Instructional Approaches for the Integration of Cultural Elements in Indigenous. Language Classroom: A Case Study of the Bafut Language

Comfort Numfor Nchang
Department of English Modern Letters; Higher Teacher Training College Bambili
The University of Bamenda

Enow Parris Cecilia Bechem
Department of Linguistics and African Languages
The University of Bamenda

ABSTRACT: *Language teaching involves culture teaching. This study examines mother tongue teachers' opinions on the integration of culture elements in the mother tongue classroom. It investigates instructional strategies used by mother tongue teachers in the integration of cultural elements in indigenous language classroom. The study made use of focus group interview with 10 mother tongue literacy teachers. Six key informants were also interviewed. The results showed that, language is a product of culture and must be incorporated as an essential aspect of mother tongue learning and teaching. The results also indicated that, both the mother tongue teachers, and the key informants employ a variety of approaches in the integration of cultural elements in the mother tongue classroom. It is only when cultural elements become an integral part of mother tongue curriculum and instruction, that learners acquire both cultural and communicative competence.*

KEYWORDS: culture, instructional approaches, cultural elements, integration, indigenous language

INTRODUCTION

When a child is born, the child's life, opinions, and language are shaped by what the child comes in contact with. Understanding a culture and its people can be enhanced by knowledge of their language. Children are exposed to their surroundings that they become members of their cultural group. This idea, was discussed by Confucius from time immemorial and was recorded by his follower, Analects (Xu, 1997). The relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted, such that language is used to maintain and convey culture and cultural ties. Linguists and anthropologists have long recognized that the forms and uses of a given language reflect the cultural values of the society in which

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the language is spoken (Hantrais (1989), Emmitt & Pollock 1997). Brooks (1968), argues that physically and mentally of everyone is the same, while the interactions between persons or groups vary widely from place to place. Patterns which emerge from these group behaviours and interactions will be approved of, or disapproved of. Behaviours which are acceptable will vary from location to location, thus forming the basis of different cultures (Brooks, 1968). One's view of the world is formed from these differences. According Hantrais (1989), culture is the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. Thus, peoples' views are dependent on the culture which influences them, and is described using the language which has been shaped by that culture. On their part, Emmitt & Pollock (1997), indicated that, in order for communication to be successful, language use must be associated with culturally appropriate behavior. One is influenced by the language used to express one's ideas, as language is rooted in culture and culture is reflected and passed on by language from generation to generation. Consequently, teachers of a language are also teachers of culture (Byram 1989). Language teachers must therefore teach their learners on the cultural background of language usage, by making use of culturally appropriate teaching styles.

Statement of the Problem

Language learning is a complex process that involves not only mastering the vocabulary, and grammar, but also including culturally appropriate behaviour. Knowledge of vocabulary and grammar alone is not enough for one to be competent in a language. That is, knowledge of linguistic structure alone does not carry with it any special insight into the political, social, religious, or economic system, or even insight into when you should talk and when you should not" Kramsch, (1993, p. 10). One needs to be aware, of culturally appropriate behaviour. Therefore, for successful communication to take place, language use must be associated with culturally appropriate behavior. On the other hand, learners should also understand that, behaviors that are appropriate in their own community may be perceived as inappropriate by members of another speech community. This is, the importance or essence of mutuality between language and culture.

Meanwhile, teachers usually feel unprepared to teach either culture or 'intercultural competence, due to the absence of a model to adapt to in their teaching method. Even if the experience is there, culture keeps changing and shifting as Corbett (2003), in Salim Soran Karim. (2017), indicated earlier. On his part, Cortés (2007), quoted in Salim Soran Karim. (2017), concentrates more on the problems which learners are likely to face if they do not practice the cultural aspects of their language in the classroom. Samovar, Porter, and Jain (1981, p. 24) observe that, culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. Such observations cultivate awareness in language teaching experts that language and culture are inseparable. On his part, Peck (1998, p. 1),

emphasizes that "Without the study of culture, language instruction is inaccurate and incomplete". These observations later developed the perspective that teaching and learning culture in language programs are inevitable.

The implementation of Structuralism, and the traditional methods of language teaching in the beginning of the 1970s, neglected cultural teaching. These teaching approaches regard ESL/EFL teaching as a matter of linguistics, with emphasis placed on structures and vocabulary. The negligence of teaching cultural elements became worse with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the late 1970s. However, in later development of the communicative approach, it was realized that to communicate effectively, one should adapt the properties of his language use to the social 'variables' of class, gender or race in which he/she interacts with others. Consequently, the role of culture in the language curriculum grew, as indicated by the appearance of a great number of teacher-oriented texts, like those of Rivers's (1981) and Hammerly's (1982), which included detailed chapters on culture teaching in ESL/EFL classroom. Robinson's (1988) and Valdes' (1986), are other major works on culture learning in ESL/EFL contexts which appeared during this era. Many researches supported the cultural syllabus from the 1990s, and its importance was reaffirmed by Stern (1992). Meanwhile, other scholars also recognized the inseparable relationship between culture and communication (Byram 1997a) and Kramsch (1993). Consequently, the growth of English as an international language resulted to the inclusion of culture in EFL curriculum. Indigenous languages can do likewise.

Objectives of the Study

1. This study examines mother tongue teachers' opinions on the integration of culture elements in the language classroom.
2. It investigates the strategies mother tongue teachers use for the integration of cultural elements in the Bafut language classroom.

Research Questions

This study will attempt to answer the following research questions.

1. Do you teach your learners in relation to the cultural background of the target language?
2. As mother tongue teachers, what teaching strategies do you implement for the integration of cultural elements into the Bafut language classroom?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section of the study will review studies that have been carried out in relation to the scope of this study, and examines the theories on which this study is based.

Literature Review

Researchers have carried out research underlying culture teaching in the language classroom. There seems to be an agreement in culture teaching in language learning. Researchers (Murphy, 1988, Oatey, 2000, and Gao, 2006), quoted in Salim. (2017), support the idea that teaching culture plays a significant role in language education. Before these views, Murphy (1988) pointed out four different approaches of learning culture in FL curriculum. For the purpose of this study, two approaches will be examined here. On the one hand, is the 'segregated' view which sees 'cultural studies' as independent from language learning, (Murphy (1988, Bennett et al. 2003), in Salim. (2017). On the other hand is the 'integrated' view which sees culture as part of language learning and acknowledges that teaching target language is impossible without teaching culture. Oatey, and Gao, are among the numerous researchers who support this view. Recent studies carried out in this area are reviewed below.

The Concept of Culture

The definition of culture has been a much debated issue among scholars over the years. Condon, (1973), argues that stereotypes assign group characteristics to individual purely on the basis of their cultural membership. The cultural stereotypes affect how people think, speak, act, and interact with one another. As it is indicated by Kramsch, (2013), language is not a bunch of arbitrary linguistic forms applied to a cultural reality that can be found outside of language, in the real world. Without language and other symbolic systems, the habits, beliefs, institutions, and monuments that we call culture would be just observable realities, not cultural phenomena. To become culture, they have to be associated with meaning. The meaning we give to foods, gardens and ways of life constitute culture, (Kramsch 2013, p. 62).

Culture is closely related to one's feelings and activity and is bounded up with social, national, and issues of identity. Culture has become the object of many studies in numerous fields such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and linguistics (Murphy, 1988). According to Condon (1973), culture can be defined as a way of life. No matter where people live, their behaviors and thoughts follow and are generally based on their own cultures. Culture is closely related to one's feelings and activity and is tied up with social, national, and issues of identity. There are different dimensions of culture, which include ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools that characterize a group of people in a given period of time; it is also the beliefs, values, and material objects that create our way of life, Condon (1973). Culture establishes a context of cognitive and affective behavior for each person. It influences individual estimation and attitudes, and can also have an effect on practical aspects of life such as hobbies, Kramsch, (2013).

The Link between Language and Culture

It is nearly impossible to disentangle the influences language and culture have on each other, as language is born out of a culture. According to Samovar, Porter, and Jain (1981),

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culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, but also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. Summarily, culture is the foundation of communication. Stern, (1992), argues that, teaching culture predominantly includes a 'cognitive component', an 'affective component' and a 'behavioural component'. The cognitive component relates to knowledge of TC in general, such as geographical knowledge, different values and attitudes. The affective component relates to target language learners' curiosity and inclination towards TC. The behavioural component relates learners' behaviour to the way they encounter culture appropriately. Thus, teaching culture plays a significant role in language education. The integrated view looks at culture as a part of language learning and points out that teaching target language is impossible without teaching the culture.

According to Allison & Vining, (1999), language presents our ideas or concepts, which are subject to change depending on which cultural elements are dominant at any given moment. Whenever language expands, the culture changes. This means that languages can evolve in response to the changing historical and social conditions. Meanwhile, Cortés (2007), reiterates more on the problems which students are likely to face if they do not practice cultural elements in the classroom.

Culture in Language Teaching

Bárdos, (2005), indicated that, the projects and proposals of the European Council regarding language teaching showed a significant change of perspective in the 1970s. This change was influenced by research results in the domains of pragmatics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and social psychology. In a multicultural setting, foreign language speakers have to be able to use the target language following the norms of the respective community, and be aware of what should or should not be said as part of their language behaviour. Speakers must take into consideration the situation, the circumstances, the topic, the expected level of formality, their partner's level of knowledge, and the culture-sensitive scenarios. The development of genuine and accurate language behaviour and personal style is a result of such careful approach and thorough selection (pp. 149–150). Consequently, language teachers must become mediators between cultures, the primary sources of the target culture for their learners.

According to Bárdos (2004), a currently fashionable wider interpretation of culture, meaning that culture is everything that is created, made, or touched by humans, may become relevant from the point of view of planning language teaching. This has several advantages, as teachers can freely choose from various topics and phenomena which can easily meet these requirements. Other viewpoints regarding the status, importance, and content of culture in language teaching, have been formulated, showing the complexity of the issue. Some frequently quoted interpretations belong to Rivers, (1981), and Seelye (1993). According to Rivers, (1981, p. 314), "we must focus on both appropriate content

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and activities that enable students to assimilate that content. Activities should encourage them to go beyond fact, so that they begin to perceive and experience vicariously the deeper levels of the culture of the speakers of the language". Seelye, (1993, p. 10), confirms that, learning a language in isolation of its cultural roots prevents one from becoming socialized into its contextual use. Knowledge of linguistic structure alone does not carry with it any special insight into the political, social, religious, or economic system, or even insight into when you should talk and when you should not.

According to the National Standards for Foreign Language Education project (1996), students cannot truly master new language until they have mastered the cultural context in which the new language occurs. This means that understanding a new culture is an important element in achieving the success in second language acquisition. In fact, the learning of language and the learning of culture can be compared with a child's first experiences with the family into which he or she is born, the community to which he or she belongs and the environment in which he or she lives (Lu, 1998). We acquire our mother tongue naturally during our childhood because our society, our environment, and our culture continually feed us. Similarly, when we acquire a new language, we also digest the new culture's ingredients.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Lev Vygotsky's social interactionist perspective and the Whorfian hypothesis

Social Interactionist Perspective

The social interactionist perspective is based on the sociocultural interactions that help children develop their linguistic capacities and is based on the theories of Lev Vygotsky, whose premise contends that language development in early childhood is formed through social interactions with those in their surroundings that create a language acquisition support system (Giorgis & Glazer, 2008). This theory is an approach to language acquisition that stresses the environment, and the context in which the language is acquired. It focuses on pragmatics of language rather than grammar which should come later. In this approach, the beginner speaker and the experienced speaker exist in a negotiated arrangement where feedback is always possible. The social interactionist theory is concerned more with pragmatics of the language, unlike Chomsky who pays more attention to the development of grammar and Skinner who pays gives more significance to active linguistic environment. However, the social interactionist theory does not neglect these previous theories, but it gives an additional social perspective of language acquisition as a compromise bridge.

Whorfian Hypothesis

According to the Whorfian Hypothesis, our words are coded in language and so are our thoughts and this linguistic pattern dictates more than just the language we speak. This

pattern also dictates our sense of reason, how we view nature, our relationship views, and every other aspect of our conscious and unconscious mind (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). This phenomenon is known as linguistic determinism and is based on Whorf's theory that every language utilizes a unique set of semantic representations (Ajayi, 2008). These semantics determined aspects of our conceptual representations, is how language influences habitual thought (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Bafut; a town in Mezam Division of the North West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. Bafut is spoken by the Bafut people. Bafut belongs to the Ngemba group of languages that, in turn, falls under the Grassfield language which differs considerably in vocabulary and structure from the common dialect. Despite these few variations, the mutual intelligibility between the two dialects of Bafut is very high. However, the dialect which Linguists use in studies is the central dialect.

This study was conducted by taking a sample unit of 10 teachers of literacy classes, all native speakers of the Bafut language, aged 27 and above. The method of sampling was purposive sampling to include the targeted study group. This study made use of group interview known as focus group discussion (FGD) methods, involving the 10 Bafut literacy teachers, both males and females, to collect its data. The teachers of Bafut literacy classes were interviewed to share their experiences, viewpoints, and knowledge on the inclusion of cultural materials in the mother tongue classroom, and the teaching strategies they use for the integration of cultural elements into the Bafut language classroom, given that the Bafut language is fading away with the older generation, due to the language contact situation in the Bafut community. The interviews were done in the Bafut language and translated back to English so as to give the teachers the opportunity to use the Bafut language they teach in the classroom. The interviews were conducted in the Bafut Development Association (BDM) Hall, in Bamenda.

Six key informants (3 males and 3 females) were also selected for the study, from the Bafut community. The selection of key informants was based on knowledgeability, given that they were all linguists, and mother tongue teacher trainers. These trainers of trainers were those the researcher could easily talk to and who understood and had the information the researcher needed. That is, linguists with sound background knowledge of mother tongue teaching methodologies. This was to ensure that their knowledge, opinions, experiences and methodologies in culture teaching in the mother tongue classroom were properly reflected in the findings.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In this section of the study, the results of the interview with the 6 key informants and those of the group discussion with literacy teachers of the Bafut language are presented. The results of the focus group discussion were complimented by findings from the six key

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informants. Some useful ideas and strategies on the integration of cultural elements in the Bafut language classroom are presented.

Question One: Do you teach your learners in relation to the cultural background of the target language? This question was directed to the 6 linguists or key informants; for the simple reason that they are mother tongue teacher trainers, who need to equip mother tongue teachers with resources qualify them as mother tongue teacher.

According to these key informants, Language learning, specifically the mother, should involve different dimensions, vocabulary, grammatical competence, language proficiency communicative competence, and cultural understanding. Therefore, mother tongue teachers should be aware of the significance of culture studies in the language classrooms. These will increase learners' cultural awareness. They also acknowledged that 'language learning is culture learning' and vice versa. According to them, the understanding of one will be difficult without the other. They explained that, teaching or learning a language in the classroom independent of its cultural roots prevents the learners from establishing a relationship with the target language community.

As the information from the key informants indicates, the culture of the native or target language speakers should not be ignored in the language teaching and learning process. This indicates the importance of native speaker norms. Nevertheless, in case of some international languages used in several countries in the world, including Cameroon, for example, English, the issue becomes more complicated, as there are different varieties of English spoken around the world.

Question Two: As mother tongue teachers, what teaching strategies do you implement for the integration of cultural elements into the Bafut language classroom? The mother tongue literacy teachers involved in the focus group interview talked about making use of the different teaching strategies to include cultural items in the Bafut language classrooms. They made mention of the following strategies and explained how they are used in the classroom.

Literature in the Bafut Language

An effective means to develop an understanding of the Bafut language and culture is through literary works, such as story books, folktales. Folktales are stories originating in popular culture, typically passed on by word of mouth. Short stories and oral tales in the Bafut language will provide the readers with insights of the Bafut language and culture. Carter (1995) points out that literature, is the surest bridge to understanding. Let learners read novels, plays, short stories, in the mother tongue.

The teachers said they teach culture through oral tradition. This is means of communication where knowledge, ideas, arts and cultural elements are received, preserved, and transmitted orally from generation to generation. The Bafut language teachers make use of oral tradition in the classroom through songs, chants, folklore, prose and verses. In this way,

the history, oral literature, cultural norms and other knowledge are transmitted across generations through oral tradition. The key informants added that, mother tongue teachers are encourage to make use of oral tradition in the classroom as they are reflections of the customs, traditions, history, values and practices, inherited and piloted by the Bafut people for so many generations. If teachers implement this in the classroom, learners will unconsciously adopt the Bafut cultural values from such entertainment sources with little or no extra efforts.

Bafut Films or Movies

Developing communication skills is the main goal of language learning. Thus, one of the most effective way of developing this skill is to expose language learners to real life situations, such as films, movies or dramas. Watching films on television at home, in the language classroom, or on mobile phones offer language learners the opportunity to witness behaviors that are not apparent in text books. The teachers established that, they usually send films to the learners to share through android phones, and watch at home. After watching these films, aspects of the Bafut language and culture are then discussed in the Bafut literacy classroom. The learners may also be given different tasks to perform after watching or listening, such as describing the behaviour of characters performing different roles in the films. Teachers may also engage learners in the discussions of cultural norms, and values of the Bafut language community, including non-verbal behaviours such as gestures, reflected in the films. Learners could also be encouraged to describe the observed behaviours and try out different communication strategies in the Bafut language. The key informants added that Bafut films and dramas can develop the language learners skills, vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation, and increase the learners' cultural understanding, as well as intercultural awareness. Therefore, Bafut films and dramas provide exposures to real language used in cultural context, as they reflect the Bafut language and culture used in real life. Herron et al.'s (1999) study showed that students achieved overall cultural knowledge after watching videos from the target culture in the classroom. Thus, films are effective materials in teaching basic language skills, and should therefore be included as teaching aids in the language classroom.

Ethnographic Studies

Sending learners into the community to gather information is an effective means to develop an understanding of the Bafut culture. The Bafut language teachers indicated that they often assign learners to carry out ethnographic interviews with native speakers in the Bafut community, record the information through any means available to them, such as, through video and audiotapes, or note taking. Learners are usually assign to gather information from such activities or sources as;

➢ Cultural and development associations,
➢ Social groups,
➢ Traditional dance groups,

- ➢ Family histories,
- ➢ Interviews with quarter heads or heads of Bafut traditional houses, etc.

The teachers said they often assist in the collection of such cultural elements in the Bafut community by organizing the learners into groups, and offering ongoing supervision.

Learners as Cultural Resources

Sending learners into the Bafut community to gather information is also an effective means to develop an understanding of the Bafut language and culture. According to the literacy teachers, mother tongue classrooms are less culturally and ethnically diverse. They said as mother tongue teachers, they utilize the resources this provides. One of them explain that, he often use learners as expert sources to present aspects of the cultural groups and associations to which they and their parents belong, in the Bafut language classroom. These may include cultural aspects of Bafut traditional dance groups, traditional meetings and other cultural associations meetings. This learning activity, or presentations offer learners the opportunities to organize and make connect between the Bafut culture and foreign language culture.

Role Play

Role play is a very important sociocultural approach used in the inclusion of cultural aspects in the language classroom. The teachers pointed out that, they also utilize role play as a useful instructional technique in the Bafut language classroom. A sociocultural approach is the most useful method currently applied in language instructions (Wertsch, 1991). The main objective of a sociocultural approach is to prepare learners for communication and dialogue between cultures. According to Savignon (1997), sociocultural strategies can be seen as one of the most efficient ways for learners to achieve sociocultural competence within communicative competence.

The teachers further explained that using this strategy in the Bafut language classroom, they ask learners to role play or act out communication roles based on the Bafut culture. For example, after learning about ways of addressing different groups of people in the Bafut culture, such as people of the same age, older people, chiefs, and people of different statuses, learners could role play a situation in which greetings are used. In the course of doing this, other learners observe and identify appropriate ways of greeting in the Bafut culture. They then role play the same situation using a culturally appropriate form of greetings. This enables the learners to develop communicative strategies in relation to the Bafut cultural norms.

Culture-specific Items or Objects

Culture-specific items or objects can be utilized as important teaching aids in the language classroom. The teacher informants established that, they use cultural items or objects specific to the Bafut culture to be talked about in in the classroom. Richards & Schmidt, (2010: 485), refer to such culture-specific items or objects as realia. They define realia, in

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language teaching as "actual objects and items which are brought into a classroom as examples or as aids to be talked or written about and used in teaching". The teachers acknowledged the use of caved objects, articles such as baskets, traditional attires, musical instruments, cups, or even food, to discuss their cultural relevance and plan various activities based on their cultural or historical importance.

Using Common Proverbs as Transferred Tool

Another relevant strategy for the introduction of cultural elements in the mother tongue classroom is the introduction and practice of such culture-specific elements as proverbs. A *proverb* (from Latin: proverbium) is a traditional saying that expresses a perceived truth about human behavior, or give some form of life advice, based on experience. Bafut proverbs improve communicative competence and cultural knowledge. Informants acknowledged that, they make use of common proverbs in the Bafut language classroom. This helps the learners to understand the literal and figurative meanings of proverbs in the Bafut culture, when to use them, and how they are different from or similar to proverbs in other cultures. According to Ciccarelli, (1996), proverbs can also help learners them to understand how differences might underscore the historical and cultural background of a country. According to the key informants, using proverbs as a means to transmit the Bafut culture can guide learners' behaviour, and help them to explore the values of indigenous Bafut culture, represented in the proverbs. Therefore, these structures must be explained and practised in the classroom. These among many other strategies can be used to integrate cultural elements in the mother tongue classroom.

DISCUSSION

With regards to the findings, all the mother tongue teachers and the key informants seem to be aware of the importance of integrating cultural elements into the mother tongue curriculum. The literacy teachers mentioned that language and culture are deeply interwoven, and cannot be separated. This implies that they consider the inclusion of cultural material into the mother tongue curriculum as imperative. Therefore, there is an increase in the awareness of including cultural elements in language teaching curriculum. However, whether this increase is in relation to mother tongue education was beyond the scope of our study. Thus, future researchers may consider this gap in their research. Integrating culture into mother tongue teaching requires careful planning. What cultural elements should be integrated into mother tongue curriculum, and how much time it should take, should be considered in the preparation of these material.

Implication to Practical Research

Literature, films, culture-specific material, role play, and other sources were suggested as significant approaches used to integrate culture into the mother tongue classroom. Developing a systematic approach in which these strategies are incorporated into mother tongue text books may result to competence in the mother tongue. The practical approaches

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used by mother tongue teachers may be used as topics of discussion in the seminars of mother tongue teaching practice.

Mother tongue teachers should be trained to develop sound objectives in relation to the cultural content of the curriculum and develop culture-specific activities in line with the objectives. However, these teachers cannot singlehandedly design all the teaching materials. Mother tongue text book designers can assist in designing the text books. Meanwhile mother tongue teachers should develop a critical approach to recommended mother tongue textbooks and select the best materials for the inclusion of cultural elements in the language classroom.

Integrating mother tongue cultural elements into the mother tongue curriculum can improve communicative competence. In Bafut, classrooms are heavily populated with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. The incorporation of culturally relevant teaching approaches can improve their understanding of the Bafut language. Linguists and mother tongue teachers can work together and write textbooks that focus on teaching culture. This will help fill the gap between the theory and practice of effectively teaching culture.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to examine mother tongue teachers' opinions on the integration of culture elements in the language classroom, and investigate the instructional strategies mother tongue teachers use for the integration of cultural elements in the Bafut language classroom. Cultural learning helps us to discover that there are a multitude of ways of viewing the world. Understanding the relationship between culture and language helps language teachers to develop instructional strategies for teaching our languages. In the information driven world, language ability gradually becomes an essential skill. For children to achieve linguistic competence in the mother tongue, culture should be integrated in language teaching curriculum. Thus, mother tongue teachers must instruct their learners on the basis of the cultural background of the target language usage.

Further Research

It should be noted that the present study reported the opinions of literacy teachers of a single mother tongue, the Bafut language. As such, the findings may not be generalizable. Further studies including other mother tongues are encouraged, to enable a better understanding of the problem.

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Biography

Comfort Numfor holds a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in English Language; a Master of Arts (M.A.) in Applied Linguistics & a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) in Applied Linguistics from the University of Buea in Cameroon. She is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English Modern Letters; Higher Teacher Training College Bambili, the University of Bamenda. At present, she teaches applied linguistic courses. She has published papers in national and international journals such as Plurilinguisme en Afrique, Epasa Moto, The Gongm Epitome and Nyaa & Partners Publishers etc. Contact: 677494992; email: nnumforcomfort@yahoo.com

Biography

Dr. Enow Parris Cecilia Bechem is a Lecturer and a Sign Language teacher trainer in the University of Bamenda. Enow Parris has a Ph.D in Applied Linguistics with triple concentration in, Deaf education and sign language, Psycholinguistics and Speech pathology. She is a member of the Cameroon Deaf Empowerment Organisation. An organization aimed at working for full education opportunities for deaf Cameroonians from nursery to higher education, promotes human and civil rights of deaf people and their families through advocacy, develop and promote Cameroon Sign Language as the language of deaf people in Cameroon. Enow Parris has taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses and supervised more than fifteen dissertations in Linguistics. She has presented and published many scientific articles in National and International journals as well as conferences. She is a research consultant, a reviewer and a special education specialist with a passion to serve humanity. She is an advocate of best special education practices in **Cameroon**. Email: enowparris76@gmail.com