



Private Higher Education Initiatives in the North West and South West Regions (Cameroon) 1994-2020: Development and Promotion of Quality Professional Studies

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Abstract: The 1993 Higher Education Reforms and the 1995 National Forum on Education, brought remarkable changes in the provision of advanced education in Cameroon. The 1993 Reforms produced six public universities and greatly emphasized on the need to orientate university education towards professionalisation. Though the reform emphasized on professionalisation, the newly created Universities did not quickly adjust their programmes to address the need of attenuating post-secondary schooling youth unemployment. It is in this context that, this paper drawing from primary and secondary sources and employing a descriptive-analytical approach, examines the seemingly grey training domains that private higher education promoters appropriated and the extent to which they aligned their functioning with the statutory norms of the Cameroon Ministry of Higher education. The paper argues that private higher education institutions of learning that developed in Cameroon's North West and South West Regions predominantly observing somewhat Anglo-Saxon education principles set out among other business interest, to fill the void created by the absence of professional oriented fields of study in public universities. In the course of reaching this end, some of the institutions for different motivations dishonoured the statutory regulations thereby abusing the confidence assigned on them by the state to serve as intermediate auxiliaries to offer quality education geared towards containing the amplification of youth unemployment.

Keywords: Cameroon, Higher Education, Private, quality, North West, South West, Professional, promotion, studies

1. INTRODUCTION

After the independence of British Southern Cameroons by reunification with the Republic of Cameroon on 1st October 1961, the Federal University of Yaoundé was created to meet the higher education need of the new nation state. This university given that it was the only higher institution of learning in the country, could not immediately address the burgeoning demand of secondary school leavers yearning for advanced learning to appropriate certain general and academic experiences which could be further developed in employed professional settings. As a result of this need, in 1993, the government of Cameroon launched a series of reforms culminating in Decree No. 93/034 of 19th January 1993, which defederalized the lone state university in Yaoundé and created six new public universities; two in Yaoundé (Yaoundé I and II), Buea, Ngaoundéré, Dschang and Douala.¹ Although the creation of the six state universities was a step ahead of addressing the increasing demand of post-secondary school graduates, it however, did not meet up with the steady urge by a number of secondary school graduates seeking to continue their studies in the universities by way of professionalisation.² This limitation gave room for private social entrepreneurs and faith based

¹ Terfot Augustine Ngwana "University Strategic Planning in Cameroon: What a lesson for Sub-Saharan Africa? EPAA Vol.11 No47, 2003, 1-26.

² Bilola Theresia Samfoga Doh, "Evaluating the Strategic Objectives of the Cameroon Higher Education" PhD Dissertation University of Turku, 2015, 29.

organizations to open private higher education institutions to provide professional training. In the North West and South West regions, the Bamenda University of Science and Technology was the first private higher education initiative to be created in 1994 following the liberalization policy in Cameroon³.

From 1994 to 2020, about fifty-five private higher education institutions were created in the administrative units coterminous with the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. This paper examines private higher institutions in the North west and South West Regions of Cameroon as it vacillated from its nascent phase in 1994 to the explosion of the Anglophone problem into a crisis's scenario in 2020. The paper maintains that the emergence of private higher education in the North West and South West region was largely presaged by the desire to leverage the gap of professionalization. In this regards, the institutions were authorized to operate different professional programmes within a well-defined regulatory framework. However, in the course of executing their circumscribed missions, some of the institutions for different motivations dishonoured the statutory regulations thereby abusing the confidence bestowed on them by the state to serve as auxiliaries in the provision of quality professional education geared towards containing the amplification of youth unemployment. This paper is structured in two parts: the first part presents the context and circumstances that contributed to the development of private higher education institutions of learning in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon, while the second addresses the principal domains of learning, and appreciates the extent to which the institutions adjusted to statutory norms.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Debates on the integration and emergence of the private sector in providing higher education have received different positions on the categories of intervention and motivations of creation. Varghese⁴ identified three types of private higher education institutions; state supported private institutions, which receive funding support from government; the not-profit private institution, which are owned and operated by trusts which rely heavily on endowments and fees collected from students; and for-profit institutions which operate on profits basis.⁵ While the state support higher private institutions through subventions in some cases, the general tendency has been skewed towards 'the for-profit institutions'. These institutions became very popular in the 1990s in most African countries.

Different scholars have also identified various reasons for the emergence of private higher education; Varghese identified some diverse reasons for the emergence of private higher education, as follows;

the inability of the public sector to satisfy the growing social demand for higher education; the changing political view, the inability of many countries to respond to new demands of courses and subjects of study in the public universities; and finally, in many centrally planned economies, the transition from state planning to market forces was also associated with the expansion of the private sector in higher education⁶.

According to Kruss⁷ and Levy⁸ public higher education institutions have failed to meet the local demands, opening way for the private sector. To them, the startling growth of public higher education institutions in many developing countries during the post-communist period was associated with this factor. Atchoarena and Esquire further posit that the growth of private education could be a response to deficiency or the failure of public institutions in various areas, one of which is the quality of

³ Emmanuel T. Nwaimah "Cameroon: New University Part of Tertiary Reforms." *University World News*, 12 October 2008.

⁴ V.N. Varghese, "Private Higher Education in Africa" *International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO, 2004.*

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ V.N Varghese "Incentives and Institutional Changes in Higher Education" *Higher Education Management Policy, Vol 10 No1.2740.*

⁷ Kruss, G, "more, Better, Different? Understanding Private Higher Education in South Africa" *Education and skills Development. (ESD), HSRC, 2003.*

⁸ Levy, D.C, "Profit and Practicality: How South Africa Epitomized the global Surge in Commercial private higher education. PROPHE Working Paper Series, 2013.

teaching.⁹ To them, private institutions respond to demands from the elite for quality education. Levy for his part contends that one of the major reasons for the unanticipated growth of private higher education worldwide was the adaptation of neoliberal policies that seek to restrict the role of the state. To him privatization contributed to the proliferation of private higher education institutions. Altbach suggests that international agencies such as the World Bank (WB) exerted considerable pressure for the market to play a more prominent role in providing educational services and prescribed privatization as a means to meet demands for access to post-secondary education.¹⁰ UNESCO on the same lane, but on a more restraint position, advanced the claim that public funds alone cannot sustain a viable and differentiated higher education system. The growth of private higher education institutions could also be attributed to the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) promoted by the World Bank and other international agencies. Following the imposition SAP, Subsidies on higher education were eliminated. This therefore triggered private investment in higher education.

3. CONTEXT OF PROFESSIONALISATION OF STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The decades preceding the independence and reunification of Cameroon was dawned with a burning desire to provide post tertiary education in such a way that it could salvage certain pressing social, economic and administrative demands that could palliate some structural and functional exigencies in the public and private sectors of the new nation state. This necessity for higher education resulted in an increasing number of students registering in various faculties of the University of Yaoundé. Given that it was the only public higher education facility that offered a variety of programmes in the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences, the establishment quickly experienced an exponential rise in students' enrolments. The student population for example dramatically increased from 9,000 in 1977 to 45, 000 in 1991¹¹.

While the university served as a veritable melting pot for all the Cameroonian students yearning for higher education training and certificates, students from the North West and South West Provinces, mainly from the seemingly Anglo-Saxon educational off roots experienced tethering challenges especially with the language of instruction that was predominantly French and the learning programmes that were mostly skewed towards the Francophone tradition. This in essence was in defiance of the bilingual legal status of the university.¹² The social environment and the difficulty in adaptation considerably reduced the success rate of the Anglophone students, limited their access to the university, and increased their frustration. Besides, the University of Yaoundé was created to train cadres especially for senior positions in the civil service and therefore did not offer or take professional courses as a priority. In the early 1990s, the problems of higher education reached the point of explosion, the students- teacher ratio stood at 1:54. It became imperative to decongest and decentralise the University of Yaounde. In January 1993, a comprehensive package of reforms was decreed by the government to solve the congestion problem in the lone University of Yaoundé. The primary goals of the reforms of 1993 were the decongestion of the University of Yaoundé and the professionalisation of university studies, intended to produce graduates who could be useful to the private sector as a whole. Broadly speaking, the reforms sought to address the challenges of access, quality, capacity-building and funding¹³.

In order to solve the problem of congestion at the University of Yaoundé, and address the challenge of access, the reforms created six full-fledged state universities in Buea, Dschang, Douala, Ngaoundéré,

⁹ Atchoarena, D and P Esquire Private Technical and Vocational Education in Sub-Sahara Africa, Paris: UNESCO, 2002.

¹⁰ Altbach, P, G. Private Higher Education: Themes and Variations in Comparative Perspective. International Higher Education Winter, 1998.

¹¹ Theresa m. Ndongko and Solomon N. Gwei, "Issues and Perspectives in Cameroon Higher Education" in Theresa M. Ndongko and Leke I. Tambo (eds) *Educational Development in Cameroon, 1961-1999*. (Platteville: Nkemnji Global Tech, 2000), 133.

¹² Terfot Augustine Ngwana. "The Implementation of the 1993 Higher Education Reforms in Cameroon: Issues and Promises "in Higher Education Policy: institutions and globalisation. New Dynamics in south Africa after 1994.(South Africa: Centre for Higher Education Transformation, 2001), 3. Retrieved from <http://www.chet.org>

¹³ Njeuma et al "Reforming a National System of education of Higher Education: The Case of Cameroon. ADEA Working Group on Higher Education 1999, 8-9.

Yaoundé I and Yaoundé II. Though the creation of the six new universities decongested the University of Yaoundé, it did not resolve the issue of professionalisation. Prior to the 1993 Reforms and emphasize on professionalisation, the state as early as the 1960s had already established certain centres of professionalisation of learning within the higher education spheres. Professional education already existed in the schools and centres of the university such as teacher education in Higher Teacher Training College, ENS Yaoundé, Agriculture in the School of Agriculture in Dschang, Translation and Interpretations in Buea, Food Technology in Ngaouderé as well as Commerce and Technical Education in Douala. These institutions important as they were did not provide opportunities to many students given that admissions were highly competitive and selective. Besides, they were still embedded in the French system of education.¹⁴ The 1993 Reforms created a number of professional programmes within the Universities, for example, at the University of Buea programmes such as Accountancy, Banking and Finance, Nursing, Medical Laboratory Science, Chemical Technology, Material Science, and Journalism and Mass Communication, were introduced. This did not still solve the problem of professionalisation because the university graduates did not receive the type of education required by the demanding private sector. This innovation was a welcome relieve but could not allay the huge demand that was emerging from the feeder secondary schools that were socializing students more and more on professionalized knowledge.¹⁵

The 1993 Reforms also gave the private individuals, organisations and religious bodies the right to create private higher institutions of learning in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. The first institution as earlier mentioned to be created in response to the Reform orientation was the Bamenda University of Science and Technology (BUST), in 1994. The founding of BUST presaged an enthusiastic move towards the opening of many private higher education institutions in the North West and South West Regions. Most of the founders of the private higher education institutions, such as Dr. Fomba, Dr. Biaka Francisca, Dr. Nicodemus Ngwanyam, maintained that they invested in private higher institutions because they observed a manifest neglect by public institutions to promote technical, commercial, and medical oriented professional training programmes.¹⁶ The principal catch phrase that most of the private higher education promoters mentioned was professionalisation of training to address the economic and welfare needs of the country.

Professionalisation as a premise of higher education is not new. It was already articulated a few years after independence. As early as 1974, the session of the National Council of Higher Education and Scientific Research recommended the enhancement of professionalisation.¹⁷ It was resolved that university studies should be reorganized to reflect the needs of the country. The approach was to create a university of technology to train technicians to support the nation's economic progress, and the establishment of a selective post-graduate programme pursuing research to solve national problems.¹⁸ The period from 1962-1992 in Cameroon was characterized by the progressive involvement of higher education in technological and professional training. Efforts in responds to national and global job market needs were in line with monitoring market signals and translating them into new curriculum and programmes¹⁹.

Due to the open admission policy in the universities and strict admission requirements for professional schools, the efforts of professional education were not producing enough graduates for government positions. With this situation, it was necessary to increase the number of students undergoing professional and technological training. In the 1990s, it was realised that the lone University of Yaoundé could not accommodate the exponential number of students knocking on the

¹⁴ Ngwana T.A., "University Strategic Planning in Cameroon",

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Interview with Dr. Fomba, Aged 65, Founder Higher Institute of Management Science Buea, Buea 25 February 2021.; Interview with Francisca Hongla, Aged 64, CEO of St Veronica Medical Centre, which comprises St Veronica Polyclinic and Biaka University Institute Buea, Buea

¹⁷ Sup Infos , special Edition 1961-2011. Les 50 Ans de l'Université Camerounaise, Yaoundé: MINESUP 2011, 38.

¹⁸ Njeuma et al ,” Reforming a National System of Higher Education.”1999, 4.

¹⁹ W.N. Ekane, "Towards Responsive Curriculum Development in the University" in (eds) Theresa M. Ndongko &Leke I. Tambo , Educational Development in Cameroon 1961-1999 : Issues and Perspectives (Platteville: Nkemnji Global Tech, 2000), 150.

doors of higher education every year. As a result of that, the government decided to undertake a major overhaul which was articulated in the 1993 reforms²⁰. The 1993 reforms were contained in a series of presidential decree signed between April 1992 and January 1993. According to Njeuma et al, the main aim of the reforms was to decongest the University of Yaoundé and to professionalise university education in order to produce graduates who could be useful to the private sector and the country.²¹ The motive of the reform was directly utilitarian and addressing relevance. After 1993, the major reform policies shaping the professionalisation 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; turned Growth and Employment Strategy Paper; Education Sector Strategy and the Global Reform of Higher Education launched by 1999 UNESCO Conference in Budapest.²²

Since 1993, professionalisation has been variously articulated in major higher education documents. It has been constantly articulated in public speeches related to education. For instance, President Paul Biya's message to the youths in 2007, stated *inter alia* that "various actions are envisaged or ongoing as part of professionalisation and diversification programmes."²³ In 2008 he added that "We need to radically transform the image of higher education in Cameroon"²⁴. In his 2011 speech to the youth he stated further that "regarding higher education, professionalisation remains the watchword without neglecting the extension of the BMD (Bachelor-Masters-Doctorate) system"²⁵. In 2012, he averred that; "In fact professionalisation or training as the case may be is a prerequisite to resolving the problem of youth employment." In his 2014 outing, on the eve of Youth Day commemorations, the President still re-emphasized the importance of professionalisation when he stated that, "our educational system at its different levels has already opted for professionalisation"²⁶ and in 2015 he added that, "given the relatively recent adoption of professionalisation of education...its impact will definitely not be immediate."²⁷

From November 2015, the Ministry of Higher Education took a vast and ambitious operation to review training programs in the Higher National Diploma, HND (*Brevet de Technicien Supérieur*) cycles. This initiative became obvious given that the programmes so far implemented had become obsolete because of the exponential evolution of the labour market. In order to reconcile professional requirements with the legitimate need of students to pursue their professional dreams, three stakeholders ; representatives of the business world, teachers-experts from the universities and professional schools, proprietors of private institutions of higher education had the opportunity to brainstorm in series of seminars. The outcome of these reflections culminated in the emergence of new fields and modification of existing programs to adjust to the labour market. This became the intermediate space that private higher institutions of learning stepped in to occupy.

4. ORIGINS AND EXPANSION OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

The first private higher education institutions in Cameroon were set up in the 1960s. They were created by faith based organisations that were essentially focused on theology and functioned as associations. An example of such an institution was the Saint Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary Bambui which was meant to train Catholic priests. Besides this example, post-secondary institutions were almost inexistent in Cameroon up till the early 1990s. This was as a result of certain factors; the

²⁰ Doh P. S., "Response of Higher Education Sector in the poverty Reduction Strategies in Africa: The case of Cameroon" PhD Dissertation University of Tampere Finland, 2012.

²¹ Njeuma et al, 1991.

²² Bilola Theresia Samfoga Doh, "Evaluating the Strategic Objectives of the Cameroon Higher Education" PhD Dissertation University of Turku, 2015, 29.

²³ Up Station Mountain club. Youth Day Message by President Paul Biya, Sunday, 11 February 2007. Retrieved from <http://www.postnewsline.com/2007/youth-day-messa.html>, 20th February 2020.

²⁴ 10 February 2008: President Paul Biya Addresses the youths.

²⁵ SUP Infos, Edition special 1961-2011. Les 50Ans de Université Camerounaise, Yaoundé MINESUP, 2011.

²⁶ Head of State's message to the youths on the occasion of the 48th edition of the National Youth day celebration. (Cameroon), 10 February 2014. Retrieved from <https://pr.documents>11174>, 13 June 2021.

²⁷ Head of State's Message on the occasion of the 49th edition of the National youth day, 10 February 2015. Retrieved from <https://pr.cm>news>1155>.

most important of which was the absence of a state policy and regulatory framework to guide the establishment and operations of private higher education in the country. The decentralisation of the University of Yaounde and higher education reforms in 1993 gave credence to social entrepreneurial ventures that were in gestation waiting for the enabling conditions to be released. This was specifically the case of the project sustained by Dr. John Ngu Foncha who among others piloted the venture that culminated in the founding of BUST, in 1994²⁸.

This was the first private higher education to be created in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. As a pioneer initiative, the institution took part in different reflection forums that produced the framework to guide the functioning of lay private higher education institutions in Cameroon. After BUST was created, different professionally-oriented higher education institutions emerged that were promoted mainly by private social entrepreneurs and Christian religious organizations. By 2020, there were about fifty-five private higher education institutions in operation providing a range of professional studies in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon.

In the 1990s, there were just a handful of private higher education institutions in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon, such as The Bamenda University of Science and Technology (1995), National Polytechnic Institute Bamenda (1996), Maflekumen Higher Institute of Health Sciences Buea (1996), Access Higher Institute of Professional Studies Buea (1997) and Biaka University Institute Buea(1998). The 2001 higher education common rules applicable to private higher education document revolutionized the spirit to create private higher education.

5. PROFESSIONAL DOMAINS OF STUDIES

The Private higher education institutions, in a bid to assist the government in training its citizens, offered courses which were mostly oriented towards the technical, commercial and medical-fields. These job-related courses became a lure that attracted many students to enroll in various private institutions of higher education. In terms of programmes, the private higher education institutions aligned their programmes with those of their mentor universities. In spite of this state-defined cooperation, the institutions still had their own philosophies and visions. In general, private universities offered courses that required fewer investments in terms of infrastructure and logistics. The institutions founded by Religious bodies, besides offering professional training added religious studies. The Catholic University of Cameroon (CATUC) for instance trained future priests, who after acquiring degrees in philosophy and theology, could then move to the various seminaries in the country to complete their training for priesthood. Theological degrees in CATUC, were awarded in the name of the Holy Sea and were as a result of a prescribed course of study in the ecclesiastical faculty of Theology. This emphasis however, did not obviate the attention given to commercial and managerial sciences as well as intermediate medical and laboratory sciences²⁹.

It is important to note that the programmes offered in private higher education institutions varied depending on the orientation of the university. Private higher education institutions offered mostly the courses that were not offered in many traditional universities and when offered, the numbers of positions available were always very limited. A typical private higher education institution in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon offered courses in business, agricultural technology, natural resource exploitation, engineering and information technology. Unlike most public higher education that offered the Bachelor-Masters, Doctorate protocol of training, private higher education institutions trained towards the award of the National Higher Diploma (HND) and Professional Bachelors' and Masters Degrees³⁰.

Most of the courses offered by the private higher institutions were professional in nature. The programmes centered largely on business studies like Accounting, Banking and Finance; Insurance and Risk Management, Management; Marketing; Hospitality and Hotel Management; Events and Conference Management; Supply Chain Management; Tourism; Human Resource Management; Micro-Finance and Development, Financial Management, Logistic and Supply Chain Management.

²⁸ Prof Mbanwana Paul Vice Chancellor of BUST, Interview by Immaculate Akemche, 12 May, 2021.

²⁹ Ndiyah Florence, "Catholic University of Cameroon (CATUC), Bamenda, makes Public courses" *L'Effort Camerounais* June 2012, Retrieved May 2022.

³⁰ Cameroon Higher National Diploma. Vol 5 Tertiary Education Sector, 2018.

The private institutions also provided agricultural technology and promoted specialized trainings in courses such as; Agric Economics, extension and Rural Sociology; Animal Science; Crop and Soil Science, Nutrition, Food Science and Technology . Engineering and technology also constituted part of the training offered in the private higher education institutions. In this regard emphasis was given to civil, mechanical, electrical and power engineering.³¹

Some of the private institutions started originally with the focus on health and medical sciences, but shifted focus as time went on. The shift in focus could be attributed to profit motivations. These were the cases of the St Louis University Institute of Health and Biomedical Sciences Bamenda and Biaka University Institute Buea. The founders of these institutions were social entrepreneurs and realized diversification into other fields of studies could secure and broaden their profit margins. The medical oriented institutions offered courses such as: Nursing; Physiotherapy, Dental Therapy, Radiology, Medical Lab Sciences, Pharmacy Technology, Public Health, Reproductive Health, Medical Biochemistry; Medical Microbiology; Medical Pathology and Medical Virology.

6. STATUTORY REGULATIONS GUIDING PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION STUDIES

Though private individuals and organisations were authorized to open higher education institutions, there were statutory regulations guiding their functioning. The private institutions were not allowed to function independently. The institutions were required to enter into a mentee-mentor relationship with one of the state universities. During the mentorship period, the institutions critical matters like quality of teaching, evaluation and certification had to be strictly monitored and controlled by the public university contracted to serve as mentor. The process of mentorship/affiliation was usually cumbersome but had to be fulfilled if the institutions had to stay within the legal norms³². An institution applying for affiliation with a university made a formal request to the Vice Chancellor or Rector of the state university soliciting for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on a well-defined cooperation protocol. The institutions were to follow the agreements from the MOU to a maturity point where a Specific Partnership Agreement (SPA) was contracted. During the period of mentorship, the institution was restricted to provide only those programmes which were contained in the partnership texts.³³ The agreement took into consideration, the scope of the arrangement, responsibilities, financial arrangements, quality control mechanism, mode and means of payments, validity period, and procedure for resolution of differences and termination of agreement.³⁴

Some Institutions also signed MOUs with UBa such as; Bamenda University of Science and Technology (BUST), Higher Institute of Technology and Management (CITEH-HITM), Higher Institute of Business Management (HIMBUMS), Higher Institute of Management (HIMS), Catholic University of Cameroon(CATUC), FONAB Polytechnic Bamenda, FOMIC Polytechnic Buea, Higher Institute of Business studies (HIBAT), National Polytechnic Institute Bamenda.³⁵ While SPAs were signed with, Redemption Higher Institute of Biomedical and Management Science (RHIBMS) Muyuka, Laureate Higher Institute of Administration (LAHIBA) Bamenda, Harvard Higher Institute of Science, Technology (HHIST) Bamenda.³⁶The following conditions governed the granting of affiliation;

the institution should be under the management of a regular constituted governing body; availability of water, electricity, fuel, gas, telephone and internet; the institution must meet the higher education quality criteria at main campus as well as affiliated institutions. The institution must have enough land space (0.5-acre minimum) with required physical infrastructure; the institution must have firmed proper rule regarding the efficiency of discipline of its staff and other employees; there should be provision for

³¹ About Us- National Polytechnic Institute Bamenda <https://npbedu.org/aboutus> retrieved 20 February 2022.

³² Prof Victor Julius Ngoh, President Catholic University Institute Buea, in discussion with the author, 23, March 2022.

³³ Affiliation Createria/ guidelines for universities/ institutions of Higher Education in Public Sector. <https://hec.gov.pk/Documents>, retrieved 10 December 2021.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mbifi Richard “Open Door Policy at the University of Bamenda” The University of Bamenda News Magazine No003/2014 December 2014, 11.

³⁶ Ibid.

well stocked library and well-equipped laboratory facilities and other practical work where affiliation is sought it fields due arrangements should be made for imparting instructions. In the library, there should be at least 50 books per subject for supplementary reading. They should be able to subscribe 10 daily newspapers and 5 weekly periodicals. The seating facilities in the library should be able to accommodate 10% of the total number of students. Also, the institution must possess 50 Of its teaching faculty employed from an accredited university in relevant subjects on permanent basis with minimum prescribe qualification from accredited university in relevant subjects.³⁷

According to Ngoh, there were also financial requirements to be attained before an institution was affiliated as follows;

The institution should be financially stable and has the ability to sustain functioning and efficient working; it shall furnish such reports, return and other information as the university may require, to enable it to judge the financial sustainability and soundness of sponsors. There should be huge amount not less than 5 million for the smooth functioning of the institution and also tangible assets in form of land, buildings etc.³⁸

On constitutional and cultural lane, the institutions were required to strictly comply with and respect the constitutional provisions, local laws and cultural religious sensitivities.

In order to physically verify the detailed academic and physical infrastructure available with the institution, the inspection committee had the option or not to conduct an inspection of the institution before granting an affiliation. All formal arrangements of affiliation between institutions and state universities were agreed upon and formally written down as approved legal agreement and signed by senior authorised representatives of the private and public institutions.³⁹ Institutions were required to pay an annual affiliation fee, at such rates as may be prescribed to cover the cost of services provided by the university. The university and the private institution shared the statutory registration fees of 50.000FCFA received from the students, in a proportion determined by the Senate in its different sessions. The management of affiliated related issues was usually entrusted in the hands of an ad-hoc committee which could co-opt experts for specific meetings from inside or outside the university as necessity demanded.⁴⁰ The public universities could only consider application for affiliation from private institutions offering or desiring to offer programmes connected with those offered by the university. Furthermore, an institution could be affiliated to two or more universities depending on where their respective training programs were lodged and had expertise. As a result of this, many private higher education institutions MoUs and SPAs with the University of Buea and the University of Bamenda for business, agricultural, and medical-laboratory sciences⁴¹.

Apart from the accreditation process, the government of Cameroon to ensure that private higher education met some credibility came up with decree No 2001/832/pm of September 19, 2001 setting the common rules applicable to private higher education institutions in Cameroon subject to those set by international conventions. After opening private programmes and institutions in Cameroon, they were subjected to ongoing monitoring by the National Commission of Private Higher Education (NCPHE), which conducted visits, evaluated peer reviews and institutional self-assessment as well as issued reports on compliance with accreditation and quality assurance standards. The National Commission of Private Higher Education evaluation and Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) authorization were also necessary to establish private higher education institutions to introduce new academic programmes or departments.⁴²

³⁷ Prof Victor Julius Ngoh, aged 72, President CUIB, interviewed by Immaculate Akemche, Buea, 23 February 2021.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Interview with Prof V.J. Ngoh, President Catholic University Institute Buea, Feh Mary , Biaka University Institute Buea.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mbifi Richard “ Open door policy” *the University of Bamenda Magazine*. No. 002/2014, 11.

⁴² WENR, Education in Cameroon, WENR, World Education News Reviews, April 30, 2021.

7. TRANSGRESSION OF STATUTORY REGULATIONS

The procedures to create and run programmes in the private higher education sector were well defined by specific instruments of MINESUP. In spite of these guiding principles, some private initiatives for different motivations violated the statutory regulations guiding their operations. The government of Cameroon to ensure conformity in the activities of private higher education came up with Decree No. 2001/832/pm of September 19, 2001 setting the common rules applicable to private higher education institutions in Cameroon subject to those set by international conventions. In the nascent phase of applying the provisions of the document, the slight attention was accorded to quality control mechanism in the private higher education institutions. Given this passive consideration to quality assurance, some proprietors arrogated the right to begin operating programmes that were not authorized by the supervisory instance in MINESUP. Besides, they went ahead to unorthodoxly issue certificates to supposed graduates candidate who enrolled and met with the cost of tuition. These proprietors dished out certificates ranging from the Bachelors to Doctorate degrees to candidates in different fields of study⁴³. This expression of charlatanism was quite common in most private higher education institutions where subterfuge was exploited around the programs which were authorized to mask those that were not accredited. The principal drive for such unconventional practices was the anticipation by the educational promoters to make profits and modestly to provide study access to growing study demands⁴⁴.

Some of the private higher education institutions like the international University of Bamenda claimed to have existed even before the 1993 when the higher education reform authorized private initiatives to provide advanced learning opportunities. These pronouncements most often were not accompanied by any authorisation texts that could render them authentic. The proprietor of such institutions took cover under the pretexts that students needed higher education programmes which by then were not offered by the state universities. In the Higher Education Conference for private education promoters that took place in Buea in 2015, participants identified consensually agreed that charlatanism was a bane in the sector and it was high time they turned over the page. Among the factors identified as conduits to charlatanism were offering of unapproved programmes by the mentor university and by extension MINESUP, poor quality and understaffing in the private institutions and unconventional matriculation, convocation and certification practices.⁴⁵ In most of the private institutions, there were programmes that had no hubs in the mentor universities. Such a situation was bound to exist because the mentor universities, mainly the state institutions were not conceived with a mission to provide the large spectrum of mostly business, technological and medical sciences studies that were in vogue in the new professional training dispensation appropriated by the private higher education sector.

In a press release by the MINESUP in 2013, The International University of Bamenda was identified among others as not yet been granted the creation agreement and the authorisation to open⁴⁶. This meant that the institution was operating in illegality. The International University of Bamenda, provided a range of courses that were not offered in most of the Universities in Cameroon. Some examples of such specialised courses were Asian American Studies, Astronautics, Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, Chinese, Danish, Consumer Affairs, Latin, Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies.⁴⁷ Given these rare categories of programmes, the International University could not be mentored by the Anglo-Saxon Universities of Buea and Bamenda. The university claimed to have been the first private university from the English speaking regions of Cameroon. They were said to have started in 1990, but succeeded to sign Specific Partnership Agreement with the University of Douala only in 2018. On several occasions, the Minister of Higher Education warned the institution to desist from operating in illegality⁴⁸.

⁴³ Business in Cameroon, "The Minister of Higher Education nabs private institutions" Business in Cameroon. Retrieved from <https://www.businessincameroon.com>.

⁴⁴ Nick Ngwanyam "Over 80% of those who create private higher institutions of learning in Cameroon are people who just want to make money" *The Teachers' Voice Magazine*, September 2016, 24-25.

⁴⁵ Higher Education Conference: Private Education Promoters, tough proposals to government, *The recorder Newline* <https://recordlines.blogspot.com/2015/05/private-education-conference>.

⁴⁶ "Eleven Unauthorized Private Universities" WENIR, Sept/oct 2013.

⁴⁷ International University Bamenda, Cameroon. <http://www.iubamenda.org>learning>.

⁴⁸ Michael Ndi "The Minister of Higher Education Jacques Fame Ndongo, ordered International University of Bamenda (IUB) to stop issuing degrees" *Cameroon Postline*, 13 May 2003.

The Ministry of Higher Education and the National Commission of Private Higher Education, (NCPHE) decried the proliferation of charlatan private higher education institutions in Cameroon. The Minister of Higher Education, Chancellor of Academic Orders announced and emphasized in different public outings the need for a systematic control to ascertain the legality of private higher education institutions operating in the country. This was part of the measures to bring sanity to the sector that was steadily engulfed by charlatanism. Institutions that were acting ultra vires were summoned to appear before the ethics sub-committee of the NCPHE, for appropriate hearing and sanctions. By 2016, dozens of private higher institutions operating illegally in the North West and South West Regions had been identified and called to conform to the existing regulations or closed up. Private higher centers of learning with prestigious nomenclatures like the Pan African institute for Development was isolated as one of the institutions that were running varied undergraduate and post graduate programmes but was not accredited by MINESUP. Words of caution were variously extended to candidates enrolling in the institution to guard against being manipulated and deceived to believe the certificates obtained from the institution was recognized by the higher education system of Cameroon. The St. Monica University of Buea was also identified as not accredited to run PhD programmes and/ or issue certificates at this level. Holders of certificates from the institution were advised by the Minister to desist from using them. St. Monica was accredited to run Professional Bachelors and Masters programmes, but not PhD programmes⁴⁹.

The issue of certification and use was particularly serious in the use of such documents especially as requirements for enrolment in programmes in state universities or for professional and academic recognitions. Certificates/Diplomas issued independently by the private higher institutions could not be provided any equivalence in the BMD system. As such they were not recognized as academic achievements in Cameroon. Moreover, holders of the certificates could not gain the opportunities that went with the certificates in their bid to advance their studies or gain employment in the private or public services. The consequences of such limitations were serious. An example of such was a 'Barrister at Law' in Bamenda who was expelled from the Bar from having gained entry into the Bar by using unrecognized academic transcripts and certificates from the International University of Bamenda. It was common to see students enrolling for post-graduate programmes in such institutions without the basic entry requirements. An undergraduate student without a Bachelor's degree could surreptitiously find himself in a PhD programme and before the statutory minimum six semesters brandish a doctorate Degree. The International University of Bamenda promoted by 'Dr.' Patrick Fusi was one of the most conspicuous spotlights of acts of illegality where Doctorate training and certification was routinely dishonoured⁵⁰.

The Bamenda University of Science and Technology also had issues with the Ministry of Higher Education. In separate releases signed by the Minister of Higher Education, Prof. Jacques Fame Ndong, he warned that, any certificate signed by authorities of BUST violating the accreditation status, will not be recognised. He said BUST was granted accreditation as a "University Institute" not a university⁵¹. According to him, this status did not allow Bamenda University to issue Diplomas independently of its mentor institutions which were the University of Buea and the University of Dschang. According to a release, signed on July 13, 2020, all diplomas, Bachelor degree, Master's degree and PhD delivered and signed in violation of accreditation status by the authority of BUST were not recognized by the Ministry of Higher Education⁵².

Apart from these institutions that were authorized to operate as higher education institutions but that violated their terms of reference given to them, they were some that were not authorized at all to operate in the country but kept luring ill-informed candidates to enroll in their programmes. These

⁴⁹ Cameroon: higher Education Minister prohibits two institutions from issuing certificates, *Journal du Cameroun*, 16/07/2020.

⁵⁰ Michael Ndi "The Minister of Higher Education orders International University"

⁵¹ Cameroon: Higher Education Minister prohibits two institutions from issuing certificates *Journal du Cameroun*. 2020.

⁵² Njodzefe Nestor "Panic grips proprietors of illegal private higher institutions" *The Median News*, Sunday, 4 September 2016.

institutions benefitted from the social media to persuasively and aggressively market their programmes. They did so by presenting partnership protocols, real or imaginary, with some renowned universities in Europe, the United States and Asia. It was common to find these universities popping online with imposing academic brochures, but with no mention of the accreditation in the website of MINESUP. Examples of such virtual institutions were the Tiko University, and Kesmond University. From every indication, the desire to respond to professional training provisions was enormous, the regulations in place were clear but the implementation in some cases were flawed by overzealous promoters who wanted to take every opportunity to make fast cash⁵³.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper examined the context and circumstances that contributed to the development of private higher education institutions of learning in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. It explored the principal domains of learning and appreciates the extent to which the institutions adjusted to the statutory norms. The investigation exposed that conditions propitious for the development of private higher education in the Regions were embedded in the national exigencies of providing context-relevant and dynamic evolving educational opportunities to leverage secondary school studies. The challenges of students coming from the North West and South West Regions to find a convenient and purposeful studying context in the lone state University in Yaoundé from 1961-1993, and the 1993 higher education reforms gave private entrepreneurs and religious bodies the opening to serve as auxiliary platforms to provide tertiary education. Principally the paper revealed that private higher education institutions of learning developed to fill the void created by the absence of professional oriented curriculum in the public universities. These programmes which were in high demand in the job market included business studies, agricultural technology, medical, laboratory and pharmaceutical technology as well as engineering sciences. The programmes were to function in a well-planned educational system where the private institutions were to be monitored by the supervisory body, the Ministry of Higher Education through a mentor-mentee partnership contracted with the state universities. While this protocol was respected in some instances, in other circumstances, some of the institutions for different motivations violated the statutory regulations by surreptitiously carrying out certain obnoxious practices in student's enrolment, teaching and certification that were against the regulations in force.

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