

The Challenges of the Secondary Education History Curriculum in Cameroon

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Abstract

Educational and curriculum reforms are most of the time prompted by circumstances, including technical, cultural, ideological, political and economic considerations of the role of education in society. These considerations are often the basis of the reform. From this view, the basic assumption is that, intended curriculum reform has usually an impact in terms of positive changes in the fate of the educational system in which it is implemented. In other words, the curriculum reform, namely the history curriculum revision is certainly the effective way through which the educational shortcomings and abuses in terms of content, the teaching method, the assessment method ... could be resolved in order to provide Quality education. This was the main purpose of the 1998 Orientation Law set up in Cameroon in the field of education which ushered in the reform of the hitherto existing curriculum. This article aims to explore the challenges of the history curriculum in Cameroon through the analysis of collected data official documents, field observation and interviews. The study reveals various shortcomings in relation to the curriculum content and teaching method. The goal of the 1998 orientation Law had been to solve the shortcomings in curriculum content of the previous curriculum by taking into consideration local culture; this however remains unresolved as the status quo is still maintained in the new curriculum. In addition, the complex teaching method disorients not only the teachers but also pupils. From the perspective of content and teaching method; contemporary history should be taught in depth in secondary school, and strategic plan to implement new teaching method should be clearly defined.

Key Words: Cameroon, 1998 Orientation Law, History curriculum, Competency-based Approach

1. Introduction

Cameroon is a country situated in Sub-Sahara in Africa continent. The geographical location of Cameroon, mid-way between West Africa, Southern Africa, East Africa and North Africa, makes it a land of diversity. This diversity is at once human, climatic, biogeographical, which justifies the appellation "Africa in miniature ". Cameroon like almost countries situated in Sub-Sahara Africa continent, have been colonized by European countries such as France, Great Britain.

By its demography, Cameroon presents statistics that are increasing over the years. Cameroon was 20 million inhabitants in 2011 (Ministere de l'Economie, 2013-2020). For the period 2010-2020, the annual rate of growth is estimated to be 2.1 % (ibid). This corresponds to a demographic increase of about 420000 inhabitants per year. This increase is accentuated in the young population segment. Indeed, the statistics reveal 50% of the population included in the young group in Cameroon (Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development, 2013). The implications of demographic statistics mentioned above are numerous including the demand for high education and especially the response of public authorities in terms of education policy with appropriate and effective curricular orientations.

Cameroon's educational system originates from the heritage of the English and French double colonization. It presents two subsystems with a duality of teaching languages and the diversity of teaching orders. Inventory of the diversity of teaching orders reveals the public school and the private school. Apart from this diversity, the orientations of the educational system of Cameroon are determined at the central level of the State, which by legislative or regulatory means, defines curricula and textbooks. The High school history Program is therefore the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education, which has the responsibility to design and develop it through the inspectors and the curriculum experts. The history curriculum is uniform in nature and, is part of the various subjects in the official examinations in Cameroon

Several factors can be at the root of curriculum reform in a country's education system. These factors are varied including those endogenous and exogenous. However, all these factors have in common: the desire to stimulate innovations in terms of changes in a given educational system (Apple, 2013). Indeed, the educational and the

reforms of the curriculum are most often triggered by circumstances such as: technical, cultural, ideological, political, and economical considerations of the role of education in society. These considerations are often the reasons to implementing the reform. These considerations are often the basis of the reform. The basic assumption is that intended curriculum reform has possible impact in terms of positive changes in educational system in which it will be implemented. In other words, the curriculum reform is an effective way through which the educational shortcomings and abuses in terms of content, teaching method, and assessment methods could be resolved to provide quality education. This was the main purpose of the 1998 education Orientation Law in Cameroon. However, the observation, and the interviews carried out; reveal inconsistency between the intended curriculum reform official documents and the field reality. This article aims to explore the challenges of the 1998 curriculum, especially the aspect of history curriculum in secondary education in Cameroon.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. Curriculum

The term curriculum is surrounded by several issues, including the goals for, purposes, focus and conceptions of curriculum are central to its nature and these terms have different emphasis depending on the type of curriculum under discussion. There is not general agreement about the definition of curriculum concept. According to (Shubert, 1986) the term curriculum is shrouded in definitional controversy, so much so that it would require a book-length treatment to begin to deal it. The definition of curriculum has evolved over time with changes in conception. Earlier definition as submitted by (Tyler, 1949) described curriculum as “all the learning of students which is planned by and directed by the school to obtain its educational goals.” Another definition described curriculum as the totality of experiences a learner has under the guidance of a school, a subsequent definition described curriculum as not just all experiences of a learner, but “planned experiences” offered to the learner under school’s guidance (Wheeler D. , 1967). An expanded definition of curriculum defined it as not only all the planned learning opportunities offered to the learners by the school, but also the experiences learners encounter when the curriculum is implemented (Print, 1987). A more elaborate description was the one that defined curriculum as providing a framework for learning and suggest that all the things learned are prioritized with reference to the educational needs of the students to be taught and the social and political environment where the teaching and learning take place (Quicke, 1999).

At the core of the plethora of definitions is the reverberation of the emphasis on the intentional organization of learning experiences in school, decision making framework and that learning progresses through the instrumentality of teaching (Billet, 2011). Various terms have been used relating to curriculum such as hidden curriculum, curriculum development and so on.

2.2. Hidden curriculum

Hidden curriculum is as all the beliefs and values and understanding that are passed on to the in an educational institution, not through formal teaching but, unconsciously, through what the institution implicitly demands of the student. (e.g.: regularity of work, deference to authority...) B R Snyder (1971) cited by (Rowntree, 1981).

2.3. Curriculum Reform

Curriculum reform has been described as the process of developing a coherent sequence of learning situations, materials, and student’s assessment procedures, which has the potential to bring desired changes in students’ learning (Cai, J., & Howson, G, 2013). Curriculum Reform also means bringing changes to the subject, content, delivery, and assessment of curriculum; carrying out amendment or improvement by changing or removing faults or abuses. Changing or improving the already existing curriculum to suit the societal needs and educational objective and changes in the society (Shubert, 1986). In other words, curriculum reform refers to improving the existing curriculum by introducing new teaching method, new knowledge acquisition, new ability, new skills, new evaluation system, new assessment, and the standards of the statement of history teaching with compliance to the educational outlines.

Reform "is to make changes in (something, especially an institution or practice) in order to improve it." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2017). Curriculum reform requires a set of prerequisites that are examined in the Tyler Model cited by (Kelly, 2004), (Null, 2011) and Wheeler Model, (Wheeler D. , 2005). These different models highlight the interactive nature of the different components of the curriculum reform process. According to these models, the reform of the curriculum implies the clear definition of the objectives, considering the environment, the learning experiences and the content, the methods/procedures and the evaluation, to put in place the desired changes. However, change is sometimes dreaded because of the consequent transformations (Hall, G.E. and

Hord,S.M, 2006).

Educational change involves modifications in practices that alter educational programs, with the aim of providing better education to learners (Carlson, 1971). Often, to set up the changes, the authorities responsible for educational changes/adjustments use a plethora of implementation models, including coercive power, in which the desired innovations are designed by a central body that sometimes tends to overlook the complexity of the innovations introduced into the educational system at the regional levels. Yet, change is not a linear process or simply a sequence of events, but rather an interaction of several factors acting at various stages, so that everything that happens in a phase can affect and change what happens in another (Fullan, 2001). The changes that teachers are expected to make are often too radical, with ambitious objectives that prescribe changes that deviate widely from normal practices (Rondinelli, D.A., Middleton, J. and Verspoor, M.A., 1990). As a result, the planned curriculum is not implemented, but rather a transformed version of what the developers had in mind is running (Hall, G.E. and Hord,S.M, 2006). From this perspective, this study highlights the constituent elements of the curriculum reform set up in Cameroon in 1998 in terms of the content of the curriculum reform, the strategy to implement the reform, the teaching method adopted by the teachers, and the teacher's attitude to the reform.

3. Data Collection Methods

This study employed the use of observation, interview and document analysis method to obtain relevant data on the challenges facing the reform of secondary school history curriculum in Cameroon in line with the principle established by (Bardach, 2009). Among the methodological elements considered, there is the choice of a structured interview which demands the use of the questionnaire. The participants or interviewees were selected based on purposeful sampling strategy. They include participants who have been engaged in curriculum and education issues as well as teachers of History as subject and principals of secondary schools in Cameroon. In this section, emphasis was placed on the number of persons to be interviewed, the meeting place of the persons to be interviewed, the common criterion of the persons to be interviewed. A summary of the participants is shown in the table below:

N ^o	Category	Number	Code
1 11	Ministry of Education Senior History Curriculum experts	05	HC. Ex 1, HC. Ex 2, HC. Ex 3, (...), HC. Ex 5
	Senior University Lecturer of Yaounde1	05	Uyde1, Uyde2, Uyde3, (...), Uyde5
22	College Principal	05	CSC. MA1, CSC. MA2, CSC. MA3(...), CSC.MA5
3	Ministry of Education Secondary School History teacher	35	Sht1, Sht2, Sht3, Sht4 Sht5, Sht6, (...), Sht35

Table 1. Interviewees

Observation was through visits to schools and high schools in Cameroon. Based on the observational elements defined by (Yin, 2011) in the context of qualitative research, emphasis was placed on teaching methods, the characteristics of individual people (their dress, gestures and non-verbal behavior), the interactions between teachers and students while actions teaching taking place. Explicitly, data on this subject were collected from: extracted documents from the websites of the Ministry of Education in Cameroon. Participation in organized forums, colloquium, seminars, conference dealing with the problem of curriculum reform and fieldwork contributed to the collation of the information provided by the documents. The interview and field visitations allowed in-depth observation of the reality concerning the methods of teaching.

After the compilation of the data in relation to the research topic, the available information was disassembled and reassembled, the sorting of the data collected based on analysis of the subject eliminated all information not related to the research topic. The reassembling and synthesis of the information gathered highlights the constructed nature of the data analysis. The aim is to develop manual codes that allow the processing and consolidation of data with the same interests.

4. Background of 1998 Orientation Law

According to the data collected, a committee of curriculum experts was set up by the government to assess the previous history curriculum in secondary schools in Cameroon. The committee identified the following shortcomings between the curriculum and the vision of education desired in the country:

- a) The history curriculum was not adequate in volume in terms of the number of lessons.
- b) The content of the history curriculum did not fit with the educational principles based on local realities. The absence of lessons on the contemporary history related to the colonization of Cameroon in the history curriculum was criticized by the participants.
- c) The teaching method was deviation from the new method desired by the government. On purely pedagogical level, the government advocates the use of objective-based teaching. The teaching method has been criticized, and shortcomings was based on the fact that, the teacher is at the center of learning activities. The initiative is not given to learners during the learning process.

To remedy the shortcomings observed in the previous history curriculum, the government, through the Ministry of Education took a set of measures including: the formalization of the content of the reform, the setting up of the outlines of the type of education in connection with the type that the citizens wanted and the strategy for achieving the implementation (Cameroon, 1998). Therefore, intended curriculum was drawn by the Ministry of Education through the committee of curriculum experts. Intended curriculum is a written document prepared by the authorities in charge of an educational system retracing the expectations and objectives of the entire Community vis-vis education (Cai, J., & Howson, G, 2013).

During the national conference (General States of Culture) in 1991, the principles that should govern educational system in Cameroon were designed. The Committee of curriculum experts set up by the State designed the intended curriculum in relation with the educational principles defined during General States of Culture in 1991. The General States of Culture is considered as the precursor to the educational reform of 1998 which culminated in the 1998 Orientation Law. In articles 3.4 and 7, the 1991 General States of Culture advocated the recovery of the ethnic, religious and artistic diversities of Cameroon. These recommendations were taken into consideration by the general States of Education in 1995. During the General States of Culture, cultural rooting was adopted as a fundamental principle of the educational system. This principle had the base of the type of individual to be trained in Cameroon (Cameroon, 1998). However, according to the respondents, despite the establishment of the intended curriculum through the 1998 Orientation Law, the history curriculum of secondary education still faces challenges of various natures.

5. The Challenges of the History Curriculum

On the challenges facing secondary school history curriculum in Cameroon, responses from participants and field observations showed that there were diverse challenges at various stages of the curriculum implementation: the curriculum content, the teaching methods, the implementation strategies and the evaluation.

5.1 Challenge in relation to the curriculum content

The results of this study reveal that the 1998 Orientation Law was aimed at valuing the local culture. To train Cameroonian citizens rooted in their culture but open to the world through technological innovations. This cultural rooting goes through the control of its culture, in particular the display of the past events which constitute the memory of a country. However, reality on the field is totally different. The curriculum contents are still deadlocked in a part of Cameroon's contemporary history, including the colonization and the accession to independence.

There are divergent opinions gathered in the context of this study through the interviews. Participants identified the lack of political will of the Government include this portion of the national history in the curriculum in order not to arouse social tensions and diplomatic problems with the former colonial powers. The responses of participants showed that 60% of the respondents from the Ministry of Education senior curriculum experts, 80% of the secondary school principals and 85% of history teachers affirmed that challenges still exist in the secondary school history curriculum content.

5.2 Challenge in relation to the teaching method.

The teaching method of history recommended in 2000 by the Ministry of National Education of Cameroun was the objectives-based teaching. In other words, the educational objectives are defined by the teacher and constitute the compass of learning activities. However, shortcomings have been attributed to this method,

because the entire teaching and learning process center on the teacher. This resulted in the introduction of the constructivist approach based on the collective construction of the knowledge in which the initiative is left to the learners. The new reform called Competency-based Approach entered into force in 2014, which emphasizes the ability of the learner to use concretely what he learned at school in complex tasks and situations, at school as in life. The innovations of the new teaching paradigm are defined by the Inspectorate General of Education (Ministry of Secondary Education) through the official curriculum. Three developments are observable in the new paradigm of teaching proposed by the Ministry of Secondary teachings of Cameroon. These developments relate to innovative points including:

- a) Passage of pedagogy based on the transmission of historical knowledge has the prospect of acquiring knowledge to solve the problems of life.
- b) The willingness to give learners the tools to integrate themselves comfortably into the socio-political life
- c) The transition from an evaluation of knowledge to an assessment of the competences necessary for sustainable development

To these innovations, can be added basic concepts including:

- a) The framework for contextualizing the teachings, defined as examples of life situations for which the curriculum aims to train learners.
- b) The competent act or the pedagogy of integration; It is the set of action deployed by a person to improve his daily life (Nkoumou, 2015).

However, the field investigations through observation and interviews indicate a set of considerations in relation to inconsistency between official documents and the teaching methods practiced. The discomfort of the history teachers' perception of the new teaching methods was, observable. The history teachers involved in this study expressed the difficulty of completing the outlines of the new reform. The main reason for this is the lack of teacher training in relation to the new concept of competency-based approach. This suggests that the teachers were not sensitized and then unfamiliar with the details of the reform. As a result, both methods (objective-based education and competency-based approach) are applied in simultaneously the same teaching process.

5.3 *Challenge in relation to implementation/Strategy plan.*

Regarding the implementation itself, the strategy developed to implement the reform include the gradual introduction of The Competency-based Approach reform into the national curriculum. This implies the setting up of a set of parameters to contribute to the achievement of the reform including the environment in which the reform will be implemented is favourable through logistics. In other words, three questions developed by Tyler/Tyler's Model of curriculum development have to be answered initially:

- a) How can the learning experiences that are likely to be useful in attaining the objectives selected?
- b) How can the learning experiences be organized for effective instruction?
- c) How can the effectiveness of the learning experiences be evaluated?

Bring back The Tyler's Model in this study is to mention a set of elements that are necessary including the sensitization and evaluation of the new reform before delivery. However, that was not the case. The respondents of this study (senior lecturer curriculum expert), have mentioned the difficulty related to the implementation of the Competency-based Approach of teaching because of the lack of experts in this field. That mean, those who are supposed to teach the Competency-based Approach are not receiving good training because of the lack of expert. This certainly has a negative impact on the perception of the competency-based approach of history teachers. On the question of strategies for achieving the goals of the curriculum, the respondents unanimously agreed that the challenges facing the history curriculum in secondary schools in Cameroon are connected to flaws in the strategies employed for achieving the curriculum goals. While 60% of the curriculum experts opined that the curriculum implementation has not met the target goal, 91% of the secondary school principal and 96% of the history teachers submitted that the implementation has not been same as planned.

Regarding the infrastructural aspect related to implementation of reform, a considerable handicap is due to the absence of libraries in schools, particularly in rural areas. This situation puts the teacher again at the center of the learning. The participants in this study expressed concern about the implementation of reforms in rural areas because of the lack of basic equipment such as libraries. The Competency-based Approach advocates the active participation of learners in the learning process. In the same vein, poverty in the rural areas impacts negatively on education provisions and living in the rural areas in Cameroon doubles the possibility of being out of school

(UNESCO, 2010).

5.4 Challenge in relation to evaluation/monitoring

On the problem of evaluation, the respondents noted that this aspect has not been adequately executed, with 89% of the curriculum experts, 94% of secondary school principals and 97% of history teachers affirming the prevalence of this challenge. The lack of a regular evaluation is detrimental to the effectiveness of the reform. When the evaluation is done, it lacks objectivity and rigor. As reminder, Curriculum reform is a continuous process based on different dimensions. Each step of the curriculum reform interacting with others

- a) Step1: Need Assessment/Situation Analysis of existing curriculum.
- b) Step2: Curriculum Reform Removal of Faults or Abuses of existing Curriculum.
- c) Step3: Deliver/Implementation of New Curriculum
- d) Step4: Evaluation of effectiveness of the New Curriculum

6. Conclusion

Cameroon has put in place various educational reforms. In 1995, a curriculum reform was implemented to integrate the training that combines general knowledge with work practices. Other reforms and different laws have been promulgated in secondary education such as Law n ° 98/004 of 14 April 1998 on the orientation of education in Cameroon, Law No 2004/22 of 22 July 2004 to lay down rules governing the organization functioning of private education in Cameroon and so on (Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development, 2013).

With respect to the 1998 Orientation Law its main objective was to adapt the curriculum to the local culture, and then to provide quality education. However, this study conducted on the ground through observation and interviews, indicates important challenges including the content and method of teaching the reform.

The history curriculum in postmodern reality is always a reminder of the colonial legacy. Thus, some parts of contemporary history are still obscure, because of the lack of political will of local authorities and to this can be added the influence of the former colonial power. With regard to the method of history teaching, Cameroon has been working since 2012 to establish the Competency-based Approach with the aim of improving the quality of teaching in secondary education. This could also have a correlation with the report drawn up by the public authorities of Cameroon in charge of education mentioning not only the existence of pockets of low access to education, but also the implications of acquiring Poor knowledge by students, this shows a deficiency in the educational system (Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development, 2013).

Education is essential in different societies because it is through education that each society is shaping its future with better understanding the past, is promoting its values, is building a bridge between generations, in developing strategies to face and solve challenges that necessarily appear with time. That is why; the policies depend on the goal set by politicians. When a country is underdeveloped, it is sometimes easy to find out that its education system is not performing well. Sometimes, as the study has shown, it appears the policies are still influenced by their colonial past.

7. Recommendations

With reference to the major findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- a) To promote the cultural rooting of learners the history curriculum should avoid shrouding parts of the history of the country. Contemporary history should be taught in depth in secondary education.
- b) From the perspective of content, the history curriculum should be designed to foster national awareness and the humanistic spirit, collaboration and communication, critique and innovation.

From the perspective of implementation, regardless of how a curriculum is designed, its ultimate value depends on how it is implemented in the classroom (Cai, J., & Howson, G, 2013). Therefore, strong emphasis should be given to monitoring and evaluation in curriculum implementation process by the public authorities in charge of education issues in Cameroon.

- a) To achieve competency-based history teaching method, teachers should be associated upstream and downstream of the curriculum development. To identify the weaknesses and strengths of the teaching method in relation to the environment.
- b) Both national and international research findings on history curriculum and international trends on teaching method should be reviewed at needs assessment stages of curriculum development process.
- c) In order to set up quality education in Cameroon, teachers should be given continuous (pre-service and in-service) training on Competency-based Approach, on constructivism, active learning, and continuous

assessment.

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