

# Secondary School History Curriculum Reform in Cameroon and China

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## Abstract

China has embarked on various curriculum reforms, including History subject curriculum reform. The goal was to set up quality education throughout the country. To meet this goal, the Chinese authorities have set up a comprehensive modern curriculum system. The content of the curriculum has been a part of the success of quality education and has contributed a great deal to political, economic and cultural development in the country. Every country, including China and Cameroon, has a strong ambition on strengthening secondary education, which is usually carried out by the introduction of curricular reforms. The history subject curriculum reform has as its intention the introduction of changes in relation to the content and method of teaching the subject with the ultimate goal of establishing quality education. However, according to available data in Cameroon, along with the existence of persistent low access to education, there is also the implications of poor knowledge acquisition by students, indications of the weaknesses in the curriculum reform implementation process and by extension of the education system (Cameroon, 2013 P44). This article attempts a comparative study exploring the history curriculum implementation process in both China and Cameroon. Data was collected through official documents, field observation and interviews. The study shows that in terms of content of history curriculum, the common goal is to adapt the content to the new vision of education in both countries. The history subject teaching method is intended to have the student at the center of learning in both countries. On the strategy for implementing the new history curriculum reform, the preparatory phases were clearly elaborated by the Ministries of Education in the two countries, the difference is at the level of implementation of the history curriculum reform by the regulatory bodies charged with the implementation roles. The collaboration between the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the bodies such as National Center for School Curriculum and Text Book Development (NCCT) and Research Centers for Basic Education Curriculum (RCBEC), and Normal universities allow the taking into account of national, regional and local realities in the implementation of the new curriculum in China. In Cameroon, collaboration exists between the regular schools and the Ministry of Education through the General Inspectorate of Education. However, because of centralization; regional delegations and division delegates can only apply resolutions from central administration without cognizance of the existing realities of the local environment in which the curriculum reform is implemented. The Chinese experience as shown by the study can be a reference to Cameroon in terms of collaboration for implementation from the central to the regional governments.

**Keywords:** Cameroon; China; Curriculum Reform; History subject

## 1. Introduction.

In the last three decades, the most populous country in the world, China, embarked on various educational reforms. The goal was to set up quality education throughout the country. To meet this challenge, the Chinese authorities set up a comprehensive modern curriculum system. The curriculum content of the intermediate school in mainland China is based on the separation of Arts and Sciences (Gu Mingyuan, Ma Jiansheng, Teng Jun, 2016, p. 62). The arts include mainly Chinese, Math, English and humanities such as history subject. The content of the curriculum has been a part of the success of quality education and has contributed a great deal to political, economic and cultural development. Optional courses and activity courses were added to basic education (OECD, 2016, p. 10). With regard to the changes introduced in the Chinese education system, it is possible to state that, despite the existence of some practical questions, the curricular reforms specifically the reform of the history curriculum carried out through the 2001 New Curriculum reform is a significant contribution to the implementation of quality education (Muju, 2006) (Nanzhao, Z., Muju, Z., 2007).

Cameroon, as well as China, has a strong ambition on strengthening secondary education, which is carried out by the introduction of curricular reforms on secondary education. Guided by the 1998 Law, the innovations related to the content and the method of teaching was introduced into the history curriculum. The history curriculum reform was intended to introduce changes in relation to the content and method of teaching history subject. The ultimate goal was to establish quality education in Cameroon. However, according to available data in Cameroon, along with the existence of persistent low access to education, there is also the implication of poor knowledge acquisition by students, indications of the weaknesses in the curriculum reform implementation process and by extension of the education system (Cameroon, 1998) (Cameroon, 2013, p. 44).

In view of the foregoing, the common element between the two educational systems mentioned above is the

willingness to set up a quality education. To meet this challenge; curricular reform was implemented including the history subject. However, it is important to note that China is doing remarkable well while in Cameroon, certainly there is progress but the problem of poor knowledge acquisition by students indicate weaknesses in the process of implementation of the curriculum reform.

The purpose of this study is to examine the process of implementing curriculum reform in both countries (Cameroon and China) through a comparative study to address the process used by Cameroon and China in the implementation of reform of the history curriculum in secondary education. The similarities and the difference can enhance an understanding of whether the process of implementation of the history curriculum reform is a determinant factor in setting up quality education.

## **2. Background of the Study**

### **2.1 Organization of Education System in Cameroon**

Cameroon is a country situated in Sub-Sahara in Africa continent. Cameroon's educational system is rooted in the dual heritage of the English and French colonization. Consequently, it presents two subsystems with duality of teaching languages and the diversity of teaching.

Several ministries are responsible for the management of the education sector in Cameroon including the Ministry of Basic Education, the Ministry of Secondary teachings for the secondary schools and the Ministry of Higher Education for the tertiary education. To these are added the Ministry of Employment and Vocational training responsible for providing professional training of young people and the Ministry of Youth and Civic education in charge of the supervision of the youth not in school.

This multiplicity of ministerial departments results in a highly divided operation of the sector, making it difficult to coordinate (RESEN, 2013). The result is the difficulty of having statistical data about the sector. The recently held regional and national consultations have noted this and have strongly recommended the creation of a single national Education ministry (RESEN 2013). Despite 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 (RESEN, 2013, p. 23) (Cameroon, 1998). The High school history curriculum is developed by curriculum experts in the Ministry of National Education through the Inspectorate General of Education. The history curriculum has a national character and, is part of the various components of the official exams in Cameroon.

### **2.2 Organization of Basic Education in China**

China has an immensely huge geography with diversity of culture in the country. Throughout its long history, education in China has remained a highly centralized system dominated by the tradition of the merit of Confucius (Guo, 2012). In chronological terms, the Chinese educational system can go back to the sixteenth century BC (Guo *ibid.*). Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the education system has undergone various major reforms (Nanzhao,Z.,Muju,Z., 2007). These various educational reforms have led to the establishment of the current education system in China. With nearly 260 million students and more than 15 million teachers in about 514000 schools (China, 2015), China has the largest educational system in the world. The structure of education includes 3-year pre-school education, 6-year primary education, 3-year lower secondary education (middle school) and education Upper secondary School of 3 years (high school). In higher secondary education there is an increasingly important sector of vocational and technical education, which accounts for about 50% of the total enrolment at the upper secondary level (Muju, 2006).

The Chinese educational system has a centralized structure and supervised by the Ministry of Education. The ministry of education formulates the policy, which is then implemented at the provincial level by the provincial educational authorities (OECD, 2016). The education policy is carried out under the impetus of the Council of State as a central authority; The Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for the development of curriculum content (Tsang, 1991) (Guo, 2012). The state's educational policy aims to enable learners to develop the cognitive, moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and professional dimensions of life. Through its educational system, China has been able to adapt to different political, economic and cultural temporal realities. It is also through education that China has developed the capacity to build social values. All of this emphasizes the importance of education in China (Xu, 2009) (Xiaobing, 2001).

## **3. Conceptual Framework**

Comparative education as a modern field of study dates back to 1990 (Horsley, 2014) and concerned with the analysis of factors that take into account the similarities and differences in educational policies and practices in various countries, as they have developed over time and as they do today (Rowntree, 1981, p. 47). Another definition proposed by (Dedeo,S.,& Baskan,G.A., 2011) is about; the field that attempts to establish the world's education problems and, considering the similarities and differences between these problems, examine them in the content of country's values and conditions so as to develop proposed solutions that are unique to the country.

From this point of view, comparative study not only sustains its analysis of similarities and differences between educational systems in terms of policy, curriculum, but also has as its goal of improving the understanding of educational systems. It is in this perspective that the different themes of the comparative education including research on curricular reform have aroused an increased interest in the scientific community.

According to (Alsaadi A. , 2001), the objectives of comparative education are to evaluate the negative and positive elements of the educational system. In the same perspective, (Cai, J., & Howson, G, 2013), the aims of comparative education were listed as a follow-up: to improve the understanding of educational systems through the identification of the current process, to describe the similarities and differences in educational phenomena between systems, estimating the relative effects of the variable that are considered determinants of educational outcomes, identifying the general principles of educational effects. This study on the curricular reform carried out in the secondary school in Cameroon and in China is in line with this.

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 & Howson, 2013, p. 815). 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, p. 80). 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 an official change in the way something is done or organized" (Dictionary, 2012). Curriculum reform requires a set of prerequisites that are examined in the Tyler Model cited by (Kelly A. , 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). Very often, to set up the changes, the authorities responsible for educational changes/adjustments use a plethora of implementation models, including the power-coercive, 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. 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 M. , 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 school.

#### 4. Data Collection

This study employed the use of observation, interview and document analysis method to obtain relevant data on secondary school history curriculum in Cameroon and China in line with the principle established by (Bardach, 2009). Among the methodological elements considered, there is the choice of a structured interview. The participants 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 and China. 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:

**Table 1 Interviewees from Cameroon**

<i>N<sup>o</sup></i>	Category	Number
1	Ministry of Education Senior History Curriculum experts	05
	Senior University Lecturer of Yaounde I	05
2	College Principal	05
3	Ministry of Education Secondary School History teacher	15

**Table 2 Interviewees from China**

<i>N</i> <sup>o</sup>	Category	Number
1	University Lecturers/Curriculum Experts	05
2	College Principal	05
3	Basic School History teacher	15

Observation was through visits to schools and high schools in Cameroon and China (Zhejiang Province). 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 teaching is taking place. Explicitly, data on this subject were collected from: extracted documents from the websites of the Ministry of Education in Cameroon and China (MOE). 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.

## **5. Findings**

Three major themes were addressed in this study, including: rational elements justifying the expediency of the reform, the strategy of setting up the reform of the history curriculum then strategy designed to evaluating/monitoring history curriculum reform.

### **5.1 Rational Elements of History Curriculum Reform in Cameroon And China**

With respect to the rational elements involved in the reform of the history curriculum; changes required by the Cameroonian and Chinese authorities concern both the contents of the history curriculum and the methods of teaching. As for the contents of the history curriculum the goal is to adapt them to the new vision of education elaborated by each country (Cameroon and China).

An educational system must adapt to the social realities, to the political and economic stakes of the time. Taking into account the social dynamics, curricular reform is carried out in a recurrent way. It was in this context that Ministries of Education of Cameroon and China have carried out history curriculum reforms. Through respective specialized bodies such as Ministry of Education (Inspectorate General of Education in Cameroon), Ministry of Education (National Center for School Curriculum and Text Book and Development in China) in charge of curriculum development, preceded by the evaluation of the existing curriculum in each respective country. The history curriculum in secondary education of both countries were evaluated and then estimated deficient in relation to contents. As a result, adjustments were needed.

The history curriculum must reflect the political, economic and socio-cultural aspirations of a nation. The history curriculum should foster national awareness and the spirit of innovation with learners. It is in this sense that the changes are introduced through the reform. To this is added the desire to break with the ancient practices of the teaching methods of history. The former curriculum puts the teacher at the center of learning Activities. Thus, the teaching method based on the individual teacher's authority and performance has been replaced by more effective methods than the model defined by the curriculum experts. The reform of the history curriculum calls for a radical change of pedagogy in the education system. China as well Cameroon had to promote constructivist learning based on the ability of students to develop their personality and empowerment.

The subject of history in China has been confined to trials and other effects of utilitarian thinking, thus giving too much attention to recitation, weakening the ability to understand. The history curriculum contributes to the intellectual training of learners to enable them to become responsible citizens with a keen sense of critical observation. The history curriculum also allows the acquisition of the necessary tools to understand the events presented. From this point of view, the training of the learner in history aims to acquire a consciousness of its cultural identity.

### **5.2 Strategy to Implementing History Curriculum Reform in Cameroon And China**

On the strategy for the implementation of the history curriculum reform; similarities exist in the preparatory phases in terms of strategic plan development by the Ministries of education of the two countries. Multiple stages are defined in the strategic plans for the implementation of the reform such as: design of the introductory framework for the history program, delivery of history curriculum, design of implementation capabilities.

Effective reform of the history curriculum, process of experimentation of the planned history program and progressive implementation with experimental areas. The difference is at the level of the time frame for history curriculum implementation and the roles of the bodies in charge of the implementation of the history curriculum reform. As part of the implementation of the history curriculum reform in basic education; China has a defined time frame for history curriculum reform implementation (05years) (Nanzhao,Z.,Muju,Z., 2007, p. 26).

The Ministry of Education in China, through the National Center for School Curriculum and Text Book Development (NCCT) addressed the importance of capacity building for the effective implementation of history curriculum reform. A number of measures were taken to effectively implement reforms such as the establishment of Research Centers for Basic Education Curriculum (RCBEC) in cooperation with normal universities/colleges across the country. The major innovation is related to the willingness of the authorities to take into account the environmental realities that may constitute an obstacle to the effective implementation of the history curriculum reform.

At the local level, each county is responsible for the implementation of the reform. This is a major element in the successful implementation of the decentralization of the education system. In addition, the establishment of the history curriculum reform steering groups at all levels and the creation of the special research groups in each community provide a clear communication on the objectives of the reform.

Moreover, the Transformation of the existing administrative units (Department of Research in Teaching) into faculties and educational schools in units that meet the needs of the development of regional and local education at all levels, from the province to the school; a measure that help teachers understands the different components of history curriculum innovations. National and local administrations extend their support by establishing resource centers and undertaking projects, such as the rural distance education program and the national platform for basic educational resources.

In Cameroon, the time frame for history curriculum reform is not defined. Collaboration exists between the regular schools and the Ministry of Education through the General Inspectorate of Education. However, due to the centralized system of educational system regional delegations, division delegates and colleges can only apply resolutions from central administration. As a result, as has been demonstrated by Rogan and Grayson quoted by (Sergiovanni, 1998), the changes and innovations implemented through structured systems of bureaucratic education tend to be remote from the realities of most classes in the developing countries. The history curriculum reform set up by the authorities in Cameroon seems to follow this model of implementation. This is the model of introduction of changes and innovations in the curriculum called force-coercive. This model of introduction of change and innovation is characterized by the application of power by the authorities responsible for the problems of education. It is a passive diffusion of a centrally prepared innovation deemed necessary for the beneficiary

### **5.3 Evaluation/Follow Up of History Curriculum Reform**

China placed a special emphasis on the evaluation/follow-up of the reform of history curriculum. The evaluation/follow-up of the reform of history curriculum takes place at three levels: national, regional and Local. Concerning the evaluation/follow-up mechanism of the history curriculum reform; the Department of Basic Education in the MOE established several national surveys and seminars with local education officials, researchers, teachers and school principals. The purpose of these surveys was to collect data to evaluate the implementation of the new History program. An evaluation schedule for the experimental areas was prepared by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in close collaboration with the educational departments at all levels (national, regional and local). The various assessments of the experimental areas of history curriculum reform are presented as follows:

- (i) In 2002, evaluation of the implementation of the curriculum in 42 state experimentation zones.
- (ii) In 2003, evaluation of curriculum implementation in six provincial test areas was conducted with the aim of using curriculum standards for the subject of history.
- (iii) In 2004 the evaluation with a new program in 7 provinces/municipalities was made (Nanzhao,Z.,Muju,Z., 2007, p. 36).

In Cameroon, the evaluation and monitoring Mechanism was developed by the Ministry of Education. This mechanism has several aspects, including the mid-term evaluation and the evaluation at the end of the reform. However, as the respondents to this study attest, the implementation of the strategy paper on the evaluation and follow-up of the history curriculum reform remains a challenge. In addition, the evaluation lacks objectivity and efficiency when it is made. This situation poses the problem in relation to the effectiveness of the design of the evaluation and follow-up mechanism of the history curriculum reform in secondary education in Cameroon.

### **Conclusion**

This comparative study was designed to explore the process of implementation of the reform of the history curriculum in secondary education in Cameroon and China. The study looked at three key questions such as:



rational elements justifying the expediency of the reform, the strategy developed for the implementation of the reform and the strategy designed for evaluation and follow-up of the reform. Regarding similarities between the two countries the study reveals that the two educational systems aimed to introduce changes with respect to the content and method of teaching of history subject. As for the contents of the history curriculum the common goal is to adapt them to the new vision of education in both countries. The teaching method of the history subject is intended to be a framework in which student are at the center of learning in both countries. On the strategy for implementing the new history curriculum reform; the similarity is in clear elaboration of the preparatory phases by the Ministries of education of the two countries, the difference is at the level of the roles of the bodies in charge of the implementation of the history curriculum reform. Thus, Chinese experience as shown by the study can be a reference to Cameroon. The collaboration between the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the bodies such as NCCT and RCBEC, and normal universities allow the taking into account of national, regional and local realities in the implementation of the new curriculum in China. In Cameroon, collaboration exists between the regular schools and the Ministry of Education through the General Inspectorate of Education. However, because of centralization; regional delegations, division delegates and colleges can only apply resolutions from central administration without cognizance of the existing realities of the local environment in which the curriculum reform is implemented. This is also true for the evaluation/follow-up of the history curriculum reform.

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