

# CAMEROONIAN UNIVERSITY IN THE ERA OF «BOLOGNIZATION»

© 2019 KOUMA J. C. G. (Cameroon)

DOI: 10.31857/S032150750003737-2

*This study is an analysis of the achievements and dynamics initiated within the Cameroonian university since the beginning of the process of Bolognaization, created by the Declaration of the Sorbonne signed in 1998 by the ministers of higher education of four European countries: Germany, Italy, France and the United Kingdom. The Bologna process, commonly known as LMD, is seen as an adaptation of Cameroon to a new competitive global environment. It is true that there is an abundant literature that looks at the changes, challenges and crises that the higher education systems in Cameroon and Africa have experienced. Specifically, this is to present the business cycle that led to the implementation of the LMD system (Bachelor-Master-Doctorate, from French «Licence-Master-Doctorat») in Cameroon and scrutinize the architecture of the Cameroonian university as it exists today without ignoring its impact in the Central African subregion. It is about understanding the issues and challenges related to the strategic management and organization that today's higher education needs to face. This inevitably implies taking part in the debate on the transformations of Cameroonian higher education, which, over the past ten years, has experienced a certain change. The purpose of this contribution is to show that Cameroon's link to the LMD system has led to considerable progress in skills production, infrastructural development and subregional integration. The author also wants to highlight the efforts of the Cameroonian government within the dynamics of the system.*

*Keywords:* Cameroon, university, Bolognaization, modernization, cooperation, reform, internationalization

**The change in the Cameroonian university system of 1993, whose main objectives were the decongestion of the only State University of Yaoundé and the professionalization of university studies in order to obtain graduates likely to be useful to the private sector and to the country as a whole, and its linkage to the Bachelor-Master-Doctorate (LMD) [7] have contributed not only to the improvement of the working conditions of the university community, but also to the development of the internationalization of this system.**

This contribution of the 1993 reform and the changes imposed by globalization on universities are related to the definition of new missions for the Cameroonian university.

## CONJUNCTURAL AGENDA

Upon its creation in 1961, the Cameroonian University was immediately challenged to quickly provide appropriate responses to the pressing needs of a society that, a year earlier, had just achieved its independence. The absence or insufficiency of qualified executives led to a surge in the urgency of the training of professionals and managers in all trades. Indeed, Cameroon is subject to a deep reconfiguration under the pressure of both international donors and internal socio-political groups [15].

This situation immediately led the higher education of Cameroon into a process of gradual

reforms in which it is still today, such as the Bologna process.

This membership can be interpreted as a pragmatic act, characteristic of the political policy of the President of the Republic Paul Biya, considered as the «Apostle of the new university governance» [33]. This process as well as the prospects of emancipation of the Cameroon's entire university system, are constantly drawing on relevant guidance from different institutional sources.

Firstly, there is the Orientation Law of Higher Education of April 16, 2001, which "assigns to Higher Education a fundamental mission of production, organization and dissemination of scientific, cultural, professional and ethical knowledge for the development of the Nation and the progress of humanity" (Art. 2). Therefore, higher education appears as a driving force for the aspirations of Cameroonians for a better life, insofar as it aims fundamentally to satisfy the social demand

---

KOUMA Jean Cottin Gelin (Cameroon), Post-graduate student (Political Science), People's Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, Russia (cotingelin@yahoo.fr)

of a post-secondary education and the production of new knowledge that is both scholarly and practical. That is why «the State gives higher education a character of national priority» (Art. 3). Above all, it states that the State which grants higher education a character of national priority, organizes and controls it [30].

Secondly, there are the institutional measures, developed synergistically by all the countries of the CEMAC zone (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa) on February 11, 2005 in Libreville (Gabon), namely the declaration of the Chiefs concerning the construction of CEMAC space for higher education, research and vocational training. It was this political will that favored the start of the process of «Bolognization» of the Cameroonian university the same year.

Thirdly, Cameroon instituted the LMD system in 2007. These consultation meetings marked the materialization of the will of the «father of the nation», who had prescribed the effective start of the LMD in his speech to the nation on the eve of the youth festival, February 10, 2007 [25]. The adoption of this system in Cameroon met a twofold need: on the one hand, to guarantee the competitiveness of the training provided in the face of the globalization of knowledge; on the other hand, to harmonize diplomas and programs designed to promote greater readability, to allow greater mobility, to increase their effectiveness and to offer an exit to the world of employment [22].

Fourthly, there is the presidential prescription of February 10, 2008, according to which «we must radically transform the image of Higher Education in Cameroon» [2], which reinforces this real advance to internationalization and globalization of Cameroonian higher education [13]. Said prescription falls within the logic of global restructuring of Cameroonian higher education. President Biya intends, through this vision, to achieve «a university better piloted, better managed, better evaluated, generating a strong and competitive Africa at the national, sub-regional and international levels» [13].

Fifthly, the Strategy Paper for growth and employment (DSCE) was adopted by the Cameroonian government in 2009, which programmed the effective emergence of Cameroon by 2035. It is in line with the presidential prescription and identifies higher education as a major player in this perspective of emergence, which justifies the merits of the main mission that the document assigns to it, namely «the development of a creative, innovative and competitive human capital» [19].

After this set of legal texts reorganizing the

Cameroonian university system, the implementation agenda for the LMD system in Cameroon is defined in four phases backed up by a given data chronologically underlined as follows.

#### **FOUR STAGES TO PROFOUND CHANGES**

The first phase, which ran from 2005 to 2007, involved the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) of Cameroon organizing a series of consultations to study the feasibility and reliability of this project (LMD) to develop the possibilities and conditions for successful linkage to it and to rethink in depth the university training system as well as the curricula and teaching methods [25]. However, a local sociological diagnosis showed that despite the political will and enthusiasm of academic leaders, the adoption of the LMD model appeared «premature» [13] and that it should be emphasized that the justification put forward by the Cameroonian authorities for the adoption of the LMD system was that it was the global context of globalization of trade and the promotion of knowledge that Cameroon made a sudden adoption of this system [31].

The second start-up phase started at the beginning of the academic year (2007-2008) and concerned the Bachelor 1 and the Master 1. This phase aimed to test the state universities in the reform of the LMD and in the incentive to professionalize studies. The global challenge here is to use the LMD as «an instrument for the operationalization of the triple space of higher education, research and vocational training in the Central African sub-region» [25]. Regarding the local reception, «the LMD system is really a chance for the University. It's a chance to open up, to a professional world» [35]. It allows the student to intervene to perfect the program according to his future career plan. However, the massive use by Cameroonian universities of this exogenous model appears as a detrimental extraversion, a form of submission and dependence whose perverse effects can be significant [13]. It is true that there are strong reasons to believe that some academics were acting as «conservatives of outdated ideologies, even critics despising new ideas» [37].

The third phase called consolidation and finalization will extend during the academic years 2008/2009 and 2009/2010, and will include Bachelor 2 and Master 2 as well as the integration of all university cycles to the LMD model. That same year, Cameroonian universities will deliver the first degrees in the Bachelor and Master programs [13]. The LMD therefore appeared as a new educational

opportunity through which the university, through its missions and its teaching activities, research and initial and continuing vocational training, found its original vocation [17].

The fourth phase between 2011 and 2018 concerns the preservation of achievements and the continuation of the momentum initiated since the reform of the LMD. This system has brought a total revolution of the practices that have been going on in higher education institutions in Cameroon, and whose main thrust is innovation through the triptych: professionalization - employability - quality assurance.

Of great consequence is the professionalization of teaching with several vocational courses taught in Cameroonian universities and the existence at MINESUP of a program called Pole of Support for the Professionalization of Higher Education in Central Africa (PAPESEC). It offers capacity building and advisory services to institutions that request them on topics identified as relevant and that are not satisfied by other stakeholders. The Technological and Professional Component Support Program (Pro-ACTP) [16] is a real foundation on which the new dynamics observed at the level of the technological and professional component institutions, through rehabilitation programs, infrastructure building and laboratory equipment. There is an acceleration of professionalization [9] and the issuance of authorizations to provide vocational and technological education in Cameroon [29].

Then follows the employability of higher education diplomas (the creation of incubators for enterprises in some state universities: National Polytechnic School of the University of Yaoundé 1, the Faculty of Industrial Engineering of the University of Douala, University of Dschang, etc.). It is true that in the context of Cameroonian universities, whether public or private, the concept of technology, innovation and business incubator is still very recent and has not really been implemented, and in any case it is only at its beginning. Improving the employability of students is a MINESUP priority, driven by the slogan «one student, one job» [17]. In the same spirit, the Universities-Business Forum 2010 in Yaounde declared in its draft university-business partnership charter that one of the main innovative elements of the LMD system is the greater openness of the university to the socio-economic world. It included in the objectives of this charter the need to develop the student entrepreneurial culture.

Finally, there is the quality assurance evaluation mechanism available at MINESUP through the creation of the Department of Academic

Accreditations and Quality (DAUQ) [10] in 2012, through the project of self-evaluation of Cameroonian universities. Nevertheless, quality assurance in higher education is a relatively new phenomenon in Africa. In 2007 only 16 out of 52 countries in sub-Saharan Africa had national quality insurance agencies, most of them recently set up [18].

The full accomplishment of such missions necessarily leads to a change in operational paradigms. All the strategies deployed in public and private academic institutions will now have to tie in with this new paradigm of the knowledge economy through the production and dissemination of scholarly knowledge on the one hand and the practical knowledge on the other.

## **ARCHITECTURE OF CAMEROONIAN UNIVERSITY**

Our goal here is to give a succinct account of the current university architecture in Cameroon. The linkage to the LMD system substantially modified the university architecture at the double level of space and internal restructuring. In terms of space, the new state universities are created in Maroua (2008) and Bamenda (2010) as well as an arsenal of higher schools and faculties. Most universities are relocated and these measures aim to meet the needs of this influx of the Cameroonian student population. Universities that support the supervision of students are regularly confronted with various requests generally from Cameroonian students and even those from the countries of the sub-region. In addition, Cameroonian universities suffer from infrastructure problems, like the University of Douala which hosted for the academic year 2017/2018 nearly 70 thousand students, against a little over 66 thousand in 2016/2017 [40], a number that is constantly increasing in all other state universities.

The creation of academic institutions in all regions and remote parts of the country represents a way to relieve academic constraints and also a way to improve the conditions of supervision of students. Also, it allows to propose local responses based on an alternation of academic and administrative supervision. It is true that this relocation of the university is rather perceived as a political issue. To meet the demands of increased enrollment, universities also have a strategy of decentralization or delocalization of their activities from the main campus [18]. It is a political response consisting of providing each region with its university for the purposes of regional balance. The recent creations of the Higher Technical in Ebolowa, Garoua and Bertoua in 2017 have just consolidated this state of

affairs. These higher schools are very popular because they lead to jobs for civil servants [32]. In addition to 8 State universities, Cameroon has 242 private institutes of Higher Education (IPES) including the Catholic University of Central Africa (UCAC), the Protestant University of Central Africa (UPAC) located in Yaoundé, the University of Mountains (UDM) in Bagangté, the Adventist University of Nanga-Eboko [21].

This brings the number of students to 520,000 students in 2018 in state and private universities [21]. This opening of higher education to the private sector aims at increasing the supply, increasing the capacity of reception, the diversification of the training by the creation of the professional sectors which can meet the real needs in human resources of the national economy [39]. It is true that these private universities are very expensive for poor or middle-income families [38].

Fully committed to innovation, Cameroonian universities are able to reduce the scientific divide and resist the exodus to the industrialized countries with which they develop mutually beneficial cooperation programs. However, it is important to note that the university system is broadly divided into 8 State universities where it exposes their Western affiliation [28]. They are considered peripheral, regarding western universities as central and paradigmatic [1].

This politicization of the university and the reform [27] organize new dynamics in the academic and administrative field, particularly in the career of the teacher and support staff and the status of the student.

## **THE ACTIONS OF THE CAMEROONIAN GOVERNMENT**

Until 2004, the Cameroonian university was confronted with the gravitational forces generated by inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructure, exponential growth in student demand, teachers sometimes unmotivated and unfamiliar with the LMD system and mechanisms for setting up projects eligible for funding from bilateral and multilateral cooperation [27].

From the year 2005, the Cameroonian university has chosen the path of modernity and academic praxis [27]. Thus, between 2005 and 2018, several factors contribute to the transformation of the Cameroonian university. These main factors are punctuated by reforms and new initiatives whose particularity is that they constitute the stages or strata of this evolution [23]. Observing the practices, discourses and modes of operation of academic

institutions show that they feed on novelties and new ideas [26].

The first aspect relates to the political will of President Paul Biya who has placed the Cameroonian university at the forefront of development policy. From the new university governance inspired by the Head of State [15], the orchestrated reforms spring from the eminence of the person loyal and faithful to the president, at the head of the Ministry of Higher Education since 2004.

President Biya is a credible resource in the current development of the Cameroonian university system. Even as some see in these acts of the President of the Republic a mobilization of power to strengthen his position, under the rhetorical cover of globalized pressure [24] imposed by the LMD, it must at least recognize that the Minister Fane Ndongo Jacques offers an impressive work on this sector. There he established a pedagogy of hope that overcame the ideology of fatalism, conformism, and deception that the enemies of progress wanted to impose at all costs. To the mentality of «Cameroon can do nothing», he opposed the right to dream that another image of higher education is possible, inspired by the very high instructions of president Paul Biya, great architect of the new governance university.

Through direct observations, the improvement of the working conditions of the actors of the university community becomes a reality. The Cameroonian university field is marked by highly qualified teachers. The faculty consists of teachers whose curricula vitae has credibility of the institution in the eyes of the African and Malagasy Council of Higher Education (CAMES). The highest density of Cameroonian associate professors in legal, political, economic, management and medical sciences is considerable in Central Africa. It has always been present at the different sessions of the aggregation contest. Internally, the advancement of the grades of teachers is based on a battery of laws and regulations that clearly indicate the procedure to be followed to move from one grade to another, via the Consultative Committee of Interuniversity Institutions (CCIU) [12].

The quality of higher education in Cameroon is based on the working conditions of its teachers. This concerns teachers from the perspective of the evolution of their working conditions. Teachers practice in a rather favorable conditions characterized by the introduction in 2009 of the premium for the modernization of university research which is of the order of \$18,7 mln per year and which allows teachers to publish high-level books and innovative articles in the best scientific

journals of the world [16]. Higher education and research drive peoples' progress through innovation, inventiveness and creativity [15]. Moreover, the support staff of public universities have for the first time had a special status since 2011 [11].

Without support staff, the work of teachers is nil and of no effect. They are the architects of the university. With endurance, perseverance and competence they work in the shadows. It is in view of the neuralgic place they occupy in society that the Head of State has prescribed studies for the elaboration of their special status [4].

As regards students, in addition to the excellence bonus paid regularly to the most deserving of them since 2010, for an overall amount of \$8 mln per year in addition to the educational, heuristic and socio-cultural infrastructures of more and more high-quality, they were entitled, in the year 2017, to a presidential gift of 500 thousand computers for all state and private universities of Cameroon and 9 university digital development Centers in 8 State Universities and the Cameroon-Congo Inter-State University [16].

This major achievement promotes a global emulation within the area of higher education and research in Central Africa, despite the feeding of a real campaign of denigration in order to discourage efforts of public authorities. The digital education that is the foundation of the university of the future, the university of the 21st century, *new-look* university becomes a reality in Cameroon. This university becomes more professional, more digital, more collaborative and more committed to stimulate creativity and find solutions to the great societal challenges of humanity.

The New Information and Communication Technologies (NTIC) associated with the concept of «knowledge economy» have taken a capital importance. This idea of linking the Cameroonian university to the global digital space takes shape in a context of exponential growth in the production of knowledge, as well as massive investment in their present and future development. These innovations are also transnational, such as the creation of interstate schools [23], like the

Cameroon-Congo Inter-State University in Sangmelima and Ouesso [8].

The internationalization and globalization of Cameroonian higher education is sufficiently prepared and implemented in an environment where Cameroon is undeniably the hegemon and provides sufficient part of the GDP of the entire Central Africa countries [20]. But the universities of the Central Africa subregion or of Cameroon precisely, are still at the «bottom of the wave in terms of the existence of resources in gray matter» [30]. This means that there is still much to do and perfect for the constant and progressive improvement of the living and working conditions of the components of the entire university community [5].

The linkage of Cameroonian higher education to the Bologna process is first and foremost the result of an evolution in higher education. It is, on the other hand, the result of a political will to modernize and develop a national higher education system that has reached its limits because of a lack of innovation and daring to cope with local needs.

Nevertheless, the Africanization of the LMD through its transposition into the politics of higher education is part of a desire to «stick to the European wagon», especially since the social recognition of students and African executives often still passes through European standardization. The effects induced by the Bologna process affect African countries and their university populations, who are forced to reorganize their higher education system [14]. Cameroon will have to re-root itself in order to base its modernity on its own values for the future and revive its creativity. Although some people have believed that Africa can not be content to plagiarize any imported model, even by the so-called LMD reform [6].

The challenge of the LMD system is not to produce only knowledge, but to make the product of training adequate to the needs of the socio-economic sector [3]. All this requires the establishment of a climate of democratic freedom and a meritocratic university system capable of staving off economic and social development. The LMD promises a better visibility of higher education.

## References

1. Atangana J.C. (2010). The university and national construction in Cameroon: assessment and prospects. Thesis for PhD, University of Paris X-Nanterre.
2. Biya P. Speech to the Youth of February 10, 2008 - [www.prc.cm](http://www.prc.cm) (accessed 20.05.2017)
3. Bouzeriba R. (2018). The Competence Approach in Higher Education. Paris, L'Harmattan. 258 p.
4. Cameroon Tribune Daily, Yaoundé, 26.05.2011.
5. Cameroon Tribune Daily, 22.11.2013.
6. Cijika K.C. (2018). Contexts, Debates, Critics, Issues and Perspectives. Paris, Les Implies.
7. Declaration of the Sorbonne signed in 1998 by the ministers of higher education of the European countries: Germany, Italy, France and the United Kingdom - [www.minesup.gov.cm](http://www.minesup.gov.cm) (accessed 02.04.2017)

8. Declaration created the Cameroon-Congo Inter-State University on December 21, 2012 - [www.diplocam.cm](http://www.diplocam.cm) (accessed 22.07.2016)
9. Decree № 2012/433 of 5 September 2012 establishing the University Accreditation and Quality Department. Yaoundé.
10. Decree № 06/0014 / MINESUP / DDES of February 2, 2006, creating, regulating studies and assessments of the professional licensing of universities in Cameroon.
11. Decree № 2012/433 of 05 September 2012 on the organization of the Ministry of Higher Education. Yaoundé.
12. Decree of May 18, 2011 for the support staff of the special status. Yaoundé.
13. Decree of the President of the Republic signed in October 1994. Yaoundé.
14. Djouda F.Y.B. (2009). The adoption of the LMD system «by the universities of Cameroon: issues, constraints and perspectives» // *The Journal of Higher Education in Africa (JHEA)*, vol. 7, № 1-2, pp. 141-157.
15. Éyébiyi E.P. (2011). The alignment of West African higher education // *Cahiers of Research on Education and Knowledge*, Special Issue 3, pp. 43-59.
16. Fame N.J. (2009). What higher education and what research, in Africa // *Geostrategic*, vol. 25, pp. 229-235.
17. Fame N.J. (2017). The offer of the military training has expanded // *Cameroon Tribune*, 18 September.
18. Fame N.J. (2007). The LMD system or the horizon a student, a job // *Sup Infos*, № 6, December.
19. Goolam M. (2011). Higher Education in Africa: Facing the Challenges in the 21st Century // *International Higher Education*, № 63, 20-21.
20. Growth and Jobs Strategy Paper (GESP), 2010-2020 Policy Framework for Action, August 2009 - [www.minepat.gov.cm](http://www.minepat.gov.cm) (accessed 01.08.2018)
21. Hugon P. (2005). Sub-Saharan Africa: a contrasting face // *The Strategic Year 2005*, Paris, Armand Colin, pp. 385-405.
22. *L'Action Daily*, 31.08.2018.
23. Leclerc M.O.E. (2011). *Academic worlds facing the market: circulation of knowledge and practices of actors*. Paris, Karthala, 396 p.
24. Makosso B. et al. (2009). *Higher Education in Francophone Africa: Crises, Reforms and Transformations. Comparative study between Congo, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso*. Dakar: CODESRIA.
25. Mazella S. (eds.) (2009). *Student globalization. The Maghreb between North and South*. Paris, Karthala, 404 p.
26. Ministerial Circular No. 07/0003 MINESUP / CAB / IGA / of October 19, 2007. Yaoundé.
27. Njuguna N. (2003). *Improvement in Innovations in Higher Education: Innovations in Universities in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi, Kenya.
28. Ngwe L., Pokam H. et al. (2008). The Emergence and Prospects of Private Higher Education in Cameroon // *JHEA*, vol. 6, № 1, pp. 95-125.
29. Niang A. (2005). Research and its blocking factors in French-speaking African universities: the experience of Senegalese universities // *JHEA*, vol. 3, № 1, pp. 77-100.
30. Order № 10/0395 of 16 November 2010 setting the framework and organization of the authorization to provide vocational training (HDPT). Yaoundé.
31. Orientation Law of Higher Education of April 16, 2001. Yaoundé.
32. Pefedieu D. (2008). The Cameroon LMD System - [www.pdgweb.afrikblog.com](http://www.pdgweb.afrikblog.com) (accessed 20.07.2018)
33. Pigeaud F. (2011). In Cameroon of Paul Biya. Paris, Karthala, 276 p.
34. Speech by Prof. Jacques Fame Ndongo, Minister of Higher Education of Cameroon and Chancellor of Academic Orders on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the proceedings of the General Assembly of the Conference of Rectors of French-Speaking Universities Africa and the Indian Ocean (CRUFAOCI), which took place on Monday, February 19, 2018 at the 1000 Amphitheatre of the University of Dschang-Cameroon - [www.minesup.gov.cm](http://www.minesup.gov.cm) (accessed 25.04.2018)
35. Speech of Prof. Jacques Fame Ndongo, Minister of Higher Education on the occasion of the ceremony of presentation at the Amphitheatre 700 of the University of Yaounde I, Friday, January 27, 2017 - [www.minesup.gov.cm](http://www.minesup.gov.cm) (accessed 13.09.2017)
36. *Mutations Daily*, 20.07.2006.
37. The Treaty Establishing CEMAC signed on 16 March 1994 in N'Djamena (Chad) - [www.minesup.gov.cm](http://www.minesup.gov.cm) (accessed 14.03.2015)
38. Touraine A. (1984). *The return of the actor. Essay of sociology*. Paris, Editions Fayard, 238 p.
39. Tsafack Nanfoss R. (2006). The dynamics of private higher education in Cameroon // *JHEA / RESA*, 4 (2), pp. 99-122.
40. University of Douala academic year 2017/2018 - [www.uni-douala.com](http://www.uni-douala.com) (accessed 12.05.2018)