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# Governance in the pre-tertiary education sector in Cameroon

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According to English Encyclopedia, [1] pre-tertiary education can be defined as education obtained prior to that acquired at the university. In Cameroon, pre-tertiary education refers to education received at all levels before university enrollment. The pre-tertiary education system in Cameroon has made significant progress over the past two decades with regards to educational opportunities for children. For example, in 2009, more than 3.9 million children of school age were enrolled into primary education, compared with only 2 million in 1991. Indeed, the past 27 years, the percentage of school age children enrolled in primary education compared with the population of the official primary school age has almost doubled. It is important to note that, since 2000, the abolition of school fees in basic education has led to a tremendous increase in the overall enrollment rate. [2]

Despite these improvements, Cameroon's basic education system has been facing many challenges (including learning quality, poor governance and accountability) leading to the inequitable and inefficient distribution of resources across regions. This was found to be true when we compared developments in Burundi, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania. [3] These countries have made relatively significant strides towards broadening educational opportunities alongside quality education. With a recent increase in insecurity (i.e., armed conflict in the North West and South West regions, and the Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North region of the country), educational opportunities in Cameroon for children has declined. The Norwegian Refugee Council [4] recounts that, at the peak of the crisis in the Far North (in 2015), 144 schools were closed due to insecurities, affecting 36,000 children. The government of Cameroon reported that about 30 schools were attacked (a dozen teachers killed or wounded) during the 2016/2017 academic year in the North West region. [5]

Moreover, Cameroon is lagging behind the countries mentioned above due to a certain laxity, on the part of educational authorities, to improve the quality and equity of primary education service delivery. To buttress this fact, the Global Partnership

for Education recounts that, the government of Cameroon received a grant worth US\$53.3 million from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development in 2014. This grant was meant to improve the quality and equity of primary education service delivery in Cameroon with an emphasis on disadvantaged areas. [6] In addition, reviewing past academic and budget performance, operational inefficiency at the regional level of educational administration and poor evaluation of teachers constitutes some of the lapses compared to Burundi, Rwanda and United Republic of Tanzania.

The purpose of budget planning is to mobilize and allocate resources to manage the education system, and to provide for financial management and accountability. [7] Next, we will discuss the management of public expenditure for education, system functioning and teacher motivation and evaluation.

## Management of Public Expenditure for Education

The planning and disbursement of public finance in Cameroon's education sector is handled by the Ministry of Budget and Finance (MINFI). It controls financial distributions to the regions and collaborates with the Ministry of Basic Education and Ministry of Secondary Education in making these decisions. The Ministry of Basic Education has three key areas of intervention in line with government expenditure for education. Firstly, it manages and support institutions, financially. The key objective is to ensure the effective implementation of its programs in line with the allocated budget. For this to be achieved, there is a need to monitor the average rate of achievement of operational programs, which is the indicator used by the State (see 2019 Budget). [8] Based on proper evaluation, stakeholders will be informed about the judicious or injudicious use of funds allocated for the basic education sector as recommended by the Law N02018/011 of 11 July 2018 on Cameroon Code of Transparency and Good Governance in Public Finance Management.

Secondly, the Ministry of Basic Education helps to finance the development of pre-school with

the objective to increase the rate of pre-school enrollment throughout the national territory. There is need for an increase in the budget to enable government authorities responsible for public expenditure in the sub-sector to invest in building more schools and make provisions for school materials where there is need (see 2019 Budget). This will encourage more parents to enroll their children into pre-school because of the low cost involved.

Thirdly, the government's plan to universalize primary education, by increasing access to more children in schools, needs to match the judicious use of public funds meant to construct more schools (2019 Budget).

The process of planning and allocation of funds is strategic to determine levels of accountability in public expenditure for basic education. Good governance and accountability practices in Cameroon's basic education sector are poor:[\[9\]](#) financial transfers move from the center to the periphery by-passing the regions. The financial control mechanism is not effective (i.e., successful in producing an intended result). The misuses of funds and rent-seeking have become an integral part of the way our Government does things [\[10\]](#). Schools are entities concerned with financing in education. According to a 2007 World Bank report on government expenditure for education, ensuring that schools receive adequate financing and material is instrumental to good governance.

The central administration supports schools in three ways: 1) through infrastructure development, 2) sufficient provision of school material and 3) financing. Procurement procedure in infrastructure development and supply of school items are biased due to political influence. Public contracts are not awarded to individuals based on their competence to deliver. As regards finance allocation to schools, established corrupt networks and practices by authorities at the central administration make things worse. To sum up, public finance management in the education sector in Cameroon is poor considering the lack of transparency and accountability which are important determinants of good governance [\[11\]](#). Poor governance has a negative effect on how

the educational system functions.

## System Functioning

System functioning in the pre-tertiary education sector in Cameroon involves activities that take place continuously during the school year. Some of these activities include the recruitment and transfer of teachers, remuneration, monitoring of teachers and school performances.[\[12\]](#)

The recruitment of teachers in Cameroon is managed by the Ministry of Public Service in collaboration with the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education [\[13\]](#). The compact between these ministries and the schools is fragile due to a lack of strict enforcement of defined standards and expectations vis-à-vis school functioning and outcomes. According to a World Bank report on governance in the education sector in 2012, favoritism and nepotism, through political interference in the recruitment of teachers were identified as common practice in the Basic and Secondary Education Sectors in Cameroon. Apart from teachers who are recruited through competitive entrance examination, the recruitment procedure of teachers outside the public service in areas of need is not transparent. Individuals and politicians mount pressure on officials to employ their relatives or friends as contract or temporal teachers in secondary schools. In addition, the disbursement of teacher's salaries constitutes a key element of spending in the education sector. Generally, the way money is spent on teachers, the purchase of didactic materials and the cost of running evaluation exercises, may likely determine the effectiveness of how schools are managed and how they can be properly evaluated.

## Evaluation and Teacher Motivation

Monitoring of teachers and school performances is relatively weak, given the fact that many schools in the country have not incorporated information communication technology in teaching.

Evaluating the quality of service delivery at schools remains challenging, especially in regions that rely on locally employed teachers. Responses from

an interactive discourse with a series of teachers reveal that teachers' performance and attendance monitoring are generally inadequate and differ according to the type of contract. It creates gaps in teaching qualities across schools. Assessment of locally employed teachers is rare. Those recruited by the state do not undergo another challenging assessment except that which is generally designed for all civil servants. Accountability of schools in primary education sector is dysfunctional. Inspectors are supposed to execute several rounds of inspection annually, but are constrained by travel impediments and understaffed inspectors especially in remote areas. [14] Next, we will highlight the following recommendations.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Public Transparency**

It is very important to consider setting up a system of public transparency aimed at improving good governance practices. This mechanism should give credence to a more organized role for local leaders (e.g., parents). Furthermore, broadening the involvement of media to assist in monitoring the school system is going to be beneficial. For example, investigation and continuous follow-up by journalists specialized in the education sector.

#### **Public Accountability**

Public accountability is an instrument that advances good governance standards in a democracy. This includes regular evaluation and independent surveys supplemented by an option for citizens to assess and exchange their views on the quality of services offered by teachers. This continuous exercise may help create duty consciousness among teachers, thus helping to improve their output.

#### **Improve the Management of Teachers**

School authorities in remote areas should resort to a monitoring mechanism that incorporates school councils and Parent-Teacher Associations. This group will seek to improve performance monitoring, as well as ensure a judicious use of financial resources meant to cater to teachers' salaries and the purchase of relevant school items.

#### **Recruiting Should Be Transparent**

The recruitment process (apart from teachers recruited in public service) in most schools in remote areas do not adhere to standard professional norms. Due to the corrupt nature of some school authorities, professional competence is traded for favoritism, thus affecting the way in which teachers are recruited. This has a negative effect on performance. The remedy is to instill transparency in the recruitment process. For example, by announcing vacant teaching positions to the public and ensuring a rigorous selection process based on a proven track record of teaching competence and qualifications.

#### **It is advisable to increase salaries of temporal and contract teachers**

Improved salary payment – particularly PTA teachers (Parents Teacher Association) is crucial and promotes commitment to effective service delivery. This can be done through an increment of subsidy by government to private schools.



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