



Revised Higher Education Policy in Cameroon and the South West Labour Market

Rachael Eben,
Ph.D, Maritime Law.
Department of Law,
University of Buea, Cameroon.
ebenrah@yahoo.com

Key words: higher education policy, government policy, labour market, South West Region, professionalization, employability, and graduates.

ABSTRACT

Education has been one of the driving forces through which the government of Cameroon has sought to extricate poverty alleviation, a key tenet of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In order to achieve this goal, the government, in consultation with the World Bank, adopted a new higher education policy in 2001. This research examines the outcome of this new policy revised on the labour market for graduates in the South West region of the country. The impact of the implementation and implications of the new policy on the labour market for graduates is examined within the context of the country's bilingual culture. The research complemented desk-based information with field data. Findings indicate that the new higher education policy has led to a democratization of the higher education sector with a corresponding proliferation of higher education institutions, an explosion in graduate numbers, but without corresponding employment opportunities. It is therefore recommended that more emphasis be placed on professional programmes in the region's institutions in order to reinforce the job-readiness of its graduates. These professional programmes should be designed in partnership with industries to satisfy their specific needs which will have a direct impact on the absorption of unemployed graduates. Most especially, Alumni Relations Offices should be created and reinforced in all institutions of higher learning which should cater for the employment of graduates through alumni relations, creation of entrepreneurship hubs that are meaningful, and Endowment Funds to manage graduate growth. In addition, there should be a revision of the policy to accommodate a General Graduate Service Corps (GGSC) - designed to deploy all new graduates to serve a one year mandatory period on a small stipend in other parts of the country. This would provide graduates with language skills, practical hands-on experience to gain competences, reduce the frustration of graduates, curb mass migration, foster national integration and eventually reduce unemployment.

Revised Higher Education Policy in Cameroon and the South West Labour Market

Introduction:

I. Historical Perspective

Cameroon, a bilingual country of French and English heritage and two former trust territories of the League of Nations, formally reunited as one nation in 1961, with a referendum on 20th May, 1972 (BBC News, 2016) which transformed the country a unitary state from its federal status.¹ This history has a unique significance on the educational outlook of the country because even though the two systems have coexisted mostly peacefully, this coexistence is gradually being challenged by feelings of “not-belonging” by the minority English-speaking counterparts. Nevertheless, bilingualism remains a key element of all public and private life in the country as it shapes government policy, commerce, education as well as its relationship with national and international partners. Therefore, government policy on higher education has been governed by its bilingual history and quest to attain national unity, growth and cohesion of its two peoples.

In this respect, during the 1960's, right after Cameroon attained independence, the country's single state-owned university in Yaoundé was designed to train graduates to join the labour market via the public service. With time, however, government reduced its hold on higher education and new universities opened to meet the needs of young Cameroonians eager to acquire tertiary educational competences. One way of facilitating the acquisition of knowledge by young Cameroonians was abolishing the tuition-free public university policy and democratizing the higher education system. This eventually led to an increase in the number of higher education and professional institutions. Therefore, meeting the employment needs of graduates in order to curb poverty remains central to the growth of the country.

Cameroon has a young population that is eager to pursue higher education in order to meet the needs of development. A country with a population of over 23.3 million (World Bank, 2017),² it has a constituted youth population of about 60% of the entire populace (CIA World Factbook, 2017).³ The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) stands at US \$33.1 billion, a per capita income of \$3,386.1 per annum (Global Finance Magazine, 2017),⁴ making it 152nd of 189 world's richest countries (Global Finance Magazine, 2016).⁵ It has uranium, gold, manganese, bauxite, aluminium, oil and gas, and also possesses significant amounts of almost every variety of flora and fauna found in Africa. This biodiversity in the country makes it one of Africa's richest (Gale, 2007).⁶ Being endowed with natural resources, the country can attain its growth and development agenda if these resources are properly harnessed, especially in the domain of education.

Indeed, the labour market in Cameroon has seen an upsurge in the number of graduates entering it, with graduates' demand for skilled employment inching towards a crisis point. Most recently, more than 110,000 students graduate yearly from the country's higher education institutions. Unfortunately this surge in the number of graduates from both public and private universities has not seen a corresponding increase in the number of employment opportunities in the labour market. Rather, the unemployment rate for those under 25 in 2015

¹ BBC News, “Cameroon Country Profil 2016” <http://www.bbc.com> October 2018

² World Bank, “Cameroon Country Report 2017” <http://www.worldbank.org> October 2017

³ CIA World Factbook, “Cameroon Youth Population” 2017

⁴ Global Finance Magazine, “Cameroon Profile 2017” <http://www.gfmag.com> October, 2017

⁵ Global Finance Magazine, “The World's Richest and Poorest Countries 2016”

⁶ Gale, T, “*Republic of Cameroon*- World Encyclopedia of Nations” 2007 <http://www.encyclopedia.com/places> October 23 2017,

stood at 21.3% (Cameroon Tribune, 2015)⁷ and few graduates from Cameroon universities find employment within a year of graduating (Stateuniversity.com 2008).⁸ Compared to other African country’s unemployment rate for graduates – Ghana 41.6%, Nigeria 23.1%, Kenya 15.7% and South Africa 5.9% (universityworldnews.com 2014),⁹ it is presumed that unemployment for Cameroon graduates remains within the high end of the spectrum.

In addition to unemployment, the agonizing problem of underemployment is steadily gaining momentum in the South West region of the country. More and more graduates are employed as callbox or kiosks attendants, taxi drivers, shoes vendors, motorbike riders, cosmetics salespersons, with another portion travelling overseas for better opportunities, while some others are forced to pursue graduate education because there is nothing else to do. These underemployed graduates in the region are currently stuck in so called “dead-end jobs”.

CURRENT TREND OF GRADUATES IN THE SOUTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

Public and Private Higher Education Institutions	2015 Graduates	2016 Graduates	2017 Graduates	2018 Graduates	2019 Graduates
University of Buea, Cameroon –Main Campus	3,356	3719	1986	-	3225
University of Buea, Medical School	300	176	-	-	-
University of Buea , HTTTC, Kumba	-	397	528	-	1276
Catholic University Institute of Buea (CUIB), Buea	290	394	341	412	-
Pan-African Institute for Development- West Africa (PAID-WA), Buea	300	255	225	-	-
Total Number of Graduates Per Year (approx.)	4246	4941	3080	412	5501

With over 4000 students graduating yearly as indicated in the table above, there is enormous pressure on the labour market for employment of these graduates. It should be noted that the table above is a miniscule of the number of students graduating from universities and higher education institutions in the region annually. Hence, this paper investigates the impact of the implementation of government’s new higher education policy within institutions of higher learning and the implications of those policies on the labour market in the South West region of the country. For a better understanding of the implications of those policies on the labour market for graduates in the region, it is necessary to put into perspective what government policy on higher education are nationally.

II. Background to higher education policies in Cameroon

The higher education policy in Cameroon had a chequered history before the 1990’s, without a clear direction of the growth trajectory for institutions of higher learning in the country. Government policy on higher education was mostly focussed on attracting young Cameroonians into universities for eventual public service jobs. To this end, government introduced policies related to the award of scholarships to meritorious Cameroonians to study at institutions of higher learning overseas; where they could acquire critical skills that were needed to build the nation upon their return. It also embarked on attracting university students into the single state university in Yaoundé by incentivising them with bursaries; where they studied under a tuition-free system, their

⁷ Cameroon Tribune, “University of Buea Graduates 26 Ph.D Holders December 2015.

⁸ State University.com, “Cameroon Higher Education Training 1998” <http://www.stateuniversity.com> October 2017

⁹ Universityworldnews.com, “Higher Education Could Help Solve the Job Crisis- Report” 2014

housing and feeding greatly subsidised, and put on a monthly stipend (Nafukho, Muyia, & Irby, 2014).¹⁰ However, this policy became untenable when the university population swelled to about 30,000 students (Nwaimah, 2008),¹¹ and the economic realities in the country made it practically impossible to continue with those generous policies. The result was the scraping of some of those policies in the 1990's and subsequent introduction of a tuition-fees paying system, even at state-run universities.

Government further revised its higher education policy after consultations with the World Bank in 1998 (State University.com, 1998)¹² and President Paul Biya promulgated into law on 16th April, 2001 a new policy designed to provide a clear vision for universities and affiliated institutions of higher learning in the country (Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon, 2001).¹³ The fundamental goal of the Revised Higher Education Policy is captured in its article 2: *"The higher education realm shall be assigned a basic mission of producing, organizing and disseminating scientific, cultural, professional and ethical knowledge for development purposes."*¹⁴

Thus, the key elements of the revised 2001 policy document can be summed up in eight main areas, namely:

1. Bilingualism
2. Equality and National Integration -Ethics and national consciousness (patriotism)
3. Research and innovation - promotion of science, culture and social progress through -theoretical courses, practicals and internships.
4. Democracy
5. Professionalism- quest for excellence
6. Development
7. Training and further training of staff
8. Respect of the rule of law

These policy pinpoints characterise the main areas of interest by the government in engendering a culture of development, peace, social progress, elimination of poverty, promotion of arts, science and culture, as well as instilling a spirit of patriotism amongst its citizens. In focussing on these policy areas, the government hopes to develop its higher education graduates into innovators, patriots, change and development makers, and entrepreneurs who can well integrate at both national and international levels. Above all, the policy captures a clear focus on the direction of travel set forth by the administration to comply with the demands of the Millennium Development Goals in eradicating poverty.

In order to achieve these objectives, the government has instituted an implementation agenda through the 'University Standards Framework' which was set-up in 2015 after the national conference on 'University Standards' (Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon, 2015).¹⁵ The framework on University Standards addresses the grading of scripts, recruitment of faculty and staff, adopted the Bologna Matrix (License-Maitrise-Doctorat (LMD) or BMP-Bachelors- Masters-Ph.D), instituted Quality Assurance Cells at universities, put in

¹⁰ F. M. Nafukho, H. M. Muyia, & B. J. Irby, *Governance and Transformations of Universities in Africa: A Global Perspective*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, Inc. 2014

¹¹ Nwaimah. E.T, "Cameroon: New University Part of Tertiary Reforms" 2008 University World News

¹² State University.com, "Cameroon Higher Education Training 1998" <http://www.stateuniversity.com> October 2017

¹³ Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon, "Government Policy on Higher Education" 2001 Yaounde.

¹⁴ Guide to Higher Education Law no.2001/005 of 16 April 2001, article 2

¹⁵ Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon, "University Standards" 2015 Yaounde

place a semester system, and called for the provision of practicals and internships for students to complement their coursework.

It should be noted that the implementation of higher education policies within institutions of higher learning in Cameroon has been gradual but steady. This implementation process began with the introduction of the 1998 higher education policies following the creation of new public universities across the country to reduce the growing population at the University of Yaoundé, and have since continued. Although government created some public universities in the 1990's and has continued to add to that list (ten in 2022), many private universities have also been created by private individuals, business groups and denominational institutions. With considerable autonomy granted to each public university, they have the ability to implement the higher education policies according to the needs of their individual institution. Private universities and institutions of higher learning mostly enjoy the same level of autonomy that public universities generally enjoy. The freedom to run and manage their individual private institutions unperturbed, (but mostly under the tutelage or oversight of a "mother university") has also imbued them with the freedom to implement government higher education policies in a way that best suits the needs of their individual institution. Nonetheless, all universities and higher education institutions are charged with the responsibility of implementing government higher education policies judiciously in order to achieve the goal of nation building and development. It should be noted that this freedom to run universities in a manner that suits the individual institution also comes with responsibility to follow stated guidelines which must be implemented scrupulously, failure to which sanctions will be attracted. Article 10 (2) of the 2001 law stipulates: *It shall be empowered to sanction administrative and academic authorities as well as students, lecturers and other higher education staff in compliance with the statutory provisions.*¹⁶

III. Implementation of the prevailing higher education policies in Cameroon

1. Bilingualism

Bilingualism is a central theme not just at the level of government, but also within higher education circles in the country. Being the birthplace of the first Anglo-Saxon university in the country, the University of Buea, founded in 1993 (University of Buea, 2017),¹⁷ enjoys a key position with respect to the implementation of government's bilingualism policy at academic institutions in the region. Consequently, standards set by the University of Buea have acted as benchmark from which most institutions of higher learning in the region have crafted and implemented their bilingualism policy.

The implementation of bilingualism policy in the South West region within higher education institutions has seen a steady increase in the number of graduates in the region who are bilingual, partly based on standards set by the higher education policy to favour a culture of bilingualism, but also because of globalization. Students of French heritage at most institutions of higher learning in the region have the opportunity to attend pre-sessional/intensive English Language classes to prepare them for higher education training. This approach has been mostly established and propagated by the University of Buea, a policy which has been emulated by other institutions in the region. This fosters fluidity in the use of language at institutions of higher learning, which significantly helps to produce graduates who can express themselves in either English or French, with mostly francophones being favoured because of the pre-sessional language classes.

Thus, the key government policy on bilingualism has been implemented in the South West region through the design of programmes aimed at developing those language skills and the freedom to use language democrati-

¹⁶ Article 10(2)

¹⁷ University of Buea, "Brief History" <http://www.buea.cm> October 2017

cally from the language programmes. The outcome is graduates who are equipped with language skills to satisfy the needs of employers in need of bilingual graduates.

2. Equality and National Integration - Ethics and National Consciousness (patriotism)

Government policy on admission into institutions of higher learning in the country has been mostly democratic, paving the way for admission of students into universities without bias on race, gender, age, religious background, regional origin or disability (thereby being ethically astute). The implementation of this policy is based on equal access to institutions of higher learning to every Cameroonian (and even foreigners) based on their superior academic qualifications. The government has therefore assured access to institutions of higher learning to all those who obtain the requisite academic discipline needed to secure admission into universities and higher education institutions. This is noticed with the increasing number of candidates succeeding in national exams; about 60% in baccalaureate exam alone in 2010 (universityworldnews.com 2010).¹⁸ Anglophone exams have also experienced a swell in performance in the past years, with the Cameroon General Certificate of Education (GCE) recording 67.4% at the GCE A/L in 2018 (Journal Du Cameroun, 2018).¹⁹ Most critically, in the South West region, the quality of standards for admission into institutions of higher learning was established with the creation of the Cameroon General Certificate of Education (GCE) Board on 1st July, 1993 (Ministry of Secondary Education, Cameroon, 2016),²⁰ which is charged with the mission of assuring high standards for Anglophone examinations.

Therefore, by providing a level playing field to all residents and non-residents through its rigorous evaluation system, government's goal of attaining equality and national integration at its higher education institutions produces graduates capable of entering the labour market with skills that can be easily absorbed by the job market.

3. Research and Innovation –promotion of science, culture and social progress

Research and innovation constitutes the key focus of growth at institutions of higher learning in the country. With this focus, the government has allocated a significant amount of its budget on the trajectory of innovation at its universities and affiliated institutions of higher learning. In 2014, through earmarked accounts, the Minister of Higher Education requested an additional FCFA 14 billion to transform research at higher education institutions. Moreover, a total of 67.7 billion was allocated to higher education for the 2017 fiscal year to be used, in part, to purchase workshop and laboratory materials for universities created since 1993 (Cameroon Tribune, 2016).²¹ Also, of its budget of over 9 billion for 2016, the University of Buea allocated FCFA 500.000.000 for externally funded research grants (Camerounweb, 2016),²² which have helped to train graduates in core interest areas along government's overall vision. Therefore, by targeting areas such as medicine, health, manufacturing, technology, telecommunications, engineering and culture, government puts the spotlight on these areas of development at the centre of university institutions in order to curb poverty.

However, most universities in Cameroon lack funding for projects, are required to secure project funds themselves, and also face serious challenges related to transparency in the award of grants. Research funding has noticed a steep decline since 1985, from about 95% government support in 1987 to 60% in 1993 (Shabani,

¹⁸ Universityworldnews.com, "Cameroon: Universities Face Overcrowding" 2010.

¹⁹ Journal Du Cameroun, "Cameroon: Complete results of 2018 GCE Ordinary and advanced Levels –Exclusive" May 2018

²⁰ Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), "Cameroon. Cameroon General Certificate of Education Board" 2016

²¹ Cameroon Tribune, "Pan African Universities a Priority" 2016 <http://www.cameroontribune.cm/articles> March 2018

²² Camerounweb, "University of Buea Adopts over FCFA 9.65 billion Budget" 2016

2007).²³ Similarly, the Ministry of Research and Innovation was allocated a budget of FCFA 12 billion in 2016, constituting just about 1.5% of the country's annual budget (Cameroon PostLine, 2015).²⁴ In 2016, 41% of projects or laboratories in Cameroon did not possess a dedicated research budget (Zajontz & Schamp, 2016),²⁵ which negatively impacts the quality of graduates trained and their ability to secure jobs after graduating.

4. Democracy

This is an essential element amongst the policy goals of the higher education agenda. Its main objective is to create higher education institutions which are apolitical and non-partisan. With this goal set high on the scale of the government pedestal, it ensures that institutions of higher learning dwell on education, arts, science, sports and culture, such that groups with known affiliation to political parties are completely disbanded from existing and operating within the confines of universities. This democratic agenda creates an atmosphere of tolerance, participation and inclusion, without fear of persecution by individuals and groups that are affiliated to political parties. This apolitical atmosphere exists at both state-run and private institutions of higher learning in the South West region (and indeed the country as a whole), in order to foster peaceful coexistence of people within the same academic milieu with different political affiliations. Thus, institutions of higher learning develop well-rounded graduates who are tolerant and equipped with essential skills to work with those with opposing viewpoints and political leanings.

5. Professionalism – quest for excellence

The key goal of any university institution is to train its graduates to become professionals in their chosen fields. In this regard, the government has been greatly involved in the training of professionals in most aspects of higher education, especially in health sciences, technology, science and research. Health sciences is prioritized through emphasis placed on the training of health professionals to man the many health units being created to ease the current burden on the healthcare system in the country. To achieve this goal, the government mandates all health training institutions to meet the stated guidelines outlined within the 'university standards framework' (Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon, 2015),²⁶ through access to teaching hospitals, qualified staff and ancillary facilities to enable the training of medical students.

In addition to its emphasis on the training of health science, science and research professionals, government also places emphasis on internships to complement and professionalise the training of students from Cameroon universities. Universities have been establishing and maintaining partnerships with relevant industries in order to facilitate students' internship placements for the acquisition of practical hands-on experience that should enhance procurement of jobs upon graduation as prescribed for by the revised law of 16th April 2001.

6. Development

The World Bank categorises Cameroon as a middle income country, even though the rate of poverty increased by 12% to 8.1 million from 2007-2014 due to slow growth; arising mostly from some oil fields reaching maturity (World Bank, 2017).²⁷ Together with interest in its young population and the desire to eliminate poverty, the country places development at the centre of its higher education policy. The result is the continued

²³ J. Shabani, "Higher Education in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa" In J. J. Forest, & P. G. Altbach, *International Handbook of Higher Education: Part One: Global Themes* Springer 491-498 2007

²⁴ Cameroon PostLine, "Opposition Rejects 2016 Budget" December 2015

²⁵ Y. Zajontz, & E. W. Schamp, "The University-Regional Development Link as a Mission: The Case of Young Universities in Cameroon" In L. Ngwe, & H. De Prince Pokam, *L'Enseignement Supérieur au Cameroun depuis la Reform de 1993: Dynamique et Perspectives* CODESRIA 167-159 2016

²⁶ Ministry of Higher Education, "Cameroon University Standards" 2015 Yaounde

²⁷ World Bank, "Cameroon Country Report" 2017 <http://www.worldbank.org> October 2017

drive to foster development through science, research, arts, culture, and sports at all levels of higher education. By focussing on these areas, the government hopes to achieve development for its people by investing its resources in the vital aspects that can propel this growth direction. As a fragile economy, by investing in higher education, the prospects of bringing many more people out of poverty is considerable, a proposition which has been demonstrated by government's funding of higher education research and innovation projects.

7. Training and further training of staff

The training and further training of staff is an essential component of the overall mission of the university system and to ensure that all the goals of higher education are attained. To this end:

The qualifications of higher education lecturers shall be stipulated by statutory means.

(2) Lecturers shall especially work in the following domains:

- a) Teaching, including initial and continuous training, correspondence training, guidance and assessment of knowledge;*
- b) Research;*
- c) The dissemination of knowledge and the setting-up of a link with the economic, social and cultural realm;*
- d) National and international inter-university cooperation;*
- e) Assistance to development;*
- f) Management;²⁸*

The training of higher education staff is assured through a system-wide approach which sets higher education faculty members on a growth trajectory. Lower ranking faculty/staff are trained progressively by higher grade staff (assistant lecturers to professors) and this ensures that knowledge is transmitted by the most experienced to the less experienced as they move through the academic ladder. This transfer of knowledge and skills ensures continuity in the growth of high quality staff in all state university institutions/systems.

Another means of training staff is through the provision of financial assistance to support research and modernisation as stated in article 38 (2b) above. The provision of this financial assistance to all faculty members in all state universities ensures that all members of the academic corps become active in research, ensuring that they acquire the latest skills in their respective specialties for the growth and development of the university.

In addition, Academic Planning Committees are established at each institution to take campus-wide decisions related to the standards of the different institutions. These Academic Planning Committees also foster the principle of democracy at universities, whereby critical decisions on standards are developed by the entire body and not just a top-down approach is adopted in maintaining quality at universities. This also goes to add to the aspect of democracy, where individual institutions have the leeway/autonomy to take management decisions that affect their individual institutions without being tied to the "coat-tails" of the Minister of Higher Education. This freedom to take critical management decisions by institutions of higher education facilitates the attainment of higher education goals, since the development of any viable society lies with the capacity of its citizenry or human resources.

But most importantly, the Council for Higher Education, Scientific and Technical Research plays a critical role in the training and growth of academic staff. The rigor that is demanded from staff at every level of transition in grade ensures the quality in the final product.

²⁸ Article 38(1)

8. Respect of rule of law

Respect for the rule of law at institutions of higher learning ensures that educational goals are achieved within the stated timeframe. This policy goal has succeeded at institutions of higher learning in Cameroon, mostly through the peace and serenity that reigns in most institutions of higher learning in the country. Nonetheless, universities and higher education institutions in Cameroon have also been the launch-pad for social justice campaigns, political unrests, demonstrations and opposition to the government on issues that affect even national life. In the 1990s, students at the then University of Yaoundé called on government to create more universities to reduce the pressure on the single state-run university in the country (Nwaimah, 2008),²⁹ and even joined the opposition to clamour for the introduction of multipartism. In spite of government initial rebuff to students' calls for the creation of more universities and acceptance of multipartism, the government finally caved in and created more state-owned universities and also backed down on its opposition to the formation of opposition political parties in 1990 (International Crisis Group, 2010).³⁰

In the same vein, although students in universities in the South West region have mostly respected the rule of law, they have also been involved in social and political issues which have pitted them directly against soldiers, gendarmes, the police and other special forces called in by the government to quell unrests (Ateba, 2016).³¹ This is partly because the government sees its role as guardian of the peace as critical and any opposition to the status quo is halted at its bud. This mostly peaceful atmosphere and respect for the rule of law at institutions of higher learning ensures that educational goals are attained in order to prepare graduates for the labour market.

IV. Implications of government's higher education policies on the labour market in the South West region of Cameroon.

In order to assess the implications of higher education policies on the labour market in the South West region, it is critical to ascertain that a prime factor on the labour market in the employment of graduates in the region is the emergence of a new, but slowly growing crop of bilingual francophones in the region's universities and institutions of higher learning. Bilingualism is gradually becoming more critical in the labour market in the region, which has been spurred by more francophones becoming increasingly aware that English is the language of science, the language of commerce and the language of technology. It has led to an increasing number of francophones in Anglo-Saxon institutions, keen to reap the benefits of technological advancements and globalization. They are studying in English-only institutions of higher learning, with implications on the labour market in the region. One higher education institution in Limbe with a total student population of 278 had 189 francophones; constituting 66.8% of the student population in the institution. Another higher education institution in Kumba with a class size of 26 students had 12 francophones, making an effective presence of 46.2% in just one class alone. Two other private institutions of higher learning in Buea with highly specialized academic programmes have more than 60% of their students who are francophones, and this trend is growing.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

²⁹ E. T. Nwaimah, "Cameroon: New University Part of Tertiary Reforms" 2008 University World News

³⁰ International Crisis Group, "Cameroon: A Fragile State?" 2010

³¹ Ateba, S, "Cameroon Strike: The United States Expresses Concern Over the Loss of Life and Brutality Against Anglophone Protesters?" cameroon-concord.com/headlines/item/7378-cameroon-strike-the-united. 2016 October 2017

An investigation of 21 graduates from different universities and higher education institutions in the university town of Buea revealed the persistence of underemployed rather than unemployed graduates as the table below indicates. All 21 graduates in the research pool were currently employed in the informal sector- mostly low skilled jobs. From 2003- 2017, 11/21 graduates still remain underemployed, giving a 52.3% rate in a 14 year period. The Catholic University Institute of Buea shows that as of their 2019 alumni information, 18% are employed, 19% self-employed and 61% pursuing graduate education in their graduate statistics³²

Graduates for the project cover a span of 14 years – from 2003 -2017

2003	2005	2006	2010	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
3	1	1	1	2	3	4	3	3

Type of current employment they are undertaking

Callbox (Kiosk) operator	Bike rider (own business)	Sales (apples, cosmetics, shoes etc,) own business	Vendor (Betting Games Operators)	Technician (Own business)
9	2	4	3	3
Satisfied with current job		4	Not satisfied	
Interested in entrepreneurship		19	Not interested in entrepreneurship	
Would like to travel overseas to gain employment		14	Not interested in overseas travel	
Would write ‘concours’ to gain employment		5	Didn’t think ‘concours’ could get them a job	
Couldn’t pass a ‘concours’ without knowing the right people		14	Could pass a ‘concours’ without knowing the right people	
Knew a friend/family with similar unemployment situation		20	Knew a friend/family with similar unemployment situation.	
Currently undertaking graduate studies while waiting for a better job		3	Not currently pursuing graduate studies	

The findings reveal that the level of frustration and dissatisfaction amongst these graduates is palpable. This mostly comes from the inability to get into public service institutions because of lack of proper “connections,” the inability to travel overseas like their friends in order to escape the unemployment dilemma in the country, being forced to pursue graduate studies because of lack of employment, challenges faced in setting up and running a small business in the country, and the general feeling that there is not much in the region in terms of opportunities for them.

The outcome of the policy as demonstrated from the table above indicates that the new policy has triggered a gradual new shift of employment for graduates, which is the transition from overdependence on government to a steady movement to the private sector for some, travelling overseas for opportunities for others and a gradual growth of young Cameroonian entrepreneurs. This growth of private sector employment could partly be attributed to the new government policy which focuses on internships, bilingualism, more practical rather than theoretical programmes at universities (albeit limited), and other auxiliary opportunities at institutions of higher learning.

³² Catholic University Institute of Buea, (CUIB), “CUIB prepares for Commencement Ceremony ahead of Dec 11-13th 2019” <https://cuib-ameroon.org/2019/12/16/cuib-prepares-for-commencement-ceremony-ahead-of-dec-11-13th-2019/> October 2020

Thus, the main fall-out from this new government policy on higher education in the region is the growth of young Cameroonian entrepreneurs. With the democratization of the higher education landscape, more private universities are being created that focus on individual growth and the ability to take initiative from the practical programmes that they offer. The Catholic University Institute of Buea is the harbinger in the domain of entrepreneurship for its students in the region, with greater focus being placed in developing entrepreneurs and job creators, rather than job-seekers. In order to achieve this, the university is involved in programs that create awareness and exposure of its students to employers by instituting a ‘best-business competition endeavour’ (a kind of career fair); and instituted a Student Incubator Program for start-ups (Catholic University of Buea 2016).³³ The best-business competition project offers seed-money to the student with the most viable business project, and acts as motivation for other aspirant graduate entrepreneurs. Over all, these initiatives have fostered the emergence of graduates who are entrepreneurs and self-starters, who can enter the labour market as entrepreneurs and innovators – not dependent wholly on the government for jobs.

In addition, the policy on bilingualism has been a major catalyst in the training of graduates with language skills to meet the needs of employers. By allowing students and lecturers the freedom to use both languages with a great degree of latitude, the government has invariably provided avenues for language skills to be developed both laterally and democratically within Cameroonian universities. The impact has been the turnout of graduates who can be hired with language competences that suit the needs of employers. It has created a labour market that is vibrant with bilingual graduates, who are well-rounded and can easily satisfy the aspirations of employers who are in need of those with language skills. However, English speaking graduates in the South West region have not yet reaped a net benefit from this bilingualism policy since intensive/pre-sessional English Language classes are offered to francophones, with no corresponding pre-sessional/intensive French Language classes being offered to Anglophones by these universities. The result is the existence in the South West Region of graduates of in search of employment in a labour market which is skewed towards bilingual aptitude.

On the other hand, the outcome of this new education policy in the region has invariably led to the proliferation of many higher education institutions which are producing graduates which the labour market cannot keep up with. This is partly due to the fact that there is little or no correlation between the way some programmes are designed and the eventual competencies they hope to imbibe their graduates with for eventual employment. This fact is buttressed by Mbah on the employability of graduates in the South West region of Cameroon from the University of Buea, in which he attributes some of the drawbacks to employment to poorly designed programs that do not meet the demands of the job market, public corruption, lack of proper orientation, and inadequate facilities to train students with hands-on or practical skills at most universities in the country (Mbah 2014).³⁴

This has led to the emergence of a new and growing crop of graduates with skills that cannot be absorbed by the present labour market. This class of highly educated, yet poorly skilled graduates is a problem which needs prompt government attention. The frustration and dissatisfaction (17/21 from our research pool) of this group of young and talented Cameroonians is palpable, and is getting to a crisis point which the government has to promptly address.

³³ Catholic University Institute of Buea (CUIB) 2016 [www.http://Udib-cameroon.com](http://Udib-cameroon.com) March 2018

³⁴Mbah, M.F, “The Dilemma of Graduate Unemployment within a Context of Poverty, Scarcity and Fragile Economy: Are there Lessons for the University?” International Journal of Economics and Finance 27-36.

Even though there is growing creativity and a move towards entrepreneurship as the future route for graduate employment, this sense of creativity is being hampered, no doubt, by lack of an enabling environment for entrepreneurship, poor governance, lack of opportunities and a tax system which has formed the foundation of graduate underemployment in the region.

Conclusion

It should be noted that government has taken lead in implementing these key policy objectives through its, Council for Higher Education, Scientific and Technical Research, Quality Assurance Cells, University Standards Framework; which emphasises uniformity in the implementation of policies across the university systems. The introduction of internships across the system has also been a catalyst in the growth of employment of graduates who leave school with some practical experience and skills for the job market.

Therefore, the net effect of government policy on higher education on the labour market in the South West region has been a democratization of higher education, many universities training graduate entrepreneurs and self-starters, increase in the number of Francophones studying in English-only institutions; more Francophones becoming bilingual in the process and so more job-ready. Anglophones are still graduating from the Anglo-Saxon university as monolinguals, thereby skewing the job market to their own disadvantage in a market that is increasing drifting towards bilingualism to reflect the country's bilingual heritage. Most importantly, there is a gradual dilution of the Anglophone culture by the dominant group, with acquisition of English Language skills in Anglo-Saxon universities, so the labour market will be further narrowed for South West graduates.

Unfortunately, the South West region does not yet boast the type of industries/companies that can easily consume skills possessed by most of its graduates from institutions of higher learning. Consequently, this deficit in available employment in the region has been the prime driver of persistent migration of Anglophones to foreign countries in search of better opportunities.

It is therefore recommended that the higher education policy be revised to accommodate a General Graduate Service Corps (GGSC) – designed to deploy all new graduates to serve a one year mandatory period, on a small stipend, in other parts of the country. This would provide graduates with language skills, practical hands-on experience to gain competences, foster national integration and eventually reduce unemployment because the current rate of dissatisfied graduates in the region is of grave concern.

Existing institutions of higher learning in the region should also intensify the professionalization of programmes at their various institutions in order to equip graduates with more practical skills needed by the current job market. In order to achieve this, they have to establish partnerships with industries/companies so that they produce professional graduates whose competencies are tailored to suit the current industry needs so that they would be easily absorbed.

Most especially, Alumni Relations Offices should be created and reinforced in all institutions of higher learning which should cater for the employment needs of graduates through relations with alumni; creation of entrepreneurship hubs that are meaningful and funded; and Endowment Funds sponsored by alumni at these institutions to manage graduate growth. The potential for alumni sponsorship is enormous and this should be properly courted and sustained, with transparency demonstrated at all levels of alumni intervention by all in that spectrum of alumni relations.

References

- [1] BBC News. Cameroon Country Profile. August 09, 2016 <http://www.bbc.com> October 16, 2018
- [2] Cameroon PostLine. Opposition Rejects 2016 Budget December 2015
- [3] Cameroon Tribune. Unemployment:Protestant University Discusses Way-out Yaounde January 2015
- [4] Cameroon Tribune. *University of Buea Graduates 26 Ph.D Holders.*December 2015.
- [5] Cameroon Tribune. *Pan African Universities a Priority* 2016 <http://www.cameroontribune.cm/articles> March 2018
- [6] Camerounweb. *University of Buea Adopts over FCFA 9.65 billion Budget* 2016
- [7] Catholic University Institute of Buea (CUIB) 2016 [www.http://Udib-cameroon.com](http://Udib-cameroon.com) March 2018
- [8] Catholic University Institute of Buea. CUIB Sends out 412 in its 5th Commencement Ceremony <http://cuib-cameroon.org/2018/12/23/cuib-sends-out-412-students-in-its-5th-commencement-ceremony/>January 2020
- [9] CUIB prepares for Commencement Ceremony ahead of Dec 11-13th 2019 <https://cuib-ameroon.org/2019/12/16/cuib-prepares-for-commencement-ceremony-ahead-of-dec-11-13th-2019/> October 2020
- [10] CIA World Factbook. *Cameroon Youth Population* 2017
- [11] Gale, T. *Republic of Cameroon-* World Encyclopedia of Nations 2007 <http://www.encyclopedia.com/places> October 2017
- [12] Global Finance Magazine *The World's Richest and Poorest Countries* 2016
- [13] Global Finance Magazine, Cameroon Profile 2017 <http://www.gfmag.com> October 2017
- [14] International Crisis Group. *Cameroon: A Fragile State?* 2010 .
- [15] Journal Du Cameroun. *Cameroon: Complete results of 2018 GCE ordinary and advanced levels -Exclusive*
- [16] Journal Du Cameroun. Cameroon: UB Graduates Urged to be Peace Ambassadors.<https://www.journalducameroun.com/en/cameroon-ub-graduates-urged-to-be-peace-ambassadors/> January 2020
- [17] Mbah. F. M. *The Dilemma of Graduate Unemployment within a Context of Poverty, Scarcity and Fragile Economy: Are there Lessons for the University? 2014* International Journal of Economics and Finance 27-36.
- [18] Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon. *Government Policy on Higher Education 2001* Yaounde.
- [19] Ministry of Higher Education, Cameroon. *University Standards* 2015 Yaounde
- [20] Ministry of Secondary Education, Cameroon. *Cameroon General Certificate of Education Board.* MINESEC -2016
- [21] Nafukho, F. M. Muyia, H,M., & B. J., Irby, *Governance and Transformations of Universities in Africa: A Global Perspective.* 2014 Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- [22] Nwaimah E.T. *Cameroon: New University Part of Tertiary Reforms.*2008 University World News
- [23] Muma.R *Cameroon's University of Buea Graduates 300 Medical Personnel* July 30, 2015
- [24]Shabani. J. Higher Education in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa. In J. J. Forest, & P. G. Altbach, *International Handbook of Higher Education: Part One: Global Themes*,Springer 491-498 2007
- [25] State University.com. *Cameroon Higher Education Training* 1998 <http://www.stateuniversity.com> October 2017
- [26] The Median Newspaper, Controversy at 2016 Graduation: UB medical doctors denied Hippocratic oath <http://themedianpaper-yde.blogspot.com/2016/07/controversy-at-2016-graduation.html> November 2017
- [27] University of Buea. *Brief History* <http://www.buea.cm> October 2017
- [28] University of Buea Two Valedictorian at 23rd Convocation <http://www.ubuea.cm/two-valedictorians-at-23rd-convocation/> January 2020
- [29] Universityworldnews.com. *Cameroon: Universities Face Overcrowding 2010.*
- [30] Universityworldnews.com. *Higher Education Could Help Solve the Job Crisis- Report, 2014*
- [31] World Bank. *Cameroon Country Report* 2017 <http://www.worldbank.org> October 2017
- [32] Ateba, S. "Cameroon Strike: The United States Expresses Concern Over the Loss of Life and Brutality Against Anglophone Protesters cameroon-concord.com/headlines/item/7378-cameroon-strike-the-united...November 29, 2016 October 2017
- [33]Zajontz.Y, & Schamp E.W, The University-Regional Development Link as a Mission: The Case of Young Universities in Cameroon In L. Ngwe, & H. De Prince Pokam, *L'Enseignement Supérieur au Cameroun depuis la Reform de 1993:Dynamique et Perspectives* 2016 CODESRIA 167-159
- [34] Mbah. F. M. *The Dilemma of Graduate Unemployment within a Context of Poverty, Scarcity and Fragile Economy: Are there Lessons for the University? 2014* International Journal of Economics and Finance 27-36.