

A Preliminary Study of the Cultural Content of Chinese Curriculum in Cameroon's Middle Schools

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Abstract: *Chinese Language* is a 90-hour compulsory course for students of the third and fourth grades in Cameroon's middle schools. The cultural content in the present curriculum focuses mainly on cultural knowledge and the contemporary cultural system of China, completely relegating to the background, the teaching of the culture of the Chinese language itself as well as cultural communication. Cultural elements outlined in the current curriculum are aimed at teaching learners the cultural system of China in a bid to make them learn from China's development path. They include the understanding of the differences between China's and Cameroon's economic models, understanding of the secrets behind China's development, and how to use traditional Chinese medicine as an example to promote Cameroon's traditional medical healthcare, etc.. Based on the above realities, this article puts forward some suggestions geared at improving the current curriculum. The author believes that the cultural content in the Chinese syllabus in Cameroonian middle schools can be re-adjusted to meet the exigencies of the general syllabus of international Chinese education and its own local needs. Cross-cultural communication and traditional Chinese culture should be incorporated into the Chinese language curriculum in Cameroon because it is one of the linguistic elements that beginners are expected to master in addition to phonetics, grammar and vocabulary.

Keywords: Cameroon; elementary stage; teaching of Chinese; curriculum

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1. Status of Chinese Education in Cameroonian Junior High Schools

1.1 *A brief history of foreign language education policies in Cameroonian junior high schools*

There are currently two education systems in Cameroon: one with French as the official language, and the other with English as the official language.

The differences between the two include the following aspects. First of all, in the education system with

French as the main medium, there are seven years of secondary education, that is, four years for junior high school, and three years for high school. However, in the education system that uses English as the medium language, the secondary education period is also seven years, but five years for the junior high school, and two years for high school. Secondly, the foreign language education of the two education systems is also different. In the education system using French as the medium language, students must receive foreign language education, such as Spanish, German, etc. By contrast, in the education system using English as the medium language, students have no foreign language learning requirements at all. This article mainly studies the foreign language education policies in the education system using French as the medium language.

Affected by its historical, ethnic and cultural factors, the Cameroonian government has been actively advocating a “cultural diversity” policy since its independence. Since the early 1960s, the Cameroonian government has gradually regarded the diversification of foreign language education as an important part of the “cultural diversity” policy. For example, German and Spanish have been incorporated into the secondary education system as early as 1951. Through foreign language education, the Cameroonian government hopes to train students with an international perspective and world citizenship.

In 1967, the Cameroonian government determined the disciplinary status of foreign languages in junior high school education. Cameroon’s Ministry of Secondary Education stipulates that in the education system that uses French as the medium language, students in the third and fourth grades of junior high school must have foreign language courses. Due to historical colonization by European countries, and taking into account the economic strength of European countries and the diplomatic environment of Cameroon at that time, the Cameroonian government chose European national languages as the first choice for foreign language education during the long period from 1967 to 2011. Junior high school third-year students can only choose Spanish, German, Latin and Greek. In 1998, the Ministry of Secondary Education revised the syllabus and issued the “No. 98/004 Education Policy Guidance” document on April 14 of that year. This document has become the guiding ideology for foreign language education in Cameroon’s junior high schools, and has been used as the overall guidance document for Cameroon’s national foreign language education policy. Article 5 of the guidance document states: “Cameroonian education must cultivate Cameroonians rooted in her culture and open to the world.” “Culture rooted in her” refers to the education of the native language and Cameroonian culture, while “opening to the world” refers to the education of foreign languages. In order to improve foreign language education, Cameroon, on the basis of “Education Policy Guidance No. 98/004”, included Italian in the list of junior high school foreign language elective courses in 2011, and included Chinese in the list of foreign language education in 2012, and opened it in every province in the country. And a local teacher was assigned to each pilot junior high school. There were 10 provincial administrative units in Cameroon. In December 2014, the Ministry of Secondary Education of Cameroon issued the “New Policy Guidelines for Junior High School Foreign Language Education”, which also listed the establishment and arrangements of new junior high school foreign language education courses.

1.2 Introduction to teachers, students and class hours of Chinese language education in Cameroonian junior high schools

From the perspective of factors such as the number of learners, the number of teachers, and the research of

local Chinese textbooks, it can be said that Chinese teaching in Cameroon is the pioneer of Chinese teaching in Africa. At present, more than 160 junior high schools offer Chinese language teaching, more than 20,000 Chinese learners, and more than 180 local Chinese teachers. The main Chinese textbook in use “*Hello Cameroon*” series is a complete set of localized Chinese textbooks.

According to the “Education Policy Guidance No. 98/004” issued in December 2014, the “Junior High School Chinese Education Policy Guide”: Cameroonian elementary school students usually take the junior high school entrance exam at the age of 12, which means that under normal circumstances, the entry age of junior high school students approximately 10–14 years old. The general goal of *Chinese Language* in the junior high school is to train learners who can enter high school or adapt to the language needs of the labor market. “The Junior Chinese Course Syllabus” stipulates that the teaching time of Chinese in the third and fourth grades of junior high school is divided into five semesters. The teaching content includes citizenship, nationality, international awareness, family and social life, environmental protection, health and welfare, and economic life. There are five units of media and communication, each of which has 18 hours of class hours. There are a total of 90 hours of class hours for each of the third and fourth grades of junior high school. However, due to factors such as national holidays and international festivals, the Cameroonian government does not require teachers to make up lessons, in fact, there are less than 90 hours of Chinese lessons a year. The document requires each junior high school to take five exams a year. This means that an exam will be held every 18 hours. See Table 1:

Table 1: *The Teaching Content and Class Hours in Cameroonian Junior High Schools*

Life scene	Module title	Class hours
Family and social life	Family life and social integration	18 hours
Environment, health and comfort	Health, comfort and environmental protection	18 hours
Media and communication	Media (information and communication technology)	18 hours
Economic life	Economic activity: production of goods and services	18 hours
Citizenship	Civic life and openness to the world	18 hours

1.3 The principles and goals of the formulation of the Chinese curriculum syllabus in Cameroonian junior high schools

The compilation of any course syllabus requires an appropriate framework or organizational principles to be formulated in advance. The Cameroon Education Conference established a curriculum framework in 1995 and implemented it in 1996. The organizational philosophy of this learning project is derived from “the Guideline Law” formulated in 1998, which stipulates that the school’s responsibility is to cultivate responsible, independent and global citizens of Cameroon. Chinese teaching as a course in middle schools must follow “the Guidelines” formulated in 1998.

The Cameroon’s Ministry of Secondary Education requires Chinese teaching in middle schools to teach the general knowledge of China. In order to explore Chinese society, this project has added contextualized teaching methods through organizing activities and simulating realsituational communication to conduct effective teaching activities. In order to enable students to better communicate in Chinese, teaching should be focused on the devel-

opment of students' language skills (oral communication skills, reading comprehension skills, and writing skills). Therefore, the disconnection between teaching and real life should be avoided as much as possible. In addition, culture and language are mutually infiltrated. The foreign language policy of the Ministry of Secondary Education requires that Chinese beginners in Cameroon should be familiar with some important phenomena in Chinese culture in order to learn Chinese better. But here, the Ministry of Secondary Education clearly points out that the goal of learning Chinese culture is by no means for young people in Cameroon to give up one's own culture. On the contrary, this kind of knowledge learning is to enable them to improve their own cultural literacy, to enable them to compare different cultures and different perceptions of the world, so that young people in Cameroon pay more attention to Cameroon's own rich cultural resources.

In addition, the Chinese curriculum syllabus should consider political, economic, social, cultural, and personal challenges. In terms of political and economic challenges, the Chinese syllabus requires the teachers engaged in Chinese teaching to be conscious of the importance of Sino-African cooperation and friendly relations, and especially to deepen the learners' understanding of Cameroon-China relations and make them have a sense of responsibility and mission in the future relationship development. In view of China's role in the world economy and Cameroon's development, Chinese teaching is becoming more and more important. In addition to the increase in the cooperative relations between the two countries, learning Chinese also provides a new tool and more access for young people in Cameroon.

From the above, we can see that the overall goal of Chinese syllabus in Cameroonian junior middle schools is the same as that of other foreign language courses. The general goal of teaching is to focus on Cameroonian citizenship and international citizenship, family and social life including participating in family life, keeping active working relationships, and promoting harmonious social development; It is also to emphasize economic life, environmental protection, health and welfare, media and communication. These five modules are designed to cultivate students' listening, speaking, reading and writing.

2. A Comparative Analysis of the Cultural Teaching in the Junior Chinese Curriculum Syllabus and the General Curriculum Syllabus for International Chinese Teaching

In order to comply with the rapid development of Chinese teaching around the world and meet the needs of various countries for the standardization of Chinese teaching content, Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters organized the development of "The General Curriculum Syllabus for International Chinese Language Teaching" (hereinafter referred to as "The Hanban Syllabus").

"The Hanban Syllabus" is a general description of the objectives and content of Chinese as a second language course. It aims to provide reference basis and reference standards for Chinese teaching institutions and teachers in the formulation of teaching plans, the evaluation of learners' language ability, and the compilation of textbooks.

2.1 The second level of cultural teaching in the general syllabus of international Chinese teaching

Cultural awareness	Description of Objectives
Cultural knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start to learn about the right of individuals and communities in the host country to learn different languages. 2. Begin to understand the development and achievements of the host country and China in terms of culture and education. 3. Start to learn the history of Chinese culture, art, etc., and its contribution to the world. 4. Begin to understand the development history of Chinese language and culture and its contribution to the world. 5. Have a basic understanding of the cultural connotations of the most-commonly-used idiom and allusions in Chinese. 6. Begin to understand the linguistic and non-verbal communicative functions of Chinese culture. 7. Begin to understand Chinese communication etiquette and customs. 8. Begin to understand the social structure and interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture, such as individuals, families, etc.. 9. Begin to understand the contribution of the Chinese to the society of the host country.
Cultural understanding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin to understand that culture can not only be acquired, but also acquired through learning. 2. Begin to understand the relationship between cultural learning and language learning; language is an important part of culture. 3. Have a basic understanding of the basic values in Chinese culture. 4. Begin to understand the diversity, dynamics and interpenetration of culture.
Cross-cultural awareness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have a basic understanding of the similarities and differences between Chinese culture and the culture of the host country. 2. Begin to cultivate one's own cross-cultural awareness through learning Chinese culture. 3. Begin to make an objective evaluation of the host country's cultural customs and thinking habits by comparing the culture of the host country with that of China.
International perspective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Through learning Chinese, begin to understand the world culture and expand the international horizon. 2. By learning Chinese language and culture, begin to develop the ability to explain the world's diverse phenomena from different perspectives. 3. Have a basic sense of world citizenship.

2.2 Cultural teaching in the Chinese curriculum syllabus of Cameroonian junior high schools

Topic	Description of Objectives
Citizenship, nationality and international awareness	<p style="text-align: center;">Cultural content</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Understand the contribution of Chinese citizens' daily life to China's rapid development. (2) Understand the role of the current Chinese administration system in China's rapid development. (3) Understand the influence of Chinese culture on citizens' behavior (specifically their rights and obligations). <p style="text-align: center;">Social integration goals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Know who you are. (2) Cultivate to be patriotic and good citizenship. (3) Cultivate to serve the country and fight against corruption.

Topic	Description of Objectives
Family and social life	<p style="text-align: center;">Cultural content</p> <p>(1) Talk about the differences between Cameroon’s and China’s family model. Understand the similarities, differences, advantages and disadvantages between China’s family planning policy and Cameroon’s related policies.</p> <p>(2) Understand the social security, social services, social assistance and other policies for the elderly, the weak, the sick and the disabled in China.</p> <p>(3) Understand China’s ethnic policies.</p> <p>(4) Chinese and Cameroon festivals.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Social integration goal</p> <p>Cultivate the ability to resolve family conflicts, cultural differences, religious differences, ethnic differences, and age conflicts.</p>
Economic life	<p style="text-align: center;">Cultural content</p> <p>(1) Understand the differences between the economic models of China and Cameroon.</p> <p>(2) Understand the secrets of China’s development.</p> <p>(3) Take traditional Chinese medicine as an example to promote traditional medicine in Cameroon.</p> <p>(4) Avoid unfavorable behaviors to others and the environment.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Social integration goals</p> <p>(1) Write a CV and apply for a job.</p> <p>(2) Understand various occupations.</p>
Environmental protection, health and welfare	<p style="text-align: center;">Social integration goals</p> <p>(1) Understand specific vocabulary for medical treatment.</p> <p>(2) Drug instructions.</p> <p>(3) Avoid self-treatment.</p> <p>(4) Avoid drugs on the street.</p>
Media and Communications	<p style="text-align: center;">Cultural content</p> <p>Connect new media with Cameroonian culture.</p>

Wang Yong divides culture into culture of knowledge and culture of communication in his article “Analysis on Teaching Strategies of Chinese Culture as a Foreign Language.” (Wang 2009) He believes that “culture of knowledge refers to economics, politics, geography, history, art, etc., and culture of communication refers to culture of linguistic communication culture and that of non-verbal communication. The former mainly refers to the mental state, values, and life of a nation that are implicit in the language system, ways of living, ways of thinking, moral standards, right and wrong standards, customs, aesthetic tastes, etc.. The latter refers to the cultural factors in the transmission of information and methods other than language.” (Wang 2009) Zhang Zhanyi also divides cultural teaching into culture of communication and culture of knowledge. Culture of communication includes ways of thinking, values, moral standards, etc.. while culture of knowledge includes economics, politics, history, geography, science and technology, education, etc.. By comparing the above two syllabus documents, it is obvious that there is a big difference between the cultural teaching in the Chinese syllabus of Cameroon’s junior high schools and the cultural teaching in the general syllabus of international Chinese teaching. (Zhang 1990)

The culture teaching in the Chinese syllabus of Cameroon’s junior high schools focuses on knowledge and culture, while the culture teaching in the general syllabus of Chinese international education focuses on culture of

communication. In addition, the cultural teaching in the Chinese syllabus of Cameroonian junior high schools tends to Chinese modern system culture, that is, to tell the stories of contemporary China, while the cultural teaching in the general syllabus of international Chinese teaching tends to Chinese traditional culture, trying to present the image of an ancient civilization. Both have different definitions and requirements for culture.

The cultural content formulated by the general syllabus of international Chinese language teaching expresses Hanban's intention to spread Chinese culture. It helps Chinese learners understand Chinese traditional spiritual and material culture to help understand China's thousands of years of civilized history. The cultural teaching requirements set forth in the Cameroonian Chinese Curriculum Syllabus are in line with the original intention of the Cameroonian Ministry of Secondary Education to offer Chinese courses, that is, to learn about China's system and culture, and to understand China's development process, so as to learn from China's development path. This is the original intention of the Cameroonian government and the ultimate goal of offering Chinese courses.

3. Suggestions on Cultural Teaching in the Chinese Curriculum Syllabus of Cameroonian Junior High Schools

The cultural teaching in the Chinese syllabus of Cameroon's junior high schools focuses on culture of knowledge and that of modern Chinese system, and completely ignores the language and cultural teaching of Chinese itself and the teaching of culture of communication. Although this is in line with the original intention of the Ministry of Secondary Education of Cameroon to offer Chinese courses, but it is not conducive to achieving its goals. In view of the will of the established country, the author believes that the cultural teaching of Chinese syllabus in Cameroon's junior high schools should insist on prioritizing knowledge and culture and Chinese modern system culture. However, junior high school learners belong to the primary stage, and the cultural teaching and the teaching of communicative culture of the Chinese language itself are very important to students at the elementary stage, so it is imperative to carry out the teaching of Chinese language and culture and the teaching of culture of communication at this stage.

The purpose of the primary stage of the Chinese syllabus for junior high schools in Cameroon is to "after two years (216 hours) of study, learners can master certain language knowledge, have the initial listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and initial language communicative skills, and be able to meet the communicative needs of their daily life, study and general social occasions. The purpose of elementary Chinese teaching also includes proper introduction and teaching of Chinese national conditions and Chinese cultural knowledge."

3.1 Suggestions on the content of cultural teaching in the Chinese language itself

This article briefly puts forward suggestions for cultural teaching in the Chinese syllabus of Cameroonian junior high schools from the two aspects of vocabulary and Chinese characters. The Chinese curriculum teaching design and Chinese curriculum syllabus in Cameroon's junior high schools are all based on comprehensive courses, so teachers teach pronunciation, Chinese characters, vocabulary, and culture, while conducting comprehensive courses at the same time. The cultural teaching listed in the Chinese syllabus of Cameroonian junior high schools does not involve the cultural meaning of Chinese characters and vocabulary. Scholars usually believe that

cultural factors implied in Chinese characters and vocabulary may enable students at the elementary stage to have a certain understanding of and interest in Chinese characters and vocabulary. Although the Chinese curriculum syllabus of Cameroonian junior high schools does not provide separate explanations of Chinese characters and vocabulary, nor does it clearly list the requirements for the teaching of Chinese characters and vocabulary at the primary stage. But according to the topics listed in the Chinese syllabus of Cameroonian junior high schools, we can see that the Chinese characters and vocabulary that Cameroonian junior high school students are exposed to are things or concepts related to daily life.

Regarding the teaching of Chinese characters in the primary stage of Cameroon, the author believes that because the students of Cameroonian junior high schools have never been exposed to Chinese characters, teachers can use the cultural factors in Chinese characters to increase students' interest and attention. This helps to improve the understanding of Chinese characters among Cameroonian students. Like hieroglyphs such as “mountain”, “hand”, “wood”, “water”, and “rain”, etc., their meanings can be guessed from their shapes. The Cameroonian Chinese syllabus may consider requiring teachers to teach the historical changes, the radicals, the components and structures of Chinese characters.

Vocabulary teaching in the primary stage of Cameroon focuses on the level of “material culture”. The Chinese characters representing most of the things are those that learners can directly sense, and easily find their meanings. They can usually be understood without too much explanations. However, due to cultural differences, some basic vocabulary is particularly difficult for students in Cameroonian junior high schools to understand. For example, in the Chinese syllabus of Cameroonian junior high schools, there are vocabulary indicating kinship and social appellation, like 爺爺 and 外公 (grandpa), 姥姥 and 外婆 (grandma). Since there is no difference between the inside and outside of the family in the traditional culture of Cameroon, the appellation is also the same. The father's father and the mother's father have the same title. This has allowed Cameroonian junior high school students to mix 爺爺 and 外公 (grandpa), 姥姥 and 外婆 (grandma). The author believes that teachers should explain the cultural meaning of these Chinese characters to students. Explain to students that this is a typical word that reflects social psychology and national culture, and is the embodiment of traditional family concepts in appellation words, and that in China, the father's father is called 爺爺, the mother's father is called 外公, the father's mother is called 姥姥, and the mother's mother is called 外婆. This is because Chinese people are very concerned about blood relationship, and the family is different inside and outside, so the appellation is also different. The word “外(outside)” usually refers to a relative of the mother, sister, or daughter.

Another example is that the Chinese number words in the elementary stage are easier to understand for Cameroonian junior high school learners in vocabulary learning. Generally speaking, they can easily learn to say mobile phone number, student number, etc., but some of numbers involve Chinese cultural elements, which becomes learning and communicative difficulties for Cameroonian students. Therefore, in vocabulary teaching, it is also important to teach students the cultural factors in Chinese number words. Teachers can add the cultural factors of each number when explaining numbers to students. For example, “壹(one)” means “the beginning of all things”; “二(two)” means “in pairs”; “三(three)” means “auspicious”, or “many times”; “四(four)” is a taboo meaning “death”; “八(eight)” refers to “make a fortune”, or “joyous”; “九(nine)” means “forever”, or “ever-lasting”.

All in all, Cameroonian junior high school learners are at the elementary stage, which is the initial stage for students who have just learnt Chinese and come into contact with Asian cultures. It is also a critical period for them to learn Chinese. Only by laying a solid language foundation can they support their long-term learning. The teaching of cultural factors in Chinese characters and vocabulary at the elementary stage of Cameroonian junior high schools also has very strong practical values. Since Cameroon's junior high schools do not offer special Chinese culture courses, teachers can only teach culture while teaching comprehensive courses. When teaching Chinese characters, proper teaching of cultural factors in vocabulary is of great significance for students' vocabulary learning and interest cultivation, so that the integrity and coherence of Chinese characters and vocabulary teaching can be optimized. The teaching of cultural factors in Chinese characters and vocabulary will help cultivate learners' enthusiasm and interest in learning.

3.2 Suggestions on the content of cultural teaching in culture of knowledge and intercultural communication

When we compare the Chinese syllabus of Cameroon's junior high schools with the general syllabus of international Chinese teaching, we'll also find that the cultural teaching proposed by the former is based on the contemporary Chinese system and material culture, while the cultural teaching by the latter is biased towards the contemporary Chinese system. For the study of traditional Chinese culture, the two have different requirements for learners. The cultural content formulated in the syllabus of the international Chinese language teaching complies with China's requirements for dissemination of Chinese and Chinese culture. Letting Chinese learners learn Chinese traditional culture will help them deepen their understanding of the history of Chinese civilization for thousands of years. The cultural learning requirements set forth in the Cameroon's syllabus are also in line with the original intention of the Cameroonian Ministry of Secondary Education to set up Chinese language teaching. The Ministry hopes to learn about China's system and culture to understand China's development process, so that the Cameroonians can learn from China's development methods. This is the original intention and goal of the Ministry of Secondary Education of Cameroon.

However, the author believes that it is not enough to teach the beginners to just learn culture of knowledge, the contemporary Chinese system and material culture while completely ignoring cultural content such as cross-cultural communication and traditional Chinese culture. This may cause communicative barriers. The author believes that the cultural content in the Chinese syllabus of Cameroonian junior high schools can be adjusted appropriately in accordance with the cultural teaching in the general syllabus of international Chinese teaching and its own actual needs.

Regarding culture of knowledge and the cultural teaching of contemporary China's institutions, it is believed that the Chinese curriculum in Cameroonian junior high schools should follow the principles of the Cameroonian Ministry of Secondary Education on Chinese cultural teaching, and continue to deepen the teaching of cultural content listed in the syllabus, covering the following topics such as the differences between Cameroon and China's family models, the similarities, differences, advantages and disadvantages between China's family planning policy and Cameroon's related policies, China's social security, social services, and social assistance policies for the elderly, the weak, and the disabled, China's ethnic policies, the differences between China's and



Cameroon's economic models, the secrets of China's development, the traditional Chinese medicine as an example to promote Cameroon's traditional medical care, etc.. At the same time, the author believes that the Chinese syllabus in Cameroonian junior middle schools should add the cultural content related to cross-cultural communication in order to avoid communicative barriers, misunderstandings and other common problems. For example, in daily communication, the polite language of Cameroon and China has a large cultural background difference. Handshake, hug, and kiss are the most common ways of greeting in Cameroon, but they are relatively rare in Chinese culture. Nevertheless, acquaintances in China often greet one another by some common topics related with different time or weather. For example, at noons and afternoons, they would greet you with "have you eaten yet?"; in summer, they would ask "Is it hot or not?"; in winter, they would say "cold or not?"; in daily life, they would ask "Where are you going?" or "Are you busy?", and among other greetings.

All in all, cultural factors are the kind of "culture" that students in Cameroonian junior high schools need to master in the process of learning Chinese, understanding Chinese, and using Chinese to interact with Chinese people. Simply teaching culture of knowledge and culture of contemporary Chinese systems while completely ignoring cultural content such as cross-cultural communication and traditional Chinese culture may cause communicative barriers. The cultural part of the Chinese syllabus in Cameroonian junior high schools can be adjusted appropriately in accordance with the cultural teaching in the general syllabus of international Chinese teaching and its own practical needs. Culture such as cross-cultural communication and traditional Chinese culture are the one involved in language learning and use. It is one of the language elements that must be mastered by Cameroonian students in addition to pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary in Chinese teaching. Cameroonian teachers should not just train students in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but also consciously perform cultural teaching including the language itself, cross-cultural communication, and traditional Chinese culture. This will not only help students learn Chinese more accurately and use it more flexibly to communicate with Chinese people, but help students understand the cultural factors behind Chinese characters, vocabulary, phrases, etc., so as to achieve the teaching goals of applying what they have learned into reality more effectively, thereby making Cameroonian students carry out verbal communicative tasks with more appropriate and fluent manners.

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