



WWJMRD 2021; 7(5): 84-88

www.wwjmr.com

International Journal

Peer Reviewed Journal

Refereed Journal

Indexed Journal

Impact Factor SJIF 2017:

5.182 2018: 5.51, (ISI) 2020-

2021: 1.361

E-ISSN: 2454-6615

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## Impact of the pandemic on Chinese teaching as a second language in Cameroon

### Degreume

#### Abstract

Since the outbreak of the epidemic, the work, education, entertainment, and life of people around the world have had a great impact. All organizations and personnel in the community with a shared future for mankind need to actively respond and face it together. In order to more effectively respond to this long-lasting major sudden incident, the regions affected by the epidemic around the world have taken measures to temporarily close schools, and students' learning methods have shifted from offline learning to comprehensive online classes. As a result, there has been the largest change in the history of education in the world. This sudden change in learning methods will inevitably lead to major changes in teaching models, resources, methods, teaching content, concepts, and classroom management in various countries. This article focuses on impact of the epidemic on Chinese language teaching in Cameroon. First, this article discusses how Cameroonian middle school students learned Chinese during the epidemic, and then the impact of the epidemic on Chinese language teaching in Cameroon. Finally, this article puts forward some effective suggestions to ensure the future education of Chinese language learners in Cameroon.

**Keywords:** Education; impact; Chinese teaching; second language

#### Introduction

Since its revolution, China has experienced rapid economic, political, socio-cultural and educational development. Apart from its internal change, the People's Republic of China has also forged friendly and cooperative relations with several countries around the world. In recent years there is no national or international organization can deny that China is counted among the great global powers. To perfect its relationship with the other nations of the world, china has judged better to plant Chinese language training centers on the territories of its partners. Africa, being china's first and best partner, has several Chinese language training centers. However, Cameroon remains one of china's best partners in Africa. The friendly relationship between china and Cameroon dates back to the decades. This bilateral relationship extends to several levels, namely the political, economic, social, educational plan and so on. In this subject, it would be wise to focus on the teaching of the Chinese language in Cameroon.

Early in 1995, Cameroon received its first Chinese language training center at the university of Yaoundé II. Upon its introduction into the school as a second language, Chinese has become the most attractive and important language in Cameroonian schools. Previous researchers have shown that the number of Chinese learners is increasing every year. This rapid increase in the number of Chinese language learners has led the local government and Confucius's staff to create many Chinese language training centers across the country. According to the 2020 assessment, the number of Chinese learners in Cameroon is already more than 30,000 people. It should be noted that the largest percentage of Chinese language learners come from secondary schools.

Since 2014, Cameroonian schools have faced three successive major crises. The first crisis took place between the years 2015 and 2016. These two academic years were terribly upset by the terrorist group Boko Haram. During this unforgettable period, almost all Cameroonian schools were closed, particularly the schools located in the north of Cameroon. The second crisis is the Anglophone crisis which until today remains a great threat to schools in the two

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large regions of Cameroon such as south west and North West. The Anglophone crisis has also led to the closure of schools in the two Anglophone regions of the country. The latest and most dangerous threat to schools around the world in general and Cameroonian schools in particular is covid-19. As in some countries around the world, Cameroon also closed its schools and training centers during covid-19.

The closure of schools during the pandemic had a great impact on the teaching of the Chinese language in Cameroon. This is why this article mainly studies impact of covid-19 on the teaching of Chinese language in Cameroon. During the pandemic, the model, methods and so on of Chinese teaching have changed greatly. In the following lines, this article will briefly review the introduction of the Chinese language in Cameroonian schools, and then present the model of Chinese teaching in Cameroon during covid-19 and the impact of this teaching model on Chinese language teaching. At the end of this article will make some important suggestions to ensure the teaching of Chinese as a second language in the future.

### Literature review

In Cameroon as in several others countries around the world, schools and vocational training centers were closed in a different way between December 2019 and May 2020 because of the crisis of the most dangerous pandemic in our history generally called Covid- 19 and we are forced to rethink new educational strategies and models, affirmed Bouakep Tchaptchie Yannik and Mafouen Talle Achille. In order to enable pupils and students to continue their learning normally, it was a great challenge for every local government to adopt the online learning system and educate pupils and students even being confined to their homes<sup>1</sup> To add to this, it is important to remind that even in 2021; many schools in Africa are still closed because of the effect of the pandemic. July 2020, a report summary was made on the impact of covid-19 on education in African countries. In this report, it is mentioned during covid-19, African countries have rethought new teaching strategies and techniques such as teaching through radio, television etc. In rural areas where people are in need of these modern tools, teachers have made copied of course content and share it with learners to learn by themselves<sup>2</sup> At a time when people have made great efforts to change and improve education in Africa, the new corona virus may destabilize the higher education sector and bring serious consequences, said Zhou bin feng<sup>3</sup> The writer not only cares about the challenges and problems faced by African countries higher schools Students, but also cares about the

<sup>1</sup> Impact of Covid-19 on Cameroon Education and Digital Contribution in the Teaching of English Language (North-Center-Coast-west) and Mathematics (Adamaoua-North): The case of WhatsApp Fora by Bouakep Tchaptchie Yannik and Mafouen Talle Achille, July 2020

<sup>2</sup> Covid-19 Impact on education in African Countries, July 2020, ADEA

<sup>3</sup> 新冠肺炎疫情对非洲高等教育的影响,周岳峰,2020-07-29

future of education in Africa. Degreume pointed out in his paper titled ~ the world after covid-19: Take Africa as an example~ that due to the rapid spread of the pandemic, schools and educational institutions have been closed all over the world. In most of African countries, this is not a very viable option because of the lack of equipment for online teaching and learning. In his opinion, the writer thought particularly about the non-urban zones that are still in need of the technological equipment such as radio, television and so on.<sup>4</sup> The Director of the UNESCO regional office met with Mr. Laurent Serge Etoundi Ngoa, Minister of Basic Education and Ms. Nalova Lyonga, Minister of Secondary Education in Yaoundé. The purpose of this meeting is to study alternative solutions through the use of distance education devices based on Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), following the measures taken by the Cameroonian Government to stop face-to-face lessons<sup>5</sup>

In this subject, we would focus our attention in particular on impact of the pandemic on teaching of the Chinese language, specifically in secondary schools. Covid-19 has negatively impacted Chinese language education around the world. Li Yuming declared the epidemic will definitely have an explicit or implicit, direct or indirect, short-term or long-term, negative or positive impact on international Chinese education; it is very likely that the development of this cause will be in a longer platform period. There are various problems such as the reduction of school-running entities, the decline in enrollment, the transfer of school-running "hot spots", the change of learning methods, the idleness of some teaching resources, and the insatiable desire of some people to study.<sup>6</sup> Wu chen and Diaoxiaowei pointed out, the spread of the epidemic has affected the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language at home and abroad to varying degrees. However, with the rapid development of Internet information technology and the booming of online teaching, MOOCs and micro-classes have become convenient channels for many people to receive re-education<sup>7</sup> This assertion is absolutely appreciable in the case where it is addressed to the developed countries. However, this assertion is an incomplete in the case where it is addressed to underdeveloped countries, because the teaching and learning Chinese methods these authors listed in their article are rare or unpractical in underdeveloped countries. During the interview, this article discovered that Chinese native teachers were the first to stop classes during covid-19, and as a result many Chinese language learners were deprived of Chinese lessons, especially secondary schools' students. As in other countries around the world, the Cameroonian Ministry of Education has tried to take sustainable measures to ensure the normal education of pupils and students, but one thing is important to know that the technology still seems less developed in this country, of course, this constitutes the greatest problem encountered by

<sup>4</sup> The world after covid-19: Take Africa as an example, Degreume, January 2021

<sup>5</sup> Impact due covid-19 Sir le systeme educatif du cameroun,news , 25/03/2020,Yaoundé cameroun ,

<sup>6</sup> 新冠疫情对汉语国际教育的影响,李宇明

<sup>7</sup> 疫情下对外汉语线上教学的思考与探究,吴琛 刁小卫,伊犁师范大学中国语言文学学院 新疆 伊宁 835000

teachers and learners during the period of covid-19 in Cameroon. Following the points of view of the Cameroonian press and teachers about the effects of covid-19, the subject of impact of covid-19 on the teaching of the Chinese language deserves to be discussed; this is why this topic has been chosen. To fully understand impact of this undesirable pandemic on Chinese teaching and learning in Cameroon, it would be wise to read this article right up to the last line, in short from the introduction to the conclusion.

### Research methods

Two principal research methods were investigated during this study. The first method is the audio visual interview. 10 secondary school Chinese teachers and five Chinese secondary schools students from different origins or different social classes were interviewed during this study. The interview focuses on the difficulties or problems encountered by teachers and learners of Chinese as a second language in secondary schools during the period of confinement. The second research method used in this study is reading digital news and followed by oral journals. This method has effectively participated in the writing of this article. Of course, Cameroonian magazines and presses are the most used sources during the writing of this paper.

### Results

In the past few years, schools in Cameroon have experienced three different major crises. The first crisis is the attack by "Boko Haram" terrorists, which led to the closure of schools in northern Cameroon, especially in the three main areas of the far northern, northern and Adamawa parts of the country. The second crisis was the trouble in English speaking regions of the country, during which several schools were destroyed, and the third most destructive and dangerous crisis was the explosion of covid-19 in the country in early 2020. Among these three crises mentioned above, covid-19 remains the most dangerous, especially for education, because all schools in Cameroon were closed during this epidemic. These three crises have affected the teaching of Chinese as a second language over the country. However, the influence of covid-19 on Chinese has not only lasted for a long time, but also caused changes in the education system and deprived many Chinese learners of educational opportunities. The following is a detailed description of impact of covid-19 on Chinese teaching in Cameroon.

First of all, it must be pointed out that in this study, two research methods were investigated: the first method was interview; the second method was reading digital files followed by watching the TV information of the effect of covid-19 in Cameroon national press. The following is a brief summary of the results of the interview and analysis of the data collected from the Cameroonian presses:

### Teaching methods and strategies formulated during covid-19

In Cameroon, as in other countries in the world, during the period of covid-19, fundamental changes have taken place in teaching methods and strategies of Chinese as a second language. In this difficult period, in other words, the nationwide confinement period, the teaching of Chinese as a second language in Cameroon has changed from the past classroom teaching mode to a new teaching mode generally

called online teaching. In other words, during covid-19 period, all the Chinese language learners have learned from platforms while the Chinese language teachers give their courses online. The analysis of the data shows that during the period of covid-19, Cameroonian schools have developed two new teaching methods to continue to educate students:

- ❖ Courses are offered through national television or CRTV. This kind of teaching mode is more suitable in rural and poor villages, because they are in lack of most advanced communication tools. Through interviews and other research methods, the study found that in many poor villages and areas in Cameroon, except of the rich men, most people don't have TV at home. Several students of the same grade and same subject gathered at the same TV station to take courses on national TV or CRTV. Research shows that secondary school students who study far away from home are not even able to attend the courses offered by national television due to the lack of communication tools.
- ❖ In addition to offering courses on the national television station CRTV, several alternative approaches have been developed and implemented, such as the use of digital platforms, such as WhatsApp, a social network used by multiple institutions, teachers or teacher groups. WhatsApp is a messaging application that allows text and video to be exchanged between individuals or groups of people. For the WhatsApp group, one or more members of the group are administrators. Access group can be completed by login of an administrator or by clicking the access link provided by one of the administrators. However, it is important to remember that access to the WhatsApp group is not through any mobile phone. You must have an Android phone, tablet computer or modern computer to create your own account on the platform.

These are the two main alternative methods adopted by Cameroon to ensure the education of middle school students during the explosive period of covid-19, while the rest of the world uses the most advanced teaching platforms. In the following part, we will focus on impact of these teaching methods on Chinese as second language learners; in other words enumerate the problems derived from these new teaching methods.

### Problems and challenges faced by middle school Chinese teachers and students in Cameroon during the epidemic period

This study shows that Chinese learners and teachers have faced several problems and challenges during covid-19 in Cameroon. The following are the worst problems known in 10 regions of the country:

#### ❖ Lack and perturbation of communication's equipment.

As it was said above, many people in Cameroon, in particular, the villagers don't have the communication tools at home, even the oldest mark of television they don't have. During the period of covid-19, Cameroonian education ministry has organized offering courses through the national television CRTV. It was a sweet idea to help students to improve and learn from their houses, but this kind of teaching method didn't satisfy the students who are

from the poor villages or areas. This paper found out that at least 30% of high school students have completely stopped learning Chinese because of lack of communication equipment. These students have a thorough decline in all aspects of Chinese, which are, oral expression, written expression and auditory expression. The direct result is that many of them failed the last exam of the academic year because of bad score in Chinese.

Students from affluent families and students living in urban places have a variety of communication devices. They can enter different courses through CRTV, the national television station, and courses provided through social platforms such as WhatsApp. However, they have encountered such difficulties as network interruption, high cost of Internet connection, frequent blackouts and difficulty in accessing the platform.

#### ❖ **The online teaching material resources need to be strengthened**

Teaching materials are the foundation of teaching. In the situation that the existing teaching materials cannot satisfy the all-round needs of online teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language in Cameroonian secondary schools, it is imperative to make the online teaching materials resources of Chinese as a second language more effective. First of all, in the event of a national emergency, it is difficult for paper-based teaching materials to be delivered in the first time or in a short time. Moreover, online teaching materials are not simply electronic processing of paper-based teaching materials, but are structured, systematic and interactive arrangements, matching with courses and paper-based teaching materials. According to the author's understanding, during the epidemic period, the teaching of Chinese as a second language in some Cameroonian secondary schools mostly sent the content of teaching materials to the students by taking photos, scanning and other means. This mechanical transfer presentation mode, with solidified content and single form, is difficult to ensure the personalized and interactive requirements of online teaching and learning, and the classroom effect is difficult to guarantee at all.

#### ❖ **Cameroonian local Chinese teachers lack of online teaching experience**

For many Cameroonian local Chinese teachers, online teaching is a "novice" on the road, especially for many secondary school Chinese teachers, most of the students are beginners who are far away and not very proficient in Chinese. Suddenly, they have changed from instructors to "new anchors". At the same time, it is difficult to change their teaching concepts immediately, and they have to learn online teaching platforms such as WhatsApp temporarily, it's not easy to learn how to download and use WhatsApp, and it's even more difficult to use it skillfully. Some teachers turn on the camera to block the content of the courseware, which turns into voice broadcast; the animation in some teachers' courseware can't be broadcast and becomes oral narration; some teachers do not know how to cut and broadcast the speech, so they cannot answer students' doubts. As a practical teaching method to cultivate students' speech skills and communicative ability, teaching Chinese as a second language has higher requirements for classroom interaction and on-site feedback. The lack of teachers' experience and the limitations of online teaching mode undoubtedly weaken the positive guidance and creation of teachers, the vivid and lively classroom

atmosphere created by students' cooperation affects the effect of Chinese classroom. In short, the online teaching during the period of covid-19 is not only lack of interaction between teachers and students, but also lack of the vivid classroom atmosphere.

To conclude this part, we note that the courses offered online during the period of covid-19 did not satisfy successfully the educational needs of the learners compared to the courses given in the classrooms. This study has shown that the level of learners of Chinese as a second language has fallen catastrophically, because many of the practices that should be done in classrooms have not been done. The most remarkable case is the total regression on the written expression of all learners, because the study showed that students on their teacher's guide drew Chinese characters on blackboards or in their notebooks long before covid-19, unlike this mechanism was not practical during covid-19 because Chinese teachers did not find an effective method of teaching character online or on teaching platforms.

### **Suggestions and discussions**

#### **Discussions**

The private school students had normal access to online education platforms, because most of them are from wealthy families whose parents are able to buy smartphones for them and other modern communication tools. On the other hand, Chinese students who come from the poorest families, the poorest villages and places are completely deprived of education during this period invaded by covid-19.

Teachers who have been trained in famous teacher training colleges' abroad (in china) have more experience in using online teaching platforms and they are enough good at using modern communication tools compared to those trained inside the country. Indeed, Chinese teachers trained in China have learned to give lessons on certain social platforms during their training and are able to do the PPT presentation.

The course on the Chinese character writing order has been completely removed from the lesson program in many Cameroonian secondary schools because teachers have not found a good strategy to teach students to draw characters through the teaching platforms.

The teachers who called for the interview also raised an important point according to which many of the pupils once answered the attendance on the platform; they immediately put down their communication devices and leave to play. Sometimes they invite students to answer questions, although they are online, present in the platform, but they in person are in the middle of a game with their neighborhood friends, either playing football, or joking with their friends, or playing other games.

#### **Suggestions**

To ameliorate the online teaching and learning in the future and facing the problems or difficulties mentioned above, this article suggests:

- 1- subsidizing the purchase of smartphones and improving the internet network, training students in online or distance education at the same time relaxing the conditions for using smartphones and other modern communication tools in secondary schools so that teachers skilled in computer science can train and introduce learners to their use.

- 2- Improve the supply of electricity throughout the country to avoid inconvenience during online courses.
- 3- The Cameroonian government in cooperation with the national office of Confucius institute must think about setting up effective and dynamic platforms for the unique reason of dispensing online courses during times of crisis.
- 4- Teachers should change their teaching concepts, adjust the rhythm of the classroom, optimize the classroom design on the basis of mastering the teaching materials, and control the teaching time within the effective learning time.
- 5- The ability to use multimedia technology should be included in the evaluation system of teachers' ability. By organizing training, carrying out online teaching course competition and performance evaluation, the pressure should be appropriately increased to stimulate teachers' learning motivation and promote teachers to continuously improve their online teaching skills.
- 6- In addition, teachers can not only stay in the primary stage of pushing teaching content to students by means, but also consider using corresponding strategies to effectively guide students' learning activities. Cui yun huo pointed out that when online teaching triggers students' psychological input activities, it needs the help of corresponding behavior input activities. It is necessary to simplify or reduce the requirements of behavior input activities to ensure that the activities of behavior input will not interfere with the activities of psychological input<sup>8</sup>. For example, students can be asked to make a simple diagram of teaching content to help them understand the logical relationship of concept points in listening, reading and cultural explanation, so as to combine behavior with psychology and achieve better teaching effect.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the main point of this investigation was to understand impact of the pandemic on the teaching and learning of Chinese as second language in Cameroon. The targets of the study are respectively Cameroonian local Chinese teachers and both private and public secondary schools students.

After analyzing the responses of interview's respondents, this study found that the courses have been taken place on national television and radio that called respectively the national television CRTV and the national radio CRTV. Social platforms WhatsApp and Facebook were also the two social platforms that were very useful for the delivery of online Chinese lessons during the difficult period of the pandemic; especially WhatsApp was more helpful to all teachers and students of Chinese across the country.

However, it should be mentioned that the teachers as well as the Chinese department students have faced several problems during the most complicated time of covid-19. As regards the students from wealthy families, they had all the communication tools ,necessary to access teaching and learning platforms, but they faced problems such as

permanent electricity cuts, internet network disruption, high cost of connection fees etc. this study found out that students coming from poor families, poor villages were more influenced during covid-19. This can be justified by the fact that many of them were deprived of education because of lack of smartphone, television, computer and much more other communication tools in the family.

Speaking of Chinese teachers, their biggest problem was the lack of experience in using online teaching platforms and online teaching methods and strategies.

To improve the conditions for online teaching and learning during current or future crises, this article has made some important suggestions, among which are the emphasis on training local Chinese teachers in the use of modern communication tools and use of online teaching platforms, train students in the use of smartphones and many other access tools on social online learning platforms, improve the conditions of the internet network and electricity through the whole country etc.

It is quite true that this study is well completed. In view of the author's limited experience and knowledge, this article would certainly have obscure points or needs to be improved. That's why everyone interested in reading this article is invited to make his criticisms. In the end, the author of this article would like to learn from literary experts so that he can better improve his writing skills in the days to come.

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