

RETHINKING INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING MODEL OF SECONDARY SCHOOL CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

Chinese language teaching and learning in Cameroon has developed rapidly. Teaching Chinese as a foreign language in secondary schools in Cameroon requires teachers' professional training. Due to the complexity and challenges of the Chinese language teaching, teachers need to be equipped with the necessary linguistic, didactic, communicative, and cultural competencies. Based on a critical and in-depth analysis of documents, statistical analysis and interviews, this study has analysed the current situation of the initial teacher training (ITT) model for secondary school Chinese language teachers in Cameroon in various aspects, including the training objective, duration, curriculum methods and lecturers. The results of this study show that the initial teacher training of secondary school Chinese language teachers in Cameroon has undergone many steps in its development. At the same time, it faces some challenges such as, the limited number of Chinese language lecturers, outdated training curriculum and insufficient practical courses. To address these issues, the authors made some practical recommendations such as the urgent need to recruit and train more cameroonians lecturers, strengthen and diversify cooperation with other international higher education institutions, follow up on cameroonians students who are studying in China, set up a system which will encourages graduates to come back home after their studies to participate in the country's development, enrich the training curriculum by revising the current programme, focus more on practical courses and cultural animations and finally set up a micro-teaching programme.

Keywords: Initial teacher training model, Chinese language teachers, secondary schools, University of Maroua, Cameroon.

REPENSER LE MODÈLE DE FORMATION INITIALE DES ENSEIGNANTS DE LA LANGUE CHINOISE DU SECONDAIRE AU CAMEROUN

Résumé

L'enseignement et l'apprentissage du chinois au Cameroun se sont développés rapidement. L'enseignement du chinois comme langue vivante dans les établissements secondaires du Cameroun nécessite une formation professionnelle des enseignants. En raison de la complexité et des défis de l'enseignement du chinois, les enseignants doivent être dotés des compétences linguistiques, didactiques, communicatives et culturelles nécessaires. Sur la base d'une analyse critique et approfondie des documents, d'une analyse statistique et d'entretiens, cette étude a analysé la situation actuelle du modèle de formation initiale des enseignants de la langue chinoise au Cameroun sous divers aspects, à savoir : l'objectif de la formation, la durée de la formation, le curriculum et les méthodes de formation et enfin les formateurs. Les résultats de la présente étude ont montré que la formation initiale des enseignants de la langue chinoise des établissements secondaires au Cameroun a traversé de nombreuses étapes de son développement. En même temps, elle est confrontée à certains défis tels que le nombre limité de formateurs, le programme de formation obsolète caractérisé par un ancien programme de formation et l'insuffisance des cours pratiques. Pour résoudre ces problèmes, les auteurs ont émis quelques recommandations pratiques telles que le recrutement d'un plus grand nombre de formateurs camerounais, le renforcement et la diversification des coopérations avec d'autres universités, le suivi des étudiants camerounais en Chine, la mise en place d'un système qui encourage les diplômés à revenir au Cameroun après leurs études pour participer au développement du pays, l'enrichissement du programme de formation par la révision du programme actuel, la multiplication des cours pratiques et des animations culturelles, la mise en place d'un programme de micro-enseignement.

Mots clés : Modèle de formation initiale des enseignants, enseignants de chinois, établissements secondaires, Université de Maroua, Cameroun.

Introduction

Over the years, exchanges between Cameroon and China have been intensified in various fields, including the education area. Educational cooperation between Africa and China has a long history and dates back to the 1950s (Gonondo, 2021). In the field of education and cultural promotion, Chinese language and culture were first taught at the Chinese Language Training Centre which was created since 1995 in Cameroon (Yaoundé) and then transformed into the Confucius Institute on November 7, 2007. Currently, Cameroon is one of the African countries with a long history of Chinese language learning and teaching. Since 2008, Chinese language teachers (for secondary schools) in Cameroon are trained at the Higher Teachers' Training College (HTTC) of the University of Maroua (Gonondo & Djiraro Mangué, 2021). Since 2012, the number of Chinese language learners in Cameroon has also increased, thus requiring a large number of Chinese language teachers to meet the demand. Training Chinese language teachers should be a necessary strategy to solve the lack of Chinese language teachers in countries around the world (Li & Wu, 2019). Since the establishment of the University of Maroua in 2008, the Chinese major has been one of the five specialities of the department of foreign languages at HTTC. After the graduation of the first batch of Cameroonian Chinese language teachers, the Chinese major was immediately introduced into the Cameroonian secondary education system in 2012. Since that introduction, an increasing number of

Cameroonian students choose to learn the Chinese language. Hence, this situation has led the Cameroonian government to pay more attention to the training of secondary school Chinese language teachers by opening the second cycle and the Master's degree programme such as that of the University of Maroua. Since Chinese language teachers are the backbone of Chinese language instruction in Cameroon, ensuring that they receive the proper training to become qualified educators is necessary.

I. Literature review and conceptual framework

Since the first Confucius Institute opened its doors on 21 November 2004 in Seoul, South Korea (Mosher, 2012), Chinese language learning has expanded across many countries. In order to address the global shortage of Chinese language teachers and promote Chinese language learning worldwide, it is necessary to train "local Chinese language teachers"¹ as they are more familiar with the local environment, culture, education, etc. (Wu, 2014). Therefore, in view of the urgent need to train Chinese language teachers, many countries worldwide have started to launch "local Chinese language teachers" training programmes and each country's ITT models highlight much diversity.

I.1. Initial teacher training of "local Chinese language teachers" over the world

Due to each country's specific training model, studies on ITT of local Chinese language teachers around the world have been conducted from various aspects. For example, in Kazakh, researchers such as Meng (2013), described the Kazakh local Chinese language teacher training as a "China-Foreign cooperative and complementary-interactive" model, which means that Chinese and foreign students are taught in the same class and cooperative learning is encouraged on both sides. He asserted that this training is the result of the cooperation between China and Kazakhstan, and its main purpose is to train Kazakh Chinese language teachers in a complementary way through Xi'an International Studies University. In addition, Jiang (2012) explained that there are four types of local Chinese language teachers in Central Asia, and each type has its own training model. The first type are teachers trained in the former Soviet Union, the second type are Chinese immigrants who, after the independence of the Central Asian countries, settled in Central Asia, the third type are those who have studied in China and have some level of Chinese proficiency and desire to teach Chinese as a foreign language, the last group is the students from Central Asia who have obtained a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in teaching Chinese in the last two years. For the first and second groups of teachers, the training follows a "retraining model", while for the third and fourth groups of teachers, the Chinese language teachers must have a "Master's Degree in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (MTC SOL)". From the Philippine side, Yan (2016) asserted that Filipino Chinese language teachers training is based on a 4+1 model which is quite different from the training model adopted by countries in Central Asia. This training model requires that Chinese language teachers study at university for one year, obtain the HSK level 3, apply for a scholarship from the Confucius Institute to study in China for one year, and then return to the Philippines to study for three years after studies in China. He also mentioned some shortcomings observed during the training such as the low level of Chinese

¹ For the concept of "local Chinese language teachers," it refers to teachers who have gained a considerable level of education in teaching Chinese language and culture as a second language and are qualified to teach Chinese language in their own country (Li, 2014).

language proficiency of local Chinese language teachers, the lack of understanding of Chinese culture by local Chinese language teachers, and the urgent need to improve their Chinese language expertise. In Vietnam, Qiu (2019) found that the training model of local Chinese language teachers is based on three levels, namely language proficiency (micro-level), professional proficiency (Meso-level), and socio-cultural proficiency (macro-level), but there are some areas that still need to be adjusted. In Europe countries, (Zhang, 2012) reported that, British primary and secondary schools' Chinese language teachers training model is a combination of theory and practice, with much-increased attention on the practical aspect of teaching Chinese. Meanwhile, he suggested that a training mechanism for Chinese language teachers should be built in order to meet the demand in the United Kingdom and promote the growth of Chinese language learning.

I.2. Initial teacher training of “local Chinese language teachers” in African countries

As concerns Africa, there are few studies regarding the initial training of “Local Chinese language teachers” in countries such as Cameroon, Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, etc. For example, in Cameroon, in the last 5 years, no direct study on the ITT of “Local Chinese language teachers” has been conducted. Most Cameroonian scholars are much more interested in the current situation of Cameroonian in-service Chinese language teachers and believe that the problems they face in Chinese language teaching today are related to their initial training system, which needs to be revised (Dai, 2020; Wang, 2021). On the other hand, in Sudan, Bai (2014) asserted that the training for local Chinese language teachers in Sudan combines the I+I model, which is characterized by mini-workshops and emphasis on training in the use of Chinese language teaching materials, and also further training in China. For him, the ITT of “local Chinese language teachers” in Sudan is still in its early stages, and the recruitment, processing, teaching, and planning for the future development of local Chinese language teacher training must be enhanced. In other African countries such as Uganda, a dual mode of theoretical and practical teaching is used for training, with the theoretical mode focusing more on courses related to teaching Chinese as a second language, while the practical mode focuses on classroom observation and practical lectures (Zhang, 2020). Furthermore, (Xu, 2014) believes that four or five African countries, such as Kenya, Cameroon, South Africa, Mozambique, or Angola, should be selected as training bases for local Chinese language teachers in Africa, and the training model should be divided into three levels including: bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctoral degree. In Ethiopia, Gao (2020) revealed that the only way to train local Chinese language teachers is through the Chinese language programme offered by universities in cooperation with Confucius Institutes which is a three-year study programme with a specific number of credits required, followed by a certificate issued by the university at the end. He concluded by asserting that there are various challenges with this training such as outdated and lack of appropriate Chinese language teaching materials, a poor teaching environment, and an inappropriate training system.

In conclusion, the training model for local Chinese language teachers varies among countries, but the ultimate goal is to train qualified Chinese language teachers. Each training model is adapted to the realities of its own country, and most countries usually send their teachers to China for in-depth cultural training. Overall, these studies are quite interesting, but some gaps can be identified. In terms of content, direct studies on the initial Chinese language teacher training model are limited and outdated. Nevertheless, they

contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the trends of the ITT models of local Chinese language teachers over the world and provide a solid foundation for this study.

I.3. Conceptual Framework

I.3.1. Initial Teacher Training

Initial Teacher Training (ITT), also known as Initial Teacher Education or Pre-service teacher training, is the recognised and organised private and public education program designed to train future teachers to formally enter the profession at a specified level of education (UIS-UNESCO, 2021). ITT is the first basic training aimed at building the identity of the future teacher and leading to the practice of the teaching profession (Kaiza & Ethe, 2017). In addition, it is a pre-service training before entering the classroom as a fully responsible teacher (Dumitru, 2015). Its purpose is to prepare teachers for professional life with the important knowledge and skills they need to acquire (Cichon, 2009). ITT is also defined by (Bancel, 1989) as the joint development of theoretical and practical knowledge by teachers. Therefore, Initial teacher training provides a strategic opportunity to ensure that all teachers begin their careers prepared, motivated, and able to teach for sustainability (Ferreira et al., 2007). From the above definitions, we can note the importance of ITT for teachers and summarise it as a process of acquiring the needed theoretical and practical competences by pre-service teachers in order to be ready for the teaching profession. From the above definitions also, some issues concerning the current situation of the Cameroonian Chinese language teachers training objectives, training programme, training duration, training methods and trainers' number and qualification are raised in this study. This study aims at exploring the current situation of the above raised issues, highlighting the challenges, and proposing appropriate solutions.

I.3.2. Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Training

Pre-service teacher training refers to the training that student- teachers are provided with before they start working as a teacher. In this period of training, teachers acquire knowledge that will be useful for their future work. It is an essential component of the teacher education programme since it prepares teachers for the teaching profession (Lingam & Raghuwaiya, 2014). In contrast, in-service teacher training provides learning opportunities for in-service teachers. It can be simply defined as the appropriate courses and activities in which a practising teacher might engage to enhance his or her professional knowledge and competencies in the teaching profession (samwonyi, 2016). In one word, in-service teacher training provides teachers with the opportunity to improve their teaching practices and develop new skills in areas such as classroom management, effective teaching methods, etc (Lahmine et al., 2013).

I.3.3. Teacher Professional Development

The concept of "Teacher Professional Development" (TPD) has prompted a lot of discussion in the educational field and several researchers have proposed different definitions.

Previously called teacher in-service training, teacher professional development is a crucial tool for strengthening teachers' knowledge and instructional practices (Borko et al., 2010) and (Desimone et al., 2002). Researchers such as (Guskey, 2003) defined it as "the process and activities aimed to strengthen the professional knowledge, abilities, and attitudes of teachers so that they can, in turn, improve the learning of their students." According to (Glatthorn, 1995), TPD is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a

result of gaining more experience and systematically examining his or her teaching. Its therefore includes formal experiences such as attending workshops and professional meetings, mentoring, etc.; and informal experiences such as reading professional publications, watching documentaries related to teaching, etc. (Ganser, 2000). In addition, (Tan et al., 2015) also defines it as a kind as the process of enhancing teachers' skills and competences. Many years ago, the only "professional development" available for teachers was "staff development" or "in-service training," (Glatthorn, 1995) which is defined as "the provision of organized in-service programmes designed to foster the growth of groups of teachers; but nowadays, professional development of teachers has been considered to be an ongoing or long-term process which consists of regular activities and experiences that are designed systematically to promote growth and development in the profession (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Many scholars have referred to this transition as a "new image" of teacher learning, a "new model" of teacher education, an "educational revolution," and even a "new paradigm" of professional development (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001) and (Walling & Lewis, 2000). Therefore, according to (Day, 1997) the new conception of teacher professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those intentional and planned activities that are designed to be of either direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group, or school and that improve the quality of teaching methods. It is also viewed as teachers learning, learning how to learn, and applying their knowledge into practice for their students' growth (Avalos, 2011). In conclusion, the aforementioned definitions demonstrate that TPD is viewed as a new long-term process for teachers that involves all types of learning activities to increase their knowledge continuously in order to improve the teaching quality and methods.

I.3.4. Teacher Continuous Training

Continuous training for teachers is a quite complex concept because it can be defined in numerous ways and is also referred to "Continuing Teacher Education", "Teacher retraining", "Advanced training", "Continuous professional development", "in-service teacher training" or "in-service education" etc., all of which have different meanings and connotations from one organisation, one society, one linguistic area, one era to another (Perrenoud, 1994). The primary aim of teacher continuous training is to "actualize, expand, and strengthen the acquired knowledge by teachers during their initial training and provide them with new professional knowledge and competencies" (OECD, 2005). Therefore, researchers such as (Dumitru, 2015) defines it as an assembly of activities and practices that enable the teacher to remain a respected and acknowledged professional leader within the school space, regardless of how dynamic and rapid the modernization of society and the emancipation of man; he, the teacher, must remain strong and authentic. In addition, it is also a collection of activities designed to improve the professional knowledge, abilities and competences of in-service teachers (Bastos, 2021). Briefly, teacher continuous training includes all actions that can improve or enhance teachers' abilities and knowledge, and whose ultimate objective is a change in classroom practices that results in an improvement in student learning and performance (Salman, 2014).

2. Method

This study focused on document analysis, statistical analysis and interviews. Document analysis requires the examination and interpretation of information to derive meaning, comprehension, and empirical (Corbin, 2008). For this study, document analysis was carried out in three phases: the first phase, which is preparation, consisted of analysing the topic through online inductive research using databases and websites such as the web of science, Google scholar, Wanfang, CNKI, etc., with keywords such as “Initial teacher training”, “Initial teacher training model”, “initial teacher training model of Chinese language teachers”, “Chinese language teachers” or “Chinese language teacher training”, “Initial teacher training in Cameroon” etc. In order to gain access to official documentation regarding the training of Chinese language teachers for secondary schools in Cameroon, the second phase consisted of researching the official documents through the official websites of Cameroon’s Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) and the Higher Teachers' Training College of the University of Maroua (HTTC_UMa). The third phase consisted of the review, analysis and interpretation of the results, which allowed us to evaluate the veracity and relevance of the information and to identify helpful elements for this study. Known as the process of collecting, organizing, analyzing and interpreting the data to identify and discern patterns and trends, the statistical analysis method has also been used during this study. Data concerning the number of lecturers, the time allocated for the training courses has been gathered and analysed statistically. In addition to document analysis and statistical analysis, we have also conducted interviews to verify and complete the gathered information. Three of the four regular Chinese language lecturers (for the 2021_2022 academic year) and eight student-teachers at HTTC_UMa have been interviewed during this study.

3. Findings and Discussions

3.1. Training objective

The current institution that trains Chinese language teachers for secondary schools in Cameroon is the Higher Teachers' Training College of the University of Maroua (HTTC_UMa). In 2008 at the creation of the University of Maroua the Chinese major was established and a three-year Chinese language training programme was launched. Till 2022, the higher teachers’ training college of the University of Maroua is the only institution which offers Chinese language teaching training programme to teachers (as profession) in Cameroon and in the Central and West African regions in general. According to the documents *Syllabus for the Chinese Language Teachers’ Training Programme* published in December 2014 by the Confucius Institute at the University of Yaoundé II (CI_UYII) and the *Chinese Language and Literature Major (Teachers’ Training) Syllabus* and the updated version of the previous document also published by the CI_UYII in 2018, the first cycle professional training aims at training native Cameroonian Chinese language teachers with a comprehensive and solid knowledge of Chinese language, a good use of the Chinese language, a good ability to teach Chinese language and a good understanding of Chinese culture and modern Chinese society. Graduates should be able to teach the elementary and intermediate level of Chinese language and culture, and should have sufficient language skills to pursue a Master's degree and should be very competitive in the various positions where the Chinese language is required (Confucius Institute at the University of Yaounde II., 2014). Based on the above statement, the main objective of the Chinese language teachers training programme in Cameroon is to prepare students to get (I) a broad and

good mastery of the Chinese language, (2) a proper awareness of the Chinese culture and contemporary Chinese society, (3) a good capacity to teach the Chinese language and culture at the elementary and intermediate levels, (4) a good language proficiency to pursue a Master's degree and be ready to fill in any position where the elementary and intermediate level of Chinese language is required.

Since 2012, Chinese language teaching was introduced into Cameroon's secondary education system by the Ministry of secondary education and the first batch of Chinese language teachers graduated from the HTTC_UMa were dispatched into secondary schools by the government. By 2022, HTTC_UMa has trained over 350 Secondary school Chinese language teachers (Gonondo & Djiraro Mangué, 2021, p. 84).

3.2. Training duration

The duration of training for secondary school Chinese language teachers is 3 years for the first cycle and 2 years for the second cycle¹. The training is based on a "3+2" model, meaning that there are two cycles, namely, the first and second cycle. The first cycle is a three-years training programme for the high school graduate. After 3 years of training, the first cycle student-teachers obtain the Secondary School Teachers Diploma Grade I (DIPES I²) and are qualified as Grade I Secondary School Teachers (PCEG³). While the second cycle is a two-years training programme for Bachelor's degree holders and a total of five-years training programme for the high school graduate. After 2 years of training, those in the second cycle obtain the High School Teachers' Diploma Grade II (DIPES II⁴) and are qualified as High School Teachers (PLEG⁵). It is also worth mentioning that students who have completed the first cycle can always continue with the second cycle if they desire to expand their knowledge, upgrade their skills and Chinese level. However, they must hold a Bachelor's degree in Chinese in order to be admitted into the second cycle.

Concerning the duration of courses, the time allocated to fundamental courses has been gradually reduced. The graph below shows the evolution of allocated teaching hours to fundamental Chinese courses at HTTC_UMa.

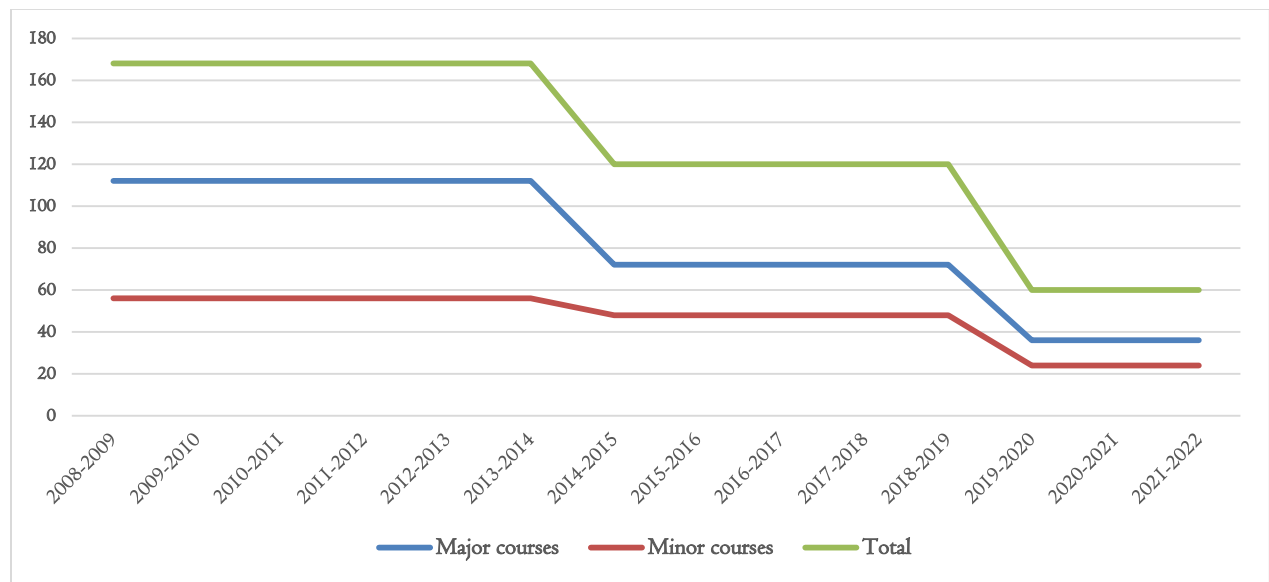
¹ The three-years training programme concerns mainly the baccalaureat holders. While the two-years training programme is for the bachelor degree holders. After the three-years training programme, the baccalaureat holders can apply to continue in the second cycle for two more years' training.

² Diplôme de professeur de l'enseignement secondaire I^{er} grade.

³ Professeur des collèges d'enseignement général.

⁴ Diplôme de professeur de l'enseignement secondaire deuxième grade

⁵ Professeur des lycées d'enseignement général

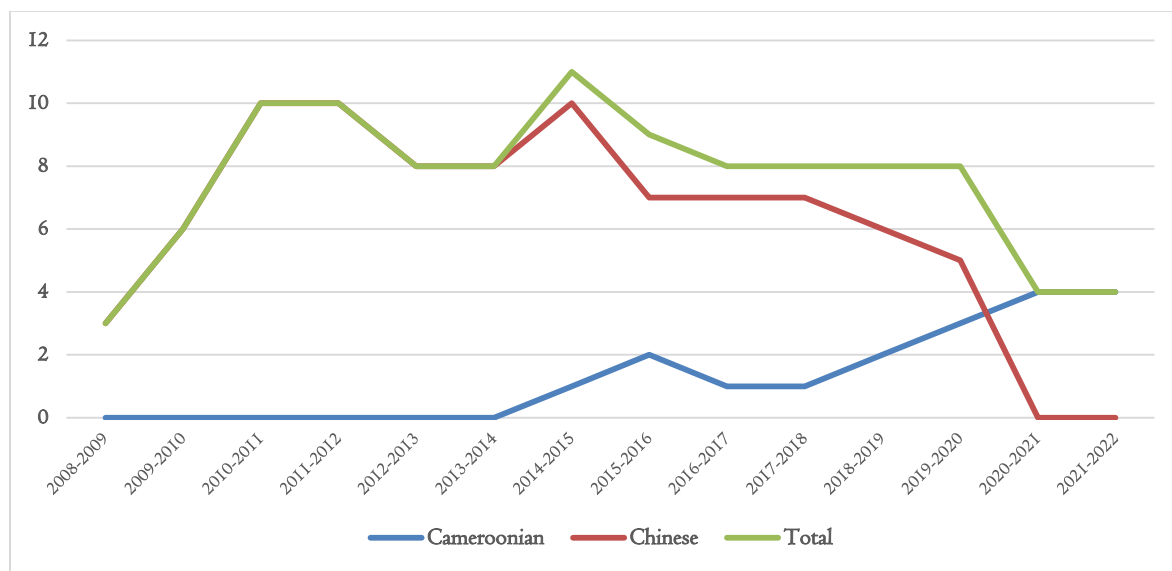


Graph 3.I: Time allocated to Chinese language teaching at HTTC_UMa

From the above graph, we can see that with time, the number of teaching periods allocated to Chinese courses has been gradually reduced. At the beginning a major course was taught for 112 hours, then it reduced to 72 hours and now it is taught for 36 hours. While a minor course was taught at the beginning for 56 hours, then 48 hours and now it is taught only for 24 hours. Although the courses have not been changed, the teaching periods allocated to those courses have been significantly reduced. This reduction of teaching period could negatively affect the quality of the trainees.

3.3. Lecturers

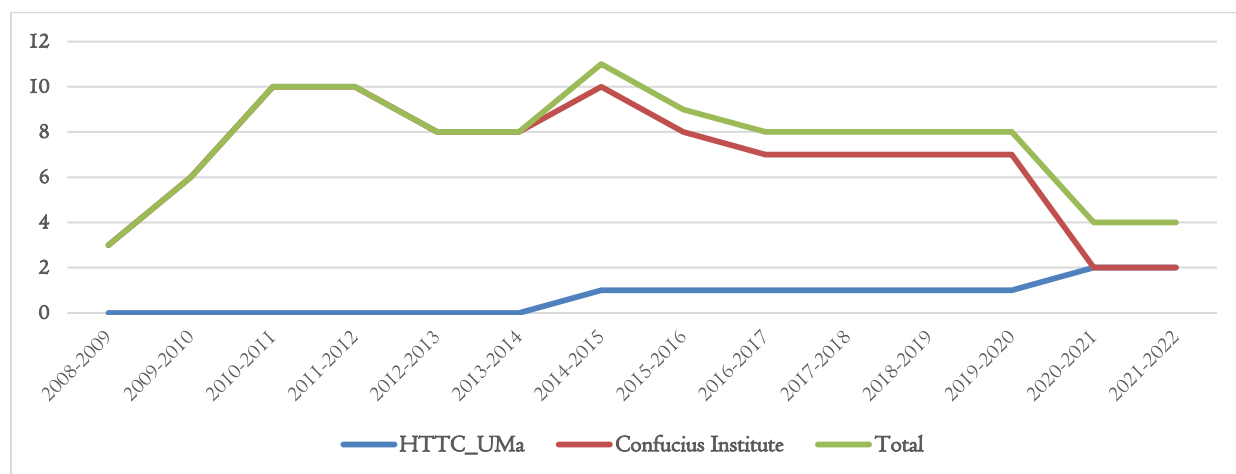
Following the rapid development of Chinese language teaching and learning in Cameroon, there is an increasing trend in the “Cameroonisation” of the lecturers because all the lecturers who are training the secondary school Chinese language teachers are Cameroonian. During the two last academic years (2020-2021 and 2021-2022), four lecturers were devoted to Chinese language teachers training. During the 2020-2021 academic year, there were four levels (the levels two and three for the first cycle, and the levels one and two for the second cycle). During the 2021-2022 academic year, there were also four levels (the levels one and three for the first cycle, and the levels one and two for the second cycle). From the above description, we may notice that there were four different levels of students to be trained by four lecturers. Additionally in the past, during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic years, ten lecturers were in charge of the three levels of the first cycle, with an average of 3.33 lecturers per level (Zhao, 2012).



Graph 3.2: Chinese language lecturers at HTTC_UMa

The above graph displays the number of Chinese language lecturers (Cameroonian and Chinese) who were training the secondary school Chinese language teachers from the establishment of the higher teachers' training college till now (2022). The above description shows clearly that the number of levels has increased, while the number of lecturers has gradually decreased. This situation shows the shortage of lecturers which could ineluctably affect the training quality and efficiency, thus impacting on the proficiency and competences of the secondary school Chinese language teachers and learners.

The Chinese language lecturers involved in secondary school teachers training at HTTC_UMa are constituted of permanent lecturers recruited by the University and temporary lecturers from the Confucius Institute. The following graph displays the distribution of lecturers involved in Chinese language teachers training at HTTC_UMa.



Graph 3.3: Regular permanent (HTTC) and temporary (C.I.) lecturers at HTTC_UMa

From the above graph, we may note that from the beginning of the Chinese language programme (2008) till 2013, all the lecturers were from the Confucius Institute (C.I.). Since 2014, the Cameroonian government is responding progressively to address the shortage of lecturers. We can also notice that from 2014, the number of lecturers sent by the C. I. to HTTC_Uma has progressively reduced. In 2014, ten lecturers were sent by the C.I., but today (2022) only two lecturers have been dispatched to HTTC_Uma.

3.4. Training programme and methods

The training programme for the first cycle of the Chinese language teaching at HTTC_UMa includes three main categories of courses: fundamental courses, professional courses, and complementary courses. For the first semester, level 1 students have five fundamental Chinese courses, namely elementary comprehensive Chinese (I), elementary Chinese speaking (I), elementary reading comprehension (I), elementary listening comprehension (I), and an optional course. During the second semester, the fundamental courses of level 1 student-teachers are composed of five other elementary Chinese courses, namely, comprehensive Chinese (2), Chinese speaking (2), Chinese characters and writing (2), Chinese listening (2), and overview of the Chinese society.

The fundamental courses for the first semester of level 2 students are composed of five intermediate Chinese courses, specifically, comprehensive Chinese (I), Chinese listening and speaking (I), Chinese reading (I), modern Chinese writing (I), and Introduction to Chinese Culture. The fundamental courses of the second semester for level 2 are comprehensive Chinese (2), Chinese listening and speaking (2), Chinese reading (2), modern Chinese writing (2), and Introduction to linguistics.

The level 3 students have Chinese language fundamental courses only during the first semester. The second semester is reserved for field experience in a secondary school. The fundamental courses of the first semester are: Advanced comprehensive Chinese (I), modern Chinese grammar, translation, modern and contemporary literary texts, and Chinese language didactics. As mentioned above, the second semester of level three is reserved for teaching practice in a secondary school. At the end of the teaching practice, student teachers are required to write a teaching practice report.

In addition to the fundamental courses, the student-teachers at HTTC_UMa also follow some professional and complementary courses. The professional courses in level 1 include: general psychology, psychopedagogy and child psychology; philosophy, sociology and history of education; didactics and general pedagogy. In level 2, they have the psychology of learning and psychopedagogy; measurement, evaluation and docimology; introduction to general didactics; didactics of disciplines. In level 3, they have three professional courses: Seminar on Didactics of Disciplines (I); Administration and Legislation; and finally Ethics of Education. Bilingual training and e-learning are the complementary courses of levels 1 and 2 of the first cycle, and level I of the second cycle.

Tables 3.1., 3.2., and 3.3. below show the list of fundamental courses. In the first cycle, training focuses more on developing students' language proficiency and basic skills namely listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, which are the basic requirements of Chinese language teaching.

Table 3.1. First cycle level I student-teachers' fundamental courses

First cycle/ level I			
First semester		Second semester	
Courses	Credits	Courses	Credits
elementary comprehensive Chinese (I)	4	elementary comprehensive Chinese (2)	4
elementary Chinese speaking (I)	4	elementary Chinese speaking (2)	4
elementary reading comprehension (I)	4	Chinese characters and writing	4
elementary listening comprehension (I)	3	elementary Chinese listening (2)	3
optional course	3	overview of the Chinese society	3

Table 3.2. First cycle level 2 student-teachers' fundamental courses

First cycle/ level 2			
First semester		Second semester	
Courses	Credits	Courses	Credits
intermediate comprehensive Chinese (I)	4	intermediate comprehensive Chinese (2)	4
intermediate Chinese listening and speaking (I)	4	listening and speaking comprehension (2)	4
intermediate Chinese reading	4	intermediate Chinese reading	4
modern Chinese writing (I)	3	writing technics of modern Chinese language (2)	3
introduction to Chinese culture	3	introduction to linguistics	3

Table 3.3. First cycle level 3 student-teachers' fundamental courses

First cycle/ level 3			
First semester		Second semester	
Courses	Credits	Courses	Credits
advanced comprehensive Chinese	4	teaching practice	20
modern Chinese grammar	4	report of teaching practicum	10
translation	4		
modern and contemporary literary texts	4		
Chinese language didactics	4		

According to the above-mentioned tables, level 3 students have few professional courses because they must complete a three-month teaching-practicum during the second semester. This is the final step of training for the first cycle student-teachers. Through this study authors found that student-teachers prefer to begin teaching immediately after completing the first-cycle, the reasons being that, some have limited financial support and others because they do not hold a Bachelor's degree in Chinese. Another point we can notice is that the “Chinese language didactics” and “modern Chinese grammar” courses are only taught in the final year (level 3) training programme. During the interview, Chinese language lecturers asserted that the

contents of the textbooks used for the fundamental courses in the first cycle of level I are nearly identical and do not differ significantly, which implies that the textbooks' contents are not diversified and applied to the current situation of students.

Table 3.4. Second cycle level I student-teachers' fundamental courses

Second cycle/ level I			
First semester		Second semester	
Courses	Credits	Courses	Credits
Chinese grammar	4	lexical analysis of the Chinese language	4
Chinese literature: ancient poetic texts, and modern and contemporary novels	4	Chinese classroom observation, practice and textbooks analysis	4
linguistics and foreign languages teaching theories	4	critical theories of literature	4
didactic I: teaching Chinese phonetics and characters	3	didactics 2: Chinese vocabulary and grammar teaching	3
overview of Chinese history	3	research methodology	3

Table 3.5. Second cycle level 2 student-teachers' fundamental courses

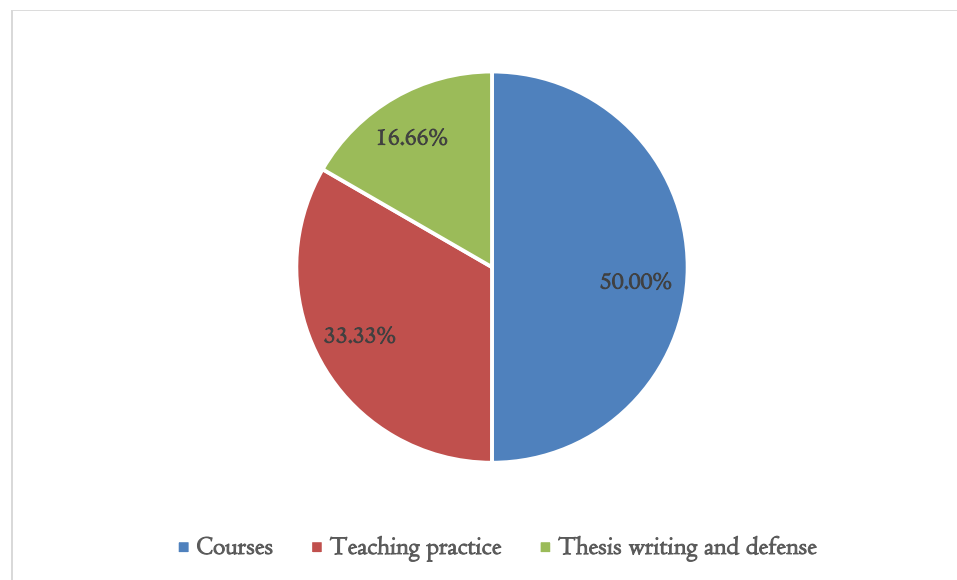
Second cycle/ level 2			
First semester		Second semester	
Courses	Credits	Courses	Credits
Chinese culture: history of Chinese thoughts	6	thesis writing and defense	10
semantic analysis of Chinese	6		
seminar on general knowledge and bilingualism	4		
seminar of writing and preparation to the thesis defense	5		

Table 3.4. reveals that during an academic year, second cycle level I student-teachers have ten fundamental courses, which are: Chinese grammar, Chinese literature: ancient poetic texts and modern and contemporary novels, linguistics and foreign languages teaching theories, didactic I: teaching Chinese phonetics and characters, overview of Chinese history during the first semester, lexical analysis of the Chinese language, Chinese classroom observation, practice and textbook analysis, critical theories of literature, didactics 2: Chinese vocabulary and grammar teaching and research methodology during the second semester. For the past two academic years (2020-2021 and 2021-2022) the research methodology course has been taught in another language (French, English) than Chinese language by a non-Chinese language lecturer. Research

methodology could be universal, but the Chinese language, maybe like other foreign languages, has its specificities. It is true that the University has its thesis writing protocol, but the student-teachers who should write their thesis in Chinese need to understand the research methodology in Chinese and adapt it to the University thesis writing protocol, taking into account the specificities of the Chinese language. This is one of the issues to be considered at this level.

Table 3.5. shows that in level 2 of the second cycle, students have 5 fundamental courses with a very high credit value, but only one of the five courses are taught in Chinese, namely “semantic analysis of Chinese”. The authors advocate that, courses like the Chinese culture: history of Chinese thoughts and the seminar on writing and preparation for thesis defense should be taught in Chinese language. The reason why a course like the seminar on writing and preparation for thesis defense needs to be taught in Chinese language is that, at the end of their training, the student-teachers have to write and defend their thesis in Chinese language.

As illustrated on the graph below, the credits allocated to the various training items of the second cycle level 2 student-teachers are displayed as follow: 50% of the total credit is allocated to the various courses, 33.33% to the teaching practice and 16.66% to thesis writing and defense.



Graph 3.4 Second cycle level 2 student-teachers' training programme

4. Challenges and recommendations

4.1. Shortage of lecturers

As illustrated on graph 3.2. (Chinese language lecturers at HTTC_UMa) and graph 3.3. (Regular permanent (HTTC) and temporary (C.I.) lecturers at HTTC_UMa), the results of this study indicate a progressive decrease in the number of Chinese language lecturers at HTTC-UMa. In the past, particularly during the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic years, there were 3 to 4 lecturers per level but today (2020-2021 and 2021-2022), there is a single lecturer per level. This is evidence showed not only of a decrease in the number of Chinese language lecturers, but also of a shortage of lecturers, which is a major

challenge. Despite efforts made by the Cameroonian government to recruit permanent lecturers over the years 2008 to 2021, as shown on graph 3.3, there is still a need for the government to recruit more lecturers. At HTTC_UMa, this problem could be resolved by the ability of the University to train its own lecturers. Cameroonian Master's degree holders in Chinese language and literature could be recruited by the University and trained by its current qualified lecturers. Another possible solution to the shortage of Chinese language lecturers is to strengthen and diversify cooperation with other international higher education institutions. Lessons can be drawn from current global trends in multi-lateral partnership for a common development.

Also, it is very important for the Cameroonian government to follow up on its citizens who are studying abroad, especially in China. According to data compiled from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, China was the third (after Germany and France) Cameroonians most popular study destination in 2019, with a number of 3000 students. In a recent research published by (Guiake et al., 2021) 20% and 15% of the 202 Cameroonian students from 90 higher education institutions in China, who participated in the research, responded respectively that they are pursuing "Chinese language" and "other social sciences and humanities" studies. This means that there is a large number of Cameroonian students in China who could be qualified to teach the Chinese language back home. In this same study, among the 32.67% of respondents who expressed their willingness to come back home upon graduation, most of them wished to stay abroad to gain international working experience before returning to Cameroon. This study is an indication of the need for the government to devise a method to encourage Cameroonian graduates to come back home after their studies to participate in the country's development.

4.2. Outdated training curriculum

4.2.1. Obsolete training programme

The current programme for the training of student-teachers at HTTC_UMa is more than a decade old. Since the first batch of the Chinese majored student-teachers HTTC_UMa, the training programme has revolved around the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. It is important to mention that this programme, developed by native Chinese lecturers, takes into account the fact that the student-teachers come into contact with the Chinese language for the first time at the university (they had not learnt Chinese language at secondary nor primary school). After the graduation of the first batch of student-teachers, the Chinese language was, in 2012, officially introduced into the secondary education system in Cameroon. Since then, third year secondary school students have been able to choose "Chinese" as a foreign language (LVII) major. In 2017, Cameroon graduated its first batch of Baccalauréat holders majoring in Chinese, meaning that they had learned Chinese for about five years in secondary school. This clearly differentiates them from the very first batches of student-teachers who had never learned Chinese in secondary school before starting their training. But surprisingly, the student-teachers today are still being trained with the same curriculum that existed since the inception of the Chinese language programme. Courses like elementary comprehensive Chinese (I), elementary Chinese speaking (I), elementary Chinese listening (I), etc. (See Table 3.1.) are supposed to be taught from the secondary school. As concerns the

training at HTTC_UMa the content of the programme needs to be enhanced to meet up with the current level of the student-teachers.

It is worth mentioning that the Chinese language curriculum at HTTC_UMa was established by native Chinese lecturers many years ago. Although this training programme was revised in December 2014, still by the native Chinese lecturers, but this time with the participation of two Cameroonian lecturers, it does not meet the standards for the Cameroonian student-teacher's development. Regarding the changes mentioned, basic Chinese I, calligraphy I and Chinese phonetics II courses in the first training programme of the first cycle, level I, were replaced by Chinese characters and Chinese character culture, elementary Chinese listening, and one optional course. In level 2 of the first cycle, basic Chinese 3, calligraphy 3, Chinese culture 3, and writing 2 were substituted by Chinese listening 2, overview of Chinese society, modern Chinese writing, and introduction to linguistics. In level three of the first cycle, the main difference observed is that the old training programme for level 3 student-teachers has ten fundamental courses which are: advanced Chinese I, Overview of China I, advanced reading I, advanced writing I, advanced Chinese listening I, advanced Chinese 2, Overview of China 2, advanced reading 2, advanced writing 2, and advanced Chinese listening 2, while the 2014 revised programme only has five courses: advanced comprehensive Chinese, modern Chinese grammar, translation, modern and contemporary literary texts, and Chinese language didactics.

In May 2018, the 2014 revised programme was again slightly readjusted, with four courses of the entire first cycle reviewed, as well as some levels I and 3 courses. In level I, the Chinese characters and Chinese character culture course that was taught in the first semester moved to the second semester with a new title as Chinese characters and writing and the elementary Chinese reading course that was taught in the second semester moved back to the first semester with the same title. Meanwhile in level 3, the Chinese audio-visual speaking and Chinese-French translation courses were respectively changed to modern Chinese grammar and Chinese-French/French-Chinese translation.

From the above training programme descriptions, the following challenges can be highlighted:

- Since the establishment of the Chinese major at HTTC_UMa, the training programme has focused mostly on some specific skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing;
- The revised training programme of December 2014 introduced a translation course which, unfortunately, was unidirectional, that is, from Chinese to French. It is only during the May 2018 readjustment of the programme that the course became bidirectional, that is, Chinese to French and French to Chinese;
- The training programme for future Cameroonian Chinese language teachers at HTTC_UMa was designed by native Chinese lecturers since its inception in 2008;
- Just like teaching time allocation for the training, the number of courses have reduced, for example in level 3, student-teachers have been given ten (10) fundamental courses compared to five (5) courses since 2014;
- Although since 2017, there are Baccalauréat holders with Chinese major moving to the University, the revision of the training programme operated in 2018 still does not take into consideration the training

level of these students, as it still offers courses like elementary Chinese comprehension, elementary Chinese speaking, elementary Chinese reading, elementary Chinese listening, etc., which are supposed to have been taught at secondary and high school levels.

To address these various challenges, there is a need to:

- Diversify the training programme with courses adapted to the current realities of the country, current training needs and current student levels.
- Ensure that the revision of the training programme is initiated and organised by the Cameroonian government, with necessary expertise from external partners.

There is need for a proper harmonization of the number of training courses and teaching hours because, currently, only 36 hours and 24 hours (of teaching and exercises) are respectively allocated to all fundamental major courses and minor courses, compared to 112 hours and 56 hours at the launch of the program, regardless of the credit value of each course. Moreover, the student-teachers only have about three months of teaching practice, which seems to be a short period. As an essential component that enables student-teachers to strengthen their abilities to teach Chinese language and to become aware of the realities of Chinese language teaching, the teaching practice period should be a little longer. The didactics courses should cover all the required aspects to be taught in the secondary schools. They should not only aim at some specific components like the didactics of the Chinese phonetics, Chinese characters, vocabulary, and grammar as it is the case now. The training should also cultivate student-teachers' text teaching skills, cultural aspects analysis and teaching skills among others. It should focus more on practical courses, cultural animations, and should match with the expected teaching job requirements. During this study, one of the interviewees, a second cycle graduate student-teacher, asserted that "some of the training programme contents do not fit the teaching realities on the field. In secondary school, we just have a Chinese textbook which requires knowing how to teach vocabulary, text, grammar, characters, phonetics, some cultural points, etc. But during second cycle training we had courses like ancient poetic texts, modern and contemporary novels, critical theories of literature, semantic analysis of the Chinese language, Chinese philosophical thoughts and other courses which are also of a great importance, but do not directly match with the secondary school students' realities".

Furthermore, according to *the Standards for Teachers of Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (2012)*, in addition to mastering the basic knowledge of the Chinese language, such as pronunciation, pronunciation methods, rules of the Chinese phonetic pattern, tones, sentences, etc., Chinese language teachers must also have thorough knowledge of the composition, the origin, key points, and difficulties of Chinese grammar, and thorough knowledge of the concepts of stroke order, rules, evolution, and structure of Chinese characters. It is only when teachers have a solid foundation in Chinese language theory that they can effectively transmit that knowledge to their students during practical teaching, which is extremely important for their professional development.

4.2.2. Insufficient practical courses

This study revealed also that the fundamental training courses provided in the first cycle of HTTC are not so different from those provided in the first cycle Chinese major at the faculty. The comprehensive Chinese,

Chinese listening, reading, speaking, the characters, the didactics, etc. are taught both at HTTC and at the faculty. It was surprising to discover during this study that the Chinese didactics course which is taught both at the faculty and at the HTTC has the same credit value of 4 at both levels. The difference observed is that new contents are taught at the faculty. We have for instance, phonetics (level 1), business Chinese (level 2), and translation (level 2 and 3) at the faculty. Apart from the above courses, the curriculum at the faculty also offers level 3 students the possibility to choose to major in Chinese language (diachronic grammar and modern syntax, new developments of Chinese language, linguistic theories and specific translation) or Chinese literature (contemporary Chinese literature, literary criticism and literary theories, comparative literature and contemporary Chinese art history). The above results showed that the program structure is unbalanced, because there are more theoretical courses with high credits than practical courses, with the course like the didactics of the Chinese language taught only in the final year of training (level 3). This is supported by one interviewee of the first-cycle, who affirmed that: “Our courses are more theoretical, the training program should provide more practical courses. We wish to be sent regularly to secondary schools for observation, because it will allow us to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in teaching Chinese.” It is also important to extend the duration of the teaching practice to give student-teachers more opportunities to practice what they have learned, thereby helping them reduce the stress they face as new teachers when they graduate and also helping them quickly adapt to the teaching profession.

As for the second cycle, the results showed that the courses are rich and provide a deepening of the theoretical and practical knowledge for the students at levels 1 and 2. However, there is a need to introduce a comparative study on the cultural aspect. Cameroon and China have many similarities and some differences as far as cultural features are concerned. The student-teachers, rooted in their local culture, also need to know and experience the Chinese culture through a comparative perspective. In addition, this study noted that there are not enough culture-related courses and the few existing ones need to be overhauled to ensure quality training. For example, in the first year, the course “Chinese Society Overview” could be redesigned as “Introduction to Chinese Culture” so that students can explore the Chinese people's geography, history, and some societal features. In the second year it is important to include a cultural course on “Chinese ethnic minorities and food” so that students can gain an understanding of China's 56 ethnic groups and learn to discuss their similarities and differences through a deeper understanding of the history and culture of the different ethnic groups as well as a deeper understanding of China's food culture. In the third year, offering a course on “Chinese literary culture” is also necessary. In the first year of the second cycle, it is important to include a course on “Chinese cultural skills” whose main objective will be to develop students' abilities in traditional Chinese skills, through which they will have to master at least one important Chinese cultural skill (calligraphy, Chinese painting, paper cutting, Chinese knots, Chinese dance, Etc.). At level 2 of the second cycle, a course on “the overview of Chinese culture and culture teaching” will be very much welcomed as it will aim to consolidate the knowledge of Chinese culture and equip students with the ability to teach Chinese culture properly. Concerning the findings about some fundamental courses taught in a language other than Chinese like thesis writing, the authors believe and advise that, it should be taught in Chinese. Since level 2 students of the second cycle are required to write a

dissertation in Chinese, it is essential to have that lesson taught in Chinese so as to help them master writing methods in Chinese, documents collection, organization, reading and analysis, Chinese dissertation writing style, the syntax of Chinese written words, and the various modules of writing a dissertation in Chinese. Regarding Chinese language teachers training, Dai (2020) demonstrated that Chinese language teachers in Cameroon secondary schools generally face issues such as insufficient basic Chinese teaching skills, and lack of teaching experience. This reflects the existing problems in their initial training. Therefore, there is a pressing need to build a strong training system for Chinese language teachers and to improve the training program by updating the course content, improving teaching methods, strengthening the training of basic Chinese language teaching skills, and laying particular emphasis on teaching practice.

It is also necessary to include separate courses on pinyin, pronunciation and grammar in the training curriculum to enable student-teachers to better master this part of the Chinese language and to meet the needs of secondary school students. Furthermore, to allow student-teachers to gain real classroom teaching experience by improving their soft skills, such as teaching behavior, communication, and classroom management, micro-teaching practice should be included in the training curriculum. This will help them to learn the art of teaching more easily and to the greatest extent possible. Systematically training first cycle student-teachers to use the *Bonjour Cameroon* textbook is very necessary, especially as it would help them adjust the textbook content to secondary school students' realities, and regularly organize Chinese teaching competitions among student-teachers to increase their motivation. More up-to-date support documents are also needed to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

This study further observed that the textbooks used in the Chinese education program at HTTC Maroua are not quite adapted to the needs of student-teachers. It therefore proposes that Cameroon's Ministry of secondary education, in collaboration with the Confucius Institute, should design appropriate textbooks for the initial training of secondary school Chinese language teachers.

Additionally, a certain language proficiency level in Chinese should be required before graduation. It could be based on a Chinese language proficiency test which is internationally recognised or any other Chinese language proficiency measuring tool.

Conclusion

This paper used a critical and in-depth analysis of documents, statistical analysis and interview methods to explore the current situation of the initial teacher training model of secondary school Chinese language teachers in Cameroon from four perspectives: training objective; training duration, number of lecturers; and training curriculum and methods. This study found that the ITT of secondary school Chinese language teachers in Cameroon faces numerous challenges which are manifested by the limited number of Chinese language lecturers, the initial teacher training courses, which are not in line with the training standards for Cameroonian secondary school Chinese language teachers, and the limited number of practical courses. This article also provides relevant suggestions to address the shortcomings in the ITT of Cameroonian secondary school Chinese language teachers with the hope of reducing the gap in the literature on Chinese language training in Cameroon.

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