



Whatsapp: Solution for Teaching a Cameroonian Language?

Geneviève Sandrine Avoa Mebenga-Beling¹

Abstract

The training of teachers of national languages and cultures is a new fact in Cameroon. This began on 2009 and it is still looking for best ways for the training of young adults. In fact, the future teachers who are trained are young and most of them use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Viber and Whatsapp. Although each student learns the local language of his / her community, we notice much failure at the end of the semester. We realize that rare are those who speak their local language at home. So, the programme of training seems intense for them. They need more than the four hours they have per week in the time table to learn this language. We looked for a solution, and we taught that the use of a social media could be beneficial. We thus create a Whatsapp group since Whatsapp is very used by Cameroonian youth. We planned activities and meeting hours. Many students were happy to experience such learning procedure. However, the procedure faced some obstacles. The greatest obstacle concerns the monitoring. First of all, some students are not on line at time, or are absent. Secondly, the management of the speaking of all participants were not easy. Thirdly, the evaluation of the exercises given. This last difficulty results from the fact that the writing system of Cameroonian languages contains some signs which cannot be typed in a phone. More reflexion must be undertaken to improve the use of Whatsapp as a possible solution for well teaching of Cameroonian languages.

1. Introduction

The current global context in education made use of ICT at all levels. Teachers use ICT as a tool to achieve their educational objectives. The term ICT covers many gadgets like the computer, the interactive whiteboard, the Tablet, Smartphone... and many software and applications. If some teachers are using ICT in class situation, others allow their learners to use ICT everywhere they want. This second group of teachers may for example use social networks during the exercise of their function. That is what we have experienced as part of this research work.

2. Context

The teaching of Cameroonian languages and cultures in school is new. So, the training of teachers of national languages and cultures is a new fact in Cameroon. This began on 2009 and it is still looking for best ways for the training of young adults. In fact, the future teachers who are trained are young and most of them use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Viber and Whatsapp. Although each student learns the local language of his / her community, we notice much failure at the end of the semester. We realize that rare are those who speak their local language at home. So, the programme of training seems intense for them. They need more than the four hours they have per week in the time table to learn this language. We looked for a solution, and we taught that the use of a social media could be beneficial. In fact, these young persons really enjoy using social media, so using it to learn can be agreeable. As says [1] BLEHCH AMRY (2014 : 120) "Students at universities and major institutions of higher education use mobile communication bases text messaging and instant messaging", we chose to use Whatsapp. Moreover, some research found that students in universities are oriented and positive about using mobile learning in educational fields, that is why researchers must investigate how mobile learning technology can be best used in education, [2] LITCHFIELD et al. (2007).

We thus chose to create a Whatsapp group for three reasons:

- Whatsapp offers the possibility of instant messages (oral and written)
- Whatsapp is very used by Cameroonian youth.
- Whatsapp does not need a perfect Internet connection or a lot of data.

3. Methodology

In the created Whatsapp group we planned activities and meeting hours. The group was made up of ten students of level one. All of them are Beti, but some do not speak the Beti language. We analysed their presence in the group during our meeting hours by using MS-Excel. At the end of the semester,

¹ Higher Teachers' Training College of Yaoundé, Cameroon



we had a conversation with each of the students to collect their feelings about the use of Whatsapp during their learning of Beti language.

4. Synchronization

Although the meeting hours were selected by mutual agreement with the students, we never had a meeting where all were present. Some students were not on line at time, or were absent. About 10 meetings organised, that is the attendance rate:

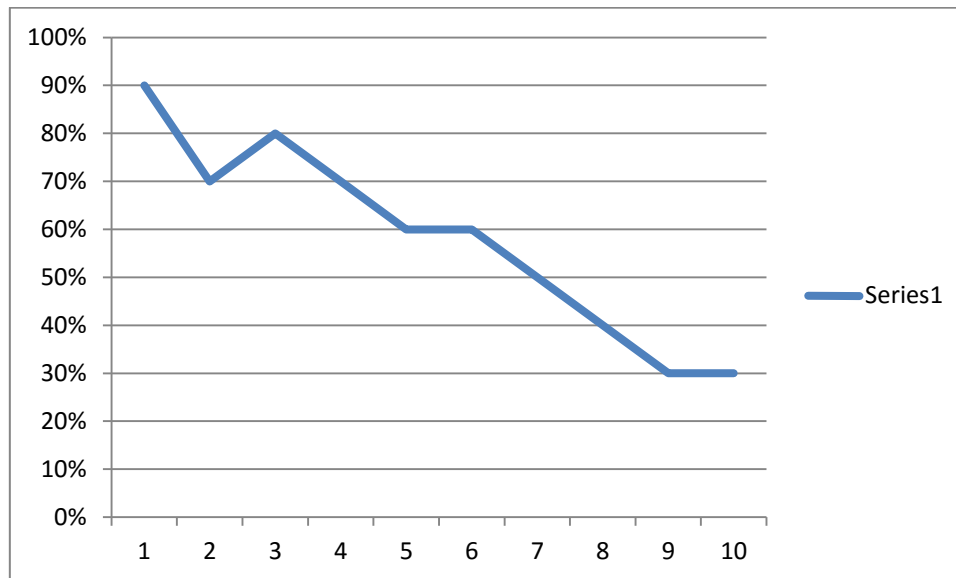


Figure 1: rate of attendance at meetings

A gradual increase of absences is clearly visible. It seems to testify to the decreasing interest in learning the Beti language by students. It is also important to point out that students who are always present at the meetings are the same who are very active in face-to-face courses. Regarding the delays, they make it difficult coordinating scheduled activities in the group.

For example, if an exercise is posted in the group, ten minutes are granted to treat. Then, five minutes are given so that each student can send her / his reply. It is clear that latecomers obstruct the smooth running of this scenario.

5. Speaking management

The management of the speaking of all participants was not easy. Indeed, more of participants, less the flow of speech is manageable. Sometimes we are left with the same question several times, because students do not always read what their peers write. Sometimes interventions are offbeat compared to the thread. This more complex teaching in a Whatsapp group.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the exercises given is not easy. This last difficulty results from the fact that the writing system of Cameroonian languages contains some signs which cannot be typed in a phone. For instance, when students had written exercises and write “ng” instead of “ŋ”. The teacher does not know whether the student does not know the right letter to write or whether the student was obliged to write “ng” because “ŋ” is not in the phone.

6. Learners' feelings

When analyzing the words of students, it seems like Whatsapp has potentialities to ease their understanding of beti language. In fact, the following sentences summarize the feelings of students at the end of the semester when they had been asked to qualify their experience of learning through Whatsapp:

- Student 1 : “ I can't say anything, because I could not afford a Smartphone, so I've never attended the meetings of the Group”
- Student 2 : “it was not easy because I had all the time to flatter my mother to be able to use her Smartphone”
- Student 3 : “I was pleased to see that Whatsapp can also be used to teach and learn”



- Student 4 : "I liked a lot, because despite some absences during the class, I could ask questions in Whatsapp group regarding these courses"
- Student 5 : "thanks to the Whatsapp group my reading level of the Beti language has improved, since I could listen to the audio messages of my classmates and the teacher as many times I want"
- Student 6 : "I appreciated because it is less restrictive than classroom courses, I could participate in the meetings of all the places where I was"
- Student 7 : "it was a nice experience, but I had a lot of difficulties with the audio files and pictures because my phone is old"
- Student 8 : "my understanding of some concepts was made easier because I could connect outside meeting hours to replay the interventions of the others"
- Student 9 : "I really liked, but not having all the graphemes in the keyboard of the phone irritated me"
- Student 10 : "my understanding of complex concepts has been deepened, the only concern is the inability to write some graphemes"

7. Possible solutions

More reflexion must be undertaken to improve the use of Whatsapp as a possible solution for well teaching of Cameroonian languages. Here are some suggestions for a successful educational use of Whatsapp:

- Avoid synchronous meetings to limit the number of absences
- Develop activities not requiring synchronous meeting
- Plan speaking turns, so that each student has a time range during which he / she can express himself / herself
- Complete online activities by discussions in class
- Think about designing applications for writing all the graphemes of the general Alphabet of Cameroon languages.

The social context of learners must actually be taken into account, as say [3] PERNIN and LEJEUNE (2004 : 04) « Les activités numériques ou numérisées nécessitent de la part des enseignants des capacités et des compétences à agir avec les numériques. Créer et transformer les activités ont besoin quelque part d'être réfléchies et structurées par celui qui s'engage dans ce type d'activités. »

8. Conclusion

Whatsapp appears to be a mean that can facilitate the learning of the Cameroonian languages, but should be used to settle the students. Indeed, some does not have a Smartphone but in their entourage there is a person willing to lend them her / his own for educational activities. So, it can be difficult to honour meetings synchronous, but possible to participate in activities spread over one or two days. In addition, the design of applications allowing to write the Cameroonian languages is essential.

References

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