

University reforms in Cameroon: For better or for worse, the case of the University of Buea

Fonkeng Epah George¹, Sophie Ekume Etomes² and Tigma Maxmillian Younyi^{2*}

¹Deputy Vice-Chancellor in charge of Academic Affairs and Research, Biaka University Institute of Buea (BUIB), P. O Box 77 Buea, Cameroon.

²Department of Educational Foundations and Administration, Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Cameroon.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined university reforms in Cameroon: for better or for worse, the case of the University of Buea. Two research objectives guided the study. The study employed a survey research design. 30 full-time lecturers with at least 5 years of teaching experience were purposively selected for the study. Both qualitative and quantitative approach was used in analyzing the data collected for the study. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 2.3) was used in analyzing the quantitative data. On the other hand, data from the open-ended questions was analyzed thematically, using themes, groundings and quotations. Findings revealed that (50.7%) of the lecturers indicated that the university has no financial autonomy. Indicating that the university cannot undertake construction projects without the state, they cannot sponsor lecturers' and students' research endeavours without depending on the state and cannot take financial decisions without the ministry. About the university having financial autonomy as per the 1993 university reforms, findings show that while 6 (20.0%) of the lecturers said the university has financial autonomy as per the 1993 reforms, 24 (80.0%) of the lecturers disagreed. With sources of university funding being students' tuition fees, business operating on campus, state budget, land and building, project, donations, students' medical and caution fees, transcript, lodging, foreign aid, farms and research grants. In line with Universities' infrastructural development as per the university reforms, findings show that the majority of the lecturers (73.3%) agreed that the university has infrastructures, even though it not adequate. Highlighting that the university is not endowed with adequate infrastructures for teaching, has no adequate laboratories and facilities, and classrooms are not well equipped for the teaching of professional courses. Many said classrooms are overcrowded, while others said the infrastructure is not user-friendly, especially for students with physical disabilities and visual impairment. About the present state of the infrastructure in the University of Buea, the majority of the lecturers said that it is inadequate. The lack of sufficient infrastructure undermines the quality of education, making it difficult for institutions to provide a supportive learning environment. Effective infrastructural development is essential not only for meeting current demands but also for positioning universities to compete in an increasingly globalized educational landscape. While university reforms in Cameroon, particularly at the University of Buea, hold promise for enhancing educational quality through financial autonomy and infrastructural development, significant challenges remain. The pathway forward requires a balanced approach that ensures sustainable funding, strategic investment in facilities, and a commitment to maintaining high educational standards. Only through addressing these critical issues can the reforms lead to meaningful improvements in the higher education landscape in Cameroon.

Keywords: University reforms, for better or for worse, financial autonomy, infrastructural development, University of Buea.

*Corresponding author. Email: tigma22@gmail.com. Tel: (237) 677 96 17 82.

INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly changing world and consequently very dynamic higher education landscape, higher education systems face many challenges. Barely recovering from the onset of massification in the seventies, higher education in Cameroon is faced with increasing competition, extensive internationalization. There is a higher demand for quality, and the obligation to prove themselves to varying stakeholders. These stakeholders, unfortunately, often are sponsors and at the same time beneficiaries of higher education's products and services. The various instabilities that occur as a result of these challenges call for appropriate strategic responses from the higher education sector (Gilliot, Overlaet and Verdain, 2001). In many private and public higher education institutions, sustainability, governance structure, policy articulations, curricula reforms and programme implementation have become an integral part of higher education. The ever-changing economic, social, and political situations in developed and developing countries have combined to create a need for constant innovations and reforms in education. As Durkheim (1938) argues, educational transformation is always the result and the symptom of social transformation. This is necessary because new ideas and needs have emerged, in which the former system is no longer adequate. According to Durkheim, educational reforms emanate from the basic conviction that significant progress can be made in a nation by its people through a careful engineering of the education reform process.

Before the 1990s, higher education was at its eminent stage of development, but the lack of professionalism was, however, a major cause for concern. Higher education in Cameroon has gone through various reforms and witnessed considerable levels of transformation through the implementation of policies designed to enhance its structural development. The Cameroonian higher education system, like those of many other developing countries, is heavily burdened by its inability to adequately adapt to the changing needs of infrastructural development, professionalism, among others. The situation has been further compounded by the general problems plaguing higher education systems all over the world: namely, the teacher-student ratio, growth of student enrolments in universities, and retrenchment in public financing policy (Mateusz, 2014).

Cameroonian higher education is no stranger to the trends that other higher education systems face. The new policy on university governance laid down in decree No. 2005/383 of 17th December 2005 was aimed at improving governance of higher education in four perspectives (managerial, academic, financial and social governance). The decree emphasizes efficiency, effectiveness, management with rigorous transparency and results. The background of this decree was the need to ameliorate the administrative and financial management of universities stated in the 1993 university reforms. It has been asserted

that the purpose was to review and reorient higher education to meet the needs of society and the labour market (professionalism), as well as to be globally competitive.

The 1993 university reform was aimed at solving the problems by implementing far-reaching innovations in the higher education system. Analysts and multilateral partners have persistently emphasized that higher education systems in developing countries are facing challenges of modernization (Neave and Van Vught, 1994). This call appeals to governments and other stakeholders to mobilize human and material resources to support the development of a 'rational system of higher education and orchestrate its smooth operation in a manner that promotes both mass education and excellence (UNESCO/World Bank, 2000).

After the 1993 educational forum in Cameroon, other major reform policies shaping the professionalization of Higher Education included: The Bologna Process (BP); the New University Governance policy; the 2001 law on the orientation of Higher Education in Cameroon; The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper termed Growth Employment Strategy Paper; the Education Sector Strategy and the Global Reform of Higher Education launched by the 1999 UNESCO Conference in Budapest. According to Bun (2008), the ultimate aim of these reforms was to produce graduates who can succeed socially and economically in the globalized world, a world driven by a knowledge-based economy. The Bologna Process overlaps with the New University Governance policy, which articulates and emphasizes professionalism by expanding professional and technical education opportunities (Buea University Newsletter, 2008; Sup Infos March, 2011). Since 1993, professionalization has been articulated in every major Higher Education document. It is constantly articulated in public speeches by Higher Education and other government officials. Regarding Higher Education, professionalization remains the watchword.

With a tenacious poise to improve the quality of training by sustainably strengthening the interaction between universities and professional circles, MINESUP has made a firm resolve to match university curricula with the real needs of the economy. Amongst the consequences of the acceptance and application of these reform ideas and assumptions at the national level are the decreasing importance of specific national and institutional characteristics, cultures, histories and interests. In the policy goals of efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and competition embodied in many higher education reform programmes, national authorities transform their public higher education systems from national organizations with multiple social roles into global players mainly operating on the basis of economic considerations. The role of the state is to act as a 'watchdog' and to make sure that external audits and evaluations of higher education institutions take place regularly (Akram and Hussein, 2017).

Context and justification

Over the years, Higher Education in Cameroon has witnessed several reforms. The primary drive of these reforms was to address the issue of high rates of graduate unemployment, a serious issue that the system was confronted with from the early 70s to the early 90s. It was against this background that the Government of Cameroon organized the 1993 university reform. One of the objectives was to professionalize Higher Education so that graduates would meet the demands of the labour market, as well as to gain skills for self-employment. After 1993, the major reform policies shaping Higher Education include: The Bologna Process; the New University Governance 127 policy; the 2001 law on the orientation of Higher Education in Cameroon with the objectives such as provide a more conducive environment for teaching and research, broaden and increase the participation of different stakeholders in the financing and management of universities by instituting more substantial registration fees and to involve the community in the attempt to diversify sources of funding (Fonkeng, 2008). To achieve this objective, Universities were required to define, in consultation with other stakeholders, the local market needs, involve professionals in the conception of programmes, define prerequisites for admission into different professional programmes, and draw up the profiles of teaching staff to be recruited.

Despite the objectives of the 1993 and 2001 university reforms, higher education cannot be achieved when self-autonomy is not upheld. Emerging trends, new economic challenges and diversifying expectations are not uncommon in today's higher education. In Cameroon's higher education, changes in the goals, strategies, and organizational systems usually occur as reactions to reforms (Niven, 2008). One such example is the 1993 reforms, which attempted to address the crises of the lone University of Yaoundé, but in doing so, multiplied some of the problems that still exist now. Ngwana (2001) holds that the 1993 higher education reforms in Cameroon were a welcome initiative and have had a significant effect on the improvement of quality and access in the higher education system. But he cautions that a superficial quantitative assessment of the achievements of the reforms may easily lead to an oversimplification of the present predicaments of the system. The 1993 reforms and most other reforms have been born out of an urgent need to fix problems with little preparation and forethought – especially relating to available human and financial resources. The current study also touches on how objectives pursued stay relevant and adaptive to conditions (resources, demands, and expectations). The tendency to leap before looking at the implications of objectives is also evident in some policy documents, which hold that lofty initiatives were taken before thinking. The role of higher education (HE) institutions in Cameroon, especially in rendering their workforce and management capable of coping in this environment, has placed HE in a much sharper focus than ever before. Their inability to gain financial autonomy,

inadequate infrastructural development, teaching/research and curriculum change with respect to professionalism. These and other problems prompted an urgent and complete overhaul of the country's higher education system in 1993. Twenty-six years after these reforms were instituted, it is appropriate to review them to determine if it is for better or for worse, not only for the University of Buea, but also for Cameroon in general.

Based on the problem, the following objectives were made to guide the study:

- i. To examine universities' financial autonomy as per the University reforms.
- ii. To investigate universities' infrastructural development as per the University reforms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary goals of the university reforms of 1993 were to decongest the University of Yaoundé and professionalize university studies, aiming to produce graduates who could be beneficial to the private sector and the country as a whole (Fonkeng and Ntembe, 2010). Specifically, make more rational and optimal use of existing infrastructure, facilities and services, especially those already existing in the University Centers, by upgrading the otherwise under-utilized centers to full-fledged universities with diverse degree programmes; broaden and increase the participation of different stakeholders in the financing and management of universities by instituting more substantial registration fees (raised from a modest 3,300F CFA to 50,000F CFA); in addition, the universities were encouraged to generate income by other activities and to involve the community in the attempt to diversify sources of funding; Grant universities more academic and management autonomy by providing basic infrastructure and finances; make programmes more varied, professional, adapted and responsive to the needs of the job market; by providing more programmes that would enable graduates find employment in the private sector as well as create self-employment; provide a more conducive environment for teaching and research by creating a better atmosphere for teachers, teaching and research whole (Fonkeng and Ntembe, 2010).

Higher education in Cameroon

The HE system operates within the framework of the 1993 reforms. With funding problems and quality decline in the University of Yaoundé, the government, between 1992 and 1993, initiated a vast overhaul of the HE system. The reforms were contained in presidential decrees numbered 92/074 of 13 April 1992, 93/026 of 19 January 1993, 93/034 of 19 January 1993, and 93/027 of 19 January 1993. The objectives addressed by these decrees included, amongst others: a) to encourage the participation of the different

partners in the management and financing of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), b) to enhance autonomy in academic, administrative and management issues, c) to professionalise the higher education system, d) to deconcentrate and e) increase inter-university and international co-operation. A principal feature of the reforms was that they granted autonomy to universities to generate extra funds for projects. Before the 1993 reforms, the structure of the Cameroon HE system was dominantly French-patterned. The pre-1993 higher education system consisted of the main university (the then University of Yaoundé) with several university-level institutions, professional/technical schools, institutes and centres which were completely separated from or simply lodged in the university. Thirty (30) years after its creation, this university had 40.000 students in a campus meant for 5000 students (Njeuma et al., 1999).

At the time of the 1993 reforms, Cameroon's only university, the University of Yaoundé, was experiencing an exponential increase in the number of students, poor teacher-student ratios and attendant negative effects on educational quality and success rates. The university's budget was spent largely on students' welfare (over 43%) to the detriment of its primary missions of teaching and research, to which less than 1.5% of the recurrent budget was allocated. In contrast, the four small university centres were underutilised because of the limited scope and nature of their programmes. For example, the University of Buea had facilities for 2,000 students but had only 60 enrolled in its single school (the School of Translators and Interpreters). The Ngaoundere University Centre, also with a capacity for over 2,000 students, had just 306 students enrolled in its modest School of Food Technology. The Dschang University Centre, with accommodations for over 4,000 students, had only 555 enrolled. Although the University of Yaoundé was intended to function as a bilingual institution, its programmes were essentially designed after the French university system and were taught predominantly in French. This created problems of access and performance for English-speaking students.

The first internal policy and regulatory framework guiding the societal service function of Higher Education in Cameroon was probably the 1993 university reforms. Even though these reforms seemed to have focused mostly on addressing the problem of overcrowding and access at the time through the creation of more universities as well as addressing their related funding challenges, it could, however, be argued that the societal problem-solving component was implicit in the reforms, and though less articulated until 2001. The 1993 reforms provided administrative and some level of financial autonomy to the newly created universities at the time and empowerment funding for their massive enrolment (Nayah, 2024). Although the social service function of Higher education has been variously interpreted by the universities over the years, some, if not most, of the universities have designed the use of the university's competencies for solutions to social problems for sustainable socio-economic

development. The social service function of the higher education system in Cameroon was later outlined and codified in the 2001 reforms on the orientation of higher education in Cameroon. Apart from the organisation and dissemination of scientific, cultural and professional knowledge, the higher education system in Cameroon, according to the orientation law, has the fundamental mission of providing support for national development efforts and universities' autonomy (Republic of Cameroon, 2001).

Before 2008, the higher education system in Cameroon comprised two-degree structures according to the French and Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-American) systems. To ensure mobility between the two subsystems and in response to the pressures of regional integration and globalisation, the degree structures were harmonised according to the Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral structures. The Francophone structure today is called the LMD system (Licence, Master's and Doctoral cycles of 3+2+3 years each), corresponding to BMD (Bachelor, Master's and Doctoral cycles), which existed in the Anglophone system. This new and comparable degree structure went operational in 2008.

University financial autonomy

Before narrowing our focus to the issue of financing higher education in Cameroon, it is important to have a brief review of the financing of higher education in Cameroon and Africa as a whole. Sustainable growth in Africa is contingent on the capacity of states to diversify their economies and thus train human capital that will help to carry out and support this transformation. According to Gioan, Pierre and Antoine (2007), in this process and when investment capacity is limited, Higher Education plays a key role in training qualified individuals who will be capable of implementing new technologies and using innovative methods to establish more efficient enterprises and institutions and thus allocate resources more effectively. The question of reconciling the autonomy of the university with financial freedom is always a contentious issue within and outside the university system. Some university administrators tend to resolve this dilemma by devising a formula for simultaneously serving both the government and the university community. Achieving financial autonomy, within this context, has become severely constrained (Olayinka, Segun and Ojo, 2017).

Universities in general and public ones in particular are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain teaching staff, with lecture halls overcrowded, buildings falling into disrepair, teaching equipment not replenished and investment in research not available (Ledoux, Blandine and Alain Mingat, 2007). Looking at the financing of Universities in Cameroon, funding remains one of the greatest obstacles to capacity building. The Ministry of Budget and Finance (MINFI) is responsible for financing the entire education sector and determines the regions for both operational

and capital/development expenditure. The reduction in government subventions and irregular disbursement of subventions have combined to make sustainable and viable funding of universities extremely difficult. On the other hand, universities are required by reforms to seek financial autonomy and other sources of revenue, such as the creation of enterprises.

Although the introduction of fees in state Universities since 1993 has reduced the reliance on state subventions as the only source of finance, as was the case in the past, the overall budget for universities has fallen short of the real needs of the system, given that lecture halls are still overcrowded and the student–teacher ratio is still very high. The pressure by the government to control the disbursement of the internally generated revenues (IGRs) and to set a percentage on the amount that the university can generate is in contrast to the ideal of financial autonomy. Moreover, the global trend towards demystification of access in higher education has made financial diversification imperative. The Governing Council of the university shall be free in the discharge of its functions and exercise of its responsibilities for the good management of university finance, as well as the growth and development of university programmes. However, the governing council of the university in the discharge of its financial functions shall ensure that disbursement of funds of the university complies with the approved budgetary ratio for: personnel cost, overhead cost, research and development, library developments, and the balance in expenditure between academic vis-à-vis non-academic activities.

Financial autonomy is vital to make higher education institutions a place where scholarship and service are supported by a sound, secure and sustainable foundation of financial resources (Olayinka, Segun and Ojo, 2017). The professionalization of higher education in Cameroon, as enshrined in the 1993 university reforms, was meant to improve the quality of higher education training offered to students and to curb graduates' unemployment. But this laudable motive cannot be attained without a robust, financially autonomous university. That is, for Cameroon to reap the benefits of this investment in human capital, its universities should be financially autonomous and also have financial support to provide quality training and sound professional prospects to their students.

Infrastructural development

The infrastructural development of state universities in Cameroon is a crucial aspect of the country's educational framework, significantly impacting the quality of education and student outcomes. Following the university reforms initiated in 1993, the Cameroonian government aimed to establish a state university in each of its ten regions, leading to the creation of several new institutions, including the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences in Bertoua in

2014, which serves as an annex to the University of Yaoundé II (Njeuma et al., 1999). Despite these efforts, the overall quality of university infrastructure remains inadequate. For instance, the 2013-2014 Competitiveness Index ranked Cameroon 128th out of 151 countries in terms of infrastructure quality, highlighting a significant gap in the necessary facilities and resources (Meka'a, Fotso and Guemdjo, 2024). The government of Cameroon allocates approximately \$930 million annually for infrastructure, representing about 5.6% of its GDP; however, much of this funding is focused on maintenance rather than new developments, leaving many state universities struggling with outdated facilities and limited access to modern educational technologies (Dominguez-Torres and Foster, 2011).

The impact of insufficient infrastructure on educational outcomes in Cameroon is evident, as it correlates with lower student performance and higher dropout rates. Inadequate facilities, particularly in science and engineering programs, hinder practical learning experiences in Cameroon universities, essential for student success (World Bank, 2024). Furthermore, investment in university infrastructure is linked to broader economic growth; studies indicate that a 1% increase in infrastructure investment can lead to a 0.0536% boost in economic growth and a 0.329% increase in private sector activity (Meka'a, Fotso and Guemdjo, 2024). This underscores the importance of enhancing state university infrastructure not only to improve educational quality but also to foster a skilled workforce that can contribute to national development goals. Addressing these infrastructural challenges is vital for ensuring that Cameroon's higher education system can effectively support the country's aspirations for economic emergence by 2035.

According to Lyons (2012), learning is a complex activity that involves the interplay of students' motivation, physical facilities, teaching resources, and curriculum demands. Availability of teaching and learning resources, like infrastructures, therefore enhances the effectiveness of schools as they are the basic resources that bring about good academic performance in the students. According to Barrett (2019), infrastructure such as classrooms is important in the teaching transaction. Based on this, the current situation of our public universities, like Buea, with limited classrooms, quality teaching will obviously be difficult to achieve.

Overcrowded classrooms in our public universities (as a result of inadequate infrastructural development) are one of the factors contributing immensely to the poor quality of higher education training. Although the role of higher education in economic development has been at the centre of controversies in recent studies, there is no doubt that this level of education plays an important role in the economic development of Cameroon. Given the high level of externalities associated with HE, the role of the state in promoting investment in the sector should equally be enhanced (Fonkeng and Ntembe, 2009).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study focuses on Benthum, Gulikers, Jong and Mulder (2011) improvement theory. This theory focuses on the need to improve teachers' training for the effective professionalization of students in meeting global needs. Teachers' professionalization of good practices, good curriculum, and available material and financial support is very instrumental because of its capability to enhance graduates' professional growth in the workplace, which was one of the major factors of the 1993 university reforms (Imants and Van Veen, 2010). Furthermore, Imants and Van Veen (2010) have emphasized that the professionalization approach and the theory of improvement should be highly reflected in the context of the educational reform project. Higher Education Institutions like the University of Buea are arguably responsible for helping students to gain the skills, knowledge and attributes required of them in the initial stages of their careers, and for ensuring students' ability to adapt to changing workforce needs. Although not all educators may agree with this statement, most institutions are moving to accept this responsibility from a curriculum change perspective with respect to professionalism. The theory of improvement is therefore critical in successful professionalization. Professionalization of students will be difficult to attain if a theory of improvement is often lacking in educational reforms. While effective teaching is vital for student learning in Higher Education, most African countries and universities are not prepared financially, infrastructural, and even their curricula do not really reflect graduates' professionalization as a major focus of the 1993 university reforms. According to Hattie (2009), the quality of teachers, in line with the quality of the curriculum, the teaching methods, and the school infrastructure, has a larger impact on the learning of students.

Higher education reforms in Cameroon - Its application in UB

During the period of independence in the 1960s to the 1990s, the Cameroonian higher education system, like those of many other developing countries, was unable to adapt adequately to the changing needs of its socio-economic and political environment (Ngwana, 2001). The major problem confronting higher education at the start of the 1990s was a language imbalance through the dominance of French, a dramatic growth in student enrolment without a corresponding increase in infrastructure and staff appointments, high dropout rates, outdated curricula, high unemployment rates among university graduates, and insufficient public funds. As earlier reviewed by Njeuma et al. (1999), what led to the holding of the 1993 education forum was the low quality of higher education, which prepared students only for government services and with little or no skills for self-employment and job creation.

It was against this backdrop that drastic measures were needed, and in 1992/93, the government initiated several far-reaching innovations in the higher education system. The main measure taken was the creation (1993) of new state universities in a system that until then had only one university. This was intended to increase the overall participation rate, and it was hoped that the enlargement of the system would provide for higher levels of non-governmental funding through introducing tuition fees, amongst other things. The government had several intentions with respect to the new university system: first, to provide the universities with more academic and management autonomy; second, to give all Cameroonians who were qualified, the opportunity to obtain university education; third, to make university programmes more professional and more responsive to market forces; fourth, to make universities more accessible to local, regional, national and international communities; fifth to decongest the overcrowded University of Yaounde; sixth to make better use of higher education infrastructure, facilities and services; and finally, to revive and maximize inter-university and international co-operation (Ngwana, 2001).

Furthermore, one of the five new universities was an English language institution, and in this way, the government hoped to deal with the problem of language imbalance. According to an evaluation carried out in 1999 (ADEAWGHE, 1999), the reforms were initially successful. Student enrolments increased rapidly in all universities, leading to a more balanced regional distribution of, and participation in, higher education. The overall teacher/student ratio improved from 1:54 in 1992/93 to 1:34 in 1995/96, and the dropout rate decreased. The universities were accorded greater administrative autonomy, while the newly introduced student tuition fees covered around 30% of the institutions' budgets.

Looking more closely at the developments after the 1993 University Reform, several weaknesses can be observed. (1) The university does not receive the amount of funding required to enroll all eligible students, and as such, many applicants are always rejected. Their only option is to enroll in other institutions or stay out of higher education. (2) There are still not enough places in the new university system to enroll all eligible students. As a result, Cameroon has witnessed a rapid growth of private higher educational institutions, which the government has not been able to regulate, to ensure, for example, that quality and equity prevail. (3) The growth of the system has been accompanied by mismanagement, a lack of adequate management capacity at all levels, and inadequate academic staff capacity. Public funding of higher education remains a problem with insufficient and irregular allocation of funds. Finally, the instruments to be used by both the government and the private institutions in the new steering relationship are either absent or totally inadequate.

After 1993, the major reform policies shaping the professionalization of higher education include: The Bologna Process (BP); the New University Governance policy; the 2001 law on the orientation of higher education

in Cameroon; The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper turned Growth Employment Strategy Paper; the Education Sector Strategy and the Global Reform of higher education launched by the 1999 UNESCO Conference in Budapest. The ultimate aim of these reforms is to produce graduates who can succeed socially and economically in a globalized world, a world driven by a knowledge-based economy. This section discusses the professionalization of higher education with reference to these reforms. The BP overlaps with the New University Governance policy, which emphasizes professionalism by expanding professional and technical education opportunities (Buea University Newsletter, 2008: Sup Infos March, 2011).

The most recent law on the orientation of higher education in Cameroon (16th April 2001) states that the fundamental mission of higher education is to produce, organize and disseminate scientific, cultural, professional and ethical knowledge for national development and the advancement of humanity (section 1, Art. 2). From this:

- i. Mission, the law outlines the following objectives in chapter 1, Art. 6(1):
- ii. Excellence in all areas of knowledge;
- iii. The promotion of science, culture and social advancement;
- iv. Social advancement, with the participation of competent national structures and socio-professional milieu with regard to programmes, organization of theoretical and practical education, and internships.
- v. Contribution to development activities.
- vi. The training and refinement of managerial personnel.
- vii. The reinforcement of ethical sense and national conscience.
- viii. The promotion of democracy and the development of a democratic culture and bilingualism.

An examination of the Cameroon experience through the lens of the analytic triangle suggests that Cameroon is a state that is being influenced, amongst other things, by global forces (such as the World Bank and UNESCO) and is attempting to change its steering approach with respect to higher education. As was shown above, it is aiming at greater institutional autonomy, more non-governmental income for the institutions, and greater awareness of the need for academic quality. The Cameroonian state is stepping back, hoping that a more direct interaction between institutions and society will result in a better functioning, more responsive, and better-funded university system. Although some positive quantitative effects of the reforms can be discerned, Cameroonian realities have caused major problems in the introduction of the new steering approach and the implementation of the reforms. These include inadequate government funding levels, management capacity problems, academic staff shortages, insufficient student places in the public institutions, and a lack of appropriate policy instruments.

These implementation problems have led to a number of social pressures in the society/institutions relationship,

resulting in the rise of a private higher education sector that is not regulated by the government. An interesting comparison emerges with the Indian and South African higher education reform experiences. In India and in South Africa, as will be argued in this book, the role of vested institutional interests played a major role in the failure of the respective governments to implement their proposed policies. In Cameroon, the failure seems more a case of a lack of appropriate institutional infrastructure, such as policy instruments, management and academic staff capacity, and adequate and stable funding. Major efforts on the side of the government and the institutions in Cameroon are needed in order to prevent the higher education system from sliding back into a pre-1993 situation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized a survey research design, selecting 30 lecturers from the University of Buea based on specific criteria. Only full-time lecturers with a minimum of five years of teaching experience were included. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to analyze the collected data. Before the quantitative data was analysed, an Epi Data version 3.1, which has built-in consistency for data validation checks, was used in entering the data. The data was further exported to SPSS version 23.0 (IBM Inc., 2015) for further consistency checks, data validation, and to identify invalid codes. In contrast, the qualitative data were analyzed thematically, focusing on key themes, frequencies, and direct quotes from participants. The themes represent significant keywords derived from participants' statements, while the frequencies indicate how often each theme appeared. In qualitative analysis, the significance of a theme is prioritized over its frequency; thus, a theme with a frequency of one holds equal importance to those with higher frequencies. Ultimately, the findings were presented through frequency distribution tables and thematic tables.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the work presents the findings of the study from the perspective of 30 lecturers teaching at the University of Buea.

Among the 30 lecturers sampled for the study, 12 (40.0%) were male, while 18 (60.0%) were female. Describing the lecturers by faculty, 8 (26.7%) of the lecturers are teaching in the faculty of Arts, 10 (33.3%) of the lecturers are from the faculty of Education, 8 (26.7%) and 4 (13.3%) of the lecturers are teaching in the faculty of Science and Social and Management Sciences.

Describing the lecturers by post of responsibility, 6 (20.0%) are assistant lecturers, 4 (13.3%) are heads of department, 16 (53.3%) are lecturers, while 4 (13.3%) are senior lecturers. Describing the lecturers by longevity in service, 18 (60.0%) of the lecturers have been teaching for

5-10 years, while 10 (33.4%) of the lecturers sampled in equal proportion, have been teaching for 11-15 years and 16 years and above. Lastly, describing the lecturers by

highest qualification, 4 (13.3%) were Associate Professors, 6 (20.0%) were Master's Degree holders, while 20 (66.7%) were PhD holders. (Table 1)

Table 1. Demographic information of lecturers.

Demographic characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	12	40.0
	Female	18	60.0
	Total	30	100
Faculty	Arts	8	26.7
	Education	10	33.3
	Science	8	26.7
	Social and Management Sciences	4	13.3
	Total	30	100
Post of responsibility	Assistant lecturer	6	20.0
	Head of Department	4	13.3
	Lecturer	16	53.3
	Senior lecturer	4	13.3
	Total	30	100
Longevity in service	5-10 years	18	60.0
	11-15 years	10	33.4
	16 years and above	2	6.7
	Total	30	100
Highest qualification	Associate Professor	4	13.3
	Masters	6	20.0
	PhD	20	66.7
	Total	30	100

Universities' financial autonomy as per the university reforms

Generally, findings in Table 2 show that while 49.3% of the lecturers agreed that the university has financial autonomy, 50.7% of the lecturers disagreed that the university has financial autonomy. To be specific, while 18 (60.0%) of the lecturers agreed that the university has full control over their financial accounts, 12 (40.0%) of them disagreed. 20 (66.7%) and 16 (53.3%) of the lecturers respectively disagreed that the university can function properly without external support and that the university can solely raise funds through the community. Financial autonomy in universities is crucial for their operational independence and sustainability. According to a study by Hong (2023), financial autonomy allows institutions to make independent decisions regarding resource allocation, which is essential for enhancing their performance and accountability. Research by Mawanda (2008) indicates that many

universities in developing countries face significant challenges in achieving financial independence due to reliance on government funding and external donors. This aligns with the findings that a majority of lecturers at the University of Buea feel the institution cannot function without external support. The ability of universities to raise funds through community engagement is often linked to their overall financial health. Trappett (2023) argues that effective community involvement can enhance fundraising efforts, yet many institutions struggle to establish these connections, as reflected in the lecturers' skepticism about the university's fundraising capabilities. Ebrahim (2003) discusses how reliance on external funding can compromise an institution's autonomy, leading to conflicts between donor expectations and institutional goals. This perspective supports the findings that a significant number of lecturers believe the university's financial autonomy is limited by its dependence on external sources.

Also, 22 (73.3%) of the lecturers disagreed that the

university undertakes construction projects without the state. 24 (80.0%) of the lecturers as well disagreed that the university can sponsor lecturers' and students' research endeavours without depending on the state. 20 (66.7%) of the lecturers also disagreed that the university can make financial decisions without the ministry. Aside from these findings, 22 (73.3%) of the lecturers agreed that the university has many avenues to raise revenue, while 8 (26.7%) of the lecturers disagreed. With respect to financial transparency, findings show that 22 (73.3%) of the lecturers agreed that there is more financial transparency in the administration of finances, while 8 (26.7%) of the lecturers

disagreed. According to Fay, Martimort and Straub (2021), many universities in developing countries struggle with financial independence due to their reliance on government funding for infrastructure and operational costs. This aligns with the findings that lecturers at the University of Buea feel dependent on state support for construction projects. A report by Gladstone, Schipper, Hara-Msulira and Casci (2023) highlights that universities often face significant barriers in securing independent funding for research, particularly in low-resource settings. This supports the finding that a majority of lecturers believe the university cannot sponsor research without state assistance.

Table 2. Lecturers' opinion on universities financial autonomy.

Items	Strongly agree and agree	Disagree and strongly disagree	N
The university has full control over her financial accounts.	18(60.0%)	12(40.0%)	30
Without eternal support the university will still function properly.	10(33.3%)	20(66.7%)	30
The university is able to solely raise funds through the community.	14(46.7%)	16(53.3%)	30
The university has many avenues to raise revenue.	22(73.3%)	8(26.7%)	30
The university can adequately maintain its support staff.	24(80.0%)	6(20.0%)	30
The university can undertake construction projects without the state.	8(26.7%)	22(73.3%)	30
The university can sponsor lecturers' and students' research endeavours without depending on the state.	6(20.0%)	24(80.0%)	30
The university can take financial decisions without the ministry.	10(33.3%)	20(66.7%)	30
The university can successfully manage its finances.	22(73.3%)	8(26.7%)	30
The community in which the university operates can depend on the university.	14(46.7%)	16(53.3%)	30
Multiple response set	148 (49.3%)	152 (50.7%)	300

Research by Teichler (2009) indicates that external oversight, such as that from government ministries, can limit the operational flexibility of universities, which is reflected in the lecturers' views on financial decision-making at the University of Buea. According to Perkins (2012), universities that explore diverse revenue streams, including partnerships and community engagement, can enhance their financial sustainability. This is relevant to the

lecturers' acknowledgment of the university's potential avenues for revenue generation. Transparency in financial management is crucial for building trust within academic institutions. A study by Baird et al. (2011) emphasizes that transparent financial practices can lead to improved stakeholder confidence and institutional effectiveness, supporting the positive perception of financial transparency among lecturers at the University of Buea.

Table 3. Lecturers' opinion on the financial autonomy of university based on 1993 reforms in Cameroon.

The university has financial autonomy	Themes	Groundings	Quotations
Yes 6 (20.0%)	Capable to successfully pay support staff and financing others	6	<p>"Yes. The university can successfully pay its support staff without government assistance".</p> <p>"Yes. Because the university is trying its best to meet up with its objectives no matter the situation".</p> <p>"It has because with student's school fees and support from the government, the university can be autonomy to finance its projects".</p>
No 24 (80.0%)	No additional sources of finance	4	<p>"No. Without other sources of finances the university can't run well".</p> <p>"No because they have no avenue for generating funds".</p>

Table 3. Continues.

Financial supervision from the state	6	<p><i>"No. This is a state university and any financial activity taking place is being supervised by high authorities".</i></p> <p><i>"No. Being a state-owned university, the state shall be aware of the budgetary management of the university so as to intervene and supplementing their budget".</i></p>
Financial aid from the government	4	<p><i>"No. It does not because it depends on the government for any financial aids".</i></p> <p><i>"No. Without subvention, the university cannot function properly since about 70% of the students pay registration fees of 50,000frs".</i></p>

About the university having financial autonomy as per the 1993 university reforms, findings show that while 6 (20.0%) of the lecturers said the university has financial autonomy as per the 1993 reforms, 24 (80.0%) of the lecturers disagreed. Among the lecturers who agreed, they all said that the university is capable of successfully paying its support staff while financing other activities, while for those who disagreed, their reasons were that the university has no additional sources of finance, depends on financial aid from the government, and the state supervises the finances of the university. The 1993 university reforms in Cameroon aimed to enhance the autonomy of higher education institutions. However, studies indicate that while reforms were intended to grant more financial independence, many universities, including the University of Buea, continue to face significant challenges in achieving this goal due to ongoing government oversight and funding dependencies.

Abd, Farley and Moonsamy (nd) highlight that many universities in developing countries remain financially dependent on government funding, which can severely limit their operational autonomy. This aligns with the findings that lecturers at the University of Buea feel constrained by their reliance on state financial aid.

According to a study by Abdul (2024), the lack of diverse funding sources is a common challenge faced by universities in Africa. This supports the lecturers' concerns regarding the absence of additional financial avenues, which are critical for achieving true financial autonomy. Ebrahim (2003) discusses how state supervision of university finances can hinder institutional autonomy, leading to conflicts between institutional goals and government expectations. This perspective reinforces the lecturers' views that state oversight limits the university's financial decision-making capabilities.

Table 4. Lecturers' opinion on the sources of finances to the university.

Themes	Groundings	Quotations
Tuition fees	14	<p><i>"Student fees".</i></p> <p><i>"Tuition".</i></p> <p><i>"Tuition fees".</i></p>
Businesses on campus	12	<p><i>"Business unites on campus".</i></p> <p><i>"The university rents some of its infrastructure for businesses which operate on campus and pay rents".</i></p> <p><i>"Payment mad by small business people on campus".</i></p> <p><i>"Shops rentage on campus".</i></p> <p><i>"Renting of land for pity businesses".</i></p>
State Subvention	10	<p><i>"State subsidies".</i></p> <p><i>"State budget".</i></p> <p><i>"Government subvention".</i></p>
Land building	4	<p><i>"Land building".</i></p> <p><i>"Land".</i></p>
Project	4	<p><i>"Micro project".</i></p> <p><i>"Project".</i></p>
Donations	4	<p><i>"Free will donation".</i></p> <p><i>"Donors".</i></p>

Table 4. Continues.

Medical fees	2	<i>“Medical fees”</i>
Transcripts	2	<i>“Printing of transcript”</i>
Caution fees	2	<i>“Caution fees”</i>
Lodging	2	<i>“Lodging/accommodation”</i>
Foreign aids	2	<i>“Foreign aids”</i>
Farms of faculty	2	<i>“Farms of faculty of agriculture”</i>
Research grants	1	<i>“Research grants”</i>

Findings revealed that thirteen sources of university funding were identified by the lecturers. These were students' tuition fees, business operating on campus, state budget, landing building, project, donations, students' medical and caution fees, transcript, lodging, foreign aid, farms and research grants. Tuition fees are a primary source of revenue for universities. They are essential for covering operational costs, faculty salaries, and infrastructure maintenance. As state appropriations have declined, many universities have increasingly relied on tuition fees to sustain their budgets. In fact, tuition and fees often account for a significant portion of the core educational expenditures at public universities (Young-Hwan, Kwon-Sik and Kwang-Hoon, 2020). Universities often operate businesses on campus, such as bookstores, cafes, and dining services (staff canteen). These enterprises not only provide convenience for students and staff but also generate additional revenue that can support various university programs and services. Auxiliary services like these are typically self-funding and can contribute to the overall financial health of the institution (American Academy of Arts & Sciences, 2015).

Government funding is a significant source of financial support for public universities. This funding can be used for various purposes, including infrastructure development, faculty salaries, and student services. However, fluctuations in state budgets can impact the stability of this funding source. Over the years, many universities have experienced cuts in state funding, which has led to increased reliance on other sources, particularly tuition (Mitchell, Leachman and Saenz, 2019). Universities often engage in land and building projects, which can be funded through various means, including state funding, private donations, and grants. These projects are crucial for expanding facilities and improving the learning environment. The ability to finance such projects is often tied to the university's overall financial health and its capacity to attract external funding (OECD, 2020).

Philanthropic contributions from alumni, corporations, and other donors play a vital role in university funding. Donations can be directed toward specific programs, scholarships, or capital projects, enhancing the university's ability to meet its goals. As state funding has decreased, many universities have turned to fundraising efforts to supplement their budgets (Mohd Youhanna and

Williamson, 2016). Fees collected for medical services and other precautionary measures contribute to the university's health services budget. These fees ensure that students have access to necessary health care while generating additional revenue for the institution. Such fees are often essential for maintaining student health services and facilities. Fees charged for the issuance of academic transcripts provide another source of income for universities. While this revenue may be relatively small compared to other sources, it can accumulate significantly over time, especially in larger institutions where the number of transcript requests is high (Karon, Ward, Hill and Kurzweil, 2020).

International partnerships and foreign aid can provide substantial funding for universities, particularly for research initiatives and development projects. These funds often come from governmental and non-governmental organizations focused on educational development. Foreign aid can help universities expand their programs and enhance their research capabilities (Abass, Opoku, Anim, Opoku and Naaela, 2024). Some universities operate agricultural programs or farms, which can serve both educational and financial purposes. Revenue generated from these operations can support agricultural research and provide fresh produce for campus dining services. This dual role enhances the university's educational offerings while contributing to its financial sustainability. Grants from government agencies, private foundations, and corporations for research projects are a significant source of funding for many universities. These grants not only support specific research initiatives but also enhance the university's reputation and academic standing. As competition for research funding increases, universities are increasingly focused on securing these grants to support their academic missions (Achanso, 2015).

Universities' infrastructural development as per the university reforms

Findings in Table 5 generally show that the majority (64.0%) of the lecturers agreed that universities' infrastructural development conforms with university reforms, while 36.0% of the lecturers disagreed. Specifically, the majority of the lecturers 22 (73.3%)

disagreed that the university has adequate laboratories and facilities. The majority of the lecturers, as well as 24 (80.0%), disagreed that the university classrooms are equipped for the teaching of professional courses, while all the lecturers, 30 (100%), agreed that sometimes, students attend lectures by standing. The importance of well-equipped laboratories is underscored by research indicating that laboratory experiences are essential for enhancing mastery of subject matter and developing scientific reasoning skills among students (America's Lab Report: Investigations in High School Science, 2006). When laboratories are inadequate, students may miss out on crucial hands-on experiences that are vital for their professional development. Effective pedagogy in higher education emphasizes the need for environments that

support active learning and student engagement. Research has shown that traditional lecture formats, which often dominate large classes, can lead to passive learning experiences that do not foster deep understanding or critical thinking (Aryan and Saman, 2024). The absence of appropriate classroom resources can exacerbate this issue, making it difficult for lecturers to implement more interactive and student-centered teaching methods. The phenomenon of students standing during lectures can detract from the learning experience, as it may lead to discomfort and distraction, ultimately affecting student engagement and retention of information. Nisar, Iqbal and Faridullah (2019) suggest that classroom management and physical arrangements significantly influence student behavior and learning outcomes.

Table 5. Lecturers' opinion on universities infrastructural development as per the 1993 university reforms.

Items	Strongly agree and agree	Disagree and strongly disagree	N
The university is endowed with adequate infrastructures for teaching.	8 (26.7%)	22 (73.3%)	30
The university has adequate laboratories and institution.	8 (26.7%)	22 (73.3%)	30
The university have well-constructed play grounds leisure.	20 (66.7%)	10 (33.3%)	30
The university classrooms are well ventilated.	22 (73.3%)	8 (26.7%)	30
The university classrooms are equipped for the teaching of professional courses.	6 (20.0%)	24 (80.0%)	30
The university has adequate land for future expansion.	30 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	30
The university infrastructure is user friendly.	24 (80.0%)	6 (20.0%)	30
The university's infrastructural development is the responsibility of the University.	18 (60.0%)	12 (40.0%)	30
The university infrastructural development is fast growing.	26 (86.7%)	4 (13.3%)	30
Sometimes, students attend lectures by standing.	30 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	30
Multiple response set	192 (64.0%)	108 (36.0%)	300

Aside from the witnesses observed in terms of infrastructure, all the lecturers 30 (100%) agreed that the university has adequate land for future expansion, while 26 (86.7%) and 20 (66.7%) of the lecturers respectively agreed that the university's infrastructural development is fast growing and that classrooms are well ventilated. While 20 (66.7%) of the lecturers agreed that the university has well-constructed playgrounds and leisure, 22 (73.3%) of the lecturers disagreed that the university is endowed with adequate infrastructure for teaching. Studies have shown that poor indoor air quality, often due to inadequate ventilation, can lead to increased absenteeism and lower academic performance among students (Sadrizadeh et al., 2022). The FRESH study demonstrated that interventions to improve classroom ventilation significantly reduced CO2 levels, which is crucial for maintaining a conducive learning environment (FRESH study, 2012). The research emphasizes that well-maintained and adequately equipped educational facilities are vital for fostering effective teaching

and learning. Poor infrastructure can lead to negative health outcomes and decreased student performance (Yangambi, 2023).

Findings in Table 6 show that while a few of the lecturers said that university infrastructural development is rapid, a good number of the lecturers said that the infrastructural development is limited/ inadequate, classrooms are overcrowded, while others said the infrastructure is not user-friendly, especially for students with physical disabilities and visual impairment. May believe that infrastructural development is progressing rapidly. This viewpoint may stem from recent investments or improvements in certain areas of the university. However, a larger group of lecturers views the development as limited or inadequate. This discrepancy suggests that while some improvements may be visible, they may not be sufficient to meet the growing demands of the student population and educational standards.

Table 6. Lecturers' opinion on the university infrastructural development.

Themes	Groundings	Quotations
Limited infrastructure	18	<p>"The university infrastructure is limited and apart from classrooms, it should include more income generating infrastructures".</p> <p>"More classrooms should be constructed to enable students learn freely".</p> <p>"Inadequate".</p> <p>"Need adequate improvement of infrastructure to meet up with the population of students and programmes".</p>
Overcrowded classrooms	6	<p>"More classrooms need to be constructed to avoid congestion in classrooms".</p> <p>"Those that are in place are good but inadequate for teaching and accommodation of the student population".</p> <p>"Larger halls should be constructed such as amphi 800 or 900 which can accommodate a good number of students and also good infrastructure with equipment".</p>
Not user friendly	6	<p>"The infrastructures are not user friendly".</p> <p>"They are not user friendly".</p> <p>"They are not friendly because physically challenged and visual challenges are not favoured".</p>
Rapid	2	"Rapid".
Fairly developed	2	"Fairly developed".
Slow	2	"The infrastructural development is slow but encouraging".

The issue of overcrowded classrooms is a significant concern among lecturers. Research indicates that overcrowding can negatively affect students' ability to focus and engage with the material, leading to increased behavioral issues and absenteeism (Education Week, 2020). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2021) showed that students in overcrowded classrooms tend to perform worse academically compared to their peers in adequately sized classrooms. This finding underscores the need for universities to address classroom capacity to enhance learning outcomes. Several lecturers noted that the infrastructure is not user-friendly, particularly

for students with physical disabilities and visual impairments. This is a critical issue, as inclusive education is essential for ensuring that all students have equal access to learning opportunities. The lack of accessible facilities can hinder the academic success of students with disabilities, as they may face additional barriers in navigating the campus and utilizing resources effectively (World Bank, 2019). Research has shown that educational environments that are not accommodating can lead to lower academic performance and increased dropout rates among students with disabilities (Jinghong, 2021).

Table 7. Lecturers' assessment of the present state of infrastructure in the University of Buea.

Themes	Groundings	Quotations
Inadequate	25	<p>"Lack of infrastructure".</p> <p>"The infrastructure is fairly developed but not the best. Some buildings are old and small whereas the student's population has grown".</p> <p>The university of Buea can be proud of newly constructed buildings though not adequate".</p> <p>"The university is still need of more infrastructures of learning even though those in use are good and user friendly".</p> <p>"Fairly inadequate in the sense that we can manage with what we have".</p> <p>"Inadequate infrastructural facilities".</p> <p>"Not quite developed infrastructural in terms of buildings and equipment facilities".</p>
Adequate	1	"The objectives never asked for much. So based on these objectives, the infrastructures are o.k."

About the present state of the infrastructure in the University of Buea, the majority of the lecturers said that it is inadequate. This sentiment aligns with broader concerns about the state of higher education facilities in Cameroon, where many institutions struggle to meet the needs of their growing student populations (Ngalame, 2023). The University of Buea has been noted for its insufficient accommodation facilities. With a student population of approximately 36,000, the university can only house about 100 students in its residence halls, leading to significant challenges for those seeking on-campus living arrangements (Ngalame, 2023). This lack of adequate housing forces many students to seek off-campus accommodations, which can be both costly and less secure.

Overcrowded classrooms are another significant issue, with the limited number of classrooms and facilities means that many students are forced to attend classes in environments that are not conducive to effective learning. Research indicates that overcrowding can lead to decreased academic performance and increased stress

among students (Yikealo, Yemane and Karvinen, 2018). The infrastructure is also criticized for not being user-friendly, particularly for students with physical disabilities and visual impairments. This lack of accessibility can severely limit the educational opportunities available to these students, as they may struggle to navigate the campus and access necessary resources. Inadequate infrastructure can have a direct impact on the quality of education. Studies have shown that well-maintained and adequately equipped educational facilities are essential for fostering effective teaching and learning environments (Yangambi, 2023). The current state of infrastructure at the University of Buea may hinder academic success and overall student well-being. The findings underscore the urgent need for investment in university infrastructure. Without significant improvements, the university may continue to face challenges in providing a quality educational experience for its students. This includes not only physical facilities but also resources that support teaching and learning.

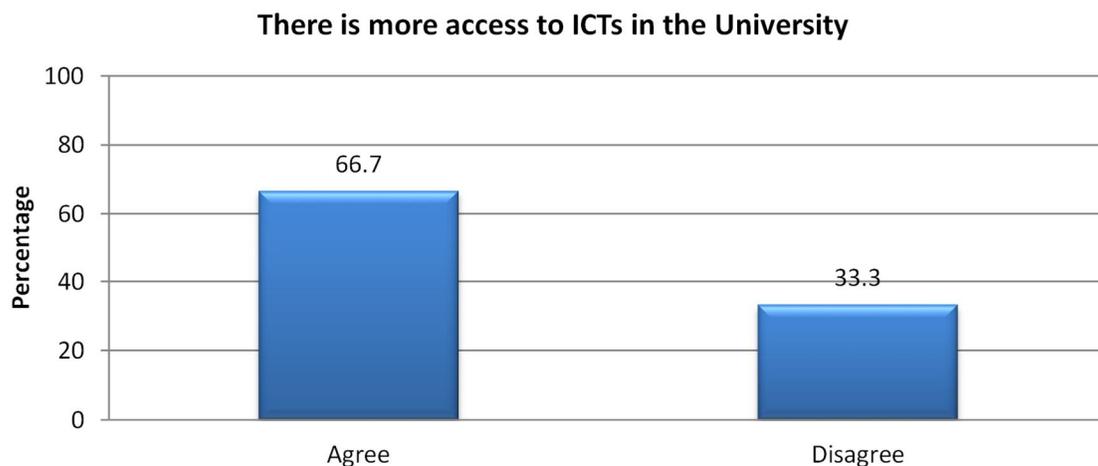


Figure 1. Lecturers stake on access to more ICTs in the university.

Findings show that while 20 (66.7%) of the lecturers agreed that there is access to more ICTs in the university, 10 (33.3%) of the lecturers disagreed (Figure 1). Access to ICTs has been shown to improve educational outcomes by providing students with diverse learning materials and opportunities for interactive learning (Blog Post Master, 2024). The positive perception among the majority of lecturers suggests that the university is on the right path toward leveraging technology to enhance educational quality. The concerns raised by the minority of lecturers highlight potential barriers to effective ICT integration. These barriers could include: Lack of adequate training for both lecturers and students on how to effectively use ICT tools can limit their potential benefits (Ertmer and

Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Inadequate technological infrastructure, such as unreliable internet access or insufficient hardware, can hinder the effective use of ICTs in educational settings (Sangra et al., 2012). Disparities in access to ICT resources among students can exacerbate existing inequalities in educational opportunities (Rubi, 2024).

While statistics for other indicators of interest was not available of the years, from 2015 to 2017 which a complete statistic of indicators of interest were gotten, it was realized that that from 2015 to 2016, students' enrolment have been on a constant rise by a difference of 1728 students but when compare to the number of academic staff, there was an increase by 11 for the same period of time. This implies

that the university recruited an additional 11 academic staff to cope with the 1,728 increase in students between 2015 and 2016. This rise indicates a growing demand for higher education at the university, reflecting broader trends in

higher education massification in Cameroon and Sub-Saharan Africa, where more students are seeking access to tertiary education (Njeuma et al., 1999).

Table 8. Comparative analysis between total students' enrolment over the years by total number of academic staff, academic infrastructure and capacity of the academic infrastructure.

Years	Total students enrolment	Total no. of staff	Total no. of academic infrastructure	Total capacity of the academic infrastructure	Increase in students enrolments from 1993/94 to 2005/06
1993/94	1,850	/	/	/	
1994/95	3,240	/	/	/	1,390
1995/96	4,040	/	/	/	800
1996/97	4,450	/	/	/	410
1997/98	5,156	/	/	/	706
1998/99	5,834	/	/	/	678
2000/01	6,112	/	/	/	278
2001/02	6,518	/	/	/	406
2002/03	7,282	/	/	/	764
2003/04	7,463	/	/	/	181
2004/05	8,689	/	/	/	1,226
2005/06	9,806	/	/	/	1,117
2006/07	10,303	/	/	/	497
2007/08	3,770	294			

Students total enrolment versus total capacity of academic infrastructure					
	Total	Capacity	of the	Academic Infrastructure	Surplus of students
2015	19,004	425	43	13,164	5,840
2016	20,732	436	43	13,164	7,568
2017	18,083	443	43	13,164	4,919

In contrast to the significant increase in student enrollment, the number of academic staff at the University of Buea only increased by 11 during the same period. This disparity suggests that the university may face challenges in maintaining an adequate staff-to-student ratio, which is crucial for ensuring quality education and effective teaching (Yangambi, 2023). The increase of 1,728 students with only 11 additional academic staff results in a higher student-to-staff ratio. A high ratio can lead to overcrowded classrooms, reduced individual attention for students, and increased workload for faculty, which may negatively impact the quality of education (Vargas-Montoya, Gimenez and Fernandez-Guti, 2023). The limited increase in academic staff relative to student enrollment raises concerns about the university's capacity to provide quality education. Research indicates that adequate staffing is essential for fostering a supportive learning environment and enhancing student outcomes (Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). These findings highlight the need for strategic planning at the University of Buea to address the growing enrollment

and ensure that sufficient academic staff are recruited to meet the needs of the student population. This may involve increasing funding for faculty positions, enhancing recruitment efforts, and exploring alternative teaching methods to accommodate larger classes (Ikram and Kenayathulla, 2023).

However, comparing students' total enrolment versus number of academic infrastructures for learning and its total capacity, from 2015 to 2017, the number of academic infrastructures for learning/lecturers was the same (43) with a capacity of 13,164 students yet, the population of students for instance in 2015 was 19,004 which was above total capacity of the academic infrastructures by 5,840 students. For 2016, with a total of 20,732 students' enrolment, the student population was above the total capacity of the academic infrastructures by 7,568 students, and for 2017, the student population was above the total capacity of the academic infrastructures by 4,919 students. The consistent oversubscription of available academic infrastructures can lead to overcrowded classrooms, which

negatively impact the learning environment. Research has shown that overcrowding can diminish student engagement, increase stress levels, and hinder academic performance (Khutso, 2023). A conducive learning environment is critical for effective teaching and learning (Munna and Kalam, 2021).

The inability to accommodate the growing student population within existing facilities raises concerns about the quality of education offered. Overcrowding can lead to increased reliance on lecture-based instruction, reduced opportunities for student interaction, and limited access to resources (Ertmer and Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). The findings highlight the urgent need for strategic planning and investment in academic infrastructure at the University of Buea. Without expanding learning facilities or optimizing resource use, the university risks compromising educational quality and student satisfaction (Wan and Chapman, 2023).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

University reforms in Cameroon, particularly as exemplified by the University of Buea, present a complex interplay between aspirations for improvement and the challenges that have emerged. These reforms, aimed at enhancing the quality of higher education, have introduced significant changes, notably in the areas of financial autonomy and infrastructural development. The push for financial autonomy has the potential to empower universities like the University of Buea to make more independent decisions regarding budgeting and resource allocation. This autonomy can foster innovation, improve administrative efficiency, and encourage universities to seek alternative funding sources, such as partnerships with the private sector and international organizations. However, the transition to greater financial independence has also posed challenges. Many institutions struggle with inadequate funding from the government, which can hinder their ability to effectively manage resources and undertake necessary initiatives. Without a stable financial foundation, the envisioned benefits of autonomy may not be fully realized, leading to disparities in educational quality and institutional performance.

In terms of infrastructural development, the reforms have highlighted the urgent need for investment in academic facilities to accommodate increasing student populations. While the reforms have aimed to address these infrastructural deficits, progress has been slow, resulting in overcrowded classrooms and inadequate facilities. The lack of sufficient infrastructure undermines the quality of education, making it difficult for institutions to provide a supportive learning environment. Effective infrastructural development is essential not only for meeting current demands but also for positioning universities to compete in an increasingly globalized educational landscape. While university reforms in Cameroon, particularly at the University of Buea, hold promise for enhancing educational

quality through financial autonomy and infrastructural development, significant challenges remain. The pathway forward requires a balanced approach that ensures sustainable funding, strategic investment in facilities, and a commitment to maintaining high educational standards. Only through addressing these critical issues can the reforms lead to meaningful improvements in the higher education landscape in Cameroon.

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