

# A prospective survey of native population's attitude towards mother tongue based multilingual education (MTBMLE) and Fulfulde as medium of instruction in the Far North region of Cameroon

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## Abstract

This paper sets out to investigate the attitude of native peoples of the Far North Region of Cameroon towards MTBMLE and Fulfulde as a medium of instruction (MOI) in the primary school of the regions.

The data were collected through a survey using a set of close-ended questions in a questionnaire administered to more than 467 informants. Some interviews were also conducted to gain more insights into the opinion of the populations towards this educational paradigm.

The results show that people have a relatively favourable attitude towards MTBMLE but would likely not support the replacement of French by Fulfulde as MOI. The key finding therefore is that despite its uncontested status as lingua franca in the region, Fulfulde is not yet accepted as a language capable of assuming a more important role in education for ideological and practical reasons.

**Keywords:** Ethnic language, Fulfulde, national languages, LIEP, MTBMLE, medium of instruction (MOI)

## 1. Introduction

Education stakeholders in Cameroon are still reluctant to fully conform to the appeal of using mother tongue as medium of instruction (MOI) in primary schools. This state of affairs is in ignorance of the UNESCO recommendations on the matter. In fact, the UNESCO's view of language of education is summarized in the UNESCO's World Declaration on Education for All (1990) as follows:

*Primary education must be universal, ensure that the basic learning needs of all children are satisfied, and take into account the culture, needs, and opportunities of the community. [...] Literacy programmes are indispensable because literacy is a necessary skill in itself and the foundation of other life skills. Literacy in the mother tongue strengthens cultural identity and heritage.* UNESCO (1990: 6)

The above declaration supports the principle that education has to be provided to primary school starters in the language which they speak at home because it is already known to them, rather than in a foreign language. This view was recently reiterated by Yao Ydo in an interview granted Radio France International (RFI)<sup>1</sup>, in which, he, the director of the UNESCO International Bureau of Education advocated a remodelling of school curriculum to adopt an indigenous curriculum that should rely on the use of mother tongue (MT) as MOI. He argued that approaching education in this perspective will help reduce the gap between children in rural and in urban communities of Africa. Furthermore, the education that is culturally relevant (indigenous curriculum) to the children will contribute in fostering their sense of identity.

Language in education policy has never been in favour of indigenous languages since the colonisation time. African countries in general and Cameroon in particular have reproduced the English/French-only language in education policy. In Cameroon, this ideology was continued under the pretext of preservation of national unity and integration. In this perspective, the way out is a decolonisation of Africa through a reform of curriculum. Besides the aspect of indigenous curriculum which is advised and advocated, there is the issue of the language to be used as MOI. The model prescribed is that of MTBMLE.

<sup>1</sup> [https://web.facebook.com/RFI.Afrique?\\_rdc=2&\\_rd](https://web.facebook.com/RFI.Afrique?_rdc=2&_rd)

At the time when more voices are pushing for a reform of the educational system to give more space for national languages, to the detriment of foreign languages, it is wise to survey the opinion of the populations about MTBMLE. The Far North region of Cameroon is the least empowered education wise. Every year, the performance of the student's leaves much to desire, and the region always stand at the bottom of all official exams. From observation, most children even in the town of Maroua speak Fulfulde in their daily conversation among each other and with their parents. Sometimes, there is French, and their mother tongue.

### 1.1. Conceptual framework and Literature review

A number of key concepts form the base of this study: they include language policy, Language in education policy, MLE, MTBMLE, LIEP

#### i. Language policy and planning

Language policy and planning has been a consecrated term in the domain of the politics of language. The notion came into scholarship in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century along with the concept of a nation-state, "when one language one nation ideology" was prominent. Many definitions are proposed to refer to language policy. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) define it as "A language policy is a body of ideas, laws, regulations, rules and practices intended to achieve the planned language change in the societies, group or system" (p. xi). According to McCarty (2011) it is "a complex sociocultural process [and as] modes of human interaction, negotiation, and production mediated by relations of power. In summary, language policy englobes transnational, national, regional, or local laws regulating the official use of **languages** in a variety of contexts, such as government offices, schools, etc."<sup>2</sup> The 'policy' in these processes resides in their language-regulating power; that is, the ways in which they express normative claims about legitimate and illegitimate language forms and uses, thereby governing language statuses and uses" (p. 8). Unlike language policy of which it is part, Language planning (later called language management (Spolsky 2009)) is often associated with government planning and means a deliberate effort to influence the function, structure or acquisition of languages or language varieties within a speech community. While language policy deals primarily with the legal framework, language planning focuses on procedures.

#### ii. Language in education policy (LIEP)

Many expressions are used by researchers to refer to the same concept in literature: "language-in-education" policy, "language education policy," "language policy in education," or "educational language policy". They all refer to how language policies in education are understood and analytically approached (Johnson 2013). These concepts are used to describe language practices in educational institutions, the mechanisms that create them (Shohamy 2006: 76) and their consequences or effects. Within a nation state, LIEP is concerned with issues such as: which language(s) to teach and learn in schools? When (at what age) to begin teaching these languages? For how long (number of years and hours of study) should they be taught? By whom, for whom (who is qualified to teach and who is entitled or obligated to learn) and how (which methods, materials, tests, etc.)? (Shohamy 2006: 76)

#### iii. Multilingual education (MLE)

Multilingual Education refers to "first-language-first" education,<sup>3</sup> or "the use of two or more languages as mediums of instruction (UNESCO, 2003:17)<sup>4</sup>. It is schooling which begins in the mother tongue and transitions to additional languages.

#### iv. Mother tongue based multilingual education MTBMLE

According to Malone (2007:1), "MT-based MLE refers to the use of students' mother tongue and two or more additional languages as Languages of Instruction (LoI) in school." The number of language involved depends on context and national language policy. It may refer to bilingual education across multiple language communities—each community using their own mother tongue plus the official school language for instruction or learning and using multiple languages in school as in other context MT-based MLE may involve four languages—the students' mother tongue or first language, a regional language, the national language and an international language. (Malone 2007:1)

Having discuss the key concept, the following looks at the language policy of Cameroon from the colonial time to present time, to show how indigenous languages have been excluded from the educational system. As the UNESCO is suggesting a remodeling of the school curriculum, eliciting the populations would help understand the possible path to go.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/the-critical-language-reflection-tool/101902>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.k12academics.com/education-issues/multilingual-education>

<sup>4</sup> <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/fr/node/5494>

## 1.2. Rationale for MTBMLE

Trudell (2016) argues that there is a clear link between language education policy and quality education. She adds that successful learning is determined by features of quality education such as the use of appropriate curriculum, teacher capacity, effective school leadership and most importantly language of instruction (Trudell 2016). Language of instruction seems to be crucial in the first years of education. Experts are unanimous to the fact that mother tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) is instrumental in achieving early-grade literacy. “Children who learn in their mother tongue do better in school and are less likely to drop out. They become proficient readers more quickly when learning in the language they speak at home than when using a language that is only used in school. Children also learn subject matter better when they do not have to simultaneously decipher a new language. A strong foundation of reading and learning in the mother tongue even improves acquisition of second language literacy and fluency and contributes to a student's long-term success.

“Using the mother tongue in the classroom enhances student participation, decreases attrition, and increases the likelihood of family and community engagement in the child’s learning. Using the mother tongue as medium of instruction enhances the child’s cognitive learning. Effective learner-centred learning requires that learning take place in the language a child speaks.”(Trudell 2016:3) when the home language is not used as LOI, the parents’ understanding and participation in their children’s education becomes limited. The Kom language project in Cameroon as an example of successful MLE programs report parents testifying that they were not only able to communicate, but their knowledge was also valued.

### *Not many countries implementing MLE in Africa*

Despite the proven advantages of MLE, very few countries implement it fully. According to the Ethnologue (Eberhard et al 2022), out of about 2.5 billion children in the world ranging in age between 0-19 (potential early learners), an estimated 1.65 million have access to education in their first language (L1), while more than 890,000 (30%) *do not have access* to education in their L1. The Middle East and North Africa are the two regions with less than 70% of children having education in their mother tongue. In sub-Saharan Africa, the second region, the percentage is about 50%. Over 75% of the world's out-of-school girls are ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities<sup>5</sup> (The Ethnologue by Eberhard et al 2022).

### *Pilot studies*

About 40 years ago some projects on the use of African languages as MOI in the formal education system were experimented in some countries on the continent with the support of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in collaboration with local initiatives.

SIL’s Kenyan<sup>6</sup> partner organization, BTL, operated a pilot multilingual education projects in Kenya (Graham, 2010; Schroeder, 2004); SIL’s Burkinabè partner organization, ANTBA, managed 20-30 *centres à passarelle*, sponsored by the Strømme Foundation Burkina Faso (Trudell and Konfe, 2010) to help school dropouts and non-school going teenager catch up with other children in French based education. A more robust project was conducted in a number of communities in *Ethiopia* (Trudell et al 2011). In Senegal, some initiatives were carried out and ongoing (Trudell and Klaas, 2010). In Nigeria, the IFE project of Nigeria has yield satisfactory results (Afolayan 1976).

Cameroon has also experimented pilot mother-tongue based multilingual education (MTBMLE) programmes in some communities since 1981 (Tadadjeu, 1997; Trudell, 2005 (Tadadjeu 1990). SIL Cameroon began a partnership with the University of Yaoundé I’s *Departement de Langues Africaines et Linguistique* (Department of African Languages and Linguistics), to provide MTBMLE to children in grades 1-4 in a program called PROPELCA (*Projet de Recherche Operationelle Pour L’Enseignement des Langues au Cameroun*, Operational Research Project for the Teaching of Cameroonian Languages). The National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees (NACALCO) later joined this partnership. The programme was quite successful but was suspended due to cessation of fundings. The Kom Education Pilot Project (KEPP) uses Kom, the mother-tongue of children, as the language of instruction in the classroom. Children begin school in their mother-tongue and then add English and French, gradually building competency in all three languages. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of MLE, SIL is conducting a study in the Northwest Region of Cameroon.

**The above** experimental researches have demonstrated indisputably that children learn some subjects (like Mathematics, Environmental Sciences, History etc.) better when they are taught in the mother tongue or first language (Chumbow forthcoming 2022)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sil-lead.org/education>

<sup>6</sup>

From the results a number of studies carried out about literacy, Trudell et al (2011:23, 20<sup>7</sup>) conclude that ‘Language of instruction is a key component of successful early-grade learning.’

Improvement in educational achievement for Africa’s children is only going to happen when those children can learn in a language they speak. In addition, use of the child’s mother tongue for learning has been shown to accelerate the learning process significantly beyond the normal rate for schools using the official language as medium of instruction. Acquisition of these skills is allowing African children who have dropped out of the official school system to return to their studies, often gaining 3 school years or more in the process.

Many countries already implement MTB MLE. Some world countries have successfully implemented MLE; they include the Philippines, Ethiopia, India, Papua New Guinea, Uganda, Namibia, South Africa, Ghana, Eritrea and Serbia. In Africa, apart from Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa, most countries are still at the stage of piloting MLE. (The Ethnologue 2022)

As many countries are hesitant to fully implement MLE, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in its Resolution Ref.: A/74/396, of 18 December 2019, proclaimed the years 2022 – 2032 as the **International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL2022-2032)**. It emphasises the need for countries to implement MLE. As a follow up strategy, the African Union through ACALAN<sup>8</sup> in conjunction with the UNESCO (UNESCO –ACALAN 2021) through the IDIL (2022-2032) is pressing for a reform of language in education policy to give primacy to education in children’s mother tongue (first language) because that would yield more benefits for the child-learner. Following the recommendations of IDIL, Chumbow (forthcoming) suggests the implementation of the MTB- MLE in Cameroon as part of the implementation of UNESCO’s proposals for the IDIL 2022-2032 in the Africa Region (UNESCO – ACALAN 2021).

Although informed about the above conclusions, most decision makers in African countries still prefer to provide education to their children principally in the ex-colonial masters’ languages years after her independence, and most MTBMLE projects are just experimental. They have remained entangled in the colonial mind-set which tends to accord (give) more importance to Western values. The superposition of Western paradigm culture and values on African culture is seen as the way to go.

#### 1.4. Contextual background

##### Language Policy in Cameroon and the Far North region

Cameroon, a country of 475 440 Km<sup>2</sup> with roughly 25 million inhabitants situated in Central Africa, is characterised by extreme multilingualism with more than 270 (or 280) indigenous languages. No national language is used formally as language of instruction in primary schools across the country as none has an official status. French and English, ex-colonial masters’ languages are official languages and only prescribed languages of Media, education, administration, etc.

Cameroon owes her language policy that gives no room to indigenous languages (IL) to her colonial past. The language policy since colonial times has always been repressive towards indigenous languages in education (Ndille 2017; Stumpf 1979; Gwanfogbe 1995, Dupraz 2015).

After the German colonial period (1884-1916), the British and French took over Cameroon and modified the language policy to the detriment of indigenous languages. In the British Cameroons territories that were administered under Nigeria, The British ideology **promoted** a more decentralized and more demand-driven colonial education system (Garnier and Schafer, 2006 cited by Dupraz 2015). They entrusted education to religious missions (financed through a system of grants-in-aid). Local languages were more often used (at least in the first grades) and British missionaries, who prioritised conversion, tried to reach as many children as possible, and more local teachers were employed.

The French has an assimilationist perspective and saw education as the means to enforce their model and push their agenda. The new colonial masters then sought to impose their languages in the newly acquired territory both in the areas of education and administration. To ensure full diffusion of the French language in its territory, the French provided heavy incentives and legally banned the use other languages in the school system. Unlike the British, the French emphasized a public, free, nonreligious network of schools (Gifford and Weiskel, 1971 cited by Dupraz 2015). French colonial administrators were adamant that instruction be undertaken only in French, as a result, French colonial

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<sup>8</sup> The African Union through its specialized language agency, the African Academy of languages (ACALAN) has made it known to UNESCO that within the purview of Africa’s vision 2063 (“the Africa we want”) which aspires to ensure inclusive development, “*leaving no one behind*”,

schools employed more European teachers than British schools. The goal of French colonial education was to train a small administrative elite. The French language was instituted as the only language of the schools that were expected to benefit from institutional support.

An Order of Brazzaville of 28 December 1920 by Gouverneur General A.F.E Victor Augagneur prescribed that: No school shall be authorised if teaching are not provided in French. The teaching of any other language is thereby forbidden » The interdiction was reiterated during the Brazzaville conference in 1944 as it was clearly declared that: «*Teaching must be provided in the French language. The use of local dialects in pedagogy is totally forbidden in private as well as public schools* »

Even after the independence in 1960, the successive constitutions of 1960, 1961, 1972 and 1984 did not change much about the place of indigenous languages in education. Recently however, the legal framework has slightly evolved in favour of national languages, general and in education but for reasons of national unity the language policy is still largely in favour of French and English. The Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon (1996). Law Number 96-06 of 18th January 1996. Cameroon's 1996 constitution requires the state to "guarantee the promotion of bilingualism at all levels of education as a factor of national unity and integration." (WERN 2021)<sup>9</sup>

As a logical follow up to the constitution, the Law Number 98/004 of 14th April 1998 to lay down Guidelines on Education in Cameroon in Article (section) 4 provides that the state emphasizes bilingualism at all levels of teaching (education) as a factor of unity and integration. Missions assigned to education point four or section 5 provides 'promotion of national languages' (Cameroonian Ministry of National Education, 1998). Other articles such as articles (section) 5, 11, 15, 16 and 17 deal with the teaching of national languages and/or official languages (French and English)

Government policies are gradually evolving towards a better consideration for national (indigenous ) languages in education. For about 10 years now, the Government through the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB) has embarked in the preservation of the country's cultural and linguistic diversity by introducing their teaching in primary schools, as some in 43 schools pilot schools throughout the country are providing early education in national languages under the Francophonie ELAN project, with five languages involved (Ewondo, Bassa, Douala, Ghomala and Ffulde). Furthermore, some elementary teachers have been instructed and trained to teach the local languages in the areas where their schools are found (WERN 2021, Henry 2017).

However, the pace is slow and shows some reluctance on the part of the government. Moreover, the settings where the projects are inappropriate as they are in cities (with students with multilingual backgrounds) rather than in the rural areas. The idea of having an indigenous language as MOI remains a wish.

While the government is considering the option of generalising MTBMLE, it is important to survey the populations' attitude towards the reform so as to take comprehensive measures, either through sensitisation campaigns or attitude engineering. The issue at stake is what is the attitude of the target population group towards MLE?

### 1.5. Research questions and research objective

The focus of the paper is to examine whether the population and children who are the recipients of this policy would support some reforms that would on the one hand suppress foreign languages, and on the other hand, promote local languages in education.

#### Objective of the research

This paper seeks to elicit the attitude of the populations of the Far North region of Cameroon towards mother tongue based multilingual education. Attitude is understood here as —*a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor* (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993: 1).

The paper therefore looks at whether the populations would support an educational reform aiming at providing education to their child or sibling in the primary school in their ethnic language or Fulfulde, instead of the established French or English only education.

#### Research questions

1. (1) Does the language practice in the home domain sustain intergeneration transmission of the mother tongue so as to justify MTBMLE?
2. (2) Would Cameroonian people based in the Far North of Cameroon be in favour of a curriculum reform in primary school in favour of MTBMLE?

<sup>9</sup> <https://wenr.wes.org/2021/04/education-in-cameroon>

3. (3) Would they support the use of Fulfulde as a replacement of mother tongue in MLE in the Far North? Would they accept Fulfulde instead of their mother tongue as language of instructions in the primary school?
4. (4) Would the populations support the use of mother tongue for the teaching of mathematics and sciences in the primary school?
5. (5) Would they support transitional MLE with mother tongue?

### **Why focus on the Far North region?**

The focus of this survey is the Far North region of Cameroon.

The Far North region is Cameroon one of the country's 10 administrative regions. It is also one of the most diversified in terms of linguistic demography (Barreteau and Dieu 1984) with close to 60 languages for a population of about three million inhabitants in a surface area of 34 263 km<sup>2</sup>, divided into 6 administrative divisions. The density is 74.52 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. Fulfulde, Arab Shwa, Hausa, and Wandala are some of the vehicular languages of the region, but Fulfulde is by far the one with wider use of the Northern Regions of Cameroon (three of Cameroon 10 administrative regions which include the North and the Adamawa regions). In this multilingual melting pot, Fulfulde has taken the place of lingua franca. French is almost absent from most homes (even more in the rural areas) although it is the language of administration (Barreteau and Dieu (2005 in Seignobos, Iyébi-Mandjek 2005). The issue now at stake is which language(s) the children master better than the others. In the Far North region, Fulfulde is used by most people for interethnic communication, and ideological issues (fuelled by the dominance of Islam) has caused Fulfulde to become the first language (and mother tongue) of most children, including those who are from non-Fulani background.

Fulfulde is the dominant language, particularly in the Diamare and its expansion is only contained in some languages such as Wandara, Arab shwa, Tupuri or in the rural areas where there is little intergroup contacts. It is fast spreading to places of intergroup communication settings such as schools, towns and market places. Newly populated areas and migration poles, areas of agricultural development (Maga, Makalingay, Kourgui, Koza). For religious reasons, Fulfulde is also very important as most Fulbes are both Fulfulde speakers and Muslims. Fulfulde is well known among the Mundang people. In the Tupuri land, Fulfulde is spoken by men in markets, but not by women. The Tupuri have always resisted Fulbes and islamisation (Barreteau and Dieu 2005).

From the educational perspective, the Far North region of Cameroon ( along with the North, the Adamaoua and East regions) is one of four of the Priority Education Zone (PEZ) (Kana-2019; Mouafo Djontu 2013, Beche 2020). School completion rates are poor for girls and rural children in particular, whose exclusion rates are 29% and 31% respectively (MINEDUB 2018 in Beche 2020). Inequalities also exist in terms of Cameroon's geographical distribution of schools, which is unfavourable to the country's three northern regions (Kana 2019; Mouafo Djontu 2013; Beche 2020). The main criteria for the characterization of a PEZ is low school enrolment for children under 9 years, the education of the girl-child and rates of school dropouts. In this respect the Far North fits into the hole. It comprises the Logone and Shari division which has the lowest rate of school. Moreover, environmental (drought and floods) and security problems (Boko Haram insurgency) have made the situation even worse.

Despite all these, parents aspire to have their children come out of poverty and the best way is through education. Since education is provided solely in French it would be wise to investigate the attitude of parents towards as educational reform. Observations and previous research have revealed that the attitude of indigenous people towards MTB-MLE is always mixed and mitigated. This is due to the long-lasting language policy that has given primacy to ex colonial languages as language of education, media, administration, etc.

## **2. Research design and methodology**

This paper is the research report of a survey aiming at eliciting and discuss the attitude of people of the Far North Region of Cameroon towards MTBMLE and Fulfulde as MOI in primary school.

### **Research context and the sample population**

#### **Sample population**

The informants were drawn from the six divisions of the region. The major ethnic groups are the following: Kotoko Shwa Arab, Musgum in the Logone and Shari; Mundang, Tupuri, Masa in the Mayo Danai and Mayo Kani; Mafa and Kapsiki in the Mayo Tsanaga, Giziga and Fulbe in the Diamare; Mandara and Guemzek-Zulgo in the Mayo Sava. The total number of people who filled out the questionnaires is 467, residents of the Far North region in Cameroon. The majority of the respondents have university level of education. A few were self-employed while a good number were university students. Their representation in the sample are as follows: Diamare( 56), Mayo Kani(105), Mayo Tsanaga( 96), Logone-Shari( 6), Mayo Sava( 43), and Mayo Danai( 69).

## The research methods and instrument

This research used a quantitative survey design with the questionnaire as data collection method. The main instrument was a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of a series of questions, all close-ended multiple choice questions, some with 5-likert scale (absolute disapproved, disapprove, indifferent (or don't know), approve, strongly approve). In each question, the respondent were presented with the item followed by the five alternatives. In some questions, the respondents were to choose between yes or no, or between the proposed languages (sometimes they were allowed to tick more than one language where it was applicable, particularly with language use domain and choice).

There were questions on their ethnolinguistic background (village of origin, language, as well as sociocultural and education factors (religion, education level, profession, marital status, etc.) Background information about Gender, age range, religion, profession and level of study was also elicited.

Two major objective of the questionnaire: elicit language choice in family and language best known by the respondents. Also the place of Fulfulde and French in family was also elicited. It was important to elicit this information to establish whether the mother tongue or some other languages are used in the family, hence whether there is generational transmission of the ethnic language. If the parents, and or the respondents spoke the ethnic language in the family, this indicated that there is the possibility to envisage mother tongue education with children. Otherwise, there is no need. The presence of Fulfulde in the family was also elicited to find out whether Fulfulde could be envisaged as a substitute for mother tongue in education eventually, since it is a language of wider communication in the far north region.

## Questionnaire administration for data collection

Since the Far North region is made up of close to 60 ethnolinguistic groups, we aimed at getting most people represented in the sample, but since the sampling was random, we ended up having only those whom we could reach through the help of research assistants. Each research assistants (about 60) received 5 questionnaires to be administered to people of their ethnic groups. The participants were chosen randomly. Eventually, we got most participants from ethnolinguistic groups as Tupuri, Mundang, and Mafa. The other questionnaires were given to specific target groups of teachers because they are decision makers in educational issues.

## Data analysis

The questionnaires that were collected were analysed using Sphinx, a statistical computer software. Tables and graphs were easily drawn by the programme.

### 3. Data Analysis and discussion of the findings

#### 3.1. Quantitative analysis

##### 1. Monolingualism/Multilingualism within the family circle

A major condition for MTBMLE is the (inter)generational transmission of the language that results in children knowing their mother tongue. To that end, the traditional and natural domain for ethnic language transmission is the home.

In this study, the informants were asked to confirm if the ethnic (first) language was the main language of the home, and whether it was the only languages used at home, and eventually they had to list all the languages used in the home domain.

**Table 1: Ethnic language as main language used in family**

**Q1: Is your ethnic language the main language used at home?**

	Missing	Yes	No	Total
Count	44	270	153	467
Percentage	9,4%	57,8%	32,8%	100%

**Table 2: Ethnic language as only language used within the family circle**

**Q2: Is the ethnic language the only language used in family?**

	Missing	Yes	No	Total
Count	14	151	302	467
Percentage	3,0%	32,3%	64,7%	100%

**Table 3:** Languages used in family

Q3: Which language do you speak in family?(choose more than one if applicable)

	Missing	Ethnic language	Fulfulde	French	other	Total
<b>Count</b>	10	<b>306</b>	190	164	41	467
<b>Percentage</b>	2,1%	<b>65,5%</b>	40,7%	35,1%	8,8%	

**Table 4:** Languages spoken with siblings or children

Q4: Which language do you speak with siblings or children (you can choose more than one)

	Missing	Ethnic language	Fulfulde	French	other	Total
<b>Count</b>	22	<b>263</b>	190	150	18	467
<b>Percentage</b>	4,7%	<b>56,3%</b>	40,7%	32,1%	3,9%	

Q3 and Q4 offered the possibility to select a maximum of 2 and 3 languages respectively; that is why the counts and percentage are above the total number of informants.

The tables 1-4 present the answers to Q1-4. In Q1, the ethnic language has been reported as the main language of the family domain (57%), and only 32% selected it as the only language used in the family. This shows that there is multilingualism in the families.

In Q3 we notice that although the ethnic language is not the only language spoken in the family, it is the most used language (65%), it is followed by Fulfulde (40.7%), and French (35%).

The data in Q4 also show that the ethnic language is used in the family (and among siblings or children) by 56% of the informants, as such (inter)generational transmission of the ethnic language can be said to be sustained by the fact that the ethnic language is used in the home domain. At the same time, Fulfulde has encroached the home language's territory. While mother tongue is used more often (56%), Fulfulde is the second most used language in the family domain (40%), just like French (32%).

Other questions elicited languages competences. They include Q5: Knowledge of the ethnic language (EL) (Do you know your ethnic language?), Q6: Minimal communicative knowledge of EL (Do you know your EL such that you can maintain minimal communication?), Q7: Good Knowledge of Fulfulde (do you know Fulfulde), and Q8: Knowledge of ethnic language by children (does your child know the ethnic language?).

**Table 5: Informants' linguistic competence**

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Q5: Do you think you know your ethnic language quite well?	5,4% ( 25)	79,9% (373)	14,8% ( 69)	100% (467)
Q6: Do you think you have minimal knowledge of ethnic language to be able to communicate without problem?	6,4% ( 30)	80,7% (377)	12,8% ( 60)	100% (467)
Q7: Do you think you have good knowledge of Fulfulde to be able to communicate?	18,0% ( 84)	60,4% (282)	21,6% (101)	100% (467)
Q8: Knowledge of EL by child/sibling	2,4% ( 11)	75,8% (354)	21,8% (102)	100% (467)
Total	6,9% (162)	69,2% (1616)	23,9% (557)	100% (2335)

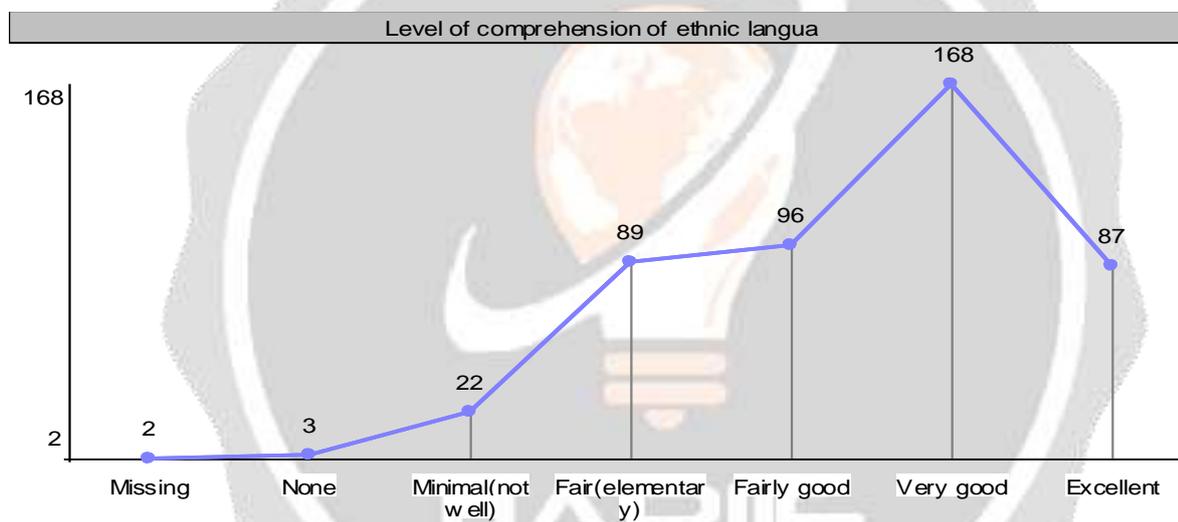
The table (5) above provide a summative presentation of the data relating to language competence and multilingualism. It shows that 79.9% of the informants have some knowledge of their ethnic language, and 14.8% have not. 80.7% claimed to have at least minimal knowledge of their ethnic language, while 12.8% do not. Also, 60% of the respondents have enough knowledge of Fulfulde. The informants also reported for their child and sibling and 75% of them claimed that their child or sibling had some knowledge of the mother tongue. Q7 (Do you think you have good knowledge of Fulfulde to be able to communicate?) helped to confirm that the knowledge of Fulfulde is also rife. 60% of the respondents reported having good knowledge of it, but fewer than 50% claim to be literate in the language.

**Table 6: Language competence as distributed according to administrative (ethnic) divisions**

Division of Origin/Knowledge of ethnic language	Missing	Yes	No	TOTAL
Missing	17,8% ( 8)	64,4% ( 29)	17,8% ( 8)	100% ( 45)
Diamare	8,9% ( 5)	76,8% ( 43)	14,3% ( 8)	100% ( 56)
Mayo Kani	4,8% ( 5)	84,8% ( 89)	10,5% ( 11)	100% (105)
Mayo Tsanaga	6,3% ( 6)	82,3% ( 79)	11,5% ( 11)	100% ( 96)
Logone-Shari	0,0% ( 0)	83,3% ( 5)	16,7% ( 1)	100% ( 6)
Mayo Sava	2,3% ( 1)	74,4% ( 32)	23,3% ( 10)	100% ( 43)
Mayo Danai	1,4% ( 1)	82,6% ( 57)	15,9% ( 11)	100% ( 69)

The table show that in each division of the region, the percentage of informant who reported knowing their ethnic language ranged from 75% to 84%. The Diamare and the Mayo Sava have lower percentage because of the presence of Fulfulde and Wandala respectively; they are vehicular languages in those division.

**Figure 1: level of comprehension of mother tongue (ethnic language) by informants.**



Q9 sought to elicit the informants’ assessment of their level of proficiency in ethnic language. The above figure shows helps to visualize the percentage of respondents per their reported competence in their mother tongue. It stand clear that most respondents have at least a fair knowledge of it, with the majority claiming to know it very well. The above chart showing the level of speakers’ proficiency in ethnic languages shows that there is potential for language reproduction (transmission) to younger generation. The regular use of the language at home also plays an instrumental role in this transmission.

**3.2. Attitude of respondents towards MTBMLE**

The series of Questions from 10 to 21 used a likert scale to elicit the infirmants attitude towards a variety of models of language of instruction in primary schools.

**Table 7: Summary table of opinion towards models of MLE**

---	Missing	Totally disapprove	disapprove	Indifferent	Approve	Absolutely approve	TOTAL
Q10: Currently teachings are not provided in the ethnic languages in school: what is your opinion about that?	1,9%	13,1%	32,5%	18,6%	<b>25,3%</b>	<b>8,6%</b>	100%
Q11: The state suggests starting primary education in ethnic language (mother tongue) with transition to French. What is your opinion?	1,1%	7,7%	19,1%	15,2%	<b>43,5%</b>	<b>13,5%</b>	100%
Q12: If in the nursery school teachings are provided entire in ethnic language with little French. What would your opinion be?	1,9%	10,9%	26,8%	12,6%	<b>37,0%</b>	<b>10,7%</b>	100%
Q13: if in the nursery school teachings are given in Fulfulde to your child (who understands it though he is not a native). What is your opinion?	1,5%	15,0%	35,5%	13,5%	<b>28,1%</b>	<b>6,4%</b>	100%
Q14: What is your opinion if in the primary school your ethnic language(mother tongue)is used INSTEAD OF FRENCH in teaching from year 1 to 3	1,5%	14,1%	28,1%	15,2%	<b>30,0%</b>	<b>11,1%</b>	100%
Q15: The government proposes that only the ethnic language is used to teach mathematics from year 1 to 3 in primary school	1,9%	12,0%	30,6%	13,3%	<b>29,1%</b>	<b>13,1%</b>	100%
Q16: If teachings are provided first in the ethnic (mother tongue) language with the introduction of French /English in year 2: What is your opinion?	1,3%	7,9%	22,5%	12,0%	<b>44,8%</b>	<b>11,6%</b>	100%
Q17: If the Grand North region. Fulfulde is to become the language of education instead of French. What is your opinion?	0,9%	22,7%	37,7%	12,4%	<b>16,1%</b>	<b>10,3%</b>	100%
Q18: Would you accept that Fulfulde and French are used (equally) to teach in primary school	0,6%	15,2%	31,0%	14,6%	<b>29,1%</b>	<b>9,4%</b>	100%
Q19: You would agree that your ethnic language and French would be the LOI in primary school	1,7%	9,6%	25,5%	10,7%	<b>39,2%</b>	<b>13,3%</b>	100%
Q20: Would you agree that you child would learn Fulfulde and not ethnic language (mother tongue) in school?	1,5%	36,4%	38,3%	9,6%	<b>11,1%</b>	<b>3,0%</b>	100%
Q21: It is suggested that here Fulfulde becomes the language is instruction instead of French/English	2,1%	34,7%	35,8%	9,4%	<b>14,6%</b>	<b>3,4%</b>	100%

Q10: Currently teachings are not provided in ethnic languages in school: what is your opinion about that?

When asked how do they feel that their ethnic language is absent from the educational system, a cross-section of informants (45%) expressed their disapproval; 34% approve the situation, while 18% expressed indifferent.

Q11: The state suggests starting primary education in ethnic language (mother tongue) with transition to French. What advice to your junior or child?

Q12: If in the nursery school teachings are provided entire in ethnic language with little French. What is your opinion?

10.7% totally disapprove and 27.0% disapprove for a cumulative of 37% who are opposed to the use of the ethnic language for instruction (with little French) in nursery school.

57% would support primary education where the EL and French are used. 26% disapprove it.

More than 55% support the use of EL in a transitional mode.

Q13: if in the nursery school teachings are given in Fulfulde to your child (who understands it though he is not a native). What is your opinion?

A bit more than 50% disapprove the perspective of having their children taught in Fulfulde. About 35% are in support of it (28% of approval and 7% of absolute approval. About 15% of the respondents constitute the swing proportion.

Two questions (Q14-15) were concerned with the use of EL in as MOI. Q14: What is your opinion if in the primary school your ethnic language (mother tongue) is used INSTEAD OF FRENCH in teaching from year 1 to 3 and Q15: The government proposes that only ethnic language is used to teach mathematics from year 1 to 3 in primary school?

The results shows some ambivalence in the opinion of the informants. About 30% disapproved and about 10% absolutely disapproved both proposals, while about 30% approved and 10% absolutely approved. Some 15% of the respondents in both cases were indecisive.

Q16: If teachings are provided first in ethnic (mother tongue) language first with introduction of French /English in year 2: what is your opinion?

57% of the informants support the eventuality of having the EL as MOI in the first year with gradual transition to English/French. About 30% are not in support of the idea.

Questions 17 and 18 sought to elicit the opinion of the informants about the contingency of using Fulfulde as the MOI instead of French or in a dual mode with French.

For Q17: If the Grand North region. Fulfulde is to become the language of education instead of French. What is your opinion?

More than 60% of the informants are opposed to the idea of substituting French with Fulfulde as MOI in primary school. 26% of informants support the eventuality (with 15% approval and 10% strong approval). That is about half of those who reject it.

Q18: Would you accept that Fulfulde and French are used (equally) to teach in primary school

As concern the dual model (concurrent use of Fulfulde and French), 46% approved and 38% disapproved it.

Q19: You would agree that your ethnic language and French would be the LOI in primary school

For this question (Q19), 35% are opposed while 53.5% support the eventuality of having EL and French as languages of instruction in the primary school.

Q20 and Q21 investigated the opinion of the informants towards place of Fulfulde in education.

To Q20: (Would you agree that your child would learn Fulfulde and not ethnic language (mother tongue) in school?), there is a stark opposition to the proposition that the children should learn Fulfulde and not the EL in school. In fact, only 14% support the proposition as against 74% of informants who are against.

To Q21: (It is suggested that here Fulfulde becomes the language is instruction instead of French/English), more than 70% are opposed to the idea of using Fulfulde as MOI in primary school in replacement of French or English. Only 18% approve it while 9% are indifferent.

Finally, Q22: (Does it disturbed you that your child does not learn the ethnic language (mother tongue) in school?), 48.8% of the informants responded positively (they are disturbed) while 36% seemed to be undisturbed. This implies they find the situation alright. About 14% seemed to be indifferent.

**Table 8: Feeling of the informants about the non-inclusion of EL in schools.****Q23: How do you feel about non-inclusion of your ethnic language(MT) in school?**

	Count.	Per.
Missing	6	1.1%
I'm disturbed	189	36.0%
Indifferent	74	14.1%
I'm not disturbed	256	48.8%
TOTAL OBS.	525	100%

The data show that about half of the informants (49%) express concern that their ethnic language is not learnt in school. The percentage of people who are indifferent (14%) and the missing ones added to those who do not feel bothered represent another half. This means that the general opinion is indecisive and/or indifferent towards the situation of not having their EL as MOI.

## Discussion

### Summary of the findings: answering the research questions

**RQ1: Does the language practice in the home domain sustain intergeneration transmission of the mother tongue so as to justify MTBMLE?**

According to the data collected, the ethnic language is used at home very often, although it is not the only and main language. Fulfulde is also present in homes, just like French. The data show that 79.9% of the informants have some knowledge of their ethnic language. 80.7% claimed to have at least minimal knowledge of their ethnic language. 60% of the respondents have acceptable knowledge of Fulfulde. The informants also reported for their child and sibling and 75% of them claimed that their child or sibling had some knowledge of the mother tongue. The knowledge of Fulfulde is also rife. 60% of the respondents reported having good knowledge of it, but fewer than 50% claim to be literate in the language.

**RQ2: Would Cameroonian people based in the Far North of Cameroon support a curriculum reform in primary school in favour of MTBMLE?**

It is difficult to decide from the data whether the population would fully support a reform of the educational system in favour of MTBMLE. There is mixed feeling regarding the use of EL to teach in the first to third year, just as to teach mathematics in first to third year of primary school. On the other hand they would probably admit a dual mode with French/mother tongue as MOI. People are likely to approve primary education with French and their ethnic language as medium of instruction.

**RQ3: Would they support the use of Fulfulde as a replacement of mother tongue in MLE in the Far North? Would they accept Fulfulde instead of their mother tongue as language of instructions in the primary school?**

As Fulfulde is the lingua franca in interethnic communication of the three Northern regions of the country, it would have been expected that such a language with regional unofficial status would receive consensus as medium of instruction or major language in education. However, according to the findings, the majority of the populations would be opposed to the idea of having Fulfulde either in a dual mode with French, or in replacement of French as MOI. More than 70% disapprove the use of Fulfulde instead of the ethnic language as MOI in primary school. This shows some sense of ethnocentrism as people are opposed to the institutionalization of Fulfulde as a regional language of education (60% are against this idea). They would rather have their EL as MOI than Fulfulde the lingua franca. At the same time, they seem to approve the use of French as MOI.

The respondents are against the use of Fulfulde as the language of education in the Grand North; they are not in favour of Fulfulde being used as language of instruction in primary schools of the Grand North, even if their children understand it.

**RQ4: Would the populations support the use of mother tongue for the teaching of mathematics and sciences in the primary school?**

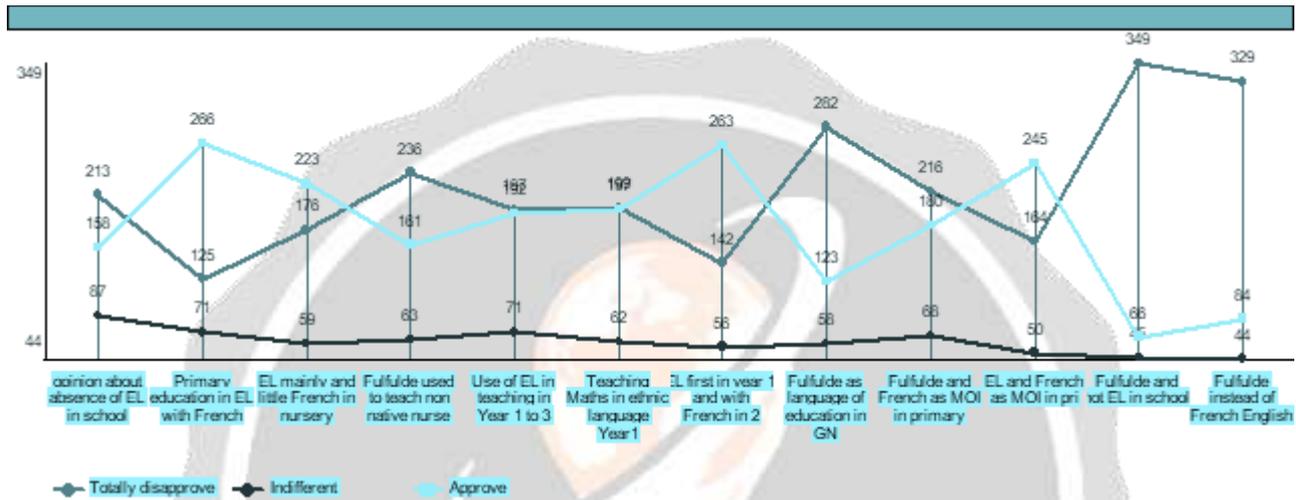
The findings show that the populations would very likely support that their ethnic language (mother tongue) is used to teach Mathematics and sciences. The above data show that there is (mixed) opinion regarding the use of ethnic language in teaching in year one to three, and using the ethnic language to teach mathematics from year one to three.

**RQ5: Would they support transitional MLE with mother tongue?**

There some data that point to the fact that the population would support a transitional mode of MTBMLE whereby the mother tongue is used in the first and second years with gradual introduction of French.

Finally, the informants seem not to be disturbed by the non-inclusion of their ethnic language in the school system.

**Figure 2: Summary of attitude of informants regarding MLE**



**Conditions for successful MTBMLE**

MTBMLE is only relevant nowadays if it concern those children who live in rural areas and who only master the ethnic (local) home language at the time of starting school. In monolingual communities or communities where a local language is dominant, the use of ethnic language as MOI in the primary schools can be justified. MTBMLE cannot not be justified in urban areas where there multilingual classroom. Two recent studies in two contexts could help highlight what doubts the parents would have towards MLE within the ELAN Afrique project supported by IFEF (2017, 2018) (Henry 2017, Ndione 2021).

**MLE in urban centres**

Henry (2017) noted from his study of the use of Ewondo in the teaching in Yaoundé that the difference between the expectations and the reality of the project have proven significant. His study could not demonstrate any linguistic and pedagogical benefits to using Ewondo, unlike socio-political and cultural benefits ones. Due to lack of didactic materials, no cognitive benefits were observed.

MTBMLE should only be implemented if these perceived cognitive(sociological and pedagogical) benefits are real, that the children’s home language is actually the one being used in education; otherwise it would be better to maintain the system as it is. In Maroua, only schools found in some areas and having only students who speak Fulfulde better than French should be enrolled. In case of multilingual practice at home where the child is proficient in both Fulfulde and French, it would be advised either to envisage a Bilingual education (Fulfulde and French) or simply leave the child in the French /English medium school, since the transition in MLE is towards the majority international language.

**Primary schools and the promotion of local indigenous languages**

The teaching of local languages should remain the responsibility of the councils and regions that will promote their teaching and learning in the areas where they are spoken as mother tongue. They could be taught either in a MTBMLE model or as Heritage languages in specific schools where the pupils are given incentives and didactic materials to learn them.

## Endogenous education

### Community driven endogenous education

Given that parents' attitude would likely be in favour of foreign languages, the preservation of indigenous languages through a sustained mode of formal teaching may be implemented through a scheme which gives more place to the communities and local government. In this regard, we advocate the creation of schools with indigenous curriculum in every council, and in towns.

The experience of Koranic schools shows that parents and local communities through local initiatives can actively create a separate educational mechanism for their children. In the town of Maroua, children attend public schools, but also koranic schools every Wednesday evening, every Saturday and Sunday morning.

## 4. Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the prospective opinion of native populations of the Far North region of Cameroon towards an educational reform in favour of MTBMLE and also the use of Fulfulde as MOI in replacement of French and/or English.

The findings show there is some support for the use of mother tongue and French in a transition model and there is stark support to primary school education in mother tongue and French but not Fulfulde as a substitute of French. In fact there seem to be a strong opposition to the idea of using Fulfulde as MOI in nursery school with natives of other ethnic groups. There are mixed opinion regarding use of ethnic language from year one to three and use of Mother tongue to teach maths.

This research points to the fact that indigenous languages still suffer some stigma. The language in education policy reproduces the ideology that local languages are second class languages, unlike foreign languages which have capacity to empower someone. One of the main challenge (even if the government decided to finally implement) will be language ideologies.

Moreover, if the rationale for using mother tongue instead of French or English and MOI is supported by the claims of socio-cognitive benefits for the learners, what is the case in the area where children probably do not master their mother tongue?

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