PUBLIC POLICY ON EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY CAMEROON: PERSPECTIVES, ISSUES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

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Abstract:

Public policy is critical in defining the direction of any institution, organization or country, including its education sector. An education policy as a public policy enhances, authenticates and regulates educational processes in a nation. A good education policy must be anchored on the attributes of good policy. Since independence, the Cameroon government has adopted different educational legislations which have guided educational processes over the years. While some scholars view these as constituting Cameroon's education policy, others argue that their disjointed and incomprehensive nature does not qualify what exists as education policy. This conceptual paper critically examined public policy on education in contemporary Cameroon vis-à-vis the attributes of a good policy. It fortifies the existing structure for potential subsequent studies in education policy, and correlation with such variables as system effectiveness. The paper draws from the fact that educational policy lapses have constituted backdrop for the recent and ongoing conflict in the Anglophone regions of the country. Hence, it raises issues and offers insight intended to stimulate education policy makers towards action. The authors conclude that there is a big vacuum in terms of comprehensiveness, quality, adequacy and access in Cameroon's education policy as a close comparative look at the situation in other African countries shows that Cameroon does not have one. The paper thus recommends on the urgent need for a National Conference on Education of the like of the 1995 Education Forum tasked among others to review all disjointed educational legislations and establish a comprehensive education policy to guide and regulate educational practices in the country's two sub-systems of education.

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1. Introduction

Education is a crucial and indispensable tool in the construction of viable and sustainable societies with outstanding democratic values. It inspires people and fortifies nations; it is a powerful counterbalance, offering opportunities for citizens to graduate themselves out of poverty. It is therefore a critical tool for the attainment of the development agenda of any nation and the world at large. In this light, scholars argue that education is a process whereby individuals acquire physical, intellectual and social capabilities required by the society in which they are born for daily functioning and national development (Denga, 2005 and Adeola, 2009). Education has both quantitative and qualitative sides. While the quantitative side refers to the economic dividends that ultimately accrue from it to individuals and their countries as a result of increased earnings, the qualitative aspect has to do with "*values, culture and needs*" (Adeola, 2009 and Uchem & Ngwa, 2014). It is a life-long individual and social learning progression that challenges the dominant ecological, psychological, economic and social paradigms. In view of the fact that education is a process that needs to be sustained, its practice in any nation is largely influenced by public policy. An education policy is therefore a public policy that enhances the educational process in any nation. Where policy is lacking, or where there exist unclear ones, educational development is likely to be directionless and marred by conflicts of interests and chaos. This paper critically examined public policy on education in contemporary Cameroon with particular attention to the issues surrounding what constitute education policy in the country. The paper recommends some important actions that need to be taken towards the development of a more valid and comprehensive education policy for Cameroon.

2. Background

2.1 Cameroon in Perspectives

Cameroon is a nation in western Africa created out of the colonial expeditions of Germany, Britain and France. The country is bounded to the north by Lake Chad, and Chad and the Central African Republic to the east. To the south, it is bounded by the Republics of the Congo, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea, and to the west by the Bight of Biafra (an arm of the Atlantic Ocean) and Federal Republic of Nigeria. It has the shape of an elongated triangle, and acts as a bridge between West Africa and Central Africa. Cameroon lies between latitudes 1° and 13°N, and longitudes 8° and 17°E. The country has been described as "Africa in miniature" because it exhibits all major climates and vegetation of the continent: coast, desert, mountains, rainforest, and savanna (Njung, Tazanu & Nfor, 2003). Cameroon is a bilingual country with English and French as its official languages. It has an estimated population of about 24 million people, distributed

among 250 indigenous ethnic groups and is presently constituted into 10 administrative regions – eight French-speaking and two English-speaking. The country is a member of two of the world's largest socio-cultural and linguistic communities – the Francophonie and the British Commonwealth. It operates within an economic and monetary zone of six member countries – the Economic Community of Central African States (CEMAC).

Being a former French and British colony, Cameroon runs a bicultural Francophone and Anglo-Saxon educational and administrative systems. Cameroon represents one of the giants in primary, secondary and higher education in the CEMAC sub-region and Sub-Sahara Africa. It has one of the highest school attendance and literacy rates in the region. In 2007 the school attendance rate stood at 83.1 percent; adult literacy rate was 67.9 percent and a higher education participation rate of 7.2 percent (which is also one of the highest in Sub-Sahara Africa (Republic of Cameroon, 2010). Cameroon in the past years has continuously constituted an interesting case of a comparatively better educational system in Africa. The Knowledge Economy Index (KEI) of 2009 shows that the country was on the 12th position ahead of some African and Asian countries, which ordinarily may be seen as being ahead. The education sector comprises four ministerial departments: Ministry of Basic Education (charged with nursery and primary education), Ministry of Secondary Education (charged with general and technical education as well as training of primary school teachers), Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (charged with post primary education and technical and vocational training in the informal sector) and Ministry of Higher Education (charge with post-secondary and higher education and training, including of teachers of secondary education). Total spending on education in the country in proportion to the national budget over the past two decades has been slightly below the Sub-Sahara African average of 16.6 percent recorded in 2013. It shrank from 14.6 percent of the national budget in 2014 to 12.5 percent in 2016; far below the 20 percent Education Sector Strategy planned spending mark (Mekolle, 2019).

2.2 Trends of Education Policy in Cameroon (from the colonial era to present)

The education system in Cameroon has witnessed two basic eras in terms of policy development, which have also constituted the turning points of educational policy in today's Cameroon. These include the 1910 German Education Ordinance which preceded the 1907 Education Conference and the Basic and Secondary Education Law of 1998 which came after the 1995 Education Forum. It is important to note that issues of education policy across the territory during the League of Nations' Mandate and United Nations' Trusteeship in the Cameroons (1919 – 1961) were directly handled from Britain and France (who were the mandate and trusteeship authorities) through their representatives in the territories, as there were no indigenous attempts at education policy development (Shu, 2000 and Tamukong, 2004). Although there are a couple of other laws, decrees, regulations and directives concerning educational practices in Cameroon, they all have their bases from the 1998 education law. Tambo (2003a) and Fonkeng (2010) notes that the forum of 1995 was a critical event in the history of education

in Cameroon; comparable only to the conference of 1910 organized by the German colonial authority. Deductively, the basic and secondary education law of 1998 is only comparable to the German Education Ordinance in Cameroon of 1910.

The attainment of independence in the 1960s like other African countries marked an important turning point in the educational history of Cameroon. For the first time, the Cameroon authorities saw the need to determine the form of education that suited them since colonial authorities restricted their attempts in the beginning. This determination was reflected in the 1961 Addis Ababa Conference that questioned the relevance of the inherited colonial education for African development. It was therefore proposed that African education should be shaped towards producing men and women interested in technological development (Shu, 2000 and Tambo, 2003a). Since 1961, the Cameroon educational system has evolved over time, with its different policies focusing on addressing the indigenous philosophical, socio-cultural and developmental needs of the nation (Mbua, 2003 and Fonkeng, 2010). However, in the face of globalization and internationalization of education, there is still some level of influence on the educational policies and system from international organizations like the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF and UNDP amongst other education related agencies. Other forms of foreign influence are through education related bilateral agreements between the Cameroon government and foreign diplomatic missions and institutions.

The underpinning priority of post-independence education in Cameroon especially at the basic and secondary level has been the 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education for All. Mbua (2003) and Fonkeng (2010) argue that between 1985 and 1990, Cameroon witnessed a severe drop in school enrolment at the basic education level resulting from the global economic crunch. Most parents placed very little or no emphases on primary education as girls in particular were withdrawn to engage in farm work or petty commerce so as to augment household income and livelihood. Considering Cameroon's adherence to the United Nations Charter and conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of Child, the EFA Declaration and others, the nation saw the need to key into the "Universal Primary Education" program which is an indispensable tool to national development (Mbua, 2003). It is for this reason that the 1996 Cameroon Constitution as amended makes provision for the educational rights of the citizenry in an effort to protect and allay their fears. Paragraph 18 of the preamble of the Constitution provides that "*the State shall guarantee the child's right to education. Primary education shall be compulsory. The organization and supervision of education at all levels shall be the bounden duty of the State*" (Republic of Cameroon, 1996).

In line with the preamble of the Constitution, President Paul Biya on February 10, 2000 decreed primary education provided in government schools free of charge. The president, by this policy, hoped that Cameroon satisfied the second Millennium Development Goal of securing universal primary education by the year 2015 (Biya, 2000). The era of the millennium development goals had passed and a review of the policy shows many lapses in its implementation (Mekolle, 2018). The implementation of the policy in government schools was only visible essentially in terms of a fee waiver for

public primary school pupils. Even though the government is said to have spent about 20 billion FCFA every decade to supply teaching aids or minimum packages for teachers, Parent Teachers Associations (PTA) in schools still collect specific amounts per pupil in order to supplement government's measures in offering basic school requirements like teachers and adequate infrastructure. Some head teachers have also continued to request for examination fees from parents, while the responsibility to provide the pupils with uniforms, books and feeding still rest with the parents (Ngwa, 2020). There is therefore every reason to uphold that free primary education in the country is to a great extent not free.

2.3 The 1995 Educational Forum

In 1995, the Cameroon Government organized a National Forum on education in Yaounde from May 22-27 chaired by the then Minister of National Education, Robert Mbella-Mbappe. The forum was the largest gathering of Cameroonians and their foreign partners from different works of life since independence on issues affecting education in the country. Discussions in this forum centered on preschool, primary and secondary school, and also on teacher education. Before this time, previous attempts at organizing such a forum, including in 1989 had all failed due to a number of reasons. According to the rules and procedures signed by the Minister on May 8, 1995 as cited by Tambo (2003a), the Forum was a consultative body, aimed at making proposals for the formulation of a new educational policy for Cameroon. Mbua (2003: 453) states that one of the rational for the holding of the forum was *"the lack of proper education policy."* The forum took place within a background of popular demands for democracy, decentralization, effective management, accountability, pedagogic reforms and relevance in education. Some people were also in support of a bicultural system of education that gives adequate recognition to both Anglophone and Francophone realities.

Generally, the forum held based on the problems that characterized the educational system as followed:

1. A pedagogy that foster reproduction rather than production;
2. A system demoralized by high dropout rates, irregular attendance and high repetition and failure rate;
3. Poor quality teaching and irrelevant curriculum content with respect to geo and socio-historical circumstances of life at all levels (Fonkeng, 2010: 201).

Following the recommendations of the forum and after deliberations and adoption by parliament of some of the recommendations, the President of the republic in 1998 enacted Law no. 98/004 of 14th April 1998 to lay down guidelines for education in Cameroon. This law which constitutes major point of reference as Cameroon education policy consists of 5 Parts and 42 Sections and applies to nursery, primary, secondary grammar and technical education, as well as teacher education.

While Section 3 of the law gives the Cameroon State the prerogative to institute bilingualism at all levels of education as a factor of national unity and integration – in an effort to foster the bilingual and bicultural disposition of the nation, Sections 4 and 5

capture the general purpose and specific objectives of education respectively. According to Section 4, the general purpose of education shall be to train children for the intellectual, physical, civic and moral development and their smooth integration into society bearing in mind prevailing economic and socio-cultural, political and moral factors. Section 5 notes that on the basis of the general purpose, the objectives of education shall be to: (i) train citizens who are firmly rooted in their culture, but opened to the world and respectful of the general interest and the common wealth; (ii) inculcate the major universal ethical values which are, dignity and honour, honesty and integrity as well as a sense of discipline into pupils and students; (iii) promote family life; (iv) promote national languages; (v) provide an introduction into the democratic culture and practice, respect for human rights and freedoms, justice and tolerance, the fight against all forms of discrimination, the love for peace and dialogue, civil responsibility and the promotion of regional and sub-regional integration; (vi) cultivate the love of effort and work well done, the quest for excellence and team spirit; (vii) develop creativity, a sense of initiative and the spirit of enterprise; (viii) provide physical, sports, artistic and cultural training for the child; and (ix) promote hygiene and health education (Republic of Cameroon, 1998).

3. Conceptual Review

3.1 Policy and Public Policy

A policy refers to a set of ideas or a plan of what to do in a particular situation that has been officially endorsed by a group of people, an organization or government. Birkland (2001) and Tambo (2003a) notes that policy is a guide to action, especially collective action. It is a deliberate road map for the attainment of particular goals and objectives or addressing issues of concern by an actor or group of actors. According to Hoy and Miskel (1996) and Birkland (2001), a policy is a general statement of objectives that guide organizational action. It contains a set of principles purposefully put together to guide actions, decisions and the achievement of rational outcomes. It may apply to government, business and non-profit sector organizations and groups, as well as individuals. Presidential decrees, ministerial orders or circulars, corporate policies, and laws adopted by parliaments are examples of policy. In government circles, Tambo (2003a) posits that policies are authoritative guiding principles from the government to institutions spelling out government's agenda and how this agenda is to be achieved.

In any society, governmental entities enact laws, make policies, and allocate resources. This is known as public policy and is true at all levels. The Norwich University (2020) and Peters (2015) opine that public policy can be seen as a system of laws, regulatory measures, courses of action, and funding priorities concerning a given issue promulgated by a governmental entity or its representatives. It involves deliberate government efforts aimed at addressing public issues by instituting laws, regulations, decisions, or actions pertinent to the problems at hand (Peters, 2015 and Pellissery, 2015). The process of public policy making can be characterized as a dynamic, complex, and

interactive system through which public problems are identified and solved by creating new policies or by reforming existing ones (Pellissery, 2015). Numerous issues can be address by public policy including education, crime, foreign policy, health, and social welfare amongst others. The process to create a new public policy typically follows four steps: agenda-setting, policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation (Birkland, 2001 and Peters, 2015). However, some scholars hold that the process follow five steps while others talk of six to nine steps, depending on the perspective from which they analyses the policy process. Figure 1 is an illustration of a five steps policy cycle. The time-line for a new policy to be put in place can range from weeks to several years, depending on the situation (Norwich University, 2020 and Peters, 2015).
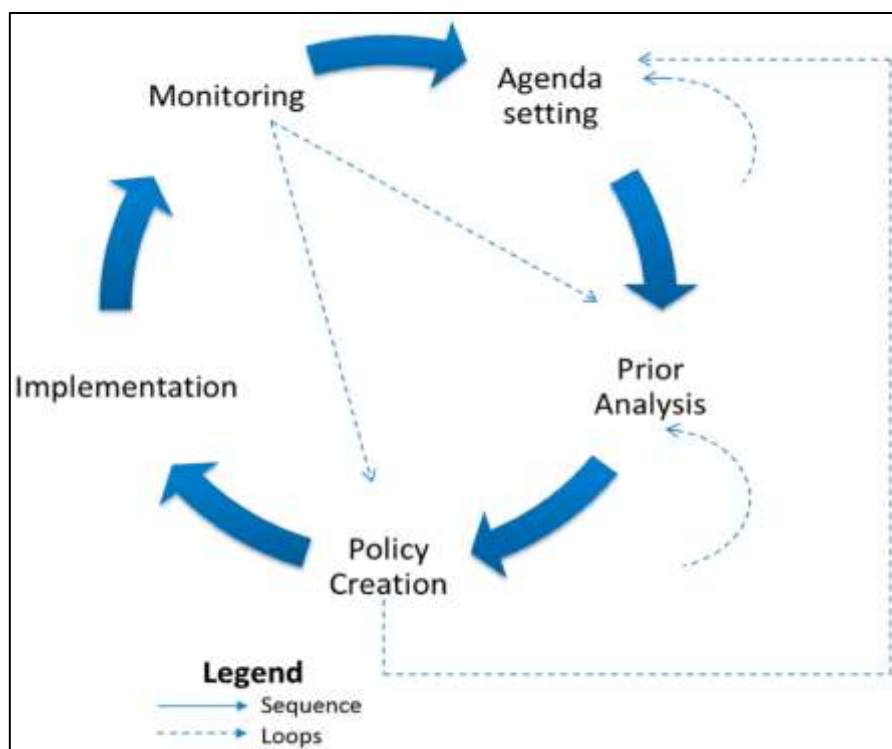

Figure 1: The public policy cycle
(**Source:** Javed, Khan and McClatchey (2018))

The process to create a public policy according to Javed, Khan and McClatchey (2018) starts with agenda setting by the policy stakeholders. This is followed by the collection of data on key issues from all concerned stakeholders, probably through a national or regional dialogue process, and analyzing the data collected for rationalization and harmonization. The policy is then created following appropriate legal procedures and then followed by implementation. While the implementation phase is ongoing, monitoring and evaluation sets in to assess its effectiveness. It is important to note that policy stakeholders can go right away to create policy after agenda setting and the monitoring and evaluation process can result to further policy analyses and policy adjustments, depending on the issues arising from the monitoring exercise.

According to the Norwich University (2020), public policy is rooted in constitutional laws and regulations, and judicial interpretations and regulations which are generally authorized by legislation. Public policy is therefore considered to be robust when it comprehensively addresses issues efficiently and effectively, and serves as a support base for government institutions, sub policies, and encourages active citizenship participation in societal development. The authoritative allocation of values for a society; the process of deciding who gets what, when, and how; the choices of government on specific problems, and the established boundaries of freedoms and the contours of interactions with other people in the political, social and economic systems are what constitute the nature and scope of public policy (Peters, 2015).

From the above, we can perceptively deduce that public policy goes beyond laws and regulations enacted by legislative statesmen and implemented by public administrators. It also includes government's plans, programs, instructions, decisions and other symbolic systems. Even though a government program can be a public policy, not all public policies are programs. The policy makers are not only statesmen but also include local representatives of citizens, experts and scholars. The existence of practical and comprehensive public policy in any societal domain tends to increase efficiency. Decisions made within a policy framework have a higher probability of being synchronize with other decision within the organization or system. In the context of this paper, the educational policy of any nation is considered as a public policy because it is a designated plan of action for the educational sector formulated by all education stakeholders, and written in (a) formal document(s) to guide the nation's educational practices.

3.2 Education Policy as Public Policy

Anja (2000) argues that educational policy, also known as educational legislation, is the branch in education that deals with legislations and rules set by government to regulate education for conformity and regularity. These legal instruments and rules as stated by Anja are meant for providing for, directing, supervising and controlling the educational enterprise in a given country, state, or region. The US Department of Education (2010) refers to education policy as the principles and government policy-making in the educational sphere, as well as the collection of laws and rules that govern the operation of education systems. Consequently, whatever the government of a country officially decides to do or not to do with its education sector could be referred to as government's policy on education.

Education takes place in many forms for multiple reasons and in different institutions. For instance, there is basic education which constitutes early childhood education, kindergarten, primary education and junior secondary education (depending on the society). There is senior secondary education, college or university education, graduate and professional education, adult education and also job training. Consequently, education policy can directly influence the education of citizens at all levels and ages (Tambo, 2003a and US Department of Education, 2010). Some areas in

education that constitute the scope of education policy or are subject to education policy debates particularly in the domain of schools include school size, class size, school choice, school privatization, tracking, teacher education and certification, teacher renumeration, teaching methods, curricular content, graduation requirements, school infrastructure investment, and the values that schools are expected to uphold and model (Bell & Stevenson, 2006 and US Department of Education, 2010). According to Bell and Stevenson (2006), the key objective of an education policy is to ensure that education in the country like every other sector operates within a legal framework for proper organization and quality assurance. The scholarly study of education policy is referred to as education policy analysis. It seeks to answer questions on the purpose of education, the specific objectives that it is designed to attain, the methods for attaining the said objectives and the tools for measuring their success or failure (Bell & Stevenson, 2006).

A good example of a public policy in the United States' education sector is *The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).* The NCLB of 2001 is an Act of Congress that is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which included Title I, the government's flagship aid program for disadvantaged students. The Act supports standards-based education reform based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education. The Act was promulgated into law on January 8th, 2002 by the then US President George Bush. Some of the key takeaways for and against the policy according to US Department of Education (2010) include the following:

- States are required to develop assessments in basic skills. States must give these assessments to all students at selected grade levels in order to receive federal school funding. The standards in the act are set by each individual state.
- Schools receiving Title I funding must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in test scores; each year, its fifth graders must do better on standardized tests than the previous year's fifth graders.
- Critics of the Act argue that the focus on standardized testing as the means of assessment encourages teachers to teach a narrow subset of skills the teacher believes will increase test performance, rather than focus on acquiring deep understanding of the curriculum.

In contemporary Cameroon, educational policies take the form of acts of parliament, presidential decrees and ministerial orders. Examples of educational policies in Cameroon include Law No.98/004 of 14 April 1998 on the orientation of basic, secondary and teacher education in Cameroon and Law No.2001/005 of 16 April 2001 on the orientation of higher education in Cameroon amongst others. These shall be examined in subsequent paragraphs.

3.3. Attributes of a Good Policy

Determining whether a policy is good or not, or if it is achieving the desired objectives of the organization or institution and the required outcomes or not is dependent on examining the attributes of a good policy. Tambo (2003a), Mbua (2003), and Bell and

Stevenson (2006) have identified a series of characteristics of public policy, especially policy relating to education. By implication, we submit that a good educational policy should possess the following attributes which can also be used as an audit tool to identify shortcomings in the documentation prior to its implementation.

A. Drawn out of due interest of the society it serves

Although the responsibility of formulating educational policies is reserved to the government who is the lawful custodian of educational issues, good policies are enacted with respect to the collective interest of the society that the educational system serves to be considered legitimate. To ensure the policy reflects collective and not individual choice of those who have legal authorities to sanction policies, the process of initiation must be participative to involve as many representatives of the various factions of stakeholders as possible. In that light, policy gets shared with a greater chance of effective implementation.

B. A declaration of intent and a major guideline

From the definition of educational policy as the statement which expresses educational goals and the process for achieving those goals, one would agree that a good educational policy is a declaration of intent for goal achievement. Ideally, education policies are major guidelines and not directives of what must be done to meet up with goals and objectives stated in the policy. Although policies in many cases generate regulations, regulations and directives are not to be considered as policy.

C. Flexible and future-oriented

Mindful of the fact that education is a process which needs to be sustained, its practice is largely influenced by educational policies. Consequently, because education is dynamic and not static, educational policies also assume this dynamic nature. Educational policies are not backward but forward looking; they guide future actions and because the future cannot be adequately predicted, educational policies usually get characterized with uncertainties which requires that they be written in more flexible and not rigid manner. Good educational policies are flexible such that the procedures and activities developed for policy implementation may differ with location and time depending on pertaining circumstances.

D. Should be written in a clear and concise manner

Good education policies are not ambiguously written; rather, they are presented in manners that are easily understood by implementers and other stakeholders concerned. The policies are often clear and consistently written in a way that prevents confusion and conflict at the level of implementation. They are general guidelines that do not require lengthy and detailed explanations of administrative procedures towards goal achievement. Besides, good education policies are collapsed in single documents to avoid

proliferation of different policy documents that addresses specific educational concerns. In short, good educational policies are both clearly and briefly stated.

E. Should be easily accessible

Considering that education serves the interest of all stakeholders, education policies should not only be available to administrators and those who work in educational institutions, but should also be easily accessible to the various interest parties such as parents, the church, the community as a whole, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), alumni, and industries that contributes to the growth and development of the educational sector. This helps reduce ignorance and conflict, thereby ensuring effectiveness, transparency and accountability.

F. The policy outcomes should be clearly stated

Policy must be goal-oriented; it must have a clear purpose and outcome if it is to be of any value to the system. It is important that staff recognize the problem that is being addressed through the policy implementation. It is extremely difficult to implement policy in a situation where people do not perceive that there is a need for the specific policy unit to be developed or implemented. If the policy is being implemented to support the education system in its growth and development, it is imperative that the policy outcomes be clearly stated so that everyone can understand why the policy has to be implemented and what the policy expectations are. Policies must be known and understood by all who are affected by them. It should clearly spell out what organization members should and should not do in a given situation.

G. There is linkage to organizational direction

Education policy makers must ensure that all policies are linked to the overall direction and goals of the organization. The overall framework of the education sector should provide some strategic direction and is important in assessing the policy direction of the educational system. Policy writers must ensure that the policy supports existing policies and procedures within the system. One of the tests of good policy is that it supports the organization in achieving its goals and objectives. Often, policy through its implementation can in fact hinder staff in achieving the organizational goals. Policy should be seen as pillars supporting the structure of an organization. Policy should be written in such a way that they expose challenges to staff and enable them to better achieve their full potentials.

H. Due process in the development stage has been observed and all stakeholders included to ensure stability

If policies are to serve as guides to actions, they should not be frequently changed. Careful study should therefore be taken in formulating policies. The organizational rules and principles must be established and clearly understood as part of the policy development process. It is crucial that all components or stakeholders of the education sector make

some input to the policy development. Policy implemented in one department may seem fair and reasonable until that policy has a deleterious effect on other parts of the organization as a whole. Therefore, as part of the organizational framework, the structure needs to be both developed and implemented. This will ensure full participation by all in the development of a concise and engaging policy document.

Education policy like any other policy document must be inclusive. Policy makers must take into full account the impact of the policy on different groups who are affected by the policy. It must bring together the viewpoints of the regulator and the regulated to find the best middle ground. Stakeholders in other words are those who are directly affected by the implementation of the policy. Policy development must therefore adopt an inclusive process where these stakeholders can participate in its development. Such a process demands that stakeholders are clearly identified, and appropriate consultations made as part of the policy development process. One of the significant problems that may be encountered if stakeholders are invited to participate in policy development is that it is often difficult if not impossible to achieve all the desired outcomes from each stakeholder group. One of the key components of policy development is to discuss with each of the stakeholder groups the policy outcomes that are going to be implemented. Where these outcomes do not meet the stakeholder's expectations, it is imperative that the organization take note and resolve these conflicts as much as possible.

I. Policy must be realistic, measurable and provide capacity for evaluation

Present situation or condition must be considered if policy statements are to be implemented. They should not be a mere statement of ideals and commitments which cannot be implemented if conditions were different. The intended policy is to achieve a specific outcome; its outcome needs to be effective in terms of the impact that it has on the government or organization. Part of the consultative process if undertaken appropriately will help identify areas where the policy may not be effective within the institution.

The policy must possess measurable indicators that will provide proof if it is having the desired impact on the sector. This is especially useful for the evaluation stage of the policy cycle. The ability to measure the effectiveness of the policy gives it capacity to be evaluated. Evaluation of policies helps governments or organizations to determine effectiveness and possible areas where change is needed, thereby enabling the system to function more efficiently.

Apart from the above, other attributes of a good policy include; sincerity of purpose, efficiency and cost effectiveness, appropriate funding, clear accountability, alignment with appropriate laws, enforceable and future proofed and historically informed. If policy implementation is to be effective and policy outcomes achieved, it becomes crucial that an audit of policy be undertaken prior to and post its implementation using the above criteria as a guideline. The attributes of a good policy also provide a strong foundation to enable policies to be reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis. It therefore becomes essential that existing policy frameworks be reviewed

and evaluated regularly to ensure that they are still achieving policy objectives as well as the governmental, organizational or institutional objectives that were originally intended to be achieved.

3.4 Education Policy Documents in Contemporary Cameroon – an Appraisal

There is considerable debate by scholars as to whether Cameroon has an education policy or not. Based on the preceding characteristics of a good public policy or education policy, we examine what pertains in the country. Anja (2000) and Tambo (2003b) states that, whereas to some observers Cameroon has no education policy, to others, the education system is pregnant with presidential decrees, ministerial orders and regulations that according to them, constitute the education policy. Tambo's (2003) book on: *Cameroon National Education Policy Since the 1995 Forum* is an attempt to contribute to scholarly material on Cameroon educational policy and practice, and to promote discourse and reflection on the prevailing issues. He further mentions that the book intended to push the education policy debate to a more tenable conclusion that could motivate further studies on Cameroon education policy.

Shu (2000: 8) acknowledges the lack of formal policy guidelines in Cameroon education by noting that one of the ten top problems of education in Cameroon is "*the problem of evolving a comprehensive national education policy which can stay while individual politicians and civil servants come and go.*" According to him, the problem of procuring adequate legislations on the educational system and making it to operate within a legal framework that doesn't give room for individual idiosyncrasies on the nation remains a critical issue to tackle. Supporting the above position, Tambo (2003a, 2003b) and Tamukong (2004) argue that an overview of policy issues inherent in the Cameroon education system reveals that Cameroon like some other countries in the world has no comprehensive educational policy that can be matched with policies such as the 1996 Education Policy of Zambia, the 2002 New Zealand First Education Policy, and the National Education Policy (NEP) (2004-2005) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Shu (2000), Anja (2000), Tambo (2003a, 2003b) and Fonkeng (2010) all agree that; what exist as education policy in Cameroon is a myriad of legislations, presidential and ministerial decrees that orient educational practices at primary, secondary, teacher education and university levels.

For instance, Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 on the orientation of basic, secondary and teacher education in Cameroon; Law No.2001/005 of 16 April 2001 on the orientation of higher education in Cameroon; Law No.2004/022 of 2nd July 2004 fixing rules relative to the organization and the functioning of private education in Cameroon; Decree No.2001/829/PM of 19th September, 2001 fixing the general rules applicable to private education institutions are some of the major legislations on education in contemporary Cameroon (Tambo, 2003a 2003b and Fonkeng, 2010). There are many other education related legislations which could simply be described as directives and not policy per se.

With regard to the characteristics of good public policies, one thing is pertinent; the lack of accessibility of educational policies in Cameroon. The compounding problem

of retrieving major policy documents or legislations in Cameroon today induces easy conclusions that an education policy is absent. This problem is particularly serious at lower levels of education as most students and teachers remain largely ignorant about policy guidelines. Most policy documents therefore exist in appellation but are realistically absent. This is pertinent to Law No.2001/005 of 16 April 2001 on the orientation of higher education in Cameroon which is not within the reach of even 20 percent of higher education stakeholders (according to a simple random survey by the authors), among others legislations. The question of integrity of educational practices therefore quickly come to mind, especially as conflict of interest and values among parents and teachers, students and teachers, and teachers and administrators continue to characterize the educational and school systems due to ignorance.

However, owing to the fact that there exist some major policy documents, one cannot be in a haste to dismiss the point that educational policy guidelines exist in Cameroon. The Law No.98/004 of 14 April 1998 on the orientation of basic, secondary and teacher education in Cameroon, Law No.2001/005 of 16 April 2001 on the orientation of higher education in Cameroon, and Law No.2004/022 of 2nd July 2004 fixing rules relative to the organization and the functioning of private education in Cameroon for example are given credence here. The 1998 law on the orientation of basic, secondary and teacher education in Cameroon particularly meets a good number of the criteria that constitute good policy. For example, the law ratified the deliberations of the 1995 National Education Forum which was highly participatory, constituting teachers of public and private schools, parent-teacher associations, students, national and international support institutions, churches, NGOs, teacher associations, academics and all necessary education stakeholders (Tambo, 2003 and Fonkeng, 2010). The law is not only popularly referred in Cameroon but also has clear and concise statements on the objectives of education in the country and guidelines about practice that could be applied elsewhere.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the above analysis, we conclusively opine that in terms good public policy and specifically education policy issues, the Cameroon government since independence has put in place and depended on a plethora of legislations as guidelines to facilitate the smooth education of the citizenry towards the achievement of the development agenda of the nation. These legislations include acts of parliament, presidential decrees, international conventions, ministerial decrees and circulars amongst others. Amongst the different national educational legislations, the 1998 education law stands out as the only policy document on education that was developed following due process or cycle of policy development. Aside the incomprehensive and outdated nature of the law vis-à-vis current global trends and innovations in education, majority of other legislations while containing some useful guidelines, are mainly the handiwork of politicians and government officials who want to be perceived as doing something in their respective positions. Many such policies were not inspired by the will to align the educational

system towards positive reforms. They were devoid of proper consultations and the participation of key stakeholders which makes the entire process faulty. Still, most of legislations are largely on paper, thereby raising issues of policy awareness, access and implementation.

Without disregard to the scholarly dispositions of persons who consider the educational system of Cameroon as having referenced policy cognizance to some of the legislation discussed in this paper, the authors strongly hold the opinion that there is a big vacuum in terms of comprehensiveness, quality, adequacy and access in the education policy in contemporary Cameroon. A close look at education policy and practice in other African countries notably the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Rwanda etc., coupled with the recent and ongoing conflict in the Anglophone regions of the country with educational underpinnings necessitate a review of the country's education policy.

On the bases of the above analyses, we earmark the following recommendations:

- There is need for a second National Education Conference (NEC) in Cameroon. It has been 25 years and counting since the 1995 National Forum on education that saw the coming together of all education stakeholders in the country to discuss and address critical issues in the country's education sector. Considering the germane issues raised by stakeholders of the English sub-system of education in 2016 and mindful of the changing patterns in national and international development, it becomes absolutely necessary for the second NEC to hold. This could offer all stakeholders the platform and opportunity to iron out all grey issues within the educational system of the country and paved the way for massive education reforms that aligned with the realities of the changing nature of society, current innovations and the sustainable development agenda.

- The need for a review of all education related legislations and the putting in place of a comprehensive education policy for the nation is long overdue. So long as the status quo remains, the chaos in the implementation of disjointed educational legislations, some of which are conflicting with other extant laws in the country will also persist. Such was the case in 2013 when the Minister of Higher Education, in a ministerial decree, banned all candidates with visual impairment from writing the entrance examination into Higher Teachers Training Colleges (HTTC) in the country, which was in violation of the Jomtien Declaration on EFA, the 1998 education law and the preamble of the 1996 Constitution on the responsibility of the state to guarantee the educational rights of all citizens. Apart from discussing critical education issues and making recommendations in the proposed NEC, such a gathering could also be used as a representative assembly of all stakeholders to review all educational legislations in the country and a comprehensive legal framework on education put in place for onward ratification and promulgation into law. Drafting and enacting a comprehensive but flexible educational policy for Cameroon that addresses nationwide educational matters at all levels could go

a long way in solving some of the critical issues arising from the educational system, especially in this era of a rapidly changing society.

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