teachers who have formal training and teachers who just have an educational qualification at the university or high school. Of the four teachers interviewed, only one (Interviewee 1) was positive about the relevance of her training to test speaking. But even admitted that the strategies discussed as techniques for assessing speaking were more of teaching strategies than an attempt at truly assessing speaking competencies. The fact that trainees are only taught to assess speaking indirectly through the identification of sounds (like interviewee 2) or not trained to assess speaking at all (like the case of interviewee 4) means that a direct and holistic assessment of the speaking ability of students is left out in the training, making the teachers less prepared to assess the skill. Mistaking a student's ability to formally identify sounds or explain how a language works for their proficiency level is a simplistic method of evaluating that robs the students of the possibility of having their competencies fully evaluated and presents to test users a false picture of students' overall competencies. Lack of training for teachers and other stakeholders has been established by other researchers on English language teaching in Cameroon, including (Nkemleke & Enama, 2019).

A few recommendations can be made to improve the pre-service training on how speaking should be assessed. Firstly, teacher training colleges should include and improve courses that have to do with assessment. In the assessment of speaking, pre-service teachers should work out strategies that will involve the assessment of students' performance in speaking, not just their theoretical knowledge. Secondly, since some teachers are recruited to teach without any teacher certification (Monono et al., 2008), language departments in universities should anticipate their future difficulties in the teaching field and include elective or optional courses that prepare students willing to engage in language teaching upon graduation. This way, they will be able to reflect on teaching practices and how speaking can be properly assessed.

It was also discovered that although many teachers had received in-service training through seminars and workshops, the number of teachers confident to test the skill was still very low. The fact that as few as 10% of teachers were confident implies that elements that bolster teacher confidence, motivation and foster teacher agency might have been lacking in the training. One way to resolve this problem is to make in-service teacher training a continuous process. This can be achieved by fixing a number of departmental seminars and training sessions to be held by language departments in all secondary schools every academic year. This way, assessment practices will be improved. Additionally, teachers should also be encouraged to join teacher associations like CAMELTA so that they can improve on their knowledge of teaching. (Adoniou 2017, as cited in Kuchah & Smith, 2018) believed that professional teacher associations allow teachers to share knowledge, experiences and expertise with one another. The seriousness and success of such training sessions could mean archiving of reports of the sessions as well as constant evaluation of the progress being made.

But there are bolder steps that could be taken to improve in-service training. For example, faculties of education could work together with language departments in university settings to develop programmes for in-service teachers who want to go for recertification programmes. Such programmes should put an eye on new approaches such as the CBA and provide training for teachers who are willing to improve on their knowledge and skills. To give value to such training sessions, certificates obtained could be considered in appointments in secondary schools; this way, hardworking and knowledgeable teachers will be promoted.

Another element to be engrained in this training for both pre-service and in-service teachers is the use of technology. Apart from the measures the government has taken such as creating multimedia centres and encouraging online education (especially during the Covid 19 pandemic), English language teachers should be encouraged to make self-development in the area of technology and integral part of their quest for knowledge. They should seek, at a personal level, ways of developing themselves while exploiting the opportunities the government is putting in place. It is easy to make excuses about one's ignorance of the use of technology to foster teaching and assessment practices, but there are also good reasons to be computer literate and to be able to use computers to assist teachers in their tasks. The benefits of computers cannot be fully appreciated by a teacher who has refused to give technology a try. Teacher agency is important to push teachers to exploit opportunities online and seek scholarship opportunities to develop such skills. But this should also be targeted from teachers' pre-service training. Finally, although teachers receive training in terms of conferences, seminars and workshops, there is hardly a mechanism put in place to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of the training done. The CBA works based on continuous assessment and it could be an interesting mechanism to observe the tenets of the CBA even in seminars and workshops for teachers.

It is clear from this study that the assessment of speaking is neglected in teacher-training education in, at least, three ways. Firstly, it is neglected at both pre-service and in-service levels such that stakeholders talk very little about it; secondly, the assessment of speaking is adapted to suit difficult practicality conditions in English language classrooms despite the demand of the CBA. Thirdly, it remains elementary in the use of Information and communication technologies (ICTs). With the introduction of the CBA in Cameroonian secondary schools, there is the need for stakeholders, not only to beef up teacher training programmes but also to engage in an aggressive process of retraining in-service teachers and putting into place a system that motivates teachers to acquire new skills on testing with the aid of computers.

6. Conclusion

The current article set out to investigate the impact of teacher training on teacher-based assessments of speaking in Ordinary level English language classrooms in Cameroon. The findings reveal that the assessment of speaking as required by the CBA is neglected both in teacher-training colleges and universities and that many teachers feel unprepared to formally assess the skill. Equally, there is generally, a low level of training on the use of computers to assess speaking at both in-service and pre-service levels. This research was necessary because it revealed an aspect of teacher training that needs urgent attention, the assessment of speaking. However, English language testing has not received much attention from English language researchers in Cameroon when compared to English language teaching. Future research within the framework of the CBA should equally focus on English language testing. There is no doubt that assessing speaking formally is one of the most challenging tasks faced by English language teachers. Despite the challenges of assessing the skill, efforts must be made to ensure that it is assessed reliably and validly. It is a good method of preparing students linguistically for future employability, but it is the only way to ascertain whether the teaching of speaking is effective or needs a modification of methodology. Teacher-based assessment of speaking implies, within the framework of the CBA, that teachers be properly trained and that students be assessed directly in authentic real-life communicative situations. An English teacher who has received quality pre-service and in-service training and continues to develop themselves technologically will not only guarantee good teaching and quality assessment but will also ensure the assessment of speaking is given the seriousness it deserves.

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