

The Role of the International Organization of Francophonie on Cultural Diversity and Peace in Francophone Africa: The case of the ELAN-Africa Project in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT: Following the independence of former French colonies, the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) was created to promote French language and culture in former French colonies. Over time, influenced by the 2005 UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity, its focus expanded toward promoting multilingualism and peace. In this context, this study examines the ELAN-Africa initiative launched in 2011 to integrate indigenous languages into primary education in Francophone Africa, with emphasis on Cameroon's Centre Region. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 66 primary school teachers through structured surveys, complemented by secondary data from OIF reports. A descriptive statistical analysis was applied to assess four core variables: frequency of indigenous language instruction, teachers' cultural competence, availability of didactic materials, and teachers' level of satisfaction. The findings reveal that although indigenous languages such as Ewondo and Basaa are now part of the curriculum, implementation remains limited due to insufficient training, low cultural competence, and lack of didactic materials. Despite challenges, the initiative marks progress toward cultural diversity and peace education. The study concludes that OIF's evolving policy reflects a shift from linguistic dominance to cultural pluralism, requiring stronger institutional support to sustain indigenous cultural preservation.

KEYWORDS: *Francophonie, Cultural Diversity, ELAN-Africa, Peace, Cameroon,*

I. INTRODUCTION

After the Independence of former French colonies, International Organization of Francophonie (OIF) was formed with a mission to promote the common interests of French language and culture. OIF historic foreign policy of exclusively promoting French language and culture had a regressive effect to ideals of cultural diversity and peace.¹ The question of integrating indigenous languages and cultures within the educational system of Francophone countries has often been a subject of intense academic debate. Since the end of colonialism and with the advent of globalization, changes in the foreign policy of the organization of Francophonie are driven by internal and external factors, largely by the 2005 Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted in 2005 the first legally international binding instrument on cultural diversity. The Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions was agreed upon with an overwhelming majority by 148 states, with only the United States and Israel voting against it.² The convention sets out legally binding rules that states and non-state actors are to implement at both the national and international levels.

The question of integrating indigenous languages and cultures within the educational system of Francophone countries has often been a subject of intense academic debate. Though, the International Organization of Francophonie brings together countries around the world that share the French language and committed in promoting the French culture, the organization undertake initiatives aimed at the preservation, revitalization, and promotion of indigenous languages and cultures within its member states. The Charter of la

¹ Neathery-Castro, J., & Rousseau, M. O. (2005). Does French matter? France and Francophonie in the age of globalization. *The French Review*, 678-693.

² Neuwirth, R. J. (2006). 'United in Divergency': A Commentary on the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. *Heidelberg Journal of International Law (HJIL)*, 66, 819-862.

Francophonie defines its missions and the foreign policy objectives to promote cultural diversity as essential components of its member states' identities. It expresses the desire to promote French culture while respecting the specificity of the indigenous systems. In effect, OIF supports initiatives to enhance educational and, cultural exchanges, and the preservation of cultural heritage in francophone states.

In this regard, on September 08, 2011, the representatives of the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF) signed in Paris, a memorandum of understanding with 08 African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, DR Congo, and Senegal).³ The convention, known as School and National Languages in Africa, (ELAN-Africa Initiative) promotes the joint use of indigenous languages and culture across the primary educational system in Francophone Africa.⁴ Since 2011 hitherto, OIF together and its partners, have been implementing the ambitious ELAN project to valorise multilingual and multicultural education in Francophone states.

Though a great deal of academic literature examined the Organization of Francophonie's contributions to cultural diplomacy in Africa, they however fail to investigate its role on cultural diversity and peace in Cameroon. This article therefore, scrutinised OIF ELAN-Africa project on cultural diversity in Cameroon. In this respect, the analysis examines the level of implementation and effects of the ELAN-Africa project 11 years after its implementation in Cameroon. The key question that animate this research is:

to what extent does the ELAN-Africa initiative preserve, revitalize, or promotes indigenous languages and cultures across primary schools in the Centre Region of Cameroon?

A quantitative research method was employed to arrive at the findings. The data was drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was comprised of survey administered to primary school teachers implementing the ELAN-Africa initiative in Cameroon while the secondary source of information was derived from OIF's reports, and the academic curriculum on national languages and culture. A descriptive method was employed to analyse the data collected. The article is structured into three main parts; the first section on legal and theoretical framework presents a deeper understanding of the concept on cultural diversity and peace. The second section, presents OIF's foreign policy on cultural diversity and peace. Section three focuses on the results of the Implementation of the ELAN-Africa Initiative in the Centre region of Cameroon. The findings show the extent to which the initiative contributes to diversity of cultural expressions in 12 primary schools across the Centre region. The final section shed light on the limitations of the ELAN-Africa Initiative in the circumscribed area of the research.

II. Legal and Theoretical Framework of Cultural Diversity and Peace

The 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity calls on nations and institutions to work together for the preservation of culture in all its forms. The declaration spells out the general principles that states and international organizations are expected to implement in order to promote cultural diversity. It underpins that culture is at the heart of contemporary debates about social cohesion, and peace. The declaration underpins that respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation in a climate of mutual trust is the best assurance of peace and security.⁵ The declaration contains twelve articles that underpins cultural diversity; article 1 upholds cultural diversity as the common heritage of humanity. According to this article, cultural diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of groups and societies that make up humankind. It is considered as a common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of the present and future generations. Therefore, cultural diversity is necessary for human beings as biodiversity is for nature. Article 3 decrees that cultural diversity is a factor for development that widens a range of options open to everyone. It is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence. According to article 4, the defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. This implies that cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, inherent from birth, indivisible and inalienable.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted in 2005 the first legally binding international instrument on cultural diversity. The Convention on the protection and

³ Ramel, F. (2014). Task sharing and peace operations: The role of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. In *Peace Operations in the Francophone World* (pp. 38-53). Routledge.

⁴ Nocus, I., Guimard, P., & Florin, A. (2017). Les effets d'un programme bilingue d'apprentissage de l'écrit (initiative ELAN-Afrique) à l'école primaire en Afrique subsaharienne francophone. *Recherches en éducation*, (29).

⁵ Matsuura, K. (2005). Appendix I UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. *Diogenes*, 52(1), 141-145.

promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions was agreed upon with an overwhelming majority by 148 states, with only the United States and Israel voting against it.⁶ The convention sets out legally binding rules that states and non-state actors are to implement at both the national and international levels. It complements the general principles outlined in the 2001 Universal Declaration that states and international organizations are expected to implement in order to promote cultural diversity. Article 4 of the convention decrees that “The defense of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from the respect for human dignity” and Article 5 underpins that “Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible and interdependent.”⁷

The Convention acknowledges that cultural diversity is a valuable asset for individuals and societies that contributes to mutual understanding, peace and sustainable development. It emphasizes the rights of individuals and communities to express, create, and disseminate their cultural expressions. The primary objectives of the convention are to safeguard the diversity of cultural expressions, including traditional cultural expressions, languages, and artistic forms. It encourages international cooperation and dialogue among countries to enhance cultural diversity. It also highlights the importance of integrating culture into strategies for sustainable development, recognizing that culture plays a crucial role in social cohesion and peace.

The eight key principles that guides the implementation of cultural diversity in plural communities include: First, the convention assert that cultural diversity can be protected and promoted only if human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of individuals to choose their cultural expressions are guaranteed. According to this principle, no one should infringe human rights and fundamental freedoms as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Second, the convention rules that it is the sovereign right and duties of states to adopt measures that protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions within their territory. Third, it contends that the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions presuppose the recognition of equal dignity of and respect for all cultures, including the cultures of persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples. Fourth, international cooperation and solidarity should enable countries, especially developing countries, to create and strengthen their means of cultural expression at national and international levels. According to this principle, parties to the convention should cooperate in providing assistance to each other in situations of serious threat to cultural expressions. Also, the convention underpins that cultural diversity is a vector for development. Therefore, the protection, promotion and maintenance of cultural diversity are an essential requirement for sustainable development. Furthermore, states and non-state actors should adopt measures that promote in an appropriate manner openness to other cultures of the world. According to this principle, parties to the convention may take all appropriate measures to protect and preserve cultural expressions on their territory that are at risk of extinction. Additional provisions in the convention set out requirements for states and non-state actors to strengthen bilateral, regional and international cooperation on cultural diversity. The provisions encourage international organizations to integrate culture in their development policies and calls upon developed countries to facilitate cultural exchanges with developing countries.

The Convention has been ratified by 152 states and non-state actors worldwide. The level of approval by the international community reflects the global commitment to protecting and promoting cultural diversity and Peace. While the OIF brings together French-speaking countries and promotes cultural diversity, it has not yet signed and ratified the Convention. However, it is worth noting that the OIF collaborates closely with UNESCO on various initiatives related to cultural diversity in the francophone geopolitical space. Therefore, this article examines how and to what extent the International Organization (OIF) of la Francophonie through its ELAN-Africa Initiative promotes western, and non-western cultures in French speaking communities.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THEORY OF MULTICULTURALISM

Multiculturalism is an important and useful theoretical construct that informs cultural diversity and peace. The roots of this concept could be traced from the international relations theory of liberalism. One of the leading theorists on multiculturalism is the Canadian born political philosopher, William Kymlicka. According to him Multiculturalism is the idea that distinct identities and cultural groups should be acknowledged, preserved, and supported. The concept seeks to address the challenges that arise out of cultural diversity and

⁶ Neuwirth, R. J. (2006). 'United in Divergency': A Commentary on the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. *Heidelberg Journal of International Law (HJIL)*, 66, 819-862.

⁷ Betzler, D. (2020). Implementing UNESCO's Convention on Cultural Diversity at the regional level: Experiences from evaluating cultural competence centers. *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 27(4), 511-525.

ethnic marginalisation.⁸ Kymlicka championed the concept of multiculturalism and argued that there are three main types of multiculturalism. First, liberal multiculturalism underpins individual rights and freedom. This mostly reflects the right of an individual to retain, practice, and celebrate their culture and cultural identity. Liberal multiculturalism recognizes and tolerates cultural differences. However, it is important to note that this approach of recognition and tolerance is supports cultures that are rooted in 'liberal ideologies. Second, conservative multiculturalism rejects the liberal idea of unity in diversity and argues that for national unity and peace to observe in diverse societies, cultural homogeneity is required. This cultural homogeneity and unity can be achieved through assimilation. Third, Cosmopolitan multiculturalism values cultural diversity but only to the extent where components of different cultures are recognised and adopted as part of a wider goal to establish a unified international identity.⁹ This research considers liberal multiculturalism which accepts competing political ideologies, cultural practices and beliefs more useful for the purpose of this research. Liberal multiculturalism accepts and tolerates all cultures regardless of whether they have conflicting values.

According to Ngwa Ridley (2023), Multiculturalism has two dimensions, the internal and external or national and international dimensions. The former refers to a population's relationship and sense of belonging within a state and the later describes the way the state relates to a population's relationship and affinity to the international community. The internal dimension focuses on the practice of cultural diversity within the territorial borders of a state and while the external approach stress on the practice of cultural diversity among other states.¹⁰

International Organizations implement multiculturalism in academic environment by promoting ethnic differences and respect of the right to cultural expression. As a result of the rise of multiculturalism and cultural diplomacy, educational curricula and policies in most parts of the world have experienced transformations. Such transformation is witnessed at all levels of education, including primary schools.

Overview of the Foreign Policy of the International Organization of La Francophonie

The International Organization of Francophonie brings together countries around the world that share the French language and committed to promoting French culture. The organization focuses on fostering cooperation and solidarity among its member states through various cultural initiatives.¹¹ The Charter of la Francophonie defines the missions and the foreign policy objectives of the organization. Though La Francophonie does not have a unified foreign policy, it provides a platform for member states to engage in multilateral diplomacy to address challenges that may arise as a result of differences in cultural expression. La Francophonie's foreign policy objectives as stipulated in its charter can be broadly categorized into 4 key areas:

First, it's the principle of promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. The International Organization of La Francophonie promotes French language and cultural diversity as essential components of its member states' identities. It supports initiatives to enhance educational and, cultural exchanges, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Through these efforts, the organization aims promote the values of linguistic and cultural diversity within and among its member states. Secondly, another foreign policy objective of the organization is to foster economic cooperation and sustainable development among its member states. It supports initiatives aimed at reducing poverty, and enhancing economic integration within the Francophone world. Such development initiatives include promoting trade and investment, supporting entrepreneurship, and facilitating cooperation in areas such as agriculture, infrastructure, and technology.

Thirdly, La Francophonie foreign policy objective is anchored on promoting peace, and stability within its member states.¹² As outlined in its charter, the organization supports diplomatic efforts, mediation processes, and peacekeeping operations in Francophone regions facing conflicts or political crises. The organization also

⁸ Kymlicka, W. (2015). The three lives of multiculturalism. In *Revisiting multiculturalism in Canada* (pp. 15-35). Brill.

⁹ Ibid

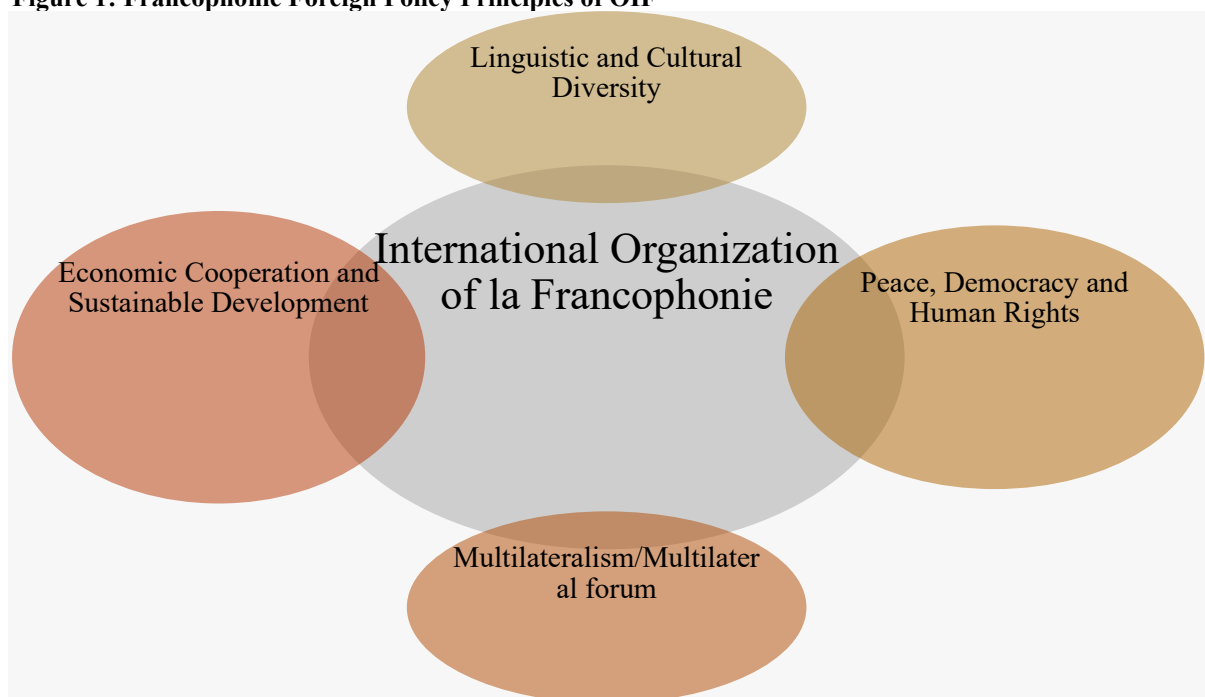
¹⁰ Ngwa, N. R., & Akgün, B. (2021). Transformation of National Identity, Geo-politics and Nation Building in Post-colonial African States: The Cases of Cameroon and Senegal. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 56(8), 1757-1779.

¹¹ Majumdar, M. A. (2024). Francophonie and Africa: Past, present and future perspectives. In *Routledge Handbook of Francophone Africa* (pp. 71-87). Routledge.

¹² Kohnert, D. (2022). Francophonie in sub-Saharan Africa: Post-colonial dependence or self-determination?. Available at SSRN 4295136.

advocates for respect for human rights, democratic governance, and the rule of law as fundamental principles within its member states. Fourthly, as stipulated in the charter, the organization actively engages in multilateral forums and collaborates with other international organizations to address global challenges.¹³ It seeks to amplify the voice of its member states on issues such as climate change, sustainable development, disarmament, human rights, and gender equality. Through its participation in international platforms, La Francophonie aims to contribute to shaping global policies and promoting the interests of its member states.

Figure 1: Francophonie Foreign Policy Principles of OIF



Source: Designed by the author

It's important to note foreign policies and priorities may vary among individual member states of La Francophonie, as they each have their own national interests and foreign policy objectives. Nonetheless, La Francophonie serves as a platform for dialogue and cultural cooperation among its members. It is equally imperative to emphasize that the analysis in this research is limited to the extent of implementation Francophonie's foreign policy on cultural and linguistic cooperation in Cameroon.

On November 19 and 20, 2022 Head of states of the international Organization of la Francophonie gathered during the 19th Summit held in Djerba and reaffirmed their commitments to use French to build unity amidst diversity within francophone geopolitical space.¹⁴ The declaration of the summit valorises the use of indigenous languages and parties pledge to work together with representatives of other language groups to enforce the principles of multilingualism and cultural diversity. Furthermore, OIF authorities declared the will to intensify cultural exchanges in the field of education. They stated their commitment to improve the importance of indigenous cultures in scientific and technical research nationally and internationally. Thus, at the 19th summit member states vowed to strengthen the respect of multilingualism in internal and external communication among francophone states.¹⁵ The also noted that digital technology is a powerful lever for indigenous culture and economic development. To this end, they support the development of indigenous cultural and creative industries that play a strategic role in contributing to economic growth and sustainable development. Though OIF brings together countries and regions where French is spoken or has a significant cultural presence, it

¹³ Erforth, B. (2020). Multilateralism as a tool: Exploring French military cooperation in the Sahel. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 43(4), 560-582.

¹⁴ Francophonie Summit (2022) The Djerba Declaration; retrieved from <https://www.francophoniedjerba2022.tn/sites/default/files/2022-11/xviii-sommet-declaration-de-djerba.pdf> accessed on 09

¹⁵ Ibid

supports initiatives aimed at the preservation, revitalization, and promotion of indigenous languages within its member states.

One specific project related to indigenous languages within the OIF is the digital language project. This project aims to develop digital tools and resources to support the preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages. It involves the creation of digital platforms, mobile applications, and other technological solutions that can assist in language documentation, teaching, and learning.¹⁶ The project also focuses on capacity building and training initiatives to empower indigenous communities to use these digital tools effectively. Through this project, the OIF collaborates with member states, indigenous communities, linguistic experts, and technology partners to develop innovative solutions that contribute to the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages. By leveraging digital technologies, the OIF strives to address the challenges faced by indigenous languages and facilitate their transmission to future generations.

The International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) has collaborated with numerous ethnic and linguistic groups. The OIF has supported initiatives related to Inuit languages, such as Inuktitut, which is spoken by the Inuit communities in Canada.¹⁷ Efforts have been made to develop resources and tools for language preservation and education, including digital platforms and educational materials. The OIF has also been involved in projects related to Creole languages, including Haitian Creole.¹⁸ These initiatives aim to promote the use and recognition of Creole languages and culture within member states, including their integration into educational systems and cultural programs.

The OIF has equally supported initiatives related to indigenous languages spoken in African countries. For example, the organization has been involved in projects to preserve and promote languages such as Wolof in Senegal, Lingala in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Malagasy in Madagascar.¹⁹ One example of a project supported by the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) to preserve and promote an indigenous language in Africa is the "Wolof Language Promotion and Digital Tools" project in Senegal. The OIF has been involved in initiatives aimed at preserving and revitalizing the Wolof language, which is widely spoken in Senegal and also serves as a lingua franca in the country. The project focuses on leveraging digital technologies to develop tools and resources for the preservation and promotion of Wolof.²⁰ It involves the creation of digital platforms, mobile applications, and educational materials that facilitate language learning and documentation. These tools aim to make Wolof more accessible to learners, including both native speakers and individuals interested in learning the language. The project incorporates capacity building and training initiatives to empower local communities and educators to effectively use these digital tools in language instruction.²¹ While in Benin, the organization has supported projects aimed at revitalizing indigenous languages such as Fon and Yoruba.²² The projects involve the development of educational resources, training programs for teachers, and the organization of cultural events to promote the usage and transmission of these languages within the country.

Results and Discussions on the Implementation of the ELAN-Africa Initiative in the Centre Region from 2012-2024

After gaining independence from France, Cameroon's political liberation was not followed by cultural and linguistic autonomy. After independence, the International Organization of Francophonie (OIF) was formed

¹⁶ Adda, G., Vasilescu, I., & Yvon, F. (2023). Language Report French. In *European Language Equality: A Strategic Agenda for Digital Language Equality* (pp. 139-142). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

¹⁷ Das, S. N. (2012). "La Francophonie" and Beyond: Comparative Methods in Studies of Linguistic Minorities.

¹⁸ Lionnet, F. (2022). World Literature, Francophonie, and Creole Cosmopolitics 1. In *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (pp. 267-276). Routledge.

¹⁹ Kouya, H. K., & Oba, D. (2021). The Contribution of the International Organization of Francophonie in Cultural Matter in the Republic of Congo from 1981 to 2016. *Randwick International of Social Science Journal*, 2(4), 347-363.

²⁰ Thomas, D. (2021). Bibliodiversity: Denationalizing and Defrancophonizing Francophonie. *Reframing Postcolonial Studies: Concepts, Methodologies, Scholarly Activisms*, 93-110.

²¹ Ibid

²² Adda, G., Vasilescu, I., & Yvon, F. (2023). Language Report French. In *European Language Equality: A Strategic Agenda for Digital Language Equality* (pp. 139-142). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

with a mission to defend the common interests of French language and culture. OIF historic foreign policy of universal French education had an adverse effect on the promotion of cultural diversity and peace in post-colonial African states.²³ With the advent of globalization, changes in the foreign policy of the organization of Francophonie are driven by internal and external factors, largely the 2005 Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions and the Cameroon's 2035 vision which promotes unity, peace and diversity. The question of integrating the teaching of mother tongues in the educational system of Cameroon has often been a subject of intense academic debate. This article therefore, analyses OIF ELAN-Africa project on cultural diversity in Cameroon. In this respect, the analysis examines the level of implementation and effects of the ELAN-Africa project 10 years after its implementation in Cameroon.

On September 08, 2011, the representatives of the International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF) signed in Paris, a memorandum of understanding with 08 African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Mali, Niger, DR Congo, and Senegal). This convention, known as School and National Languages in Africa, (ELAN-Africa) promotes the joint use of indigenous and French languages in primary education. The OIF together with its partners, implements the ambitious ELAN project to valorise multilingual and multicultural education in Francophone states. The Initiative strengthens national capacities to set up an integrated program for the teaching of national languages and cultures in schools.

In order to implement the project Cameroon authorities, set up National Steering and Monitoring Committee at the Ministry of Basic Education that will oversee the implementation of the ELAN-Africa projects. They signed a partnership agreement with the OIF that stipulates the guidelines for the implementation of the cultural diversity project in Cameroon. The project targeted in the teaching of indigenous language and culture in primary schools across the national territory. Previous research indicates that one of the major ways through which states and non-state actors promote cultural diversity is through the educational system.²⁴ Formal education in Cameroon is organized at different levels ranging from the nursery, primary, secondary, high school to university education. Different curriculums have been established at each level to address problems of cultural diversity, peace and unity. Emphasis on the promotion of cultural diversity in schools is on the adolescents' age group. Most students who fall within this age group are often primary and secondary school students. Therefore, our analysis here measures the extent to which primary and secondary schools within the framework of the ELAN -Africa project promotes unity with diversity at home and abroad.

The purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate the extent to which the ELAN-Africa project promotes diversity of cultural expression in primary schools within the Centre Region. The project was to be implemented across primary schools over the national territory in two phases. The first phase of the project spans the period of 2012-2018. During the first phase of the implementation 43 pilot primary schools distributed in the Far North, Centre, Littoral and Western Regions were selected for the first phase of the program. The project produced several educational tools mainly devoted to reading and writing of indigenous languages. In the aftermath of the first phase the following indigenous languages were introduced in primary school; Ewondo, Basaa, Duala, Fulfulde, and Ghomala. On June 2, 2018, the Ministry of Basic Education and the OIF proceeded to the signing of a partnership agreement after the execution of the first phase in prelude to commencement of the second phase. The terms of the agreement for the second phase stipulates that the OIF would support up to 50% of the budget necessary for the realization of the activities included in the action plan. In 2018 the Cameroon focal point at the Ministry of Basic Education initiated the implementation of the second phase of the project. The focal point organized a refresher workshop for the training of teachers on various pedagogic techniques.

In 2012 the Ministry of Basic Education and the international Organization of la Francophonie signed a partnership agreement to implement the ELAN-Africa initiative in Cameroon. The first phase of the project spans the period of 2012-2018. The information gathered revealed that 43 pilot primary schools distributed in the Far North, Centre, Littoral and Western Regions were selected for the first phase of the program. Therefore, in answering the question; to what extent does OIF contribute to cultural diversity in Cameroon? This research measured the effectiveness of OIF's cultural diversity implemented in Primary schools across in the Centre region. Findings from the survey revealed that in the aftermath of first pilot phase of the ELAN-Africa project, national languages and culture has been officially introduced in primary schools and is being taught as a compulsory subject. The questionnaire was administered to 66 primary school teachers in 12 primary schools within the city of Yaoundé. The four main variables that measures the diversity of cultural expression and its

²³ Neathery-Castro, J., & Rousseau, M. O. (2005). Does French matter? France and Francophonie in the age of globalization. *The French Review*, 678-693.

²⁴ Ainscow, M. (2020). Promoting inclusion and equity in education: lessons from international experiences. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, 6(1), 7-16.

effectiveness in primary schools include; frequency of lessons, cultural competence of teachers in Ewondo and Bassa, provision of didactic materials, and teacher's level of satisfaction with the ELAN-Africa initiative.

Results of variable 1. Teaching of national language and Culture

Apart from French and English which are the official languages and medium of instruction in primary schools, this study investigated if as a consequence of the ELAN-Africa project national languages and culture have been included in the curriculum of primary schools. Findings revealed that in an effort to safeguard unity with diversity at national level, the Ministry of Primary Education with support of OIF has authorized the teaching of national languages and culture in primary schools. Though decree number 2012/2 of June 11, 2012 approved the teaching of the subject, it is only after the pilot phase of the ELAN-Africa initiative that national languages and culture was formally integrated in primary school curriculum. The indigenous languages now taught in primary schools include; Ewondo, Ffuldé, Basaa, Ghomala, Bulu, Nkom, and Duala. The students are drilled to identify their language region and other languages in the region. They are as well taught to label language zones in Cameroon and how to address people politely.

Cameroon's multilingual policy is in line with UNESCO language reforms. In 1999 for the first time, UNESCO emphasized the importance of multilingual education and the need to teach at least three other languages besides the official language(s) in secondary schools. This decision in Cameroon was backed by the demands of global citizenship through intercultural interaction and exchanges in schools. The table below offers a summary list of languages taught in primary schools.

Table: 1

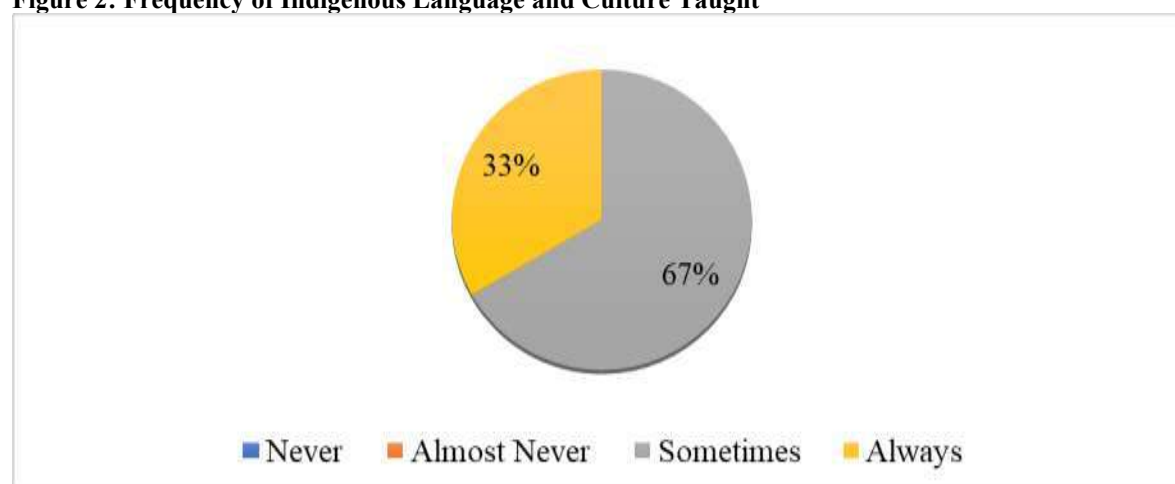
Regions	National Language and Culture
Centre	Ewondo, Basaa,
Littoral	Duala, Basaa
North West	Nkom
North and Far North	Ffulde
West Region	Ghomala

As illustrated above, the project validates a list of 7 indigenous languages that are taught in primary schools. The teaching of national languages is inseparable from national culture since the former serve as the means of expressing the later. Within the framework of the curriculum, Pupil are taught how to identify and interpret elements of their culture. At the end of lessons students are taught to dramatize customary practices related to birth, death and traditional marriage in their region. They are also trained how to entertain people using oral traditions and to develop the act of eloquence.

Results of Variable 2. Frequency of Lessons

In order to determine the extent to which teachers implement this guide, the study posed the question; *How often do you teach national language and culture in your class?* Within the framework of the curriculum, national language and culture is a compulsory subject that is to be taught for 45 minutes each day.

Figure 2: Frequency of Indigenous Language and Culture Taught



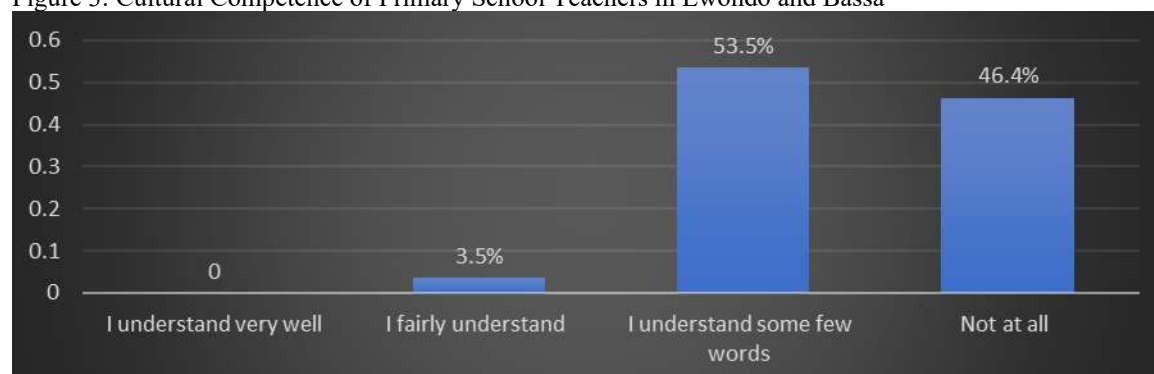
Source: Data from field research

According to findings from the field work, 66.7% of the respondents indicated that they occasionally teach the subject while only 33.3% do so on a regular basis. The results show the lack of desire and commitment from teachers to implement the ELAN-Africa initiative in primary schools.

Results of Variable 3: Cultural Competence of Teachers in Ewondo and Bassa

Cultural competence refers to the level of understanding of your own culture and that of culture others.²⁵ Teacher's cultural competence is a sine qua non for promoting the diversity of cultural expression in academic environments. Therefore, this research also investigated how best primary school teachers in the Centre region understand the customs and ethnic values of the Ewondo and Bassas. In responding to the questions the participants were given four different options.

Figure 3: Cultural Competence of Primary School Teachers in Ewondo and Bassa



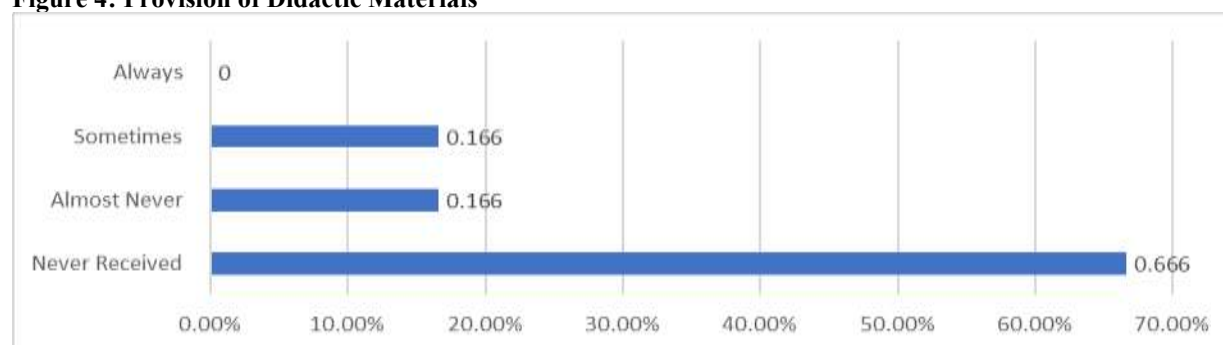
Source: Data from field research

As illustrated above, while 53.5% of the respondents implementing the Initiative posit that they only understand some few words in Ewondo and Bassa, 46.4% of them do not at all understand the language and traditional practices taught in the Centre region. None of the respondents expressed a mastery of the language and culture designated for Pupil in the Centre Region. The outcome of the research therefore reveals the lack of specialized trained teachers to implement the ELAN-Africa Initiative in Cameroon.

Results of Variable 4: Provision of Didactic Materials

When it comes to teaching culture, there are various didactic materials that can be utilized to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of different cultures. For example, cultural artifacts from the Ewondo and Bassa cultures can be used as teaching materials. Also, culturally relevant films and documentaries provide pupil with a visual and immersive experience of their culture.²⁶ Therefore, films that explore cultural practices, and historical events will provide a better understanding of the diverse culture in Cameroon. Audio recordings also encourage pupils to participate and explore the significance of music and dance in their cultures. More so, field trips to cultural sites, and national museums in Yaounde provide students with an interactive and immersive experience of different cultures in Cameroon. In this regard, we examined the extent to which students receive teacher's guide and didactic materials on national language and culture from school authorities.

Figure 4: Provision of Didactic Materials



Source: Data from field research

²⁵ Barakat, M., Reames, E., & Kensler, L. A. (2019). Leadership preparation programs: Preparing culturally competent educational leaders. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 14(3), 212-235.

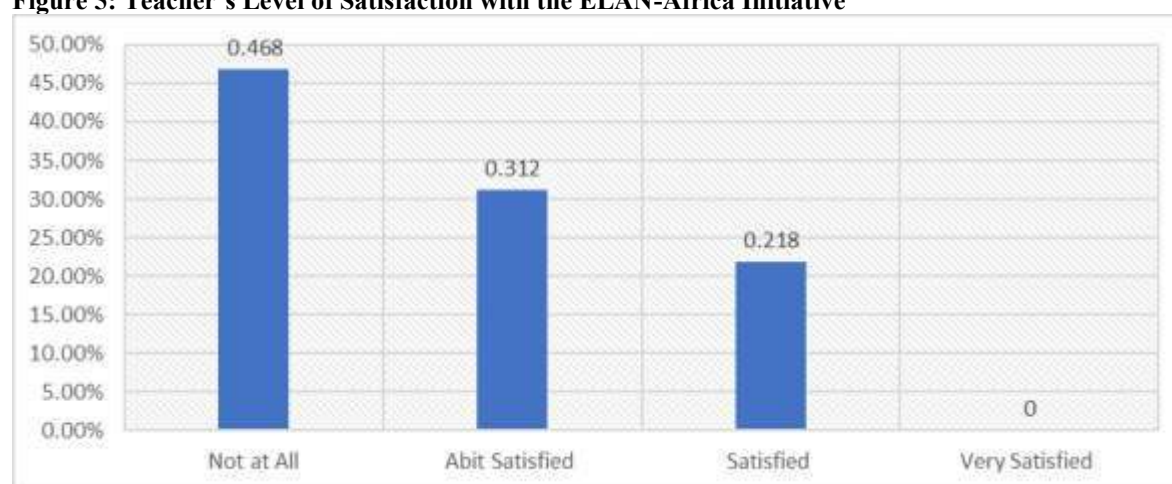
²⁶ Podara, A., Giomelakis, D., Nicolaou, C., Matsiola, M., & Kotsakis, R. (2021). Digital storytelling in cultural heritage: Audience engagement in the interactive documentary new life. *Sustainability*, 13(3), 1193.

As illustrated above, a great deal of the teachers implementing the ELEAN-Africa Initiative in Cameroon has never received teacher's guide or didactic materials on national language and culture from their school authorities. Only 16.6% of the respondents attested that they sometime receive didactic materials to teach the subject. A majority of the respondents expressed lack didactic materials to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of the different cultures in Cameroon. The three leading problems that the teachers highlighted include: First, they indicated the absence of textbooks on language and culture of the Ewondo and Bassa. Second, they also noted the lack of cultural films and documentaries to provide the pupil a visual and immersive experience of their culture. Third, inadequate financial resources to conduct regular field trips to cultural sites, and the national museums in Yaounde.

Variable 5: Teacher's Level of Satisfaction

Teacher's level of satisfaction with the teaching of national language and culture provide valuable insight into their motivations, engagement levels, productivity and overall outcome of the ELAN-Africa initiative. While there are various methods to measure the effectiveness of cultural diversity and peace projects in schools, however in this study we relied on surveys administered to teachers. We used the Likert scale which provided an opportunity for the respondents to rate their level of satisfaction with the implementation of Francophonie's cultural diversity project in primary schools. The question measures teacher's level of satisfaction with the teaching of national languages and culture in primary schools implementing the ELAN-Africa initiative.

Figure 5: Teacher's Level of Satisfaction with the ELAN-Africa Initiative



As shown above, a great deal of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the level of mobilization, motivation and general implementation of the project in their schools. While 46.8% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the level of implementation of the initiative in their schools, 31.2% noted that they're somehow satisfied. Remarkably, none of the respondents expressed complete satisfaction with effective implementation of the project in their schools. To justify their frustration, they mostly underpinned the lack of didactic materials, textbooks, and specialized trained teachers to handle the discipline.

IV. Limitations of the ELAN-Africa Initiative in Cameroon

Despite efforts by the International Organization of Francophonie to promote cultural diversity and peace education in Cameroon, the Basic Education still suffer from a large deficit of qualified teachers who are unable the speak indigenous languages and teach cultural values. This paper argues that Cameroon's basic educational system needs teachers who are not only professionally qualified but also culturally competent. It is important for the basic educational system to focus on cultural competence of teachers because, schools are expected to transmit culture from one generation to the next and as well cultivate children's intellectual and moral development.²⁷ According to findings from the survey, teachers implementing the ELAN-Africa project have not receive any specialized training to develop their cultural competence, without the necessary knowledge and skills, they struggle to effectively engage with students from diverse cultural backgrounds.

²⁷ Lim, Y. (2020). An Analysis of Primary School English Textbooks for Integrative Cultural Competence. *Journal of Research*, 24(2), 1-7.

Another important characteristic is limited representation of cultural values and norms in the curriculum. A great deal of the respondents affirmed that the existing curriculum does not sufficiently reflect the diversity of cultures present in Cameroon. The curriculum does not make precision of cultural values that can be generally applicable to Cameroonians. Among other constraints mentioned by the respondents is the lack of didactic teaching materials. The lack of didactic teaching materials presents a significant challenge to educators and students alike. The ELAN-Africa project emphasizes the exploration of diverse cultures and values in Cameroon. However, finding teaching materials or textbooks that adequately represent the diversity of cultures is a daunting task. As a solution, some of the respondents proffer the need of integration of technology. Leveraging technology can enhance the availability and effectiveness of teaching materials. Multimedia tools, and virtual resources can provide interactive and immersive learning experiences on cultural diversity and peace in Cameroon.

Also, some parents are not comfortable with their parents learning other cultural values for fear of cultural suppression. Therefore, since students come from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is not strange for parents to feel concerned about their children learning different indigenous languages and cultural values. This concern arises from a desire to preserve their cultural identity and ensure that children maintain a strong connection to their roots. Nonetheless, finding a balance between preserving one's cultural heritage and embracing a new indigenous culture is a serious challenge for the ELAN-Africa project in Cameroon. Finally, it was revealed that the outbreak of the Corona virus pandemic as well slowed down the implementation of the initiative.

V. CONCLUSION

This research scrutinized the extent to which the International Organization of Francophonie's ELAN-Africa project promotes diversity of cultural expression in primary schools within the Centre Region of Cameroon. In this respect, the analysis examines the level of implementation of the project 11 years after its introduction in Cameroon. The key question that animated our analysis is: *to what extent does the ELAN-Africa initiative preserve, revitalize, or promotes indigenous languages and cultures across primary schools in the Centre Region of Cameroon?* The four main variables in the survey that measures the effectiveness and level of implementation of the project across 12 primary schools in the Centre Region include; frequency of lessons, cultural competence of teachers in Ewondo and Bassa, provision of didactic materials, and teacher's level of satisfaction with the ELAN-Africa initiative. The findings revealed that despite efforts by the International Organization of Francophonie to promote cultural diversity in Cameroon, the ELAN-Africa Initiative still encounter the problem of cultural competence of teachers, limited representation of cultural values and norms in the curriculum. Finding a balance between preserving one's cultural heritage and embracing a new indigenous culture is a serious challenge for the implementation ELAN-Africa project in Cameroon. The outcome of the research demonstrates that, there's much to be desired concerning the level of implementation of the project in Cameroon.

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