

## THE ANGLOPHONE/FRANCOPHONE DICHOTOMY IN CAMEROON

Moses NJEI TIMAH<sup>\*</sup>

Why is it that even among identical twins in this country there is always some form of friction if one of them is Francophone and the other happens to be an Anglophone? This is a question I will use my personal experience to attempt to answer.

I happen to be one of the people who were used as a guinea pig in Ahidjo's experiment in national integration. Those of you who were educated at Bilingual Grammar School Man O War Bay/ Molyko in the sixties and seventies will readily understand what we went through in this unique experiment to build a united bilingual Cameroon. Typically, students were admitted based on merit between the ages of 12 and 14 and Anglophones and Francophones were equally represented numerically. On arrival in school, senior students usually subjected you to military style drills for weeks while the authorities looked the other way. Maybe that was a way of informing you that the school was different from others after all. Elaborate measures were taken so that while you were in the dormitory, refectory, classroom or playground the 'francos' and the 'Anglos' were always mixed so as to promote fellowship and acceptability of each other.

After some five odd years of living this experiment, I can look back and say it failed to achieve its result. Today, 23 years later, my relationship with my former Anglophone classmates is as strong as it was in school but that with the Francophones, which was casual, then is even more casual now. With hindsight I can say with confidence that the educational system is the main cause of the differences between us. In my opinion, the system of education bequeathed to the Francophones by the French is seriously flawed. In the Anglo Saxon

---

\* **Moses NJEI TIMAH:** Freelance and feature writer; Pharmacist; Photographer; and Commentator on Cameroon, Africa and World Affairs.

educational system you are expected to learn to combine academic work with character formation. Morals, hygiene, etiquettes, orderliness, work ethics, respect for superiors and public property were and are still very important components of Anglo-Saxon education. The Francophones pay lip service to these cardinal ideals.

The Anglophone system of teaching and assessment is geared towards making the student to research and answer questions from an independent stand point. This is in sharp contrast to the Francophones whose system of education even at university level encourages cramming and dependence on the teacher. This system has made examination fraud its integral component, as students are often tempted to fraudulently reproduce the exact replica of the teacher's notes in order to score higher marks rather than reading to understand. I am not saying that Anglophones are saints but fraud is not embedded in their educational system as it is with the francophone system. In fact, they have come to accept it as normal after all "la fin justifie le moyen". So goes the saying. When you look at this issue critically you are tempted to conclude that the French deliberately put this system in place with the sole intention of bringing up people who can be easily manipulated. When somebody is devoid of principles and morals and is dependent, he/she becomes the easiest person to manipulate.

All the arguments/disagreements between the Anglophones and Francophones in this triangle called Cameroon will never end because the educational systems have produced very different people regardless of whether they originated from the same father. A francophone can hardly understand why an Anglophone will fight and die for principles. An Anglophone parent cannot understand why his francophone counterpart will cooperate with his child to influence the latter's teacher. A Francophone pupil is most likely to take it physically on his teacher than his Anglophone counterpart but an Anglophone pupil is more likely to challenge his teacher on ideas than a Francophone pupil will do. An average Francophone believes that cabinet ministers are more knowledgeable than him

while an average Anglophone believes that he too is qualified to be minister. Anglophones are more likely to socialize in groups like ex-students' associations while Francophones may not bother about their alma mater. We can go on and on but we must know that it is the educational system and not the individuals that are responsible for our differences.

Most Francophones know that their educational system has failed them but they lack the courage to openly admit it. Many know they cannot pretend for long. That is why they are withdrawing their children from francophone schools and overcrowding the few Anglophone schools they can find in their neighbourhood. In towns like Douala and Yaounde over fifty percent of children in some Anglophone public primary schools come from francophone homes. Their parents know that the type of education they had was a farce and they wouldn't like the children to suffer their fate. In contrast you can hardly find a single Anglophone parent sending his or her child to a francophone school when there is an Anglophone school available. This is the only face saving way our Francophone brothers are admitting failure without overtly exposing their deflated 'majority ego'.