

Classroom Realities and System Constraints: How Curriculum and Pedagogic Related Policies Influence Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools in Southwest, Cameroon.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how curriculum and pedagogic related policies influence teaching and learning in Cameroon's secondary schools, with particular attention to classroom realities in rural communities of Southwest Region, Cameroon. The study is grounded by Open System Thinking Theory, which conceptualized education as A system. Using a qualitative design, and a purposeful sampling (snowball) technique, data was collected from 5 principals and 7 teachers from rural secondary schools through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Findings revealed that while key policies such as the Competency-Based Approach (CBA), continuous assessment, technology/digital learning, vocational/entrepreneurship education, and STEM orientation create strong reform intentions, their realization is uneven due to constraints including large class sizes, insufficient infrastructure (especially laboratories and libraries), limited and delayed instructional materials, language and connectivity challenges, teacher capacity limitations and irregularities, and mismatches between assessment expectations and classroom feasibility. Teachers described pressures to prioritize exam-oriented coverage and topics most likely to be tested, which reduced time for remediation, formative assessment, practical work, and learner-centered engagement. The study concludes that moving from a program-based approach toward a problem-solving system requires not only curriculum reform but also pragmatic system support and recommends teacher development alignment with CBA implementation, adequate resourcing, realistic pacing aligned to assessment timelines, stronger monitoring and accountability, and contextualized curriculum execution responsive to classroom realities.

INTRODUCTION

It is often said that education is a foundation of every striving society and the future of every community, and nation is heavily dependent on it. However, this statement should go beyond motivation or symbolism. Education should intentionally prepare, empower, and support learners to shape their future in meaningful and sustainable ways. Enhancing access, equity and aligning the curriculum and pedagogy with the needs of the country's socio-economic development is essential. Drawing from our experience as classroom teachers and head of departments in rural communities in Cameroon, our interactions with students, teachers, and administrators revealed insights into school leadership and policy gaps. We observed how educational policies often overlook critical social, cultural, and economic factors which contribute significantly to classroom management, pedagogy, students' engagement and learning support realities.

The first of the seven pillars in CESA (Continental Education Strategy for Africa) talks about strong political will to reform and boost education and training. Educational reforms in Cameroon Secondary Schools like the; (Law 98/004 of 14th April 1998, Republic of Cameroon, and decree of 2001, Republic of Cameroon) have aimed at improving the overall quality and relevance of education (Mekolle and Manjo, 2025). However, access to quality education alone is not enough. Access and quality are fundamental to Educational opportunity. However, such opportunities can be fragile and, in some context, unrealistic due to policy and

resource gaps. Classrooms must act intentionally to maximize opportunities or risk losing them. This moves schools and classroom beyond striving for quality to equity. That is ensuring that every school and every classroom maximize the available to ensure that each and every student reach their full potential. Education research in Cameroon and other similar contexts has often examine factors affecting student performance and quality (Alemge, 2019). However, there remains a gap in understanding how system constraints translate into classroom practices in Secondary Schools especially in rural communities. Recent studies emphasized on educational outcomes (Chingos, et al., 2012; Steiner, 2017)), while others have limited their studies in areas of resource availability and teacher shortages (REFERENCE), without exploring the classroom-Access and quality represent opportunity and opportunities can be fragile and unrealistic. mechanism through which system constraints directly affect teaching and learning.

These raises the general questions; how can we effectively move from the program-based system to a problem-solving system in Cameroon secondary schools? Do our current classroom realities reflect transformation, inclusive growth and sustainable development in young Cameroonian students? This study aims to empirically review system-level conditions and how they translate into the day-to-day classroom realities with a focus on addressing key challenges.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The present educational systems in Cameroon have undergone several historical processes, adjustments, and innovations over the years to respond to societal problems and global demands. The teaching and learning experiences in secondary schools is strongly shaped by the country's historical development of the schooling systems and the overall policy choices that accompanied them. Secondary education is the second stage of basic education and a transition between primary and higher education. It is normally divided into lower Secondary Education and upper Secondary Education in accordance with (UNESCO, 2012). Lower Secondary Education aims to expand and deepen learning outcomes, with a greater focus on subject-specific curricula to equipped students with fundamental theoretical concepts across various subjects, laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning. In certain instances, it may also incorporate rudimentary forms of vocational training (OECD, 2018). Overtime, curriculum and pedagogic policies have repeatedly aimed to standardize education, improve quality and support national development as outlined in the National Education Law No. 004/98 of 14th April 1998 (Republic of Cameroon, 1998). Despite progress, schools continuously suffer; Infrastructure deficiencies, teacher shortages, irrelevant curriculum, gender disparities, political instability, inadequate resources, limited inclusion of education, poor management and administration among others, account for the classrooms realities we face (OECD, 2020; Alemge, 2019).

Cameroon's education system inherited key structural features from colonial administration (German, British and French mandates). These features accounts for the differences in curriculum, language use, school organization, and the role of examinations. In many cases, school was linked to the colonial administration thus employment of school stakeholders, provision of school needs and syllabus relied on the centralized system which had a firm grip over learning. This created a durable "BookSmart" classroom pattern where teachers often experience curriculum as something that must b e taught as prescribed with reliance on examinations to confirm learning and determine progression (Nji, 2025). As a result, with the introduction of the competency-based pedagogic approach teachers still feel that the most reliable route to success is content completion and preparing students test formats. After independence, Cameroon used education as a tool for nation building and human capital development, strengthening planning, syllabi, and official examinations to ensure comparability across schools.

In line with Education for All declaration (EFA, 1990), and the Continental Education Strategy for Africa which underscores the need for strong political will to drive meaningful educational reforms (African Union Commission, 2016), Cameroon system of education has continuously expanded and often outpaced the availability of resources. Education is delivered within a complex environment where policy intentions, school organization and available resources interact directly, influencing what happens in classrooms (Mekolle and Manjo, 2025). Challenges such as insufficient teacher training, inadequate instructional materials, and infrastructure disparities persist because of a mismatch produced by policies that prescribe ambitious learning objectives and specific pedagogic methods of implementation in environments that cannot fully support them.

While curriculum content and teaching approaches are determined by educational administrators, classroom realities are shaped by factors that operate at the school and system levels such as; availability of teachers, leadership, curriculum relevance, infrastructure, access to basic teaching resources. Without which, teachers face limitations that affect lesson planning and delivery, assessment, students' performance and engagement.

Cameroon classroom realities are the product of policy intentions meeting historical implementation conditions. Curriculum and pedagogic policies determine what is taught, how, when and how learners are evaluated (Tanner and Tanner, 1975). In rural Cameroon settings, teaching and learning do not occur in a fully "controlled" environment where the same inputs are available to all schools. Instead, classrooms reflect inequalities and operational limitations created by differences in funding, geographic access, school governance capacity, and the broader resource distribution patterns that characterize the education system (Ndindeng, 2024). Thus, understanding classroom realities requires moving beyond describing what teachers intend to do and examining what they are able to do given their organizational and resource context. Classroom realities are therefore not simply a reflection of what teachers prefer to do. They are also shaped by the way schools are organized and managed, and by the resources available to sustain effective instruction.

Secondary education reflects structural disadvantages related to geographical inequalities, distance to school, limited infrastructure, and uneven distribution of educational inputs. Educational policies are often formulated without due consideration of indigenous knowledge systems including local materials, artifacts, cultural norms and practices, principal occupation of indigenous people which can make learning more relevant in rural schools but had remained underutilized in classroom instruction. In the rural regions of Cameroon, schools experience shortages of qualified staff, delayed delivery of teaching materials, limited or no laboratory facilities for science and inadequate technical and vocational institutions, inadequate workshops and classrooms, and difficulties maintaining learning environments. These conditions affect both the content and the pace of instruction resulting to reduced participation, and uneven performance (Mekolle and Manjo, 2025).

Statement of the problem

The Cameroon education law has been of great guidelines for educators and National development as it aims to provide learners with strong foundational knowledge, skills, and competencies that prepare them for further education and participation in social and economic life. This law has been implemented, followed up, and ameliorated throughout the years for a well sophisticated system that will not only build the nation but compete in the ever-advancing technological world of today (Republic of Cameroon, 1998). However, the effectiveness in the setting and implementation of educational goals has not been of standard and this has contributed greatly to our fallen standards in the system over the years. It is observable and right for educators to say that the educational laws of Cameroon are very good theoretically but practically they are not satisfactory (Mekolle and Manjo, 2025). Despite the challenges in accomplishing educational goals the State however puts vital resources necessary to make the goals become a reality in accordance to section 41 of the 1998 law and law number 005 of 16 April 2001 which indicated that, the current educational system shall remain and continue to function.

In rural communities, however, secondary schooling operates within conditions that differ significantly from those in more urban settings. Challenges such as; infrastructure, resources, quality, inclusion, relevance and sustainability persist (Alemge, 2018). Secondary education exhibits a clear pattern of internal contradictions and implementation failures. The tension between dual subsystems, the misalignment between curriculum goals and job-market realities, the contradiction between competency-based reforms and limited teacher capacity, the equity goals versus persistent inequality, and the mismatch between stated standards and classroom realities collectively indicate system-level contradictions. At the same time, the observed gaps in monitoring/enforcement, curriculum execution, teacher quality and staffing, and resource provision represent policy-practice gaps.

Despite continuous reforming of schools, curriculum intentions and pedagogical guidelines, classroom practices often diverges from policy expectations. These differences frequently appear in the classroom as practical challenges: lessons proceed with limited materials, learning activities become less interactive, and students' opportunities to practice and receive feedback is reduced. Teachers commonly experience tensions

between what the system demands and what the classroom realistically allows for example student readiness, overcrowding, time limitations, inadequate technological equipments, affecting instructional choices, classroom management, learning outcomes, and teacher wellbeing. This study aims to empirically examine how system-level conditions translate into day-to-day classroom realities and propose strategic and sustainable framework that addresses challenges and propose the way forward.

Research Objectives

Generally, the study aimed to diagnose system problems related to curriculum and pedagogy in Cameroon Secondary Education and propose strategic and sustainable recommendations that addresses challenges and suggest the way forward.

Specific Research Objectives

- To critically analyze how pedagogical constraints have shaped teaching and learning in Cameroon Secondary Schools.
- To analyze the impact of curriculum and pacing constraints on teaching and learning in Cameroon Secondary Schools.

Generally, the study seeks to answer the question; how can we move from the program-based system to a problem-solving system in Cameroon Secondary Schools ?

Specific Research Questions

- In What ways have classroom pedagogy been influenced by administrative constraints within Cameroon Secondary Schools ?
- What are the impacts of pacing constraints on classroom curriculum implementation in Secondary Schools within Cameroon?

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

System level Constraints And policy practice gaps in Cameroon

Cameroon's education is a diversified system born out of a double Anglo-French heritage making it varied and multifaceted. Because of this diversity, the state supervises the education system through legislation and regulations. It defines education goals, program contents, school functioning and financing modalities, assessment and evaluation systems, and organizes national examinations and the academic calendar. Education policy therefore aims to steer both educational demand and supply, and to ensure that schooling contributes to the national economic, social and political development (Republic of Cameroon, 1998).

One major system level constraint has been the difficulty of harmonizing the Anglophone and the Francophone educational subsystem. The dual education system birth from two different colonial administrations continuously battles with conflict of cultures, intolerance, absence of a strong political will to transform ideas and traditional curriculum content. According to (Ngalim, 2017), each culture jealously guards and preserves the values of its own system of education without compromising to the other, each sub-system is hesitant to accept change because the persons who identify themselves with this system are already used to the status quo and they are afraid of what those in the other system may do, there is mutual distrust and lack of tolerance between the two sub-systems. Ensuring a strong political will that investigate, propose actions and implement a policy that favors both systems was necessary but since the adoption of the national education law, these subsystems continue to face challenges in coordinating approaches, which affects teacher's ability to share experiences and professional knowledge that can benefit learners (Nsamenang, 2011). This is because the two systems are still not Unified in terms of programs. Despite these differences the two systems share much in common like the content of certain subjects, principles and practices in selection procedure and in both systems, learners are required to pass a series of examinations in order to advance to higher level of education. Hence the curricular at all levels and both systems are largely geared towards covering set syllabuses. Curriculum harmonization over the years has mostly been viewed as replacements by the dominant

Francophone curriculum as a result, school strikes and boycotts by teachers in the Anglophone Regions erupted in 2016, and till today have grounded a gross majority educational and social activities in the Anglophone Regions (Nguo, 2020). While some schools in the Anglophone urban areas still operate intermittently, a gross majority in the rural areas where the tensions are high remained closed.

More recent curriculum policies have attempted to modernize pedagogy by emphasizing competencies, learner engagement, and continuous assessment as a way to encourage interactive methods, formative feedback and learning activities that build critical thinking. However, system constraints persist as curriculum intent do not reflects learner outcomes. The system is grounded with state-mandated curriculum frameworks, standardized tests, and school system's own ambitious goals, outside programs to help achieve those goals, and highly publicized numbers. Although secondary education is aimed to prepare students for the job market, support citizens development as well as prepared students for continuous learning, the syllabus is sought of detached from learner's interest and labor market needs (Yafanyi, 2010). What students are taught does not always correspond to what they later need to do, and this misalignment contributes to graduates struggling to fit into employment opportunities. The educational system still suffers from the absence of local knowledge and practices in the curriculum as the curriculum remains unnecessary overloaded and outdated (Alemge, 2019). Thus, embracing a shift from a colonial, objective-driven education system that emphasized rote memorization, the Cameroonian education system, in theory, embraced a sustainable constructivist ideology that shifted the focus toward skill acquisition, problem-solving, and adaptability, requiring educators to adopt new pedagogical strategies and undergo continuous professional development.

The General Education Curriculum Framework (2012), promote inquiry learning, collaborative learning, contextualization of the material, and use of local language and indigenous knowledge, which are central ideas of theorists such as Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky emphasizing on the learner's agency, interaction, and meaning-making. The framework emphasizes the need for personalized instruction, where teachers assess students' prior knowledge and skills and provide differentiated instruction accordingly. This includes setting individual learning goals, designing flexible learning pathways, and providing timely feedback to support students' progress. According to Prof. Nalova Lyonga in a press release, the Secondary School Development Project promotes a holistic approach to education that goes beyond academic achievement (SESDP, 2013). The competence-based approach recognizes the importance of addressing students' social-emotional well-being, character development, and life skills in line with Law 004/98 of 14th April 1998 (Republic of Cameroon, 1998). However, a further contradiction arises as the education system promotes competency-based approaches and real-life learning contexts, yet implementation is weakened by poor teacher preparation and inadequate tailoring of syllables. Teacher shortages, and the recruitment of inadequately prepared teachers (adventurers in teaching), has compromise teaching-learning quality and limit the achievement of stated goals such as academic excellence. Schools experience poor link to the economic environment overcrowded population of students in institutions, low teaching output, inadequate infrastructure, funds and material resources (Mekolle and Manjo, 2025). Closely related is an equity-oriented contradiction where educational policies aim to promote effective education for national development, but socio-economic disparities persist. Children from rich households and some regions enjoy greater opportunities, while rural residence increases the likelihood of school non-attendance; overall, poorer learners face higher risks of being out of school (UNESCO, 2010). This undermines the system's equity objectives and produces unequal educational outcomes within Secondary Education.

Furthermore, the approximation and improvisation seen in the search for pedagogical continuity solutions revealed an education system that is resistant and unprepared to embrace change. Amidst the persistent crisis in Cameroon, the system remains in its pedagogical and structural infancy due to the low level of technological development, as a result of poor network connections, poor electricity and little or lack of digital tools in schools and in classrooms in particular. Technology affects the type of education as well as the means of instruction. With the emergence of computer technology that has revolutionized the whole education system; ICT, home learning has been made possible. However, only that system of education that withstand technological constraints strengthens a feeling of national unity. The use of technology has revealed the shortcomings of the education system in content and context (Béch , 2017). The system reflects structural weaknesses related to e-learning policy, social inequalities, and the inadequate techno-pedagogical equipment of institutions, teachers and learners in schools and within the classroom due to existing gaps in resource

availability and distribution. The Cameroonian Education Orientation Law states that “the State ensures the right of the child to education ... [and] guarantees equal opportunities for access to education for all” (Republic of Cameroon, 1998). However, little or lack of access to essential services and equipment has limited a significant population of pupils and students in rural and crisis affected regions of Cameroon who continuously struggles with network, electricity, inadequate digital tools and professionals as students especially those in the secondary education, missing out on MINSEC digital lessons (Mbodiam 2019; Yakeen, 2024). There is exceedingly high level of educational exclusion and inequality in schools and within the classroom due to existing gaps in resource availability and distribution.

These system-level constraints are reinforced by policy-practice gaps in secondary schools. The education laws are strong “theoretically” but not satisfactory “practically,” which suggests weaknesses in monitoring, enforcement, accountability, and follow-up mechanisms that are necessary to translate policy into results. These gaps are visible in curriculum as the system still suffers from the absence of local knowledge and practices, poor execution since many teachers are poorly trained or syllables poorly tailored leading to a continued disconnect between syllabi, learners’ interests, and labor market needs as indicated by insufficient feedback systems, limited responsiveness to economic realities, and weak processes for continuous syllabus improvement. The curriculum was supposed to have the same content but rather taught unconformity in the method and procedure that defines each of the systems (Fonkeng, 2005). This is reflected with the two educational system having different examinations and certificates. Also, human and material resource gaps deepen the implementation failure. Secondary schools experience inadequate teaching resources due to teacher shortages relative to student population growth, overcrowded classes, low teaching output, and insufficient infrastructure and teaching materials. The policy aims related to cultural, moral, civic, and ethical development appear not to be fully realized. Although cultural and ethical subjects exist within the curriculum, implementation and follow-up may be weak, while some learners show reduced engagement with cultural values and ethical principles, partly because educational practice and leadership examples do not consistently reinforce these values.

Classroom realities and impacts on learners

Education in Cameroon reflects a policy aspiration to modernize teaching and improve learning outcomes through structured curricula, reform initiatives, and alignment with broader global expectations. However, the classroom experience often diverges from policy promises due to implementation constraints, including resource limitations, class sizes, inadequate professionals, demographic pressures, and institutional capacity challenges (Alemge, 2019). When policies are introduced without sufficient support for teachers and schools, the intended pedagogical shifts such as increased competency focus and learner-centered instruction may not fully materialize in day-to-day teaching (Steiner, 2017). The concept of classroom realities shifts the focus from ideal models of teaching to what is actually feasible. For example, when textbooks are scarce, teachers rely more on oral explanations and chalkboard work and the absence of laboratories limits science practical’s and replaced it to theoretical teaching. Also, large class sizes increase teacher workload, limit time for continuous assessment or individualized support. These adaptations keep instruction going, but also change the quality and depth of learning.

Technical and vocational education equipped learners with practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge that enable individuals to secure employment, rather the unavailability of functional workshops with right tools, equipments and machines for effective implementation has severely restricted practical hands-on learning and lowers graduate employability which compelled schools to rely purely on theory (Audu et al., 2013). Technical and vocational training centers are seen grappling with a high student-to-tools ratio, the slow maintenance or replacement of bad equipments, the reliance on outdated machines makes learners unequipped to fit into modern industrial standard and ill-prepared for the current job market. The overcrowded classrooms causes group of students to use minimal machines for practical limiting the acquisition of skills.

A recurring theme in the literature is that curriculum implementation is constrained by time and examination priorities (OECD (2020). The pedagogic approach demands that evaluation follows Bloom's taxonomy (1956) by including all levels (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) of

educational learning theorists in evaluating instructions (Peer & Martin 2005, in Alemnge, 2021), which give students the opportunity to exercise their preferences in types of assessments and also encouraging activities like group work, projects, self-evaluation, portfolios, learning contracts, and presentations. These serve as preferable and more valuable options to traditional evaluation strategies as they go as far as to motivate and increase students' performance. However, many teachers struggle to balance curriculum goals with the pace required for coverage and examination readiness. Consequently, instruction become more focused on teaching to the test, reducing time for remediation, formative assessment, and differentiated learning activities (Gilbert, 2010; Steiner, 2017). This dynamic matters for learners because it can weaken conceptual understanding and limit opportunities for mastery learning and feedback-driven improvement.

Scholarly accounts of education in low-resource settings emphasize that adequacy of learning materials and infrastructure strongly shapes instructional quality. Where schools lack updated textbooks, teaching aids, and classroom supplies, teachers may rely on lecture-based approaches and improvisation, which can reduce learner engagement and the effectiveness of teaching methods aligned with curriculum reforms (William, Zafar and Levin, 2025). This literature also links resource gaps to educational inequity: learners in underfunded areas often experience fewer learning opportunities than learners in well-resourced contexts. Also, literature on competence-based approaches highlights that these reforms depend on active learning, inquiry, practical tasks, and adequate instructional time (OCED, 2018). This pedagogic approach demands that evaluation follows Bloom's taxonomy (1956) by including all levels (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) of educational learning theorists in evaluating instructions (Peer & Martin 2005, in Alemnge, 2021). Therefore, giving students the opportunity to exercise their preferences in types of assessments and also encouraging activities like group work, projects, self-evaluation, portfolios, learning contracts, and presentations can serve as preferable and more valuable options to traditional evaluation strategies as they go as far as to motivate and increase students' performance. However, implementation difficulties in classrooms are often attributed not to the approach itself, but to insufficient training, limited learning materials, and constrained school conditions. The consequence for learners is often a reduction in hands-on learning, weaker development of applied skills, and uneven access to modern learning experiences.

It is without a doubt that technological advancements in education have emerged to address certain educational challenges, with teachers now introducing the use of instructional materials such as printed encyclopedias, textbooks, magazines, audio-visuals like laptops, phones, and TVs, as well as visual aids such as charts, pictures, and audio materials to improve students learning. However, the introduction of technology in education has favored only the selected few due to poverty, infrastructural challenges, demographic locations, inadequate power supply. availability of technological tools and professionals amongst others. The integration of technology in education plays a crucial role in facilitating personalized instruction through adaptive learning platforms and online resources. According to Marx, even the formation of social relations and mental conceptions and attitudes are dependent upon technology. Before the provision of ICT curricula, several schools in major cities had acquired computers and started to provide courses on ICTs and with ICTs (Karsenti et al., 2012). The official introduction of ICTs in general and technical secondary schools was a result of the President of the Republic's call in February 2001 for the orientation of education toward the knowledge economy in his address to the Cameroon youths (Republic of Cameroon cited in Mbangwana, 2008), implemented in schools official ICT programs in 2003, and ICT Syllabuses and National sequential schemes of work published and made available to schools in 2008 (ERNWACA-Cameroon, 2005). Schools continue to rely on the government partnerships like; (MINESEC and MTN Foundation of 2013, private contractors, and Parent/Teacher Associations (PTA) since 2005) to supply computers, provide financial support, and motivate teachers who integrate technological techniques and methods to improve learning (Tawong, 2015). Schools that cannot afford these tools remain behind especially as the minister's distribution of digital tools favored only few urban schools. Thus, rural community schools continue to adapt to the indifferences and little exposure as instruction remain content driven, theoretical and examination focused.

Another consistent strand in research is the effect of large class sizes and teacher work load on classroom management and instructional quality. According to Marker (2013), teachers need to understand the behaviour of learners for effective planning to facilitate the teaching and learning process. However, Overcrowded classrooms make it difficult for teachers to supervise learning activities, provide individualized support, and maintain classroom discipline. Studies further suggest that large classes introduce challenges related to time

management, student engagement, and the feasibility of interactive or participatory teaching strategies (Syed, Asad, & Jamel, 2023). For learners, these conditions can translate into reduced participation, slower feedback cycles, and lower achievement especially for learners who require extra support. Similarly, teacher workload and time constraints are determinants of instructional quality. When teachers handle large classes, multiple roles, and extensive administrative demands, teaching may prioritize examination outcomes at the expense of formative assessment and learner-centered strategies. Likewise, teachers rely on familiar methods when professional development on how to manage roles is limited, even when learner needs require more adaptive approaches. For learners, this can result in fewer opportunities for feedback, less diagnostic assessment, and weaker responsiveness to learning difficulties.

Cameroon's socioeconomic and geographic diversity contributes to uneven school quality. Urban areas often have better access to infrastructure, teaching resources, and support systems, while rural areas may experience persistent shortages (Alemge, 2019). This unevenness contributes to rural-urban migration patterns and intensified overcrowding in areas that attract increasing student populations. Ultimately, learners' educational experiences and outcomes tend to differ substantially based on location and school funding capacity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The open system thinking Theory of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1950s), constitutes the main theoretical framework on which this study was based as it holds that an educational organization is a social system made up of integrated parts. This conceptualizes theory provides a framework for understanding system level constraints and how they translate into classroom practices and affect learning. Bertalanffy idea was that if a system was going to be examined or understood it had to be an open system with both inputs and outputs and a collection of parts unified to accomplish an overall goal (Bertalanffy, 1972; Adams et al., 2013; Friedman & Allen, 2014). This idea links policy intentions like curriculum structure, pedagogic guidelines, assessment expectations to the day-to-day classroom realities such as; lesson planning, teaching strategies, pacing, learner support, time use, participation, and assessment. It examines how system-level constraints (funding, teacher availability, infrastructure, learner readiness, and school organization) translate into classroom practices and affect learning.

Applied to the study, system thinking theory underscores the proposition that teaching and learning outcomes in secondary schools are not only products of classroom instruction, but also of how curriculum and pedagogic related policies are designed, resourced, interpreted, and enacted within the educational system conditions. Within the open systems framework, curriculum and pedagogic policies function as system-level inputs. These policy inputs include curriculum structure and expectations, pedagogic guidelines, and assessment requirements that specify what teaching should emphasize and how learner performance should be evaluated. However, their intentions do not translate automatically into effective classroom practice as their enactment is mediated by implementation conditions such as funding, teacher availability, infrastructure, learner readiness, and school organization that translate into classroom practices and affect learning.

Consequently, the study conceptualizes a process of policy-to-practice translation in which teachers and schools interpret and adapt policy guidance according to feasibility constraints such as instructional time, the size and composition of classes, availability of resources, and assessment demands. As a result, what teachers actually implement in classrooms differ from what policies prescribe, leading to variations in classroom instructional processes. Classroom practices such as; lesson planning and pacing, instructional strategies, learner support mechanisms, time use and management, patterns of learner participation, and the frequency, quality, and use of assessment and feedback represent the intermediate stage between policy inputs and learning outputs. They create learning opportunities that influence learner engagement, mastery, progression, and achievement regarded as instructional outcomes.

This framework emphasizes that educational layers interact rather than operate in isolation. Schools are influenced by interacting environments such as national policy directives, regional and divisional administration, school management systems, classroom instruction, learner factors, and community conditions. Changes at one level can affect others; for example, resource shortfalls or weak administrative support may constrain classroom implementation, while poor classroom performance may trigger feedback mechanisms

that influence subsequent planning, instructional adjustments, or policy interpretation. This feedback-oriented view highlights the need for policy-to-practice alignment and supports the understanding of how schools and communities can implement policy goals despite constraints such as inequality, inclusion challenges, inadequate funding, overcrowding, limited learner readiness, and time limitations.

Empirical Review

Mekolle and Manjo (2025), examined the impact of pedagogic and curricular reforms on the advancement of secondary school goals in Kupe-Muanenguba Division in the South West Region of Cameroon), amid global demands for education systems to respond to dynamic socio-economic and technological shifts. Findings reveal that pedagogic reforms, notably the Competency-Based Approach (CBA), bilingual instruction, and student-centered methodologies, show a moderate, statistically significant positive relationship with the advancement of secondary school goals. While curricular reforms, although aligned with national policy objectives, exhibit no significant correlation with goal attainment. The study revealed structural challenges including inadequate digital infrastructure, limited vocational education, and high teacher dissatisfaction. The study concludes that effective pedagogic practices, rather than curricular restructuring alone, are more impactful in advancing secondary education objectives, and recommends increased investment in teacher support, infrastructure, and contextualized curriculum implementation to enhance the impact of educational reforms in the division and in similar settings.

Chamji (2025), investigates the challenges of educational and curriculum reforms in Cameroon. The research highlighted the link between curriculum harmonization efforts and system constraints impacting effective implementation and overall success. This study identified challenges in decolonizing both colonially inherited curricula and inclusively constructing a decolonized Cameroon-centric curriculum that is Cameroonian in content and addresses Cameroonian needs, realities and challenges. Some of these challenges resulted to problems associated with national unity, peace, marginalization, unemployment, inequalities, social injustice, and non-inclusive governance. The study found out that running on two colonially inherited curricula in Cameroon comes with significant challenges but a common decolonized, Cameroon-centric curriculum presents pedagogic strategies that are feasible in the classroom to promote a decolonized mindset that potentially enhances Cameroon's educational needs.

Ngalim (2017), investigated the profound pedagogic differences that existed in the two sub-systems of secondary education in Cameroon related to a noticeable difference in curricular contents of the two sub-systems of education. He articulated his arguments within the context of Von Bertalanffy's general system theory, John Dewey's theory of democratic education, Rousseau's social contract theory and James Banks' multicultural education theory. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis, the research offered a different model for curricular organization in Cameroon taking into consideration perspectives of equity in democratic education. It argued that changes have to be affected in favor of a democratic conception of education because education is the means to construct the type of society appropriate for a harmonious relationship. He found that pedagogic discrepancies obstruct the process of equity and quality education. This study concluded that in order to ensure fairness and quality in the provision of educational values, a suspension of prejudices was imperative in order to establish a school curriculum proper to Cameroon irrespective of the colonial identities we assume.

Likewise, Tegegne, Bizuneh and Negasi, (2025), carried out a qualitative case study to investigate the extent to which constructivist learning principles are implemented in actual classroom practices in Ethiopia. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Piaget and Vygotsky, the study examines the alignment between national education policies, curriculum frameworks, and textbooks, and how these are reflected in classroom instruction in Science, Mathematics, and English and found out that, a significant disconnect between policy aspirations and teaching practices exist. While official frameworks advocate for active, student-centered, and inquiry-based learning, classroom instruction remains predominantly teacher-centered, with limited evidence of collaborative learning, reflective thinking, or real-world application. These findings were related to constraining factors such as; large class size, insufficient instructional materials, content-time in-balance, and a lack of practical teacher training in constructivist pedagogy. The study underscores the need for sustained professional development programs, curriculum streamlining, and systemic support to enable effective

implementation of constructivist approaches in resource-constrained school environments. These findings contribute to the discourse on educational reform in developing countries and offer actionable insights for policymakers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators committed to enhancing authentic and constructive teaching and learning quality.

Singh and Umesh, (2024), carried a reality Pedagogy study to understand the relevant 21st-century teaching-learning approach, focusing on how a teacher acquires an understanding of students' classroom realities or knowledge. Based on this study, a series of pedagogical tools known as the "5 C's" was used to ascertain students' realities and to allow students to engage in each phase and express themselves in a democratic classroom. Five pedagogical tools included in the reality Pedagogy approach: Cogeneration of conversation (problem-solving ideas), Co-teaching (students as teachers), Cosmopolitanism (equal opportunities and responsibility for all students), Context (Taking knowledge from the classroom and applying it in a social context), Content (Theoretical knowledge or content must be based on immediate requirements and applied in real-world situations and daily living). They found out that, to put the concept into effect, teachers must first learn about their students' lives from their friends, parents, and the student community, and then determine their involvement and engagement in classroom activities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative approach, which allowed the researcher to closely collaborate with participants. This design explored the problem under study by focusing on participants narratives and the researchers professional and lived experiences. It was essential for the study as it allowed for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and the socio-cultural contexts that has shaped their realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study focused on secondary schools in the Southwest region Cameroon, and the population of the study involved all secondary schools.

Sample size and sampling techniques

The study employed purposive sampling, using snow ball technique to collect data and maximized variation on key contextual dimensions. The focus was on Public or government secondary schools which are directly concerned and a manageable sample size of 12 participants (5 school principals and 7 teachers). The aim was to ensure in-depth exploration of the issues under study.

Instruments for Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection used was the researchers, who actively engaged with participants to elicit, interpret, and make sense of lived experiences. As emphasized by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the research relied on the researchers as the main instrument because meanings were co-constructed through interaction, dialogue, and reflection between the researchers and participants. In this study, the researchers served as the primary instrument in gathering, recording, and interpreting the lived transition experiences of the randomly selected principals and teachers as they were directly involved in the problem under studies. To support systematic and focused data collection, a semi-structured interview guide and document analysis (review of existing policies, reports and scientific papers) was utilized. The guide was carefully developed based on the Statement of the Problem (SOP) and the theoretical grounding of the study to ensure that all interviews addressed the core dimensions of the constraints experience while allowing flexibility for participants to narrate their experiences. School principals oversee schools and classroom activities such as pedagogy, curriculum implementation, resource distribution as well as interpret and adopt existing policies. Their shared experience and leadership provided insights into the understanding of system constraints. While teachers were interviewed because of their direct interactions with students in the classrooms. They understand students' needs and contribute greatly in shaping classrooms which makes them the right people to give detailed accounts of the classroom environment and the barriers faced during teaching and learning.

FINDINGS

Principals Opinion on Policies Which Have Guided the Operations of Their School

Themes	Quotations
The policies that have shaped the school and classrooms in particular	"Our main policy is the educational law of 14 th April 1998 which have laid guidelines for secondary education in Cameroon."
	"Provide inclusive and quality education in appropriate conditions of competition and compliance."
	"Competency-Based Approach of teaching."
	"Integration of technology and digital learning."
	"Vocational education and entrepreneurship."
	"Continuous assessment or sequential evaluation."
	"Clean and safety school environment."

The data presented above highlight the key theme regarding the system policies that shape the operations of Cameroon schools. The interviews conducted with school principals and teachers highlighted several key policies guiding their operations. A prominent theme was the emphasis on the 1998 Educational law that has shaped the functionality of the schools and classrooms in particular as participants emphasized on the commitment to implement the educational law in appropriate conditions of competition and compliance.

According to data gathered from participants; 1 and 8, "the main policy has been to ensure quality and inclusive education for all." Participant 2 emphasized on "Providing education in appropriate conditions of competition and compliance." Participants 3, 7, and 10 highlighted on "Competency-based approach to teaching and learning." Participant 4 and 11 "integrations of technology and digitalization." Participant 5 commented on "vocational education and entrepreneurship." while participant 6, and 12 highlighted that "continuous assessment or sequential evaluation following a harmonised progression." Lastly, participant 9 highlighted on "clean and safe school environments." The responses indicated a collective focus on instilling knowledge, individual development and overall system success, reflecting a holistic approach to education that enhances quality, inclusion and social justice.

Teachers/Principals Opinion on Curricular/pacing Related Policies and Classroom Realities

Themes	Quotations
Curriculum use and pacing expectations (official documents used)	"Approved textbooks that align with the curriculum and other related texts to help explore and exploit the content." "School activity calendar, it arranges all activities to be carried out in a year in sequence." "Subject syllabus. Outlines the content in topics and the expected attainable objectives." "Scheme of work, splitting the topics to teachable units within a given time." "The progress record booklet of learners which gives the clear picture of the learners strengths and weaknesses."
Textbook policy, introduction of CBA, STEM education, and ICT	"CBA has enhanced critical thinking" "Relevant new subjects introduced" "Emphasis have been laid on skill development, science and technology"
Curriculum coverage and constraints	"Large classrooms." "Insufficient research and practical facilities in schools like libraries and laboratories." "Language challenges and poor infrastructure." "Inadequate trained teachers and teachers' irregularities and lack

	of commitment." "Many planned and unplanned out of school activities like youth week celebration." "Poverty and parental negative influence." "Cultural orientation of learners and poor lesson planning of teachers." "Student's indiscipline cause by the imposed regulations by the government and political activities and the involvement of students. "
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The findings from interviews in the table above, conducted with teachers about their opinions on curricular/pacing related policies and classroom realities in secondary schools. One significant theme was curriculum use and pacing expectation looking at curriculum official documents that has shaped teaching and learning. Participants 1, 2, 5 and 8 holds that schools in general meeting and classrooms runs on "Approved textbooks that align with the curriculum and other related texts to help explore and exploit the content." participants 2 and 9 emphasized that School activity calendar, arranges all activities to be carried out in a year in sequence while participants 3 and 4 highlighted that subject syllabus outlines the content in topics and the expected attainable objectives, scheme of work splits the topics to teachable units within a given time and the progress record booklet of learners gives the clear picture of the learners strengths and weaknesses.

Another key area of focus was the theme strict textbook policy, Introduction of CBA, ICT and STEM Education. Participants 5 and 10 highlighted that continuous learning was emphasized through STEM education, digital learning and CBA enhances critical thinking while participants 6 and 11 recognized the necessity of skill development in science and technology, reflecting a commitment to preparing students for future careers.

Lastly, there was a strong emphasis on curriculum coverage and constraints. Participants 1, 2, 5, 7, 8 and 11 stated that large classrooms, insufficient research and practical facilities in schools like libraries and laboratory, language challenges, cultural orientation of learners, poor infrastructure, insufficient teachers, teachers' irregularities and lack of commitment, poverty and parental negative influence, students' indiscipline amongst others limits effective curriculum implementation.

Teachers' /Principals' Opinion on Pedagogic Policies and Classrooms Realities

Themes	Quotations
CBA Teaching and Learning	"With CBA, teachers now focus on what learners can do, not just what they know." "Teachers initiates discussions, group work, projects and activities to encourage active participation of the learners in the lesson." "This pedagogic method arouses learners' interest in the lesson, making them more committed than passive and helps them learn from each other." " A well-planned lesson engages both teachers and learners, handle multiple learning outcomes and integrates learners' prior knowledge and experience in the lesson." "Teachers are required to plan lessons that promote application and critical thinking." "CBA demands more preparation, but it is helping us to move away from rote learning."
Assessment-alignment and feedback	"Pedagogic policies expect regular continuous assessment with useful feedback for improvement." "Assessment is not realistic and practical because of limited classroom resources, time and large class size." "Assessment is written with little or no practical's" "Exam oriented lessons are prepared." "Alters the recommended sequence of topics in the syllabus. Topics with

	high prospects of being tested are given priority in teaching.” “Interconnection of lessons is no longer given to deserved attention.” “Question-answering type lessons are prepared.” "Timing of official exams falls within the school year taking a large portion of the teaching hours. For instance, GCE starts in May and runs through July taking three full months of school. And that is just one assessment of the many assessment done in school." "Student's focus is tilted to the exam and any attempt to teach broadly is not welcomed by the learners."
Availability of Resources	Insufficient learning resources, insufficient trained professionals. Poor infrastructure and limited class space that hinders effective delivery. The CBA method of teaching has its specifications. It requires a variety of resources and well equipped classes with moderate enrollment for its effective use.

student's focus is tilted to the exam and any attempt to teach broadly is not welcomed by the learners." The results from interviews with teachers regarding pedagogic policies and how they shaped classrooms activities revealed several significant themes. In the area of CBA Teaching and Learning, participants 1, 3 and 8 noted that with Competency-Based Approach (CBA), teachers now focus on what learners can do, not just what they know. Teachers initiates discussions, group work, projects and activities to encourage active participation of the learners in the lesson and enhanced critical thinking. Participants 2 and 4 emphasized that this pedagogic method arouses learners' interest in the lesson, making them more committed than passive and helps them learn from each other. Participants 5, 7, 8 and 12 reiterated that CBA demands more preparation, but it is helping us to move away from rote learning as it requires a well-planned lesson that engages both teachers and learners, handle multiple learning outcomes and integrates learners' prior knowledge and experience in the lesson. Also, it was mentioned that teachers are required to plan lessons that promote application and critical thinking.

Regarding assessment-alignment and feedback, participants 6, 7, 9 and 10 highlighted that pedagogic policies expect regular continuous assessment with useful feedback for improvement, assessment is not realistic and practical because of limited classroom resources, time and large class size, assessment is written with little or no practical's, exam-oriented lessons are prepared, and this approach alters the recommended sequence of topics in the syllabus that is, topics with high prospects of being tested are given priority in teaching. Participants 5, 6 and 11 acknowledged that interconnection of lessons is no longer given deserved attention and question-answering type lessons are prepared. Respondents continued that the timing of official exams falls within the school year taking a large portion of the teaching hours. For instance, GCE starts in May and runs through July taking three full months of school. And that is just one assessment of the many assessments done in school. student's focus is tilted to the exam and any attempt to teach broadly is not welcomed by the learners.

Finally, talking about resources respondents 1, 2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12 indicated that insufficient resources, poor infrastructure and limited classroom space influence effective practice. To some, the CBA method of teaching has its specifications. It requires a variety of resources and well-equipped classes with moderate enrolment for its effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

This study finds that education reform intentions are articulated with clarity in the Education Law (1998) and associated reform priorities to quality and inclusion, CBA, technology integration, vocational education/entrepreneurship, and continuous/sequential evaluation. However, consistent with Open System Thinking Theory, policy intentions do not translate into classroom outcomes automatically. Instead, they function as inputs into a set of interacting subsystems such as administrative, instructional, and community, where outcomes depend on the system's capacity to process inputs under real operating conditions.

Using Open System Thinking (Bertalanffy, 1950), the study conceptualizes reform implementation as a transformation process where policy inputs requirements, standards, assessment rules, pedagogical expectations must pass through institutional and classroom sub-systems involving administrators, teachers,

learners, and community constraints. The evidence indicates that multiple constraints disrupt this policy-to-practice transformation. As a result, teachers preserve classroom adaptations that maintain instruction but often dilute the intended instructional quality and reducing the degree to which learning becomes learner-centered, inquiry-oriented, and competency-driven. Analytically, this policy-to-practice gaps are not best explained as teacher non-compliance. Rather, they are system effects and classroom adaptations emerged as survival strategies within constraints that make intended pedagogy and assessment cycles difficult to sustain.

Participants did not uniformly reject CBA. Instead, teachers described how CBA encouraged learner-centered practices such as discussion, group work, projects, and classroom activities aimed at critical thinking. This indicates that policy influence is not wholly blocked, teachers interpret the competency message and attempt to implement key pedagogical elements. Yet teachers also repeatedly linked these practices to resource and conditions requirements. A frequently stated constraint was that CBA “requires a variety of resources, a well-equipped classroom, with moderate enrollment” for effectiveness. This matters analytically suggests that teachers’ implementation is conditional as CBA is enacted when institutional inputs enable active learning and individualized support; when these inputs are weak, teachers adjust their methods to maintain deliverability. This aligns with reform capacity arguments such as those advanced by Mekolle and Manjo (2025), that reform success depends on system capacity and implementation coherence, not policy design alone. Where resources and institutional supports lag behind reform goals, the classroom may still reflect competency but fail to realize the learning depth, feedback richness, and mastery orientation that CBA requires.

Another key emerging theme found was; policy intentions are processed, but constraints cause classroom adaptations that preserve instructional activity while reducing learning quality and learner-centered orientation. Here, teachers’ accounts showed a patterned mechanism through which constraints weaken competency outcomes by reducing interactivity, practical engagement, and feedback. To a majority, large classes and limited facilities reduce feasibility of learner discussions, practical tasks, and individualized guidance echoing concerns raised by Alemge (2019) and Chamji (2025) about curriculum implementation challenges. The effects of large classrooms were expressed in terms of practical engagement and assessment processes which becomes shallow and less diagnostic. This is because large classrooms, limits time for individual students engagement, also materials, feasible assessment routines, and feedback cycles become generalized, delayed, or reduced.

One of the most consistent themes is pressure linked to pacing and assessment timelines. Teachers described how formally scheduled examinations (GCE) within the academic year consume substantial instructional time. Empirically, this provides a structural incentive that teachers feel compelled to complete syllabus content quickly and allocate extended periods to past-question drilling. The interview evidence: “the official examination calendar forces me to finish the examinable topics early and then spend weeks on past question drill, says a teacher” supports a causal inference of examination architecture becomes a controlling variable that shapes instructional priorities. The result is distorted lesson sequencing, reduced time for building interconnections among concepts and for broader competency development. This is not simply time pressure, It is goal displacement. when the system’s dominant evaluative milestones reward coverage and examinable performance, teachers rationally adjust their teaching trajectory to maximize exam-related returns. This produces a predictable shift from competency-oriented problem-solving toward content completion and test-readiness strategies “Book Smart” (Nji, 2025).

Respondents also described misalignment between assessment policy design and classroom feasibility. The reform intentions emphasize regular continuous assessment and useful feedback. However, teachers reported difficulty implementing this due to constraints such as limited time, insufficient assessment resources/materials, and large class size. Critically, teachers reported that practical assessment is rare because materials are missing; assessment becomes largely written and correction becomes general rather than targeted. This weakens the competency mechanism of diagnostic feedback and improvement, which is central to mastery learning and competency progression. In general, if assessment cannot reliably produce timely, specific feedback, then (a) learners receive fewer opportunities to understand errors, (b) teachers cannot reliably identify misconceptions, and (c) learning becomes less iterative. Consequently, conceptual understanding becomes shallower and mastery is less likely. This supports the central thesis conception that alignment fails not because policies lack logic, but because the system lacks the operational conditions needed to execute the feedback and mastery

cycle that CBA requires.

Although policies aim for equality of opportunity and inclusion, teachers described how learner engagement and school continuity are affected by language challenges, infrastructure deficits, poverty, and parental constraints empirically backed by (Alemge, 2019). This is analytically consistent with an open systems view that, community conditions are part of the environment through which system inputs are processed. Technology/digital learning is highlighted as a reform priority; however, teachers reported that rural schools struggle with electricity, network connectivity, and limited devices, producing a “digital divide.” As a result, the same policy intent yields different classroom experiences depending on location, institutional capacity, and household constraints. This directly supports the claim that policy outcomes are mediated by structural inequality as argued by (Mekolle and Manjo, 2025), system environments change how inputs behave once they enter institutional and classroom subsystems.

Overall, the findings suggest that policy-practice gaps are sustained by weak alignment mechanisms across the implementation chain, including: monitoring, follow-up, resource planning, teacher training linked to implementation realities, and pacing/assessment coherence. Even where policies are strong theoretically, their classroom impact depends on whether the system provides implementation support that makes intended pedagogy and assessment feasible. The study thus view the reform challenge as systemic, and to move from program-based instruction toward a problem-solving system, Cameroon’s education system must strengthen (1) enabling conditions (resources, class size, facilities), (2) assessment structures that support diagnostic feedback and mastery progression, and (3) institutional processes that ensure teachers can realistically enact intended pedagogy without goal displacement driven by examinable pressures.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that curriculum and pedagogic related policies significantly influence teaching and learning in Cameroon secondary schools, but their impact is often shaped by system level realities. While key reforms such as the 1998 Education Law, the Competency-Based Approach (CBA), continuous assessment, technology/digital learning, STEM orientation, and vocational/entrepreneurship education provide strong reform intent, classroom implementation is undermined by persistent constraints including large class sizes, inadequate infrastructure (especially practical facilities), delayed or insufficient teaching/learning resources, limited teacher capacity and irregularities, language-related barriers, and inequitable access to digital tools. The study further found that pacing and examination pressures drive pedagogy toward syllabus coverage and exam readiness, reducing time for remediation, formative assessment, and learner-centered problem-solving activities. As a result, teaching may become compatible with policy language but not fully compatible with policy substance, limiting the achievement of intended competency outcomes.

The study therefore recommends that policy-to-practice alignment should be strengthened by ensuring that reform inputs are matched with feasible implementation conditions following the open system thinking approach. Also, the study recommends a coordinated action across curriculum design, assessment scheduling, teacher professional development, equal resource provisioning, monitoring and accountability, and contextualized implementation responsive to rural secondary school realities. Only then can classroom opportunities translate into meaningful learning experiences and sustainable educational equity.

Furthermore, the study recommends that educational policy makers give room for curriculum designers at the divisional levels to translate the curriculum, making sure it' incorporates aspects of cultural norms, values, religion, indigenous language and also take into consideration the main occupation and activities of the indigenous people. This will allow direct integration of local materials, artifacts, fabrics and tools used in practical hands-On learning and help to curb the issue of unavailability or inadequate distribution of resources, time constraint and distance.

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