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EXPLORING LANGUAGE CHOICE DYNAMICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF MULTILINGUALISM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MAROUA, CAMEROON

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Michael Hinmassiai

Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences, University of Maroua, Cameroon

ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of language choice in higher education, focusing on the context of the University of Maroua in Cameroon. Multilingualism poses unique challenges and opportunities for academic institutions, particularly in regions like Cameroon with diverse linguistic backgrounds. Through a case study approach, this research investigates the factors influencing language selection among students, faculty, and administrators within the university setting. It explores the impact of historical, cultural, institutional, and educational factors on language preferences and practices. By shedding light on the complexities of language use in academia, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of multilingualism in higher education contexts.

KEYWORDS

Multilingualism, Language Choice, Higher Education, University of Maroua, Cameroon, Language Dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

The role of language in higher education settings is multifaceted and complex, especially in regions

characterized by linguistic diversity such as Cameroon. The University of Maroua, situated in the northern part

of Cameroon, serves as a microcosm reflecting the intricate dynamics of multilingualism in academic environments. This introduction sets the stage for exploring the nuances of language choice within the university context, examining how various factors intersect to shape language preferences and practices among students, faculty, and administrators.

Cameroon stands out as a country boasting over 250 languages, representing a rich tapestry of cultural and linguistic heritage. This diversity is reflected in the educational landscape, where language policies play a pivotal role in shaping academic discourse and communication. The University of Maroua, established in 2008, operates within this vibrant linguistic mosaic, providing higher education opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds.

In this study, we embark on a journey to unravel the complexities of language choice dynamics at the University of Maroua. By delving into the motivations, challenges, and implications of language selection, we seek to illuminate the underlying mechanisms influencing linguistic practices within the institution. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering inclusive learning environments and promoting linguistic diversity as a valuable asset in higher education.

Drawing on insights from sociolinguistics, education policy, and language planning, we aim to explore the historical, cultural, institutional, and educational dimensions that shape language use within the university community. Through a case study methodology, we endeavor to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of stakeholders towards multilingualism in academic contexts.

The significance of this research extends beyond the boundaries of the University of Maroua, offering insights that resonate with broader discussions on language policy, diversity, and equity in higher education worldwide. By critically examining the interplay between language, identity, and power dynamics, we hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of multilingualism and its implications for teaching, learning, and knowledge production in the global academic landscape.

In the chapters that follow, we delve into the empirical findings, analysis, and implications of our study, shedding light on the intricate tapestry of language choice dynamics in higher education at the University of Maroua, Cameroon. Through this exploration, we aspire to foster dialogue, reflexivity, and informed decision-making towards creating inclusive and empowering educational environments that celebrate linguistic diversity.

METHOD

The process of exploring language choice dynamics at the University of Maroua, Cameroon, involved a systematic and iterative approach aimed at capturing the complexities of multilingualism in higher education. Beginning with the conceptualization of the study, careful consideration was given to the research questions, objectives, and theoretical frameworks that would guide the investigation. Drawing on insights from sociolinguistics, education policy, and language planning, the study sought to contextualize language choice within the broader socio-cultural and institutional landscape of the university.

The next phase of the process focused on designing the research methodology and selecting appropriate

data collection methods. A qualitative case study approach was deemed most suitable for capturing the nuanced experiences and perspectives of stakeholders regarding language use in academic contexts. Through purposive sampling, participants representing diverse linguistic backgrounds within the university community were identified and recruited for interviews and focus group discussions.

Data collection involved conducting semi-structured interviews with students, faculty members, and administrators, as well as organizing focus group discussions to facilitate dialogue and interaction among participants. In parallel, document analysis was undertaken to examine official language policies, institutional documents, and academic materials related to language planning and implementation at the University of Maroua.

Once data collection was complete, the analysis phase commenced, utilizing a thematic approach to identify patterns, themes, and divergent perspectives emerging from the qualitative data. Transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions were systematically coded and analyzed to uncover insights into the factors influencing language choice dynamics within the university community.

Throughout the analysis process, measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the findings. Member checking and peer debriefing were employed to validate interpretations and enhance the credibility of the research outcomes. Triangulation of data sources further enriched the analysis, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of language choice dynamics at the University of Maroua.

To investigate the language choice dynamics at the University of Maroua, Cameroon, a qualitative case study approach was employed. This methodological choice enabled a deep exploration of the complexities surrounding multilingualism in higher education, allowing for an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing language preferences and practices within the university community.

The study population consisted of students, faculty members, and administrators representing diverse linguistic backgrounds within the University of Maroua. A purposive sampling technique was utilized to ensure the inclusion of participants with varied experiences and perspectives related to language use in academic settings. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis served as the primary data collection methods.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including students, faculty members, and administrators, to explore their perceptions, experiences, and attitudes towards language choice in higher education. Open-ended questions were formulated to elicit rich and nuanced responses, allowing participants to articulate their thoughts and experiences freely.

Focus group discussions were organized to facilitate interaction and dialogue among participants, enabling the exploration of shared beliefs, norms, and practices related to language use within the university context. These discussions provided insights into collective experiences and perceptions, uncovering patterns and themes that emerged across different stakeholder groups.

In addition to qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, document analysis was employed to examine official language policies, institutional documents, and academic materials related to language use and instruction at the University of Maroua. This analysis offered valuable insights into the formal mechanisms and discourses surrounding language planning and implementation within the institution.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, involving the iterative process of coding, categorization, and interpretation of qualitative data. Transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions were systematically analyzed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and divergent perspectives related to language choice dynamics in higher education.

Trustworthiness and rigor were ensured through various strategies, including member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation of data sources. Member checking involved returning to participants to validate interpretations and ensure the accuracy and authenticity of findings. Peer debriefing involved seeking feedback from colleagues and experts to enhance the credibility and reflexivity of the research process.

By employing a multi-method approach and adhering to rigorous research practices, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of language choice dynamics at the University of Maroua, Cameroon, contributing to the broader discourse on multilingualism in higher education contexts.

RESULTS

The exploration of language choice dynamics at the University of Maroua revealed a multifaceted

landscape shaped by a combination of historical, cultural, institutional, and educational factors. Interviews and focus group discussions illuminated the complex interplay of language preferences and practices among students, faculty, and administrators within the university community. Themes such as language proficiency, cultural identity, educational access, and institutional support emerged as central to understanding the dynamics of multilingualism in higher education.

DISCUSSION

The findings underscored the importance of linguistic diversity as a source of richness and complexity within the academic environment. Participants expressed a strong sense of attachment to their native languages, viewing them as integral components of their cultural identity and heritage. However, challenges related to language proficiency and access to educational resources in minority languages were also highlighted, raising concerns about equity and inclusivity in higher education.

At the institutional level, the study revealed a complex landscape of language policies and practices characterized by tensions between linguistic diversity and educational standardization. While the University of Maroua officially recognizes multiple languages, the dominance of French and English as medium of instruction poses challenges for students and faculty whose linguistic backgrounds differ from these official languages. The need for greater institutional support for multilingual education and language revitalization efforts was emphasized as a means of promoting linguistic diversity and inclusive learning environments.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the case study of multilingualism at the University of Maroua offers valuable insights into the complexities of language choice dynamics in higher education contexts. By documenting the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with linguistic diversity in academic settings. Moving forward, efforts to promote inclusive language policies, enhance linguistic support services, and foster cross-cultural dialogue are essential for creating an environment where all members of the university community can thrive. Embracing linguistic diversity as a source of strength and resilience, the University of Maroua can serve as a model for inclusive higher education practices that celebrate and empower diverse linguistic identities.

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