

## Original Research Article

### An Evaluation of ‘Widening Participation and the Provision of High Quality Teaching and Learning’ in Higher Education Improvement Programmes: A Case Study of the University of Buea

#### Abstract

*The Cameroon higher education (HE) system is sincerely stratified, with younger and mature students from more privileged backgrounds comprising the majority of student's from urban city population. Since independence considerable investment has been made to Widen Participation (WP) and provides High Quality Teaching and Learning (PHQTL) but attempts to evaluate these initiatives and demonstrate impact have presented a major challenge for the HE sector. The main objective of the study was to analyse internal stakeholder's effectiveness in the implementation of WP and the PHQTL in HE can ensure peace, security, welfare and prosperity of a nation. For study purposes one state university in the Anglophone region of Cameroon was taken and different faculties were included in the population. Four senior leaders, four middle leaders and four students were taken as the sample of the study. This qualitative study was conducted through the analysis of the focus group interview transcripts and ethical considerations are presented. The study proposes a typology to measure Widening Participation at all points of the student life-cycle. The present study recommends a pyramid of measuring High Quality Teaching and Learning (HQTL) in Higher Education may be ranked and recognized at local, national and international level.*

**Key words:** Evaluation, widening participation, high quality teaching and learning, higher education improvement programme, Cameroon Universities,

#### Introduction

Widening Participation (WP) and the Provision of High Quality Teaching and Learning (PHQTL) in Higher Education (HE) have been a crucial part of the Cameroon Ministry of Higher Education strategic aims for well over a decade, and the Widening Participation (WP) indicators for HE are improving (Njeuma et al., 1999; Ebot Ashu 2014; 2020; UNESCO, 2010; 2016; 2021; GESP, 2010; Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001). Yet inequality in HE for socio-economically disadvantaged people remains a major policy challenge (Njeuma et al., 1999; Ebot Ashu, 2014; 2020; UNESCO, 2010; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1993; Njeuma, 2003; UN, 2016; 2021).

This study aims to investigate internal stakeholders' effectiveness in the implementation of WP and the PHQTL in the HE improvement programs in Cameroon higher education. With this background in place, it analyses existing empirical evidence of internal stakeholders' effectiveness in the implementation of EA and PHQTL and where they have not been met except in the resource - rich cities in Cameroon like Yaounde, Douala, Buea, Bamenda and Maroua . These reforms addressed the challenges of developing human capital and well-being, promoting employment and economic integration, governance, decentralization and strategic management of the state (UNESCO, 2010; GESP, 2010; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001).

The findings of this study will help the Cameroon Ministry of Higher Education and Universities gauge the progress of the WP improvement programmes and lead towards ensuring the success of the programme. It is also hopes to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the HE's effectiveness and improvement, especially in the implementation phase of EA and the PHQTL improvement programmes, theory and action, in local contexts and conditions. This will ensure practitioners in WP know and understand what works in context.

The literatures which inform this study are drawn from two bodies of literature. The first relating to policies is important because they help higher education establishments establish rules and procedures and create standards of quality for learning and safety, as well as expectations and accountability (Ebot Ashu, Etongwe & Fuaty, 2021b). Without policy documents like Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001, universities and the different ministries of education would lack the structure and function necessary to provide the educational needs of students. It is important to note that in Cameroon and many other developing countries WP in HE are literature supporting HE within universities improvement programmes being relative limited.

The second body of literature explores internal stakeholders' leadership effectiveness in implementing EA and the PHQTL in HE improvement programmes. The role of senior leaders, middle managers and students' voice in an improvement initiative is seen as crucial by the WP

researchers and the PHQTL improvement programs (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Njeuma et al., 1999; Njeuma, 2003; DfEs, 2003; HEFCE, 2006; 2009; GESP, 2010; Ebot Ashu, 2020; Robinson, 2003; Perry, et al., 2004; QAA, 2006; Harris and Spillane, 2008; Ebot Ashu et al., 2021b). Fullan (1991) in his work on educational improvement reminds us of-successful implementation patterns sustaining the improvement programme (Fullan and Stigelbauer, 1991; Tikkanen et al. 2019; Robinson, 2003; Fullan, 2016). A detailed and critical review of this is presented in the literature review.

The detailed reviews of the theoretical or conceptual frameworks that emerge from them are detailed in section two. This study addresses three sets of research questions:

- ❑ What does the literature tell us about WP in the HE improvement programme?
- ❑ To what extent is the leadership provided by the senior leadership team of the university perceived by internal stakeholders to be crucial in the implementation of WP and the PHQTL improvement programmes?
- ❑ What are the other important factors perceived by internal stakeholders in the university about the implementation of WP and PHQTL improvement programmes?

In this introduction, the study is first placed in context, providing a justification for the research; Secondly, the purpose, aims and research questions are presented including examples from a Higher Education Reforms in Cameroon. What will follow is the wider literature on the policy document, theoretical and conceptual frameworks on internal stakeholders' effectiveness in the implementation of WP and the PHQTL in the HE improvement programme in Cameroon. Thirdly, the research design traditions are outlined; fourthly, the analysis of the focus group interview transcripts and the ethical considerations are presented; finally, the findings and discussions of the data are discussed.

## **Literature Review**

This section reviewed sets of literature (see Introduction) which have contributed to our knowledge and understanding on widening participation (WP) and the Provision of High Quality Teaching and Learning (HQTL) in higher education (HE) improvement programmes by key international authors will be presented. A systematic literature search in the library and on the

internet recorded in this study included policy reports, academic papers, journals, conference papers etc. The results of the search were categorised into subject area themes and uploaded into the repository.

### **Policy Reforms of Widening Participation (WP) and the Provision of High Quality Teaching and Learning (PHQTL)**

After 60 years of independence, Cameroon's higher education system has still not been developed fully (Ebot Ashu, 2020; 2014). Njeuma et al. (1999) argue that many reform objectives were designed to address the challenge of providing quality education, granting of more academic and management autonomy to universities, the provision of more varied programmes (more professional and adapted to respond to the needs of the job market); reduce unemployment among graduates since the main university focused on classical liberal programmes compared to specialized professional and technical institutions seemed to receive more attention from an immediate development perspective (Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Ebot Ashu, 2020). Other important major challenges in higher education in Cameroon and across the globe are the escalation in its cost. Besides the tuition in private universities, students have to incur expenditure on hostel and mess (living costs), books, e-resources, and other incidental expenses (Njeuma et al., 1999). The antiquated educational models, lack of qualified teachers, and stark differences in access to ICT across social classes – problems that educators have been dealing with for years – are suddenly out in the open (Njeuma et al., 1999; Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Republic of Cameroon, 1963). These policies from the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon (1993; 2001) identified commonly stated reasons for these observations are: enrollment of students in states universities, neglect of Cameroonian mother tongue, wastage of resources, quality of education, political interference, poor infrastructure and facilities, inadequate research, poor governance structure are some of the issues plaguing Cameroonian educational systems and schools (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2021; Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001). The above policies better outlines an on-going debate of higher education reforms in Cameroon which gives general judgments about widening participation and the provision of high quality teaching and learning, goal attainment, good governance, public accountability and contributes to citizens' trust in

government (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Njeuma et al., 1999; Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998).

### **Widening Participation (WP) in Higher Education Improvement Programmes**

WP in HE or sometimes referred to Equal Access (EA) improvement programmes by their very nature, are government policies with specific references to WP and the PHQTL for education, employment or training for young men from disadvantaged or working class family backgrounds, later for young women, then mature women, and most recently for people with disabilities, older people, internal displaced people (IDP's), and members of migrant groups (Republic Of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Njeuma et al., 1999; Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022). Widening participation in HE can refer to alternative flexible routes of HE in vocational, professional schools and university studies, to involve work-based learning, and different modes of study such as on-the job training, distance learning and part time HE routes, or acceptance of a wider range of qualifications, or by encouraging a broader range of student to apply (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Njeuma et al., 1999; Njeuma, 2003; DfEs, 2003; HEFCE, 2006; 2009; GESP, 2010; Ebot Ashu, 2020; Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022).

Widening participation strategy aims to address discrepancies in the take-up of higher education opportunities between different under-represented groups of students and staffs (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Republic of Cameroon, 1968; 1998; Njeuma et al., 1999; Njeuma, 2003; Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022). Gifted and talented academic staff and students from disadvantaged backgrounds, lower income households and other under-represented groups such as those with disability may face barriers to entry or succeed in higher education (Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022; Tchombe, 2001; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001). A review of the 1993 and 2001 policies on EA, and PHQTL in HE shows that there is a more sophisticated approach in the whole student lifecycle in encouraging learners participation in HE. These initiatives extend from raising aspirations, through fair admission to retention, flexible progression, outreach partners, flexible delivery and lifelong learning (HEFCE, 2006; 2009; GESP, 2010; Tchombe, 2001; Njeuma et al, 1999).

Robinson (2003), reviewed with Bolton Institute, stressed that long term success required robust quality mechanisms and continual improvement between higher education ministry and university on widening participation to increase participation in each area and to address low rates of participation by students from lower socio-economic groups, low participation neighbourhoods and from individuals with disabilities (DfES, 2003; HEFCE, 2006; 2009; Ebot Ashu 2014; 2020; UNESCO, 2010; 2016; 2021; GESP, 2010; Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001),

### ***Provision of High Quality Teaching and Learning (PHQTL)***

High quality teaching and learning is purposeful, learning in which learners are provided with the ability to effectively learn, and retain skills and knowledge gained. It is usually associated with or based on student satisfaction with the learning process. High-quality teaching and learning means that education is based on best practices and research-based pedagogy (Njeuma et al., 1999; Tchombe, 2001; Lavngwa, 2016; 2019). Practically, high-quality teaching and learning involves the teacher drawing on a range of strategies that are closely matched to the learning objectives of the lesson (which, in turn, will match the particular learning needs of the students). Njeuma et al. (1999) and Tchombe (2001) discuss about the following themes emerged as factors that affect the provision of quality education in universities namely: the teacher and teaching methods, educational content, teacher professional teaching qualification, learning environment, school management, teacher motivation, teaching and learning materials, school infrastructure and availability of solutions to the learning community problems (DfES, 2003; Ebot Ashu, 2020; Ebot Ashu et al., 2021b).

In Europe, Science Position paper (2012) recommends diverse teaching staff, student centred teaching, e-learning, changing conception of teaching, increasing diverse student body, knowledge economy and knowledge societies, tuition fees; changing the platform of education developments necessitate a practical response. The use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) based pedagogies for collaborative learning come under the aegis of flexibility (Njeuma et al., 1999; HEFCE, 2006; 2009), while the different HE policies provide a basis for an institutional model to support tutors in the implementation of e-learning portfolios (Burguel & Busch, 2018; HEFCE, 2006; 2009).

WP in HE also required innovative leadership practices to ensure the PHQTL improvement programmes within HE encourage a broader range of students not just to apply and begin but to stay and to gain qualifications that meet HE expectations and the current job market (Njeuma et al., 1999; HEFCE, 2006; 2009; Republic Of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; UNESCO, 2010; 2016; 2021; GESP, 2010). Recent policies on WP in HE, argue there is now a more sophisticated approach considering the whole student lifecycle.

An evaluation of HEFCE's widening participation strategy, commissioned by HEFCE itself, suggested contemporary strategies such as the potential benefits from more universities with smaller class sizes of HE, pastoral provision, new and different kinds of academic course content, alternative pedagogies, and new forms of assessment as opposed to universities (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Parry et al., 2004; QAA, 2006; HEFCE, 2006; 2009; Ebot Ashu, 2014; 2020). The use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) based pedagogies for collaborative learning come under the aegis of flexibility (HEFCE, 2006; 2009), while the Effective Learning Framework (ELF) (QAA 2006; Ebot Ashu, 2014; 2020 ) provides a basis for an institutional model to support tutors in the implementation of Professional Development Programs (PDP) with e-portfolios. Whilst WP improvement initiative inevitably involves some form of organisation improvement Fullan and Stigelbauer, (1991) suggest that lack of attention to the process of improvement is a major reason for its failure.

**Figure 1:** Model identified four broad phases in the improvement process: initiation, implementation, continuation and outcome.



Source: Fullan (1982; 1991; 2001).

The implementation phase is said to be crucial and Fullan and Stigelbauer identified three of the major factors affecting implementation: characteristics of a university improvement programme, local characteristics and external factors (government and other agencies); different stakeholders

in local areas, and governmental levels; characterizations of improvement to each stakeholder and the issues that each stakeholder should consider before committing a university improvement effort or rejecting it.

### **Internal Stakeholders Leadership Effectiveness in Implementing Widening Participation and the Provision of High Quality Teaching and Learning Improvement Programmes**

Tikkanen et al. (2019) provide the framework for analysing internal stakeholders' leadership effectiveness in the implementation of WP in HE improvement programme. This plays an important role on how these factors are realized, hence providing a central determinant of reform success and what it doesn't (Fullan & Milles, 1992). It is presumed that strategies in educational leadership for achieving WP, PHQTL in HE (e.g. raising aspiration, fair admission and retention, professional emphasis. quality practical learning programme, capacity building, use of technology to achieve results of professionalization) (Njeuma et al., 1999; Ebot Ashu 2014; 2020; UNESCO, 2010; 2016; 2021; GESP, 2010; Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Ebot Ashu et al., 2021b), consist of top-down-bottom-up reform implementation strategies and collective proactive strategies of well-being and are crucial for universities in Africa development (Fullan, 1994, 2007; Petko et al., 2015). Thus, Tikkanen et al. (2019) imply that top-down-bottom-up implementation strategy, consisting of leadership for change management and knowledge sharing can promote school and university impact of WP, PHQTL in HE reform in terms of deep, long-lasting changes.

WP researchers have consistently stressed the importance of internal stakeholders' commitment to HE improvement programmes, and the form of professional development for HE institutions scenarios (Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Njeuma et al., 1999; HEFCE, 2003; 2006; 2009; Perry, et al., 2004; Ebot Ashu et al., 2021b; Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022). The WP improvement programmes reflects two groups of internal stakeholders' recommendations of the review.

#### ***Senior Leaders and Middle Manager Leadership***

Republic of Cameroon (1963; 1998) and Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon (1993; 2001), in their WP in HE studies with vocational training institutes, professional schools and universities in Cameroon have supplied information and guidance to support improvement

programmes and staff development for HE in vocational institutes, professional schools and universities scenarios (Njeuma et al., 1999; Ebot Ashu, 2014; 2020; Ebot Ashu et al., 2021b). An analysis in these paper was dedicated to WP and PHQTL issues, scholarly activity and developing a research culture within HE in universities improvement initiatives.

Cameroon government policies highlighted the difficulties and complexities of managing and reporting information/data for mixed economy institutions. It set out findings from vocational training institutes, professional schools and universities partnerships with the Minister of HE highlighting the need for robust quality mechanisms that lead to collective actions and meaningful improvement programmes (Njeuma et al., 1999; Robison 2003; HEFCE, 2003; 2006; 2009; Republic of Cameroon; 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001). This indicated the importance of developing WP and PHQTL within a university to better facilitate an improvement process.

### ***Student Voice***

Republic of Cameroon (1963; 1998) and Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon (1993; 2001), considered the distinctiveness of HE in universities from the students' perspective in Cameroon and encouraging learner participation involves information sharing, active collaboration, and other forms of communication and expression through which young people and adults enter into dialogue so that each other's views are taken into account and become consequential. In particular, the student experience was addressed within the sections; the context for HE in universities, curriculum development; and academic advice and support the student life-cycle (Ebot Ashu, 2014; 2020; Ebot Ashu et al., 2021b).

Njeuma et al. (1999) and Parry et al. (2004) similarly investigated the similarities and differences between the experience of students studying within a university or college. The report considered extrinsic and intrinsic features, such as social life, costs, resources, administration and tutor accessibility (Republic of Cameroon; 1963; 1998 and Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022),

## **Summary**

This literature review considered two major themes identified in the research questions. Some of the key issues which will be used to explore and explain my findings are as follows:

- The level of support for the implementation of WP in HE improvement programme.
- Debates surrounding the internal leadership effectiveness in implementing the EA and the PHQTL in HE improvement programmes.

In the next section, the research methods are considered in more detail, allowing a critical review of their appropriateness for the study.

## **Research Design**

The aim of this section is to locate and justify the research approach and evaluative case study used. This will then justify my underlying conceptualisation of the research strategy chosen for this research. Finally, I will clarify my research methodology and method and give details of how I analysed the focus groups' interview transcripts, taking into account issues such as validity and ethics.

## **Research Approach**

This evaluative case study utilises the humanistic knowledge domain as identified by Gunther and Ribbins (2003). According to them, the humanistic approach seeks to gather policies, theories and concepts from the experience of those who interested in WP and the PHQTL. In this study, the experiences of university senior leaders, middle managers and students are sought to re-interpret the existing theoretical conceptual frameworks and to propose new themes constructed from the two bodies of literature.

Within the interpretive paradigm, I adopted an evaluative case study approach to investigate internal stakeholders' leadership effectiveness in the implementation of WP in HE improvement programmes (Denscombe, 2003; Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022; Ebot Ashu, 2021c). Such an approach emphasises subjectivity, description, interpretation and agency, detailing internal stakeholders' leadership effectiveness in implementing EA and the PHQTL improvement

programmes in a university in Cameroon. The evaluation form or category in this enquiry is impact evaluation, using the process-outcomes approach (Owen, 1999).

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology because it allows the researcher to get the data directly from the internal stakeholders themselves by sitting with each group and hearing their views, voices, perceptions and expectations in detail. This strategy contends that knowledge is subjective and truthful ‘in a way that is faithful to the original as possible’ (Denscombe, 2003, p. 101).

This study combines the best features of an evaluative case study including review of research materials and transcribed focus group interviews records as an evaluative case study (Ebot Ashu, 2021c). The conclusions reached, in the absence of quantifiable data, although subjective in nature, will be based on clear evidence emerging from the focus groups’ interviews.

The technique used in this study is random sampling (Denscombe, 2003). The approach of ‘random sampling involves the selection’ (p.12) of internal stakeholders from a larger group (university population) ‘literally at random’ (p.12) and each member of the population has a known, but possibly non-equal, chance of being included in the sample. In this study two focus groups were interviewed - one comprising four senior leaders, four middle managers and another with four students in the case study university. The three groups were chosen to add validity to the data generated by means of respondent triangulation.

## **Methods**

This study employs focus group interviews as a structured group process ‘to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about’ (Denscombe, 2003, p. 169), WP in HE improvement programmes. The semi-structured focus group interview questions schedule for senior leaders and middle leaders and students guided the interview. However, flexibility was given to the

senior leaders, middle managers and students to ‘develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised’ (p.167) in separate interview sessions.

This method is preferred over quantitative enquiry using questionnaire in this study because this method will provide in-depth information and the university internal stakeholders will be able to express themselves more freely compared to the predetermined responses in the questionnaire method (Ebot Ashu, 2021a).

### **Data Analysis**

In this study data analysis was approached by cross-case analysis at first, and then treating each case on its own. The transcribed raw data from the focus group interviews was coded with numerical numbers to create data sets as recommended by Miles & Huberman (1994). This enabled the researcher to come up with relative manageable themes related to the research questions, and allowed preliminary analysis undertaken by the allocation of codes as indicated in Ebot Ashu (2014).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were given the highest importance in that informed consent was sought from all the samples and their gatekeeper in these cases the 4 senior leaders, 4 middle leaders and 4 students. Care was taken to inform senior leaders, middle managers and students that audio-recording would be used but their identities would be safeguarded and the reporting would be done in anonymity. The Cameroon Ministry of Higher Education research guidelines were adhered to in order to ensure respect for each person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom.

### **Findings**

This section presents the findings, broken down into themes, based on qualitative data collected from the focus group interviews with a university internal stakeholder’s inquiry in the form of process-outcome evaluation.

## **The Level of Support for the Implementation of Widening Participation in Higher Education improvement programmes**

Findings from the focus groups seem to recognise that the two reforms in HE tenets are Widening Participation (WP) and the Provision of High Quality Teaching and Learning (PHQTL) improvement programmes ‘assists more people from under-represented groups, particularly low socio-economic groups, to participate successfully in higher education (*Senior leader C, line 68-69*). The programmes engage with those in the work place, and support them to develop the richness of higher education learning and also allow us to develop the world class work force of tomorrow (*Student D, line 399 – 402*).

### ***Promoting Widening Participation in HE***

Responses from the internal stakeholders indicate that the leadership team involvement in supporting WP is very important and they are in partnership, with external stakeholders encouraging flexible routes into HE giving non-traditional students choice about different modes of study e.g. face to face teaching is very popular, on-the-job training, online learning, distant learning and ‘part and part time studies must be encourage’ (*middle manager B, line 80 - 81*). Education in university should ‘varied into practice models’ (*senior leader A, line 70*), and supporting learners gain admission in wide range of qualifications ‘at different sought of levels’ should be encourage (*middle manager C, line 247*).

Internal stakeholders noted that they ‘assist marginalized communities, more people from under-represented groups, particularly low socio-economic groups and those not engaged in politics or secret religious sects; Cameroonians in the diaspora could engage with those in the work place, and support them to develop higher educational learning and promote the world class work force of tomorrow’ (*senior leader B, line 30-34*).

### ***Improvements in the Provision of High Quality Learning***

The findings from the focus groups interviews identify that the PHQTL improvement programme is an important WP tenet and the leadership team are providing the necessary support not just for ‘disabled students, or students from remote villages’ (*Student B, 397 – 398*) to apply

and learn but also supporting the achievements of these ‘under privileged students’ (*line 398*), to successfully complete their awards in HE and gain suitable employment.

Responses from the internal stakeholders indicated the world of work, local access orientation, a basis for ‘flexible progression, vocational emphasis, flexible delivery, lifelong learning and a regional and local emphasis studies as the factors driving the improvement programmes’ (*senior leader B, 102-104*).

Other middle managers and senior leaders stressed that ‘teaching groups need to be smaller, say about thirty or fifty’ (*Middle manager D, line 228*), offered greater flexibility in the learning and included improved pastoral provision (*senior leader, A, line 34-35*). It can also include new and different kinds of ‘course content, alternative pedagogies, new form of assessment than frequent exams’ (*senior leader, B, line 86-87*). ‘ICT based pedagogies cover a range of learning contexts including e-learning in undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, approaches to e-portfolios, e-assessment projects and using software and mobile technologies to support learners in their different degree programmes’ (*middle leader, D, 140-142*).

### **Internal Stakeholder’s Leadership Effectiveness in Implementing Equal Access and the Provision of High Quality Learning Improvement Programmes**

The findings from the senior leaders and middle managers interviews appreciate the distributed leadership effectiveness in involving internal and external stakeholders taking control of the sole factors that affect the implementation of the WP improvement programmes process.

#### ***Senior Leaders Consultation***

Every senior leader talked about the Cameroon Ministry of Higher Education policy documents expand on these ideas of widening participation and the provision of high quality teaching and learning in HE is based on ‘three pillars: transformative professionalism, quality teaching to enable students retain knowledge and skills, quality tools for teaching and learning and quality environment’ (*senior leader, B, line 70-72*). EA and PHQTL is a very important factor for the continuing growth of an educational system in both developing and developed countries (*senior leader, C, line 124-125*).

### ***Middle Managers Consultation***

The findings seem to suggest that middle managers are content with the information and guidance provided by internal and external stakeholders as ‘extremely helpful in providing training to support services delivery. In some training programmes they highlighted the difficulties and complexities of managing and reporting information/assessment data for mixed economy institutions’ (*middle manager D, line 59 - 62*).

The findings similarly point out that middle managers are struggling to develop an academic research culture within HE in delivering a wide range of Higher National Certificates and Diploma programmes, in addition to a range of specialist professional programmes and that this ‘posed challenges for them to implement this programme adequately’ (*Middle manager C, line 350 - 351*).

These findings on the other hand also suggest that middle managers seem to have confidence in the implementation process and they are very used to the different improvement programmes promoting HE within university.

### ***Students Consultation***

Student experience was a strong consideration within the context of WP improvement programmes. Curriculum development was recognised as strength, particularly for those pursuing professional programmes and those who want to study locally. Academic advice was expected to come via structured partnerships between universities and the Ministry of Higher Education in franchise or consortium arrangements. Some of the students claim that;

*Most of our lecturers and middle managers have been very supportive providing academic support, skills development and career advice. They are enhancing student’s capability in different subject’s areas and in our employments (Student A, 453 – 455).*

The findings suggest that whilst students feel a strong need to fit in HE programmes, they want the leadership team to support progression pathways and their achievements. Other students stressed about the motivating factor and one that has significant funding issues associated with resources. Finally, a recurring theme mentioned by many was the criticality of ideas on inclusive learning. Putting the learner first is the key.

## **Discussions of the Findings**

Having summarised the themes and described the evidence in response to my research question, I will now relate these findings to the literature reviewed and theorise what impact these findings can potentially contribute to the deeper understanding of Widening Participation and the Provision of High Quality Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Improvement Programmes (Republic Of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Njeuma et al., 1999; NCIHE, 1997; DfES, 2003; Parry, 2004; 2006; HEFCE, 2006; 2009).

### **The Level of Support for the Implementation of Widening Participation (WP) in Higher Education improvement programmes**

The findings identified that in current political discourse, WP and the PHQTL improvement programmes are at the forefront of national debate on HE and there are moves to increase the number of disadvantaged students in HE, with the argument that in most African countries like Cameroon the knowledge society demands higher level skills in the labour force (Republic Of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Njeuma et al., 1999; NCIHE 1997; DfES, 2003; Parry et al, 2004; Parry, 2006; HEFCE, 2003; 2006; 2009).

The findings are (Republic Of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Njeuma et al., 1999; Robinson, 2003; HEFCE, 2003; 2006; 2009), that long term success of the improvement programmes requires robust quality mechanisms in implementing the key features of promoting EA and PHQTL including raising aspirations, fair admission and orientation, a basis for flexible progression, outreach partners, vocational emphasis, flexible delivery and lifelong learning (UNESCO, 2010; 2016; 2021; GESP, 2010; Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022).

Also confirmed in the findings was the research carried out by Njeuma et al., 1999 and Parry et al. (2004) which found smaller class sizes, pastoral services and action learning through action research to be beneficial and economical in teaching postgraduate students. Related contemporary strategies included the use of information technology based pedagogies, for

collaborative learning over a range of learning contexts including an emphasis on e-learning in Foundation degrees (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Njeuma et al., 1999; HEFCE, 2006; 2009; Ebot Ashu, 2020; Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022).

The findings seem to identify with Fullan (1982; 1991) with particular regards to the implementation phase of the improvement process, that the senior leaders and middle managers are well informed of the purpose of these initiatives. Also identified in the findings were the suggestions of Fullan and Stigelbauer, (1991) that stakeholders' leadership effectiveness in implementing WP and PHQTL within HE in universities improvement programmes are important factors in achieving a successful improvement process. Three major factors affecting the implementation are identified:

- Policies and practices developed to promote HE in universities
- Leadership effectiveness in developing pedagogies that engage a diverse range of students more effectively, in both traditional and new subjects.
- Stakeholders' issues should be considered.

### **Internal Stakeholder's Leadership Effectiveness in Implementing Widen Participation and the Provision of High Quality Learning Improvement Programmes**

The findings seem to agree with Fullan and Stigelbauer about the need for robust quality mechanisms leading to collective actions and meaningful improvement programmes supporting stakeholders into HE and employment (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Robison 2003; HEFCE, 2003; 2006; 2009). The articulate responses from senior leaders and middle managers concur with the suggestions by the literature (Parry et al., 2004; HEFCE, 2003, 2006; 2009; Harris and Spillane, 2008; Ebot Ashu, 2014; Ebot Ashu et al., 2021b ) that transformational, distributed and sustainable leadership are indeed important determinants in developing HE in university approach where an inclusive approach supporting the targeted campaigns at specific groups and markets is much needed (Filho et al., 2020; Ebot Ashu et al., 2021b; Ebot Ashu & Lavngwa, 2022).

The findings accord with policy documents from the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon (1993; 2001) and HEFCE (2003; 2006; 2009) identifying scholarly activities for HE in university

scenarios. Some suggestions were provided where further good practice and guidance would have been useful; teaching and learning strategies and implementation, curriculum content, course delivery, pedagogy and HE in university co-operative curriculum development (Ebot Ashu, 2014; 2020; Tamukong & Ngeche, 2018). Relative pitfalls were the expectations of senior leaders and middle managers, as researchers, implementing, and evaluating a range of technologies to assist assessments and the delivery of programmes, with the aim to help learners develop (Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001; Njeuma et al., 1999; QAA, 2006).

Expectations of student behaviour, levels of commitment, programme delivery and subjects differ between department and faculties (Parry et al., 2004). The university leadership team were providing individual academic advice and support of student lifecycle as recommended by the state (Republic of Cameroon, 1963; 1998; Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon, 1993; 2001). These responses seem to suggest that resources are targeted so that each individual succeeds, with students receiving detailed feedback on how they are progressing.

Indications of social class processes are played out in the students' experiences via what can be termed an institutional effect. There may be greater differences in experience between higher institutions than within an individual university. Nevertheless, working class and middle class students may have different experiences even at the same university.

### **The Contributions of Knowledge**

This report supports the need for further understanding of widening participation in HE improvement programmes which has become a dilemma for education and social researchers. These concepts change over time, but ideas about EA and the PHQTL in HE remain strongly entrenched. Notions of equal opportunity, diversity, incorporating disable students, refugees, care leavers, tribe plus wellbeing, religion, culture, social class and gender, are now frequently used in both policy and practice arenas when addressing questions of equal access, quality provision and the outcomes of education. The balance between equality and quality remains a dilemma for policy-makers.

**Figure 2: Typology to measure Equal Access or say Widening Participation at all points of the student life-cycle.**

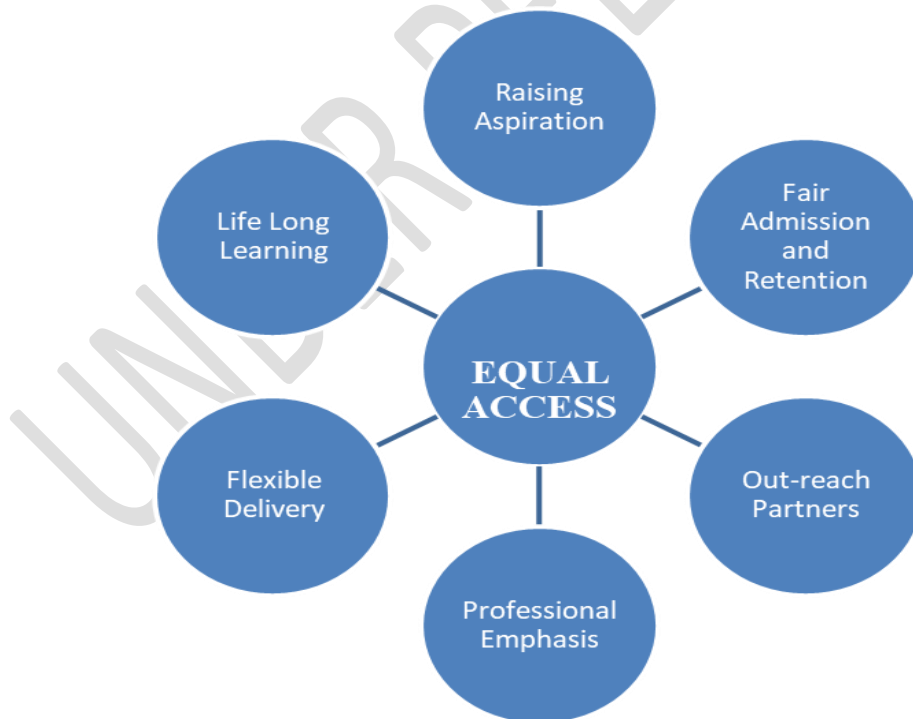
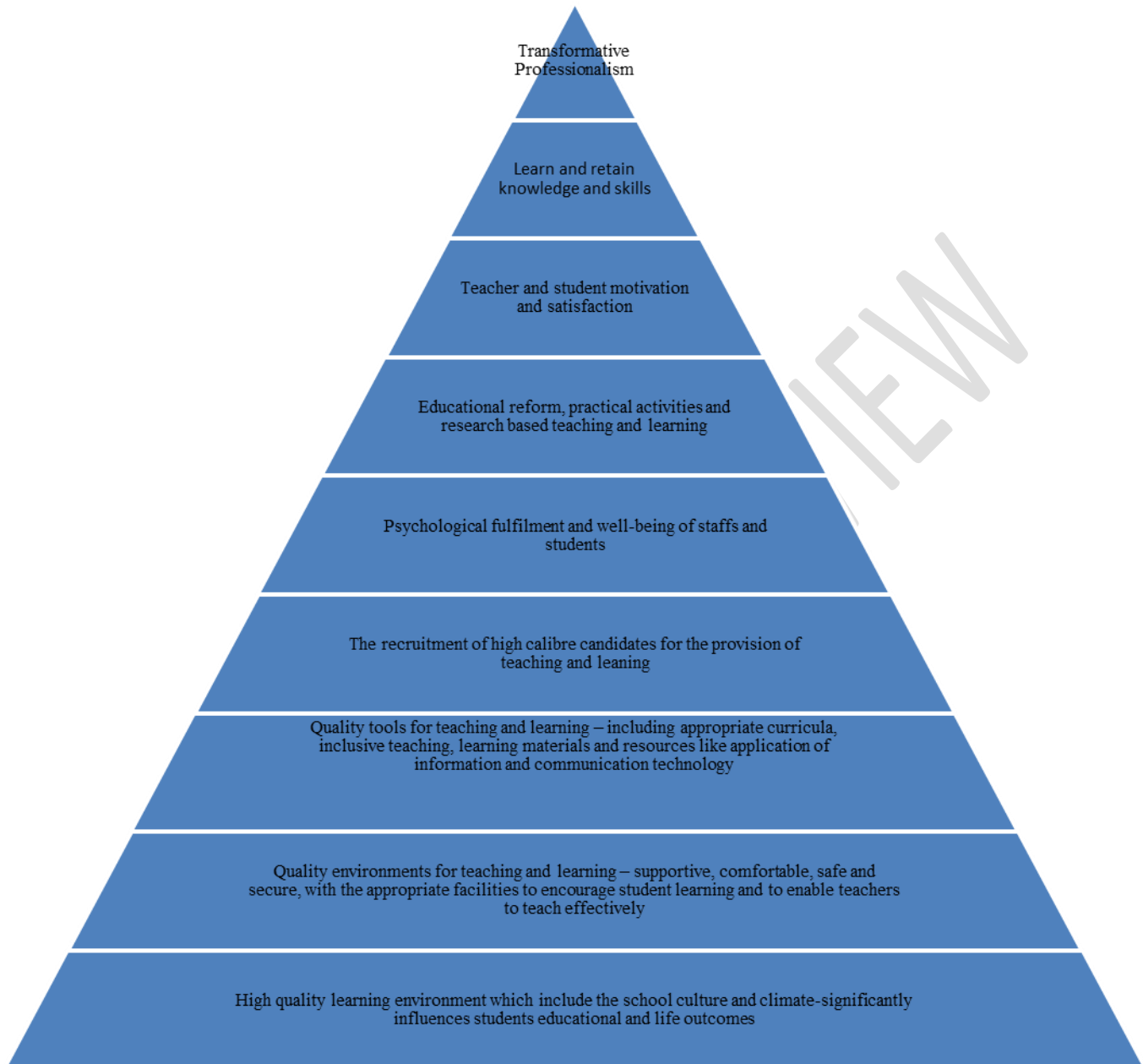


Figure 2 illustrates a typology for measuring success in widening participation in HE within Higher.

### **How the Contribution can be applied**

Measuring success in widening participation is not simple. Firstly, what is to be measured is not always clear. At institutional levels the key points outlined in Figure 2 are raising aspirations, fair admission and retention, flexible progression, out-reach partners, vocational emphasis, flexible delivery and lifelong learning though groups have changed over time, and attention has shifted from recruitment and admission to retention, on-course support, and access to equitable career opportunities.

**Figure 3: A Conceptual Framework for High Quality Teaching and Learning (HQTL) in Higher Education**



**Figure 3 illustrates a Pyramid of measuring High Quality Teaching and Learning (HQTL) in Higher Education**

#### **How the Contribution can be applied**

Recently, most universities stress on improving the quality of teaching and learning by measuring suggested indicators. Their ability to deliver High Quality Teaching and Learning (HQTL) needs relies on adequate human and financial resources, incentives and rewards efficiently deployed, with governments playing a crucial role in setting incentives, objectives and

quality standards for the higher education system as a whole. Recommended future challenges in Higher Education & how to prepare developing countries Ministry of Higher Education like Cameroon for them in achieving wider participation and high quality teaching and learning include: Online learning will have major role; traditional mode still relevant, on the job training – could involve fee, education as a continuous long-term engagement, increased entrepreneurship possibilities, increase learning opportunity for people with disability. Teachers are encouraged to become facilitators of learning and students will have more control of their own learning journey. Classrooms of tomorrow need to focus on a combination of student engagement in learning, enquiry-based approaches, curiosity, imagination and design thinking

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

- There may be interesting proposals to develop a local or national marketing and communication strategy to promote education and training across the full range of providers. The two WP tenets' approach suggested an inclusive approach supported by targeted campaigns at specific groups and markets, is much needed.
- The review of submitted materials also identified a number of issues in urgent need of future research, such as raising aspirations, fair admission and retention, flexible progression, out-reach partners, vocational emphasis, flexible delivery and lifelong learning examples.

### **Conclusion**

This evaluative case study was conducted in the form of focus group interviews with university senior leaders, middle managers and students. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge pertaining to the implementation phase of EA and the PHQTL improvement programmes theory and action in local contexts and conditions, and so provides practitioners in WP with 'what works' in context which they know and understand.

## Summary

This report concludes that in order for WP improvement programme in HE within university provision to be successful, there needs to be greater regional collaboration between both HE and institutions, and that quality assurance mechanisms need to be standardised across institutions. Furthermore, stakeholders on these programmes need a greater time to reflect upon their activities and that the provision will be most effective where there is a critical mass of staff and students.

This report also concludes that clear strategic planning involving internal and external stakeholders is a factor in the relative effectiveness of partnerships, but that differences in the relative status of partners can become a source of tension. HE Ministry with university collaboration occurs in a variety of ways that can be categorised as preferred partner (for example one college linked to one university in this evaluative case study), but sometimes a large mixed-economy college with diverse HE links.

## References

- Burguel, N & Busch, A. (2018). *How are Universities Creating the Leaders they Need?*. London: University World News. The Global Window of Higher Education.
- Denscombe, M. (2003). *The Good Research Guide, Maidenhead*. London: Open University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.
- DfES. Department of Education and Skills. (2003). *Widening Participation in Higher Education*. Runcorn, Cheshire: DfES Publications.
- Ebot Ashu, F. & Lavngwa, M. S. (2022). An Evaluation of Leadership Effectiveness in the implementation of Higher Education Reforms: The Case of the Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Cameroon. *International Journal of Education and Social Science*. 9(1), 9-27.
- Ebot Ashu, F. (2021a). Three Culturally Sensitive Research Methods for Educational Administration and Leadership Research. *Research & Development (RD)*, .Vol. 2(4), 103-115. doi: 10.11648/j.rd.20210204.14
- Ebot Ashu, F., Etongwe, R. ., & Fuaty, C. (2021b). CAMEROON PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS Supporting leadership, management and

administration development. *International Journal of Leadership and Governance*, 6(2), 32-65. <https://doi.org/10.47604/ijlg.1428>.

Ebot Ashu, F. (2021c). Case Study and Randomized Control Trial (RCT) Research Designs for Educational Leadership and Management Studies. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI)*. 8 (10), 111-118. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2021.81004>

Ebot Ashu, F. (2020). Decolonizing Educational Leadership and Administration Curriculum at Cameroonian Universities. *African Journal of Education and Practice (AJEP)*. 6 (5), 13-39.

Ebot Ashu, F. (2014). *Effectiveness of School Leadership and Management Development in Cameroon: A Guide for Educational Systems, Schools and School Leaders*. Newcastle Upon Tyne, United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Filho, W. L., Eustachio, J. H., Caldana, A. C., Will, M., Salvia, A. L., Rampasso, L. S., Anholon, R., Platje, J. I., Kovala, M. (2020). Sustainability Leadership in Higher Education Institutions: An Overview of Challenges. *Sustainability*, 12 (376), 1-19.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a Culture of Change*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass

Fullan, M. (1991). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London: Cassell.

Fullan, M., & Stiegelbauer, S. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. (1994). Coordinating top-down and bottom-up strategies for educational reform. In R. J. Anson (Ed.), *Systemic reform: Perspectives on personalizing education* (pp. 7–23). Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED).

Fullan, M. (2007). *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. (2016). The Elusive Nature of Whole System Improvement in Education. *Journal of Educational Change*, 17(4), 539–544.

Fullan, M., & Miles, M. B. (1992). Getting reform right: What works and what doesn't. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 73(10), 744–752.

Fullan, M. (1982). *The meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.

GESP, Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (2010). *Reference Framework for Governmental Action over the period (2010-2020)*. Yaoundé: The Prime Minister's Office.

Gunter, H. and Ribbins, P. (2003). The field of educational leadership: studying maps and mapping studies". *British Journal of Educational Studies*. 51 (3), 254-281.

Harris, A. & Spillane, J. (2008) 'Distribution leadership through the looking glass', *British Educational Leadership, Management & Administration Society (BELMAS)*, 22 (1), 31-34.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). (2006). *Higher education in Further Education Colleges Consultation on HEFCE Policy*. Bristol: HEFCE.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). (2009). *Supporting higher education in further education colleges: policy, practice and prospects*, Bristol: HEFCE.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2003). *Supporting higher education in further education colleges A guide for tutors and lecturers*. Bristol: HEFCE.

Lavngwa, M.S. (2019). *Plato and the Institution on Education: Critique of Cameroon Education*. (unpublished PhD thesis), Dschang: University of Dschang.

Lavngwa, M.S. (2016). Politicization of Cultural Diversity and its impact on nation building in Cameroon: A political philosophical analysis. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9(4):157-175.

Miles, M. & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

NCIHD. (1997). *National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education*. London: Higher Education in the Learning Society.

Njeuma, D.L., Endeley, H. N., Mbuntum, F. F., Lyonga, N., Nkweteyim, D. L., Musenja, S., Ekanje, E. (1999). *Reforming a National System of Higher Education: The case of Cameroon. A Report of the ADEA Working Group On Higher Education*. Washington, USA: ADEA Working Group on Higher Education, The World Bank.

Njeuma, D. L. (2003). Cameroon. In D. Teferra & P. G. Altbach (eds.), *Higher Education: An International Reference*. Indiana University Press, 215–223.

Owen, J.M. (1999). *Program Evaluation: Forms and Approaches*. London: Sage.

Parry, G. (2006). Policy-Participation Trajectories in English Higher Education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 60(1), 392-412.

Parry, G., Davies, P., & Williams, J. (2004). *Difference, diversity and distinctiveness: higher education in the learning and skills sector. 2nd ed*. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.

Petko, D., Egger, N., Cantieni, A., & Wespi, B. (2015). Digital media adoption in schools:

Bottom-up, top-down, complementary or optional? *Computers & Education*, 84(1), 49–61.

Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon. (1992). *Decree No 92/74 of 13 April 1992 on the transformation of university of Buea and Ngaoundere centers into universities*. Yaoundé: Unity Palace Printing Press.

Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon. (1993). *Decree No. 93/034 of 19 January 1993 created five new universities all over the national territory*. Yaoundé: Unity Palace Printing Press.

Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon. (2001). *Decree No. 005 of 16 April 2001 to Guide Higher Education*. Yaoundé: Unity Palace Printing Press.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) (2006). *Higher education in further education colleges in England Statistical bulletin 2005-06*. Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: HESA Services Ltd.

Republic of Cameroon. (1963). *Law No. 63/DF/13 of 19 June 1963 on the harmonization of educational structures in the Federal Republic of Cameroon*. Yaoundé: Presidency of the Republic.

Republic Of Cameroon. (1998). *Law No 98/004 of 14 April 1998: Orientation Law and Guidelines for Education in Cameroon*. Yaoundé: SOPECAM.

Robinson, N. (2003). *'The Times They Are A-Changing': A discussion of the merits of Higher Education Institutions creating links with Further Education Partner Colleges*. London: Higher Education in the Learning Society.

Science Position Paper. (2012). *The Professionalisation of Academics as Teachers in Higher Education*. Strasbourg cedex, France, European Science Foundations, Standing Committee for the Social Sciences.

Tamukong, N. M., Ngeche, M. (2018). Educational Leadership: Implications for Quality Management in the Development of Cameroon Higher Education. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (IJTSRD)*, 2(2), 756-768.

Tchombe, T. M. (2001). Structural Reforms in Education in Cameroon. Unpublished policy paper, Limbe: University of Buea.

Tikkanen, L., Pyhältö, K., Pietarinen J., & Soini, T., (2019). Lessons learnt from a large-scale curriculum reform: The strategies to enhance development work and reduce reform-related stress. *Journal of Educational Change*. 1 (4), 1-25.

UNESCO. (1997). *Open and Distance Learning. Prospects and Policy Considerations*. Paris, France, UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2010). *Strategic Planning Concept and Rationale*. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning. Paris, France, UNESCO.

United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Center. (2021). *The Human Development Index*. New York: United Nation.

United Nations. (2016). *Sustainable Development Goals*. New York: United Nation.

UNDER PEER REVIEW