



**THE WORLD BANK'S KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY POLICY
OBJECTIVES IN CAMEROON'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES 1993-2016:
CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BUEA**

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Abstract:

In conjunction with the neoliberal prescriptions of the Berg Report of 1981, most African countries adopted the World Bank's knowledge economic policy as a defining tool for university's contribution to economic development amid a wide range of challenges. Through the lens of the international regime theory and non-positivist theoretical approach, this study uses a case study design and qualitative research paradigm to investigate how Cameroon's public universities responded to the knowledge economy objective and how it affected their processes between 1993 and 2016. Using semi-structured interviews to collect primary data from academics, top management, and administrative support staff at the University of Buea, including documents and secondary data sources, results indicate that overall, reduced, and irregular public expenditure has weakened the ability of Cameroon's public universities to create, valorise, disseminate, and apply knowledge to enhance economic development. Particularly, the policy has induced a complex-type relationship between the higher education governing structure and public universities, giving rise to new and confusing dimensions in the character of public universities in Cameroon. Hence, the study concludes that international education policy strategies could be a potential source of diversion and confusion in the national education systems of receiving countries.

Keywords: World Bank, knowledge economy, neoliberalism, education policy, public universities, Cameroon, Africa

1. Research Background

Most universities in Africa were created at the dawn of independence from colonial rule in the early 1960s and thereafter. Upon creation, citizens received education and were also trained to conduct research that would influence economic development within the context of the needs, demands and aspirations of their countries (Elias, 1965;

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Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013). This was crucial because, prior to independence, most citizens of these countries pursued university education abroad, which 'was poorly adapted to the needs of Africa in general', as in the case of Cameroon (Njeuma et al., 1999, p. 2). To achieve their objectives, most African governments placed higher education (HE) exclusively under their authority—all costs borne by the government, considering education as entirely a public good. For example, the government of Cameroon embarked on a generous plan to increase enrolment in universities and lower the quota of students pursuing HE abroad. It established a tuition-free education, which was accompanied by 'well-paid bursaries' with subsidised meals and accommodation (Njeuma et al., 1999, p. 3). Academics were also well motivated, and the phenomenon continued until 1993 when Cameroon embarked on a new public management scheme for its HE in accordance with WB recommendations for sectoral policies for Africa in the 1990s and beyond (WB, 1988).

Being the first ever major HE reforms in Cameroon, the 1993 university reforms came amid challenges such as surging enrolment against stagnated infrastructure and the lack of other facilities to ease research, teaching, and learning. Despite post-independence challenges in the 1960s, much progress was made in economic development prior to the recession that hit most African countries in the 1980s. The crisis inspired the World Bank (WB) with the support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to sponsor a study to determine the cause and solution of the economic crisis in Africa. The study ended up as the 1981 Berg report, *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action*. The report pointed to the 'poor growth of the productive sectors, a declining level and efficiency of investment, waning exports, mounting debt, deteriorating social conditions and an increasing erosion of institutional capacity' (Heidhues & Obare, 2011, p. 56). Therefore, to restabilise the economy of African countries in accordance with the Berg Report, WB responded with a series of policy recommendations based on its new liberal economic ideology—neoliberalism, which was then adopted as the blueprint for the development of African countries (WB, 1981).

The recommendations of the Berg Report focused on a significant reduction in the role of the state in the economy and the reliance on market forces for the allocation of resources, including in the HE subsector (WB, 1981; Owusu, 2003). It was followed by three successive WB policy research documents that advocated for the reduction of public expenditure for HE in Sub-Saharan Africa based on the claim that it was unnecessarily high, inefficiently utilised and portrayed profound social inequalities in comparison to allocations in other sectors (WB, 1986; WB, 1988; WB, 1994). Among others, the reports recommended the adoption of private financing and 'selective user charges' in HE for redistribution of the revenue to lower education levels, capacity development for employees, research, and innovation, increase autonomy for public universities, etc., which coincided with the World Bank's knowledge economy (KE) development perspective—knowledge and innovation (research) and the capacity to absorb and use new knowledge for economic development, otherwise defined as the production,

valorisation and application of knowledge aimed at economic efficiency, competitiveness, profitability, or effectiveness (Jessop, 2017).

Therefore, motivated by WB's concern for the economic development of African countries using knowledge regimes, this study uses a case study design and qualitative research paradigm through the perspective of the international regime theory to investigate the KE policy of the WB in the HE subsector, more specifically, public universities in Cameroon. Using the University of Buea (UB) as a case study, this research specifically seeks to examine how public universities in Cameroon responded to KE policy objectives and how it affected their processes between 1993 and 2016. The aim is to highlight the importance of education policy actions based on specific country circumstances and needs.

2. New Management Approach to Public Higher Education in Cameroon

UB is one of six public universities created in 1993 by Presidential Decree No. 92/74 of 13th April 1992, harmonised by Decree No. 93/034 of 19th January 1993 (Njeuma et al., 1999) in response to WB's demands for HE sectoral adjustments in pursuit of economic development of Cameroon. This happened in line with shared neoliberal international education policy objectives intended to enhance the ability of individual nation-states to secure outcomes influenced by the efficient allocation of resources in the education sector (WB, 1981; WB, 1986; WB, 1988). The strategy involved broadening the participation of different stakeholders in the financing and management of HE as well as professionalising university studies. The goal was to enhance the special skills and competencies of the country's human resources and lead it to a strengthened competitive advantage position in the global marketplace (WB, 1990; Samoff & Carrol, 2004).

The 1993 reform measures split the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, which managed both HE and scientific research between 1984 and 1992 into two entities. The Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation (MINRESI) then emerged and was charged with eight research institutes for scientific research and innovation. The Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) also emerged and was charged with all public universities in Cameroon, which now function under its direct supervisory authority in accordance with Presidential Decree 93/027 of 19th January 1993 and laws No. 98/004 of 4th April 1998 and No. 005/2001, defining common conditions for the operation of universities in Cameroon. MINESUP provides guidelines and mission objectives, including institutional and system-wide policy perspectives constituting the essence of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Cameroon (Ministry of Higher Education, January 2015, 19). Basically, alongside presidential decrees, MINESUP determines the governance structure of public universities in Cameroon. This explains why all public universities have the same organigramme with rector (vice chancellor) as head of the university, three vice chancellors, registrar, directors, deans and vice, heads of department, etc. This justifies the single case choice of UB, which enabled a very detailed examination in real

life context of how public universities in Cameroon responded to WB's education policy objectives for economic development.

System-wide HE policies, which determine the institutional management systems of public universities are maintained by Cameroon's government through MINESUP. Within the framework of Presidential Decree No. 93/034 of 19th January 1993, public universities were granted limited academic, financial and management autonomy with just basic infrastructure and public expenditure support (Njueman et al., 1999). Particularly, they were tasked to broaden and increase different stakeholder participation in their financing, including students' compulsory registration fees of FCFA 50,000 (about EUR 76.2, increased from FCFA 3,500) per academic year. These were reinforced by Law No. 005 of 16th April 2001, Presidential Decree No. 2005/142 of 28th April 2005, Law No. 2005/342 of 10th September 2005 and Presidential Decree No.2005/383 of 17th October 2005. They guide public universities, encourage the involvement of external stakeholders in policy formulation and implementation and define common conditions and financial regulations for the operation of universities in Cameroon. MINESUP, for instance, has a Division of Planning, Research and Cooperation, charged with elaborating the processes of government policy relating to research in HE and a unit charged with coordinating and monitoring university research activities, among other things.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The non-positivist/post-structuralist approach to qualitative research alongside the regime theory determined the framework of analysis for this study.

3.1 Non-Positivism/Poststructuralism

The non-positivist philosophical approach to qualitative research asserts that reality to every phenomenon is subjectively constructed and independent of our thinking because knowledge develops in contexts, such as historical period, geographic place, and local culture (Savin-Baden & Tombs, 2017; Dillet, 2017; Trochim, 2020). According to Clarke & Braun (2013), this implies that knowledge must not be considered outside the context in which it was generated. This aligns with the contention that reality is the observation and interpretation of the perceptions of people and phenomena in a natural setting (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Neuman, 2014; see Khan, 2014, p. 225). This logic is chosen to challenge the idea of validating as reality a stance that is adopted from outside the appropriate context (Dillet, 2017), which also highlights the importance of basing education policy objectives on specific circumstances, needs, and aspirations of a people or country as opposed to worldviews or the convictions of international development organisations.

The use of the case study approach in this study—particularisation, defined by depth, breadth, and rigour, presents *“a rich portrayal of a single setting to inform practice, establish the value of the case and/or add knowledge of a specific topic”* (Simons, 2009, p. 24), WB KE development theory, in this case. Using it within a non-positivist paradigm,

enabled the exploration of the thought that different circumstances, history, and cultural heritages have different implications on policy measures. It also provided an opportunity to learn a great deal from a single case and the possibility to use its results for inferences to other contexts and to demonstrate tacitly the importance of context as a considerable factor in policy design and practice as contends Patton (2002). Hence, informed by the non-positivist/poststructuralist approach to research, the study focused on its natural setting—UB, Cameroon. Then, a complex and holistic picture was built of the setting and primary data were collected and analysed with careful consideration of circumstances in the setting (Cresswell, 1998). That is, the WB's education policy adoptions in Cameroon's context were analysed within this post-structuralist/non-positivist reasoning.

3.2 Regime Theory

International regimes are major international institutions deliberately constructed with sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making strategies around which the expectations of concerned actors converge in given areas of international relations (Krasner, 1982; Hasenclever et al., 2000; Tarzi, 2003; Amaral, 2010). Considered as a pervasive characteristic of the international system, regimes independently influence the behaviours of states with varying consequences, both in interstate relations and international cooperation (Tarzi, 2003). They institute partial international orders on a regional or global scale with the intention to enhance the ability of individual nation-states to secure outcomes influenced by the efficient allocation of resources in specific issue areas of international politics (Krasner, 1982; Hasenclever et al., 2000). Regarding the international dimension of education policies, Amaral (2010) contends that regimes do not have a strictly formal control system within which all participants are to act. Irrespective of the situation, regime actors are more inclined to respect regime norms over their strategic calculations for the simple reason to win a good reputation from other actors based on their behaviour towards instituted norms (Kersbergen and Verbeek, 2007).

It is based on the foregoing that this study examined the following research questions:

- 1) How did University of Buea (UB) respond to the knowledge economy (KE) policy objectives from 1993 to 2016?
- 2) How did the knowledge economy (KE) policy objectives affect the University of Buea (UB)?

Consequently, in analysing the study data, consideration was given to WB's intention to enhance Cameroon's ability to secure maximum economic development outcomes through its public universities guided by rules enforceable through partial orders (Krasner, 1982; Hasenclever et al., 2000). Hence, KE processes at UB were examined in relation to WB's agreed policy position aimed at economic development for Cameroon with consideration of the lack thereof, of a formal control system to strictly guide and enforce the rules involved (Amaral, 2010).

3.3 Methods

A systematic approach was used to gather and analyse information from different sources, primary and secondary, to develop knowledge about UB's KE processes for economic development. This included the due process in identifying and soliciting participants and preparing research materials and tools for data collection (Rudestam & Newton, 2007).

3.3.1 Interviews and Document Reviews

The semi-structured interview method was used as a data collection tool for this study. An interview guide was used to organise the questions in themes—University mission and research priority area(s), Funding sources and criteria for Research and collaboration, and Knowledge creation and application to ensure that these topic areas were covered. The interview process was characterised by high levels of flexibility in the nature and design of the interview questions, which allowed respondents much space to answer on their own terms and a chance for me to examine answers and forge a dialogue to get a clear understanding of their experiences and to maintain the emphasis of the research (Buck, 2005; Edwards & Holland, 2013).

Besides interview data, documents (non-technical literature) such as diverse WB country, regional and special reports, university reports and internal correspondences (memos, correspondences, special text documents and reports) were reviewed. They were considered as potential sources of empirical data for case studies that could help uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Bowen, 2009). Accordingly, policy documents and reports from MINESUP and UB, including circular and service notes, ministerial and presidential decrees provided background and context. Some of the documents were obtained under strict conditions and in confidentiality because they contained records and information considered to be personal, sensitive, and not for public consumption. These documents prompted additional questions during the interview exercise, provided supplementary data, a means of tracking change, and influenced development as well as enhanced verification of findings from other data sources (Bowen, 2009).

To guarantee the validity and accuracy of the information in some documents, some participants were interviewed in relation to the context and purpose for which some documents were produced and to seek convergence and corroboration through different data sources and methods (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bowen, 2009). This also enabled us to determine the gap in policy adoption, conceptualisation, and realities in UB and induced a better understanding of the way in which Cameroon's public universities function in relation to knowledge creation and application for economic development.

3.3.2 Selection of Respondents

The selection of respondents was determined by the intention to examine UB's knowledge creation, dissemination, and application processes for the economic development of Cameroon. The selection criteria aimed at exploring to understand how

UB's internal stakeholders perceived, conceptualised, and managed knowledge for economic development, which required that respondents be carefully chosen to match the need. Therefore, purposive sampling was used to select respondents within UB, not simply for representation purposes but for the purpose of being able to get from them adequate information (Neuman, 2014) about knowledge management—knowledge creation and application processes at the university, in relation to economic development. Respondents were selected from amongst academics, administrative and support staff, and top management personnel from different faculties and departments, particularly from those units with a direct causal relationship with knowledge creation and application—applied science units. They included the faculties of Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture, Education, Health Sciences, Engineering and Technology, Life Sciences, Social and Management Sciences, and the College of Technology.

Since the objective was to be rather 'saturated' with information on the topic than to maximise the number of respondents (Bowen, 2005), three categories of respondents were identified from the ranks of academics, top management personnel and administrative support staff. Then, based on knowledge of their positions and responsibilities (including academic/professional qualifications and experience) and on recommendation by other colleague respondents, they were selected from each category. Neuman (2014) defines this as a non-random sampling in which a researcher begins with one case and then based on information about interrelationships from that case, identifies other cases and repeats the process again and again (p. 275). In simple terms, some respondents referred other respondents whom they knew were also very resourceful or directly concerned with the subject matter under investigation. Table 1 is a representation of the interview chart.

Table 1: Number of Interview Respondents at UB

No	Level	Respondents	Code names	Category	Respondents by Disciplinary fields
1	Top management	6	M1 - M6	Overall planning and direction responsibilities	N/A
2	Academics/ teachers	10	R1 - R10	Researchers	- Life sciences: 02 - Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture: 05 - Education: 02 - Social & Management Sciences: 01
3	Administrative/ support staff	9	A1 - A9	Heads of basic units and support staff	N/A
Total		25			10

A total of 25 respondents took part in the open-ended interviews. Some respondents had dual capacities, serving as academics as well as in top management positions. For reasons of anonymity backed by informed consent and confidentiality agreements, details pertaining to positions held by respondents from the units have not been disclosed.

- 'Top management' category refers to officials at the institutional level who participate in formulating and governing university-wide policies. They also ensure the execution of system-wide policies through their management processes.
- 'Academics/teachers' represents the corps of teaching staff actively involved in research and teaching activities.
- 'Administrative staff' refers to the heads of basic units and support staff working in different faculties, departments, and central administration of UB, including from the Research and Publications as well as Cooperation units.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thorne (2000) contends that data analysis includes the theoretical perspective of the researcher on the phenomenon under examination, the strategies employed in data collection and the overall understanding of the researcher of the data that is relevant in answering the research question. Guided by the non-positivist philosophical view and the international regime theory, both deductive and inductive systematic thematic approaches were used to analyse the research data on UB's response to WB's knowledge economy – knowledge for development idea.

While the regime theory formed the base for an appropriate assessment of the way universities react to global/international education policies within particular contexts, the deductive analytic approach enabled appropriate measurement of the level of data consistency with the theory, including the global education policy and neoliberal dimensions, and prior assumptions of the study in the analysis (Thomas, 2016). On the other hand, the inductive systematic thematic procedure facilitated the emergence of findings from frequent, dominant, or significant themes that were inherent in the data, without imposing any restraints on the methods used (Boyatzis, 1998; Thomas, 2016). For example, by examining information collected from document analysis, the approach enabled appropriate corroboration with findings across datasets and reduced the impact of potential biases in the study (Bowen, 2009, p. 28). Therefore, the non-positive philosophical view was important to guide the understanding and analysis of data within the context (circumstances, needs and aspirations) of Cameroon (Creswell, 2012).

The following table presents the themes developed from the data and illustrates how they were analysed based on critical thinking, data evidence, and theoretical perspective guided by the non-positive paradigm.

Table 2: Research questions, Themes and Analytical Dimensions

Research Questions	Theme	Analytical Dimension
1. How did UB respond to KE policy objectives of knowledge creation, valorisation, and application, towards the economic development of Cameroon?	KE endeavour: Teaching, Research and knowledge dissemination and application, 1993–2016.	In relation to KE conceptualisation of knowledge development and creation for the advancement of science and technology, as well as within institutional development of special skills for the valorisation and application of knowledge.

2. How did KE policy objectives affect UB?	KE vision and educational activities of UB.	In consideration of the conceptual underpinnings of the policy objectives and in relation to the international regime theory.
	Funding KE public university—UB.	Higher Education Reform measures, 1993–2016. In relation to KE conceptual and theoretical framework.

4. Results

This study examined how UB responded to WB's KE policy objectives for the economic development of Cameroon between 1993 and 2016. Guided by the non-positivist/post-structuralist philosophical view, the data was analysed through the lens of the international regime theory, which contends that regimes coordinate the behaviours of the individual (self-interested) states through cooperative actions, sets of implicit and explicit principles, norms, and decision-making strategies to enhance their capacity to realise collective common and optimal outcomes (Krasner, 1982; Hasenclever et al., 2000; Tarzi, 2003; Amaral, 2010). Worth noting is that even though there is abundant research on universities and global education policy, this is supposedly the first study to research the situation of Cameroon's public universities in relation to WB's KE policy. As a reminder, it set out to answer the following research questions:

- How did University of Buea (UB) respond to knowledge economy (KE) policy objectives from 1993 to 2016?
- How did the knowledge economy (KE) policy objectives affect the University of Buea (UB)?

Based on the research questions, the following main findings about UB's processes in relation to KE policy objectives were obtained as represented in Table 3. To arrive at the results, categories were constructed from collected data in relation to the KE objectives—the production, valorisation and application of knowledge aimed at economic efficiency, competitiveness, profitability, or effectiveness (Jessop, 2017). The table shows the research questions as well as the themes developed from the dataset and illustrates the analytical dimensions used to arrive at the results. The findings obtained from data analysis in relation to the research questions are summarised.

Table 3: Themes, Analytical Research Dimensions and Results for KE Tendencies

Research Questions	Theme	Analytical Dimension	Results
1. How did UB respond to KE policy objective of knowledge creation, valorisation, and application towards the economic development of Cameroon?	KE endeavour: Teaching, research and knowledge dissemination and application, 1993–2016.	In relation to KE conceptualisation of knowledge development and creation for the advancement of science and technology, as well as within institutional development of special skills for the valorisation and application of knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MINESUP's Division of Planning, Research and Cooperation is a unit for coordinating and monitoring UB research activities, amongst others. - Traditional teaching and research prioritised, with minimal, insufficient, and irregular incentives. - No pragmatic endeavours in knowledge-intensive activities (STEM).
2. How did KE policy objective affect UB?	KE Vision and educational activities of UB.	In consideration of the conceptual underpinnings of KE policy objectives and in relation to the international regime theory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UB's vision is highly influenced by WB's neoliberal KE education policy measures. - UB is highly regulated by system-wide policies (MINESUP)—minimal autonomy and educational achievement (knowledge creation, valorisation, and application). - Priority given to traditional teaching and basic research.
	Funding KE public university—UB.	Higher Education Reform measures, 1993–2016, in relation to KE conceptual and theoretical framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced and irregular public expenditure support for UB—less than 30% rate of receipt. - More research funding to MINRESI—in charge of scientific research and innovation and very little funding attention on research for UB. - Reduced public investment per student (fell by 37%, 1993–1996).

Between 1993 and 2016, UB was unable to achieve far-reaching development in its teaching and research endeavours. Under MINESUP charged with sustaining the traditional mission of universities (Gaillard, van Lill, Nyasse & Wakata, 2014, UB prioritised traditional teaching methodologies and basic research activities, accompanied by minimal, insufficient, and irregular incentives. This was mainly because, in line with WB's knowledge of development policy, the government created MINRESI with eight specialised research institutes charged with scientific research and innovation. This action undermined the research capacity and vision of public universities and left them with very little funding which constrained their capacity for the production, valorisation, and application of knowledge for economic development. The following interview data from Respondent R7 affirms the assertion:

"The research allowance is not even something that we can count on for our research work [laughter]. First of all, it is too small to support any kind of research. Second, we have to fight for it to be paid. Sometimes, it takes several months for us to get it. How do you expect us to use it for research when our salaries as civil servants are too small to even support our living expenses?"

Consequently, UB lacked the ability to enhance the applicability of its study programmes or to translate the outcomes into marketable goods and services. Even though teaching and basic research were fundamental in its mission objectives, the university failed to meet international standards regarding teaching conditions, curriculum development and the use of pedagogical equipment and so achieved very little in terms of teaching quality and general educational output as reflected in the general education situation. In the 2006/2007 academic year, for instance, the student population was 10,295 against an academic staff number of 242 (138 with doctoral degrees) for 32 academic programmes in 25 departments in 6 faculties with a staff-to-student ratio of 1:42.5, enabling a class size variation of 300 to 1,000 students for common programme courses (UB Strategic Plan, 2007). The situation forced academics to concentrate more time on teaching over research; especially given that motivational funding allocations for research such as Staff Development Grant (SDG), Research Allowance (RA), Research Modernisation Allowance (RMA) and Faculty/School Research Grant (FSRG) were small and inconsistent.

Advancements in technological and scientific research did not actually constitute a crucial part of UB's economic development role. By 2007, UB had not elaborated any systematic approach that defined system-wide policy guidelines for science, technology, and innovative research. Its first attempt was indicated by the 2007-2015 strategic plan document where it elaborated its desires for knowledge production, dissemination, and application for economic development in its 2007–2015. Notwithstanding, UB fell short of pragmatic measures regarding the implementation of the plan. This was mainly due to the lack of adequate infrastructure, basic labs, and other requirements necessary for boosting its productive research activities. This was reflected in the nonexistence and

delay in the creation of regulatory research committees or boards. For example, UB's institutional review board (IRB) in charge of policies on ethical research conduct and the committee on academic integrity (CAI) in charge of policies on academic misconduct were not available in 2009, 16 years into UB's attempt at knowledge for the economic development of Cameroon.

Unsuspectingly, MINESUP mostly encouraged internal collaboration among university staff members, enhancement of traditional teaching and basic research capacities of junior staff members and their general welfare by special allowances and grants that were, unfortunately, not sustainable. In 1999, UB had not acquired the required cream of qualified academics to pursue knowledge production, its valorisation, dissemination, and application for economic development (Njeuma et. al, 1999). Most of its academics did not have terminal degrees. Assistant lecturers, including those with master's and doctoral degrees with no teaching experience and publications, constituted up to 69% of the academic staff. This is evident in the suspension of two of its peer-review journals because it lacked qualified academics to ensure the sustainability of research activities 20 years down the line. The lack of qualified academics in public universities was partly due to competition from private universities, created in line with the implementation of WB's deregulation, liberalisation, competition, and privatisation policy in public service delivery (Ross & Gibson, 2006). Hence, even with tuition fees, UB still was unable to enhance education and science, build new technologies for innovation and train a highly qualified labour force as the main determining factors of Cameroon's long-term development goals (Powell & Snellman, 2004).

However, In September 2010, the government approved and supervised the creation of the Faculty of Engineering and Technology at UB, which expanded the structure of the university's academic programmes to include professional programmes. In line with KE objectives, these professional programmes have, over time, graduated qualified professionals with applicable skills needed for different economic sectors. From the year 2000, new academic programmes in the health sciences and education disciplines enabled the training and production of a workforce with skills in both applied sciences and traditional disciplines. Similarly, COT, created in 2010, graduated students with special skills and competencies in the context of qualified human resources with the ability to spur economic competition. The Faculties of Veterinary Medicine and Agriculture, Engineering and Technology also trained and graduated some enterprising students who can engage in entrepreneurial activities and offer practical skills in agriculture, information technology and engineering sectors.

Accordingly, the vision and funding mechanism of UB was greatly influenced by the shared KE (international education) policy experience and not based on specific country circumstances. The university aligned with the accepted international regime's sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, and rules (the KE policy objective), which often are determined by the stakes of the strong actors that constitute the regime (Krasner, 1982; Hasenclever et al., 2000; Tarzi, 2003; Amaral, 2010). Therefore, Cameroon's public universities were influenced by system-wide policies, which were overshadowed by the

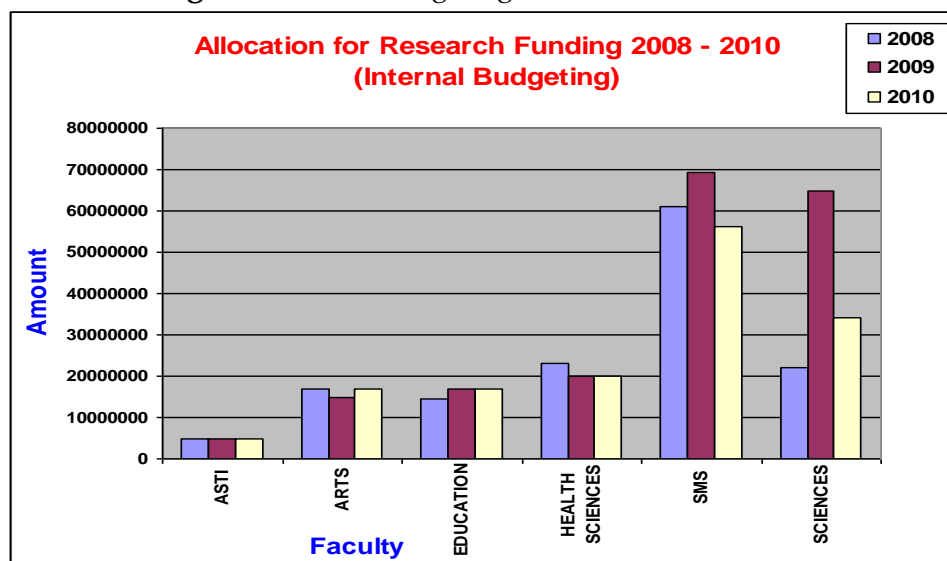
structural adjustment programme (SAP) of the WB and International Monetary fund (IMF) as the only probable solution for the social and economic development of struggling African countries at the time (WB, 1981; WB, 1989; Heidhues & Obare, 2011). And in respect of WB's recommendation, Cameroon's finance law on public investment programmes reoriented its education sector policies with emphasis on the primary education level to improve human resources development as an economic development measure for the country (WB, 1989).

Owing to WB recommendation for public expenditure reduction for HE in Africa, the amount of yearly state subvention contributed to UB between 1993 and 1996, for example, did not go beyond 23% of the requested amount yet constituted as much as 73% of UB's total available income (Njeuma et al., 1999, p. 15). This means that UB's contribution to its own budget requirement was far less than 23% of the amount that came from public subvention. This was exacerbated by a drop in public investment per student by 37%, amounting to only FCFA 187,000 (about EUR €285), which was far less than WB's recommended EUR €820 per student per year (Njeuma et al., 1999). Besides, UB's secondary source of income at that time was fundamentally a registration fee of less than €80 per student for an academic year. This left the university with a very minimal amount for research development, recruitment of required academics (qualified human resources), acquisition of infrastructural capacity, etc., which made it significantly difficult for UB to attain educational achievement for economic development. The following interview data from respondent A2 (administrative/support staff) confirms the assertion:

"Less than 5% of total annual budget of UB is assigned for research activities...No clear criteria for funding research activities since the university has very little resources, especially financial, to fund research. However, they can support part of research with a high potential for impact."

Also, the following figure for Internal allocation of research funding at UB, 2008–2010, illustrates the funding situation of UB. The figure indicates that all 6 faculties/school received approximately FCFA 482,000,000 (about EUR 734,804) with an average of about FCFA 80,333,333 (about EUR 122,467) per faculty/school. Compared to universities in the western world that are operating within the same KE policy objective, these figures are way too small and not enough to set up structures for the development of new technology, innovation and a highly qualified labour force in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) for example. Therefore, the situation at UB suggests that inadequate funding associated with policy decisions, especially for research activities, is one fundamental issue that affects the KE goal of public universities in Cameroon.

Figure: Internal Budgeting for Research 2008-2010



Source: Report on the Situation of Research at the University of Buea (May 2013).

5. Discussion

This study set out to investigate how UB responded to WB's KE objective and how the objective affected its processes. Based on the chosen methodology – non-positivist/post-structuralist paradigm of the study, the results are analysed within the neoliberal framework of education policy issues and the international regime theory. Then, in conjunction with inductive and deductive systematic thematic approaches, abductive reasoning is used to draw conclusions.

There are two major actions taken by the government of Cameroon that laid the basis for the response of its public universities to WB's KE objective for economic development. The first is the deregulation of the higher education sector and the second is the reduction in public expenditure for public universities. These were induced by the Berg report of 1981, followed by three successive WB reports (WB, 1986, 1988, 1994) which insisted that public expenditure on higher education in Sub Sahara Africa was unnecessarily high, inefficiently utilised and portrayed profound social inequalities in comparison to allocations in other sectors. This caused the shift in Cameroon's government responsibility for public universities in favour of WB's neoliberal KE policy over its own contextual policy objective, which affirms the contention that even in situations in which idiosyncratic national configurations inform national endeavours, regimes continue to exert great influence in policy positions of member countries (Fulge & Martens, 2016).

Considerably, WB's KE for the economic development of developing member states relies on models that have primarily worked in developed economies. For instance, the study of Powell and Snellman (2004) points out that the link between technology and labour productivity in the USA had a great influence on the 1981 Berg report and the first SAP for developing African countries. They assert that prior to the 1980s, there was

already a strong correlation between technology investment and labour productivity and increases in the science and engineering (S&E) workforce and employee performance capabilities in the USA. They attest that between 1980 and 2000, actual S&E employment grew incrementally by 159%, with an average growth rate of 4.9% in comparison to 1.1% for the entire labour force of the country. Thus S&E, the basis for KE idea, emerged as the new dispensation mechanism for economic development and growth in the advent of 1980s.

Taking advantage of these new developments in western countries, WB quickly adopted them in its economic development plans for African countries as a most appropriate solution to speed up technological and economic development. It laid emphasis on the production of skilled graduates in the sciences, engineering, and technology disciplines without necessarily considering contextual differences in terms of traditional capacities and cultures of receiving governments on the production and application of knowledge (Lingard & Ozga, 2007; Verger et al., 2012). In other words, WB simply challenged the domestic public political mandate of African countries to adopt the same policy objective as in the west, thereby redefining for these countries the relationship between education and economic development of the nation-state as asserted by Nagel et al. (2010). However, such a policy transfer strategy would influence positive outcomes if implemented within strong institutional structures with required capacities (financial and otherwise) to guarantee production, transformation, and application for economic development. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case for public universities in Cameroon.

Apparently, public universities in Cameroon lost the capacity to measure up to policy prescriptions because of very limited autonomy exacerbated by system-wide regulations such as the following:

- Presidential Decree No. 93/027 of 19th January 1993 defining common conditions for the operation of universities in Cameroon.
- Law No. 005 of 16th April 2001 to Guide Higher Education, signed by the president of the Republic of Cameroon. Applicable to universities in Cameroon.
- Law No. 2005/342 of 10th September 2005 to modify and complete certain dispositions of Decree No. 93/027 of 19th January 1993 to define common conditions for the operation of universities in Cameroon.
- Presidential Decree No.2005/383 of 17th October 2005 to lay down financial regulations applicable to universities in Cameroon.

To date, these decrees regulate public universities to an extent that undermines their responsibilities to effectively define for themselves their vision and operational modalities in relation to appropriate development strategies and goals for the development and transfer of useful knowledge into social and economic practices. For example, the January 1993 decree defining common conditions for the operation of universities in Cameroon created and placed eight research and innovation institutes under a non-university entity–MINRESI and charged it with scientific research and innovation. This undermined the ability of public universities towards economic

development as it empowered them only with the responsibility for traditional university mission—teaching and basic research. The action contradicts government's intention of using public universities as a driver of its KE aspirations and justifies why academics in public universities are simply motivated with research allowances that according to respondents do not even suffice for basic research activities.

Such system-wide practices that are determined by decrees in connection with the adoption of international education policy such as WB KE policy objective often end up with unintended and unpredictable negative outcomes due to contextual challenges, which are often not considered in the interactions between national governments and global actors (Verger et al., 2012). For example, while Decree No. 92/074 of 13th April 1992 (consolidated in January 1993) charges MINRESI with responsibility for scientific and innovation research, Article 23 of Cameroon's University Standards of 2015 demands in line with KE that university teaching and research be associated to concrete realities and translate into marketable goods and services to improve the applicability of study programmes. This scenario highlights the confusion in government's intention, funding mechanism, and action on public universities' endeavour towards KE objective as opposed to the role of specialised research institutes under MINRESI. The situation rightly suggests that although global actors are more involved in agenda-setting and policy formulation, it is common knowledge that policy decisions and implementation are literally the preserve of national governments (Fulge & Martens, 2016).

Evidently, inadequate funding associated with policy decisions for UB is one major reason why no concrete actions were taken to enhance research and teaching activities towards knowledge creation, development, and valorisation, not even with applied science programmes. Education at the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, for instance, is limited at the undergraduate level. According to interview data, nothing exceptional was done beyond the traditional teaching of full-time and part-time undergraduate programmes across a spectrum of engineering disciplines at COT—whose vision is to produce highly competent senior-level technicians with adequate productive and employable skills for critical development needs. At this pace, it is difficult for the faculty to achieve the required capacities towards the university's effective contribution to the knowledge for development objective, especially when labs are ill-equipped or not available at all. Based on this reality, the professionalisation of academic degrees in line with Article 6(1) of HE Law No. 005 of 16th April 2001 was not based on UB's objective calculations for immediate desirable results.

Therefore, the idea and implementation of academic professionalism were seemingly based on both government and UB's conformist attitude to education policy to gain regime legitimacy and recognition. In other words, regime actors and organisations would respect regime norms or adopt new structures and practices over their respective strategic calculations to gain a good reputation or legitimacy from other actors (Kersbergen & Verbeek, 2007). Alternatively, they would eventually develop the habit to let go of some possible advantages that they would have if they disregarded regime norms (Krasner, 1982; Hasenclever et al., 2000; Heugens and Lander, 2009;

Alvesson & Spicer, 2018). This attitude enables a complex-type relationship between the higher education governing structure and public universities, giving rise to new and confusing dimensions in the character of public universities in Cameroon. This suggests why the aspiration of Cameroon and its public universities to create and develop knowledge and produce a highly qualified labour force (relevant for the advancement of science and technology) for determining the long-term development goals of the country has remained futile.

6. Limitations

Though this study makes a significant contribution to understanding the situation of public universities in relation to KE objective for the economic development of Cameroon, it has its own limitations. It focused on UB, taking into consideration government's intervention through system-wide policies for public universities in the country. The assumption is that only some (not all) aspects from the set of findings of UB case may apply to other public universities within the context of Cameroon.

There is equally the possibility of trust issues given that only one public university out of eight was used for the study. The extent of generalisability would perhaps have been different if the results were based on multiple sets of experiments that replicated the same qualitative design at different public universities—considering contexts, settings, and circumstantial variables, which could generate different responses to the same phenomena. Perhaps, this would have provided a more reasonable depth to the transferability of the empirical insights of the study. However, based on Halkier's (2011) contention that analytical generalisation is a means to illustrate context-bound characteristics, it is valid to determine the findings of the UB case as reliable and generalisable to other public universities in Cameroon.

7. Conclusion

Inadequate funding for UB and its research activities features as the most prominent reason why UB is unable to meet its economic development goal for Cameroon. There is a need for further research on the funding mechanisms of public universities, especially with respect to research in accordance with Law No. 005 of 16th April 2001, Ministerial Circular No. 03/0001/MINESUP/CAB of January 8, 2003 (which emphasises that government's public expenditure for public universities only prioritises teaching and research), Law No. 2005/342 of 10th September 2005 and Presidential Decree No.2005/383 of 17th October 2005 on finance and other regulations applicable to public universities. These laws make up some key regulatory principles that are meant to reiterate certain issues and reorient public universities towards an enhanced economic development agenda of the country within the neoliberal economic system. Hence, research on the funding of public universities in Cameroon would determine the relationship between funding and education policy outcomes, and most importantly, shed light on the impact

that public expenditure support can have on the development and character of scientific research within the neoliberal international education policy framework.

Overall, Cameroon's system-wide and institutional policies of public universities did not seem strategic enough to enhance economic development through the KE policy objective—promotion of rapid and competitive growth and transmission of technologies and knowledge to promote economic development (Powell & Snellman, 2004; Lingard & Ozga, 2007; WB, 2007; Jessop, 2017). This suggests that international education policies can cause unintended negative outcomes for educational practice at the national and other levels (Verger et al., 2012) due to contextual differences, especially in the capacities and cultures of receiving governments. Consequently, the situation of WB's influence on the education policy of Cameroon affirms the need for national transformative capacities and guiding principles to mediate the impact of international education policy processes over national education systems (Nagel et al., 2010; Fulge et al., 2016).

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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