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# WHEN YOUR TEACHERS FAIL YOU: THE NECESSITY OF IMPROVING TEACHERS TRAINING FOR QUALITY EDUCATION IN CAMEROON

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## ABSTRACT

With the underlying hypothesis that the quality of a teachers' training is directly proportional to the quality of education pupils eventually receive, this essay explores and critiques the basic education teacher training process in Cameroon, using two notable educational theories to assess the possibility of quality education resulting from Cameroonian government-trained basic education teachers. It was found that there is dire need to improve the quality of teachers we train to ensure that they can deliver the quality of education we seek. A brief outline of suggestions is made towards improving the flawed training system.

## INTRODUCTION

Discourse on quality education is fairly recent. Though the international community has long prioritized education as a fundamental human right, until the year 2000, little had been said on the quality of the compulsory basic education (EFA: GMR 2005). Today however, there is a notable shift in both scholarly debate and international development advocacy, which now emphasizes on the quality of education achieved more than the rates of enrolment, years of schooling or gender parity (Barrett et al. 2006). Though these are worthy and necessary indicators, they are considered limited as evidence of impactful education for development.

But what is quality education? A review of literature suggests that quality has a different connotation depending on what lack in education is being addressed; whether lack in gender sensitivity, equality, pragmatism, relevance of content, pedagogic style or cultural relativity. However, 'Defining Quality in Education', a working paper presented by UNICEF at the meeting of The International Working Group on Education at Florence, Italy in June 2000, denotes five 'dimensions' of quality; learners' well-being, environment, content, process, and outcome. A quality Cameroonian education would therefore entail holistically healthy learners, provided with the adequate resources, facilities, and environments that are safe, secure, gender-sensitive and inclusive (not barring the handicapped or those with different languages). Quality education as per this definition requires teaching content that is relevant and able to add value; involving processes through which trained teachers use child-centred teaching in well-managed classrooms to facilitate learning rather than dictate.

It is clear by this definition that teachers and educators have a long standing order of how and what to impart in the classroom as well as a responsibility in ensuring the right frame of mind and environment for quality education to be carried out. The production of the required "first-rate teachers" then is a vital part of ensuring quality education is delivered.

In Cameroon, the “production” of the majority (the majority refers to those under government employ) of teachers is in the hands of certain government institutions. With the underlying hypothesis that the quality of a teacher’s training is directly proportional to the quality of education pupils eventually receive, this essay shall outline the situation of training of basic education teachers in Cameroon, using two notable educational theories to assess the possibility of quality education resulting from such Cameroonian government trained teachers. These theories, the Social Reproduction theory and the Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach, will be used interchangeably to forward arguments answering the question of if and how well the teachers (of basic education particularly) produced in Cameroon are equipped and up to the challenge of providing the quality of education sought after.

#### BASIC EDUCATION TEACHER TRAINING IN CAMEROON

Formal training of basic education teachers in Cameroon remains primarily in the hands of the government. This means that while there are a few private (mission) teacher training schools (Tchombe, 1998), the state does the greater share of teacher training with fifty-seven government owned teacher training institutions (almost one for each of the country’s fifty-eight divisions). The state is also solely responsible for the provision of teachers to state schools, which are free- and subsequently the largest providers of education.

With the implementation of free basic education in 1999, the primary Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) increased from 87.7 percent in 2000 to 105.4 percent in 2002 (Kattan, 2006). New government policy limited basic teacher education to only courses for the Grade I teacher certificate based on law no. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 (Tchombe, 1998). The government intended to improve quality by revising student curricula, providing textbooks and teaching materials, improving school infrastructure, offering in-service training for existing teachers and hiring new teachers (Kattan, 2006). Although government intentions are rarely ever followed by actions, there has been noted changes in teacher training syllabus as of 2012, the creation of an alternate route to teaching qualification via a university degree from the University of Buea, Cameroon and an increase in enrolment into teacher training colleges (MINESEC, 2012; Tchombe, 1998).

As of now, the teacher training procedure consists of selective admission into teachers’ training institutions based on registration for and success in an entrance examination of written and oral parts (Tambo, 1995). The examination, which is limited to citizens between the ages of 18 and 32 years, is in two parts: a language paper and a maths paper, both set at secondary school comprehension level by the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC, 2012). Candidates who make it through this written session then have to pass an oral test/interview. This concludes the entry process into the teachers training college.

As a student teacher, training generally focuses on educational theory, principles for practice and of course the academic disciplines they would teach (Tchombe, 1998). A more defined syllabus was drawn up by the Ministry of Secondary Education decree no. 2012/267 of 11 June 2012, (MINESEC, 2012).

This current syllabus is illustrated in the following tables.

Figure 1: Table Displaying Time Allocation in Teacher Training Courses

Levels Training domains	Three-year course: 1 <sup>st</sup> year (in hours)	Three-year course: 2 <sup>nd</sup> year (in hours)	Three-year course: 3 <sup>rd</sup> year (in hours)	Two-year course: 1 <sup>st</sup> year (in hours)	Two-year course: 2 <sup>nd</sup> year (in hours)	One-year course: (in hours)
Teaching Practice	222	222	222	222	222	222
Didactics of Primary and Nursery School Activities	510	420	510	510	510	510
Science of Education Subjects	420	510	420	450	420	510
Bilingual Training	60	60	60	60	60	60
Total	1212	1212	1212	1242	1212	1302

Annual Duration: 36 weeks

Average number of weekly teaching hours: 34 hours

The specific subjects within the training domains outlined above (except for teaching practice) with the corresponding hours per subject for all three pathways can be seen below.

Figure 2: Time Allocation and Coefficients

SUBJECTS	Three-year course: 1 <sup>st</sup> year	Three-year course: 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Three-year course: 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Two-year course: 1 <sup>st</sup> year	Two-year course: 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	One-year course	Coefficient
Educational Psychology	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
General Pedagogy	3	2	3	2	3	3	3
Educational Policies and Comparative Education	2	1	1	1	1	2	1
School Administration and Legislation	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Pedagogic Supervision	//	1	1	1	1	1	1
Philosophy of Education	//	1	1	1	1	1	1
Sociology of Education	//	1	1	1	1	1	1

Deontology and Professional Ethics	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
Introduction to Educational Statistics	//	1	1	1	1	1	1
Information and Communication Technologies	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
First Language	2	2	//	2	//	//	1
Second Language	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
French Didactics	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
English Didactics	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Didactics of Mathematics	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Didactics of National Languages and Culture	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Didactics of Sports and Physical Education	2	2	2	2	2	2	1
Didactics of Educational Technologies	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

MINESEC- Syllabuses for T.T.C one-year course p. 7 of 134

SUBJECTS	Three-year course: 1 <sup>st</sup> year	Three-year course: 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Three-year course: 3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Two-year course: 1 <sup>st</sup> year	Two-year course: 2 <sup>nd</sup> year	One-year course	Coefficient
Didactics of Song and Music	1	1	//	1	1	1	1
Didactics of History and Geography	//	1	1	1	1	1	1
Didactics of Citizenship Education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Didactics of Practical Activities	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Didactics of Sciences and Environmental Education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Initiation to Action research	//	1	1	1	1	1	2
Didactics of Nursery Activities	1	1	//	1	1	1	1
Total	34	35	32	35	35	35	31

MINESEC New Syllabus Manual, 2012 P. 7-8

As seen above, the training program comprises of one part theory, two parts content acquisition (subjects to be taught) and one part teaching practice or tutorials in schools. Over the course of one, two or three years depending on the cycle, the candidates write a final examination. They are also observed and evaluated on practical teaching skills by their professors, government inspectors and selected classroom teachers in the schools in which the students did their practice. In addition, students are required to submit a long essay (supervised) on a topic related to their training (Tambo, 1995).

Upon successful completion candidates receive certification for teaching called the Teacher Grade I certificate or the Certificat d’Aptitude Pédagogue de l’Enseignement Maternel et Primaire (Tchombe, 1998). Teachers are subsequently deployed as regional delegates as per the needs of the schools in the regions.

Despite certain changes in curriculum, several aspects have remained the same and issues persist with the “teacher production” process in Cameroon. According to the 2011 Transparency International Cameroon report, corruption pervades the educational process from the admission of students into teachers' training institutions through to the recruitment of teachers upon completion. As stated earlier, entrance into GTTC/ENIEG institutions is done through the passing of a competitive written examination followed by an oral test for the shortlisted candidates. While the content of the written exam is relatively transparent, the oral segment has been heavily criticized and is a medium for the passing of bribes to interviewers ensuring admission (Fokwang, 2003). This practice has been investigated and proven as common with national entrance examinations or concours.

Again, VSO (2013) has critiqued Cameroon’s teachers’ training process as 'ungendered'. Aside from the lack of policies to address the wide gender disparity in basic education (Lyonga, 2014; EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2013/14), VSO (2013) further states that there is no attempt at raising gender consciousness via teacher training and this results in a lack of gender sensitivity in the classroom.

The inadequacy of teaching practice has likewise been noted by Tchombe (1998) and more

recently by Lyonga (2014). The amount of time allocated for teaching practice is by far less than the focus given to the subject didactics. Issues related to class populations were also perceived: student teachers mostly practice in pairs or more, and as such, do not really experience what it would be like to handle the overpopulated classes they will be recruited to teach, particularly in rural areas.

Tambo (1995) equally criticizes the lack of diversity in teaching styles taught to teachers in training. He suggests that as a result of this inadequacy they eventually teach homogeneously in classrooms, unable to cater to students with disabilities or ensure individualistic/student centred learning which considers differences in aptitudes.

Likewise, this weakness in teaching style is echoed by Lyonga (2014). In her research, student-teachers hinged their own intelligence and subsequently that of the students they taught on the amount of knowledge they could reproduce in examinations, this not only proves that they are trained to ignore different learning styles, but also illustrates what Freire (1970) refers to as a “banking system of knowledge”.

The most common issue with the process of teacher production in Cameroon however, would be the low quality of candidates applying for training. Mingat (2002) found that teaching is mostly a last resort in African countries. In Cameroon for instance, prospective basic education teachers enter training institutions above the age of twenty having only secondary school qualifications of Advance and/or Ordinary level GCE certificates with below average scores (above average would be more than two papers in the Advance level and five or more at Ordinary level).

Considering that the standard age for those qualifications are age eighteen and below, it can be concluded that becoming a primary school teacher was not their original plan but rather something they have resigned to do for sustenance. Tambo (1995) asserts that potential teachers ought to be required to demonstrate an interest in teaching and screened thoroughly to substantiate their academic qualifications in order to ascertain their motivation for and attitude toward teaching and working with children as this would affect their quality.

Finally, with inadequate libraries and ICT equipment in training schools, student-teachers are trained without necessary resources for their capacity building and professionalization (Tchombe, 1998). This results in the teachers produced being somewhat inept in this information age.

#### THEORETICALLY CRITIQUING THE SITUATION

It is clear that there are significant problems with Cameroon’s basic education teacher training process. The subsequent part of this paper shall use two theories to assess the possibility of quality education resulting from the situation outlined above.

The idea of Social Reproduction first came to public attention through the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976), American Marxist theorists who argued against the idealistic belief that education and schooling was a means of equalizing disparities across social classes. Their work asserted that on the contrary, education was a means to a capitalist end of reproducing economic/social classifications (Nash, 1984). In summation the Social Reproduction theory asserts that formal education reproduces class structures either by who has priority access to the education or by what is taught and passed on in classroom.

The Capabilities Approach on the other hand is a multidisciplinary framework that was originally formulated by economist Amartya Sen in the 1980's (Sen, 1985). This framework is a normative one which proposes that the true indicator of well-being is what people are capable of doing/being/achieving (functioning) (Unterhalter, Vaughan and Walker, 2007). The Capabilities Approach asserts that education is an instrument of expanding people's capabilities and freedoms to achieve those functionings (Robeyns, 2006) which are important to them. Alkire (2005) also asserts that education is vital to agency as people need to be educated to participate politically and strive for change and the expansion of their valuable freedoms. Education is thus an achievement (functioning) on its own as well as a means enabling the individual to pursue subsequent freedoms (Robeyns, 2006). The Capabilities Approach is thus employed in educational research in evaluating and assessing the extent to which the education one receives offers the individual necessary freedoms and abilities to achieve valuable functionings.

It is these two theoretical lenses which shall be employed to assess the potential output of quality from teacher training in Cameroon. For one, the aspect of gender sensitivity in required quality education is impinged by the ungendered teacher training process. Due to the lack of gender sensitive training, teachers produced subsequently carry their traditionally patriarchal perceptions and stereotypes into the classrooms where, as the Social Reproduction theorist would have us understand, class/social structure specifically in terms of gender construction is generated and passed on to the next generation.

Likewise, the absence of different learning styles in training student teachers ensures they caters to learners of certain cognitive styles over other children with different aptitudes or special needs, thus reproducing an unequal learning system. This teacher training therefore leaves teachers inept at providing learner centric education required of quality education.

Following the Capabilities Approach, the teacher training process equally falls short given that most applicants for teacher training institutions are below average students who venture into teaching resignedly as opposed to inspiringly. They can hardly deliver an education which enables functioning, when their teaching as a last resort expresses the limits of their own functioning.

Using the Capabilities Approach, we can equally question the prospective teachers' ability to deliver current, relevant content demanded of quality education, considering the inadequate resources, libraries, textbooks and ICT knowledge available for them to foster themselves with (Tchombe, 1998). It is worthy to note that a pertinent problem facing basic education in Cameroon is the lack of textbooks with a majority of primary school pupils lacking accompanying texts (Worldbank, 2014). This could be interpreted by social reproduction theorists as a result of teachers who have been trained without necessary resources and thus the absence of text-reading culture.

Both the Capabilities Approach and Social Reproduction theory, would suggest that the presence of corruption in the recruitment process of potential teachers inhibits the possibility of delivering quality education. On one hand, this brings the risk of reproducing corrupt attitudes and ensures that only a particular class (those able to bribe their way in) would serve as teachers, influencing the next generation and stifling the agency of other groups from the classroom.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the international call for quality education- while an admirable one, is unlikely to be realised in Cameroon until teacher training enables prospective teachers with the capabilities to deliver quality and curbs the reproduction of certain socio-cultural inequalities.

It is recommended that in addition to current government effort in increasing enrolment rate towards universal basic education, the quality of teachers' training is focused upon. Increased and better investment in teacher training resources, gender sensitive curriculum, an inclusive pedagogy, a more rigorous recruitment process which would diminish routes of corruption and demand that candidates prove their motivation for this career field are some suggestions towards ensuring a more effective teacher training process.

Until better efforts and inputs are committed to training teachers, which Zumwalt (in Tambo, 1995) describes as the key to education, no considerable attempt would have been made towards achieving quality in education.

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