The history of Cameroon is important in understanding the evolution of education system in this country. First the country was colonized by the Germans and after the First World War became a trustee for the League of Nations under the rule of British and French governments. This has lead to development of a dual system of education that exist to the present.

Therefore the objectives of this chapter are to:

- Describe how the historical factors have shaped the system of education in Cameroon.
- Describe at least five major characteristics of the Cameroonian education system.
- Discuss the problem of language in the Cameroonian education system.

BACKGROUND

The population of Cameroon is estimated at 15,803,220 inhabitants as of July 2001. With a surface area of 475,442 km$^2$, it is bounded to the
west by Nigeria, to the northeast by Chad, to the east by Central African Republic and to the south by Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Congo. There are ten administrative regions, two (2) of which are English-speaking and eight (8) French-speaking.

Historically, Cameroon was founded around 1472 by a Portuguese navigator called Fernando Po who arrived the Bight of Biafra, then sailed up the Wouri River situated in the Coastal region. The navigator was surprised to see shrimps in the river, and so baptized the river "Rio dos Camarões" (river of shrimps). This name which was to be associated to the country became "Kamerun" during the German colonial period and "Cameroon" or "Cameroun" during British and French colonial rule. In 1884, Germany colonized Cameroon. The signing of the Germano-Douala treaty in July 1884, whereby Cameroon became a German protectorate, marked this event. But with the defeat of Germany in 1916 during the First World War, Cameroon was divided between Britain and France, and administered first under the League of Nations mandate and later under the United Nations trusteeship. Britain got two discontinuous strips of land of about 90,000km² along the Nigerian border: the strip to the north was called "Northern British Cameroons" and that to the south was called "Southern British Cameroons". The French got the lion's share and administered it as an independent territory, whereas the British administered theirs from Lagos in Nigeria.

French Cameroon became independent on 1 January 1960. Then on 11 February 1960, British Southern Cameroon voted union with French Cameroon through a referendum. This association between the two entities was consolidated on 1 October 1961 through the Reunification of Cameroon and creation of a federation made up of two states called West Cameroon and East Cameroon. The federation survived till 20 May 1972 when a unitary State made up of seven (7) provinces was created. And later in 1984, the number of provinces was increased to ten (10) through a Presidential decree.

The educational system of Cameroon is very popular in Africa. The method of learning is different in the eastern and the western part of Cameroon. The educational system of East Cameroon followed the methods of French model and the West Cameroon's system was based on the British model. The English sub-system of Education follows the system of education that was operational in the English speaking part
of the country before unification (During the Trusteeship era under Britain). This education system reflects colonial heritage from Britain and France. Efforts have been underway since 1985 to harmonize these two systems.

Education is compulsory through the age of 14 years. Primary school education has been free since 2000; however, families must pay for uniforms and book fees. Tuition and fees at the secondary school level remain unaffordable for many families.

In 2002, the gross primary enrolment rate was 108 percent. Gross enrolments ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. In 2001, 84.6 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years were attending school. As of 2001, 64 percent of children who started primary school were likely to reach grade 5.

**ADMINISTRATION**

Formal education is under three ministries: the Ministry of National Education (from nursery to secondary education); the Ministry of Technical Education and Vocational Training; and the Ministry of Higher Education. The administrative structure in Cameroon is centralized requiring endorsement of the central government, represented by line ministries. The Ministry of National Education at the national level makes education policies and at the Provincial and Divisional levels there are the Delegations of Education with inspectorate support at the sub-Division or District levels. There is however no known education policy document, the process of putting one in place commenced in 1995 when the National Education Forum was held.

There are four main actors involved in education in Cameroon. These include government at the National, Provincial, Divisional, Sub-Divisional, District and Village levels; civil society, international development agencies and the Private sector. Civil society organizations both local and international play very limited or no role in the education policy process. The Cameroon government has demonstrated its will to promote Education for All goals. The National EFA plan has however not entered the implementation stage despite the setting up within the Ministry of Education of an EFA Permanent Autonomous Technical Unit for the implementation of this plan. Cameroonians even at the Ministry
of Education (especially at the external services) do not yet have access to this National EFA Plan of Action.

ENROLMENTS

In 2000, the school age population at the primary level (6-12 years) was about 2.8 million. In 2000/2001, 2.69 million pupils enrolled, an enrolment Comprising children aged less than six years, and especially those aged more than 12 years. A good number of school age children are therefore not attending school. This state of affairs is due to several factors like inadequate funding of education leading to parents paying user fees; paucity of classrooms (20% of which are temporary and improvised structures) and partly to insufficient number of teachers, with a 1 to 63 teacher – pupil ratio, a ratio that the Ministry of Education plans to reduce to 1 to 47 by 2011. The gross enrolment rate for formal education dropped from close to 100% in the 80s to 71 % in 1995/96 and rose slightly to 78 % in 1997/98. The gross enrolment rate for preschool children is low (about 10.6%) and lower in the provinces of Adamawa (5.3%), North (4.5%) and the Far North (0.7%). Between 1996 and 2000, enrolments in private schools doubled. School enrolment is not marched by teacher supply.

STRUCTURE

The Cameroon education is mainly divided into four categories namely, tertiary education, primary, secondary and higher education. The primary schools in Cameroon provide free education to the students and it is mandatory for every pupil. There are several primary schools in the country providing basic education to the children of Cameroon. Some of the primary schools belong to the government and others are run by religious organizations.

After completing primary education, a student can pursue higher education, depending upon the financial condition of the family. The secondary educational system is divided into three parts namely, secondary schools, vocational schools and apprenticeships. For further studies a student can take admission in any of the six public universities of Cameroon.
KINDERGARTEN

In the past decade, Cameroonian parents have increasingly indulged in childhood education. Parents usually do so by first sending their children to kindergarten at about the age of two years. In the English Speaking region of the country, kindergarten is known as a "nursery school". While in French speaking Cameroon, it is called "l'ecole maternelle". Children attend school for about two or three years, until the age of four or five when they are seen fit to start elementary or primary school ("l'ecole primaire", in French). The state and Private individuals are the main actors running these schools. It is worth noting that education at this level is not compulsory in Cameroon.

PRIMARY LEVEL

Primary education lasts for six years in the Anglophone system, leading to the First School Leaving Certificate, and six years in the Francophone system, leading to the Certificat d'Etudes primaires élémentaires (CEPE). Primary education in Cameroon now runs for six years down from seven. Primary education in Cameroon is compulsory. The Government and various religious denominations like the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist in Christian regions of the country, and Koranic ones in the Islamic regions mostly run primary schools. One significant difference is that there are no tuition fees at the Government schools. In the English Speaking Cameroon, primary education runs for six years at the end of which students must sit and pass the general certificate exams as a prerequisite for graduation. The exams are the First School Leaving Certificate and the Common Entrance Examination. To follow some specific career paths, pupils have the opportunity to access some technical, vocational and professional exams.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

After primary schools, there are at least three main further channels students can pursue, depending primarily on their family financial circumstances, but also on the results obtained at the general exams. These are: Secondary/ Grammar Schools, of which there has been quite a proliferation over the last 25 years. The principal operators in this sector are the Government, the religious denominations, and a growing number of private entrepreneurs. Here again, tuition at the
Government secondary schools (GSS) is either free or costs considerably less than at the other types of school.

In the Anglophone system, the first cycle of secondary education lasts for five years and leads to the Cameroon General Certificate Education Ordinary level. Higher schools offer two-year courses leading to the General certificate of education Advanced level. In the English-speaking parts, secondary education at this Selection into the Government Secondary School was supposed to be based on the results obtained at the Common Entrance Exam. For example grammar schools generally takes five years, from ages 12 to 17. Students specialize in the arts and sciences, and at the end of the programme they must take the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) exam, at the Ordinary ("O") level. The General Certificate of Education examination (GCE) ordinary level is written by students after 5 years of secondary education. Students write the GCE Advanced Level (A/L) examination after two years of High School. The General Certificate of Education (GCE) both Ordinary and Advanced levels are the two most qualifying exams in the English Speaking part of Cameroon. The GCE Advanced Level certificate qualifies students to enter the University or other institutions of higher learning. The GCE examinations are organized by the GCE Examination Board created by the government to handle examinations at the secondary and high school levels in the English Speaking sub-system.

In the Francophone system, the first four years of secondary education lead to the Brevet d'Etudes du premier Cycle du second Degré. At the Lycées (upper secondary), three years' study lead to the Baccalauréat. Technical secondary education leads to the City and Guilds Part III and to the Baccalauréat or the Brevet de Technicien Supérieur respectively, or the Brevet professionnel. There is a Baccalaureate Board handling high school examinations for the French Educational sub-system in Cameroon (the French Equivalent of academic attainment). If they pass, they qualify for admission into a high school, involving two more years of study, at the end of which they take the G.C.E. exam at the Advanced ("A") level. Success at this last exam opens doors to universities and other higher-level institutions.
TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

The government and the private sector are the main operators and the religious missions have shied away. The primary purpose of these schools is to train students in the technical fields or to prepare them for specific vocations. The duration for vocation education is four years after which students must take professional examination. In the old days they used to take the city and guild exams of London but that is now being replaced by the ‘certificat aptitude professionale’ (CAP) exam from Yaounde. Success at either of these exams gets the students into a technical high school or another specialized institution, with adequate chance of securing employment upon completion. The students with poor results after the completion of primary education and those whose parents could not afford to take them to vocational colleges ended up learning a trade locally. These involved courses in motor mechanic, carpentry, tailors and bricklayers.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Universities, specialized institutions and schools mainly provide higher education. The minister in charge of higher education takes final policy decisions regarding universities, although each university has a governing council. Councils have responsibility for personnel recruitment. The creation of new departments, degrees, courses and changes in regulations must receive ministerial consent. Each university receives a budget from the state. The University of Bue’a is headed by a vice chancellor who is nominated by the government and who, in turn, is chair of the administrative council. A Rector heads other public universities. The Presidents of the Administrative Councils of Yaoundé I and II, Dschang, Ngaoundéré, and Douala Universities and the pro-chancellor of Buea University were nominated. A Catholic University was established in 1990. Several higher education institutions do not fall directly under the Ministry of Higher Education, but the Minister must ascertain that they meet academic standards.

Nonetheless, an merging number of private higher technical institutions of learning like the Nacho university, Fonab Polythenic, and many others are beginning to reshape the predominantly general education style of education that for over three decades has been the turf of most anglophone students in Cameroon
TEACHER EDUCATION

Training of pre-primary and primary/basic school teachers

Pre-primary and primary school teachers are trained at the Ecoles normales d'Instituteurs (ENI). Holders of the BEPC are trained in three years and holders of the Baccalauréat are trained in one year. They obtain the Certificat d'Aptitude pédagogique d'Instituteur de l'Enseignement maternel et primaire (CAPIEMP). Holders of the Primary School Leaving Certificate are trained in three years. Holders of the GCE Ordinary level examinations can complete the course in two years and holders of the GCE Advanced level examinations or those who have at least three years' teaching experience with the Grade II Certificate can complete the same course in one year.

Training of secondary school teachers

Secondary school teachers are trained in three years following secondary high school or two years following a first degree at the Ecoles normales supérieures for collège and lycée teachers or at the Ecole normale supérieure d'Enseignement technique for technical secondary education teachers.

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

Cameroon is a multilingual country comprising 247 indigenous languages, two official languages and Cameroon Pidgin English. Among the indigenous languages, four are on the verge of extinction; they are Duli, Gey, Nagumi and Yeni, all from the northern part of the country. Among the four major language families of Africa, three are represented in Cameroon. They are the Afro-Asiatic, the Nilo-Saharan and the Niger Kordofanian. The Niger-Kordofanian family is the most highly represented in Cameroon, while the Khoisan family is not represented at all.

The two official languages, English and French, came into the Cameroon scene in 1916 when Britain and France shared Cameroon into two unequal parts after defeating the German forces in the country. The new colonial masters then sought to impose their languages in the newly acquired territory both in the areas of education and administration. This led to the solid implantation of the two languages
during the colonial era, a situation that was later reinforced after Cameroon became independent. At Reunification in 1961, English and French became the two official languages of Cameroon as the country opted for the policy of official language bilingualism.

French was adopted as the official language in French-speaking Cameroon while English assumed the same status in the English-speaking sector. Cameroon, like many other African countries, naturally opted for the 'neutral' foreign language option as official language in order to avoid language conflict on the one hand and unwarranted financial and material cost on the other. This explains why the indigenous languages were kept far away and preference given to the languages of the former colonial masters. Intellectuals did not hesitate to advocate early bilingualism for the Cameroonian school child, a situation whereby English and French will be introduced in the early years of primary education when it is believed children are psychologically and physiologically more apt to learn new languages. In spite of the fact that English and French are considered to be equal in status, French has a de facto dominance over English in the areas of administration, education and the media. The domination of French is due to the demographic factor, the fact that Francophone have continued to occupy top ranking positions in government and the civil service, and also because there is no effective language policy that guarantees the rights of minorities.

In order to promote the policy of official language bilingualism, bilingual education has been implemented in Cameroon since 1961. This entails the use of the two official languages in education, especially at the university level. In four of the six state universities, English and French are used as languages of instruction in lecture halls wherein Anglophones and Francophones sit side by side in the same classroom. Thus the professor employs the official language he masters better for his lecture. On their part, students take down notes and do tests and assignments in the language of their choice. However, the practice of bilingual education in the Cameroon university system is plagued by a number of problems. The first is that most of the lectures are delivered in French in view of the numerical advantage of Francophone professors, a situation that is deplored by the Anglophone minority who feel that they are cheated.
It is also important to note that the presence of two official languages in Cameroon has imposed two distinct educational subsystems, a situation that poses problems that call for specific responses. In the Francophone subsystem, English is a compulsory subject up to the end of secondary education. This is not the case with French in the Anglophone subsystem, where it is compulsory up to the GCE Ordinary Level. This means that the Francophone student is generally more prepared to confront bilingual education at the university than his Anglophone counterpart. In addition, the two subsystems practice two different methods of evaluation, an equally disturbing situation for educational experts. While in the Anglophone subsystem the student specializes early by choosing a certain number of subjects in which he will sit for the GCE Ordinary Level examination, in the Francophone subsystem all subjects are compulsory and success is based on scoring at least the average mark. In addition, as far as the teaching of foreign languages is concerned, the Francophone secondary school clearly offers more opportunities than the Anglophone school. In Francophone secondary schools, Spanish and German are taught as subjects throughout the secondary school cycle whereas in Anglophone secondary schools they are not. Consequently, Francophones have an edge over Anglophones in the mastery of foreign languages, Spanish and German being the main foreign languages taught in Cameroon. Such a situation may be another source of frustration for the Anglophone minority.

ISSUES IN CAMEROON EDUCATION SYSTEM

There are several problems that afflict elementary education in Cameroon. First the parents are unable to afford textbooks considering the poverty level is high and also the high rate of unemployment of school products. Generally there is a problem of parental apathy for continuous investment in education. Considering that financial resources are hard earned and the immediate benefits of education are not clear and forthcoming most parents do shy away.

Second, most secondary schoolteachers do not have professional qualifications. This is due to lack of professionally trained teachers in the secondary schools though government has intensified the training of professional teachers for the secondary schools now. But the
number is still inadequate to meet the current need of the school population explosion in the country.

Third, most teachers lack Communication skills, social skills, professional skills, study and reading skills at the elementary school level. The problem is multifaceted and due to the background of the prospective teachers and trainers, which are weak due to the various schools they have attended before becoming trainers. Also due to the quality and duration of training that the teachers receive in the training centres. In addition, the resources necessary for quality teaching are not available. For example relevant and related textbooks, at each level of education for both teachers and learners to begin the teaching/learning process are not available. The available textbooks are not contextualised. They are foreign in origin and have not been adopted for the Cameroonian child’s needs. Sometimes new teachers beginning teaching find it difficult to proceed in their task of teaching, because of dearth of textbooks for schools. Overcrowding in the classrooms. Weak link between the curriculum and the societal goals.

QUESTIONS

i. Discuss how the historical and economic factors have shaped the education system in Cameroon.

ii. The issue of language has been a thorny issue in Cameroon. Discuss and give solution on how the problem can be solved putting into consideration that there are many other indigenous languages that are in use.

iii. Describe the education structure of Cameroon in both the Franco phone and Anglophone provinces indicating the salient characteristics.

iv. There has been attempts reunifying the education system in Cameroon. Discuss the main pit falls associated with the policy reforms of reunification.

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