European Journal of Education Studies
ISSN: 2501 - 1111
ISSN-L: 2501 - 1111
Available online at: www.oapub.org/edu

DOI: 10.46827/ejes.v11i9.5488 Volume 11 | Issue 9 | 2024

DEGREE STRUCTURE AND RECOGNITION BEFORE AND WITHIN THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CAMEROON AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

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Abstract:
The development of higher education systems has been marked by significant efforts aimed at promoting compatibility, comparability, international competitiveness, and attractiveness. A key initiative in this regard is the Bologna Process, launched in 1998-1999 to create the European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Process has had a far-reaching impact, shaping higher education practices and policies both in Europe and globally. This research investigates degree structure and recognition before and within the Bologna Process, focusing on higher education in Cameroon and the United Kingdom. Phillips and Ochs' circular model of policy-borrowing was employed to aid the understanding of the Bologna Process as a transnational model within contemporary higher education. Data was analyzed qualitatively using documents - from a comparative standpoint. Findings revealed that HE in Cameroon and the UK exhibit commonalities, differences, and challenges. In terms of commonalities, both HE systems have scrapped off, modified, and retained some old degrees that existed in the pre-LMD and pre-BP era, respectively. However, both HE systems differ in the types of intermediary degrees offered and the duration of their study cycles in the pre-LMD/LMD and pre-BP/BP eras. We argue that, despite Bologna's recent efforts to have a three-cycle degree system (Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate) across higher education systems, however, the 2001 Prague Communique, which encouraged higher education institutions to take advantage of national legislations to facilitate degrees and other awards, and the 2005 Bergen Communique which adopted an overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA,

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comprising three cycles - including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications – partly explain existing divergence of degrees and degree structures between contemporary higher education in Cameroon and the UK, and possibly beyond, thus having implications for recognition. The paper recommends the need for HE policymakers in Cameroon, the UK and beyond to engage in policy dialogue, exchange of good practices and effectively collaborate to mitigate degree recognition barriers.

Keywords: Bologna Process, Cameroon, degree structure, LMD, policy borrowing, recognition, higher education, United Kingdom

1. Introduction

The recent evolution of higher education (HE) systems is marked by transformative initiatives aimed at ensuring compatibility and comparability as well as international competitiveness and attractiveness across national borders. One such pivotal initiative is the Bologna Process (BP), conceived in 1998 and adopted in 1999, which is considered a concerted effort to create a European Higher Education Area (Scott, 2015). The BP introduced significant reforms through its objectives, such as the adoption of readable and comparable degrees and two main cycles – undergraduate and graduate; establishment of a common credit system; promotion of student and staff mobility; quality assurance; and the European dimension of higher education (Bologna Declaration, 1999). The Zgaga report focused on the 'global echoes' of the BP relative to the global consequences of Europe's 'useful experience', and prospects of global adaptation of BP principles (Zmas, 2015, p.729). Many more nations have joined the European movement, otherwise perceived as the 'external dimension' of the BP (Zgaga, 2006, p.12), including several African countries (Vuban & Mekolle, 2022). Amidst the global educational landscape, countries outside of Europe have grappled with integrating Bologna principles into their higher education systems, each navigating unique challenges and opportunities. Zmas (2015, p.728) noted that 'the transfer of the BP-model around the world proves to be a complex process with unclear consequences… As it makes its way into regional, national and local contexts, it comes up against existing policy discourses and practices, whose priorities may, in fact, differ from the postulates of the BP-model' thus causing BP objectives to metamorphose as they get incorporated in national systems. Within Africa, for instance, the BP is called Licence-Master-Doctorat or simply LMD reform. Efforts were made to create the CEMAC space through inspiration from the BP and the creation of the EHEA (Libreville Declaration, 2005) through the LMD reform. The LMD generally addresses the quality of education that can be obtained in CEMAC through the adoption of three degrees – Bachelor's, Master's and PhD – referred to within the sub-region as 'LMD' – involving the establishment of a system of credit to promote mobility, and a redesign of the curriculum that is student-centered and outcome-based, with emphasis on professionalization of studies for the

transition of graduates into the labour market (Libreville Declaration, 2005; Eta, 2015, p.162).

Sub-Saharan African universities, particularly those of Lusophone and Francophone zones have sought ways to adapt both their curricular structure and qualifications in line with the Bologna architecture (Charlier & Croché, 2009). Thus, the BP has had far-reaching impacts not only within Europe but globally, influencing higher education practices and policies in diverse contexts (Teichler, 2004). This reflects a strategic approach to harnessing the potential benefits of internationalization, collaboration, and quality enhancement in higher education, ultimately contributing to the advancement of knowledge, skills, and opportunities for individuals and institutions (Zmas, 2015) across global regions.

This study aims to examine degree structure and recognition mechanisms in higher education in Cameroon and the United Kingdom before and within the BP and its corresponding LMD reform - from a comparative perspective using documentary analysis. Cameroon has undergone substantial reforms in its higher education system, striving to align with international standards while addressing local needs (Nsamenang, 2003). Cameroon is an African country and a non-signatory member state of the BP. In contrast, the United Kingdom, renowned for its prestigious universities and global academic influence, has experienced a nuanced relationship with the BP, balancing its tradition of academic autonomy with the imperatives of international harmonization (Scott, 2009). The United Kingdom is a European country and a pioneer signatory member state of the BP. Comparison across these contexts in the findings have the potential of providing insights into the achievements and complexities of implementing the BP (relative to its degree structure and recognition) across countries in global and regional contexts. European Ministers had tasked the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), ahead of the 2024 Conference to create an implementation report in a bid to evaluate advancements in agreed commitments (e.g. degree structure and recognition) towards realizing the Bologna vision and goals by 2030 (Rome Communiqué, 2020, p.8). As such, this paper is timely as it provides some analytical information needed to serve this purpose. This means that the insights presented in this paper are pertinent for gaining an understanding of BP realities from an evidence-based standpoint, which are instrumental in crafting future evaluation stocktaking reports to inform the progress of the reform within the Bologna community – thus aiding the compatible and comparable recognition of degrees and qualifications in an increasingly interconnected global higher education landscape.

2. Historical Background on Degree and Qualification Recognition

2.1 Degree and Qualification Recognition from a Global Perspective

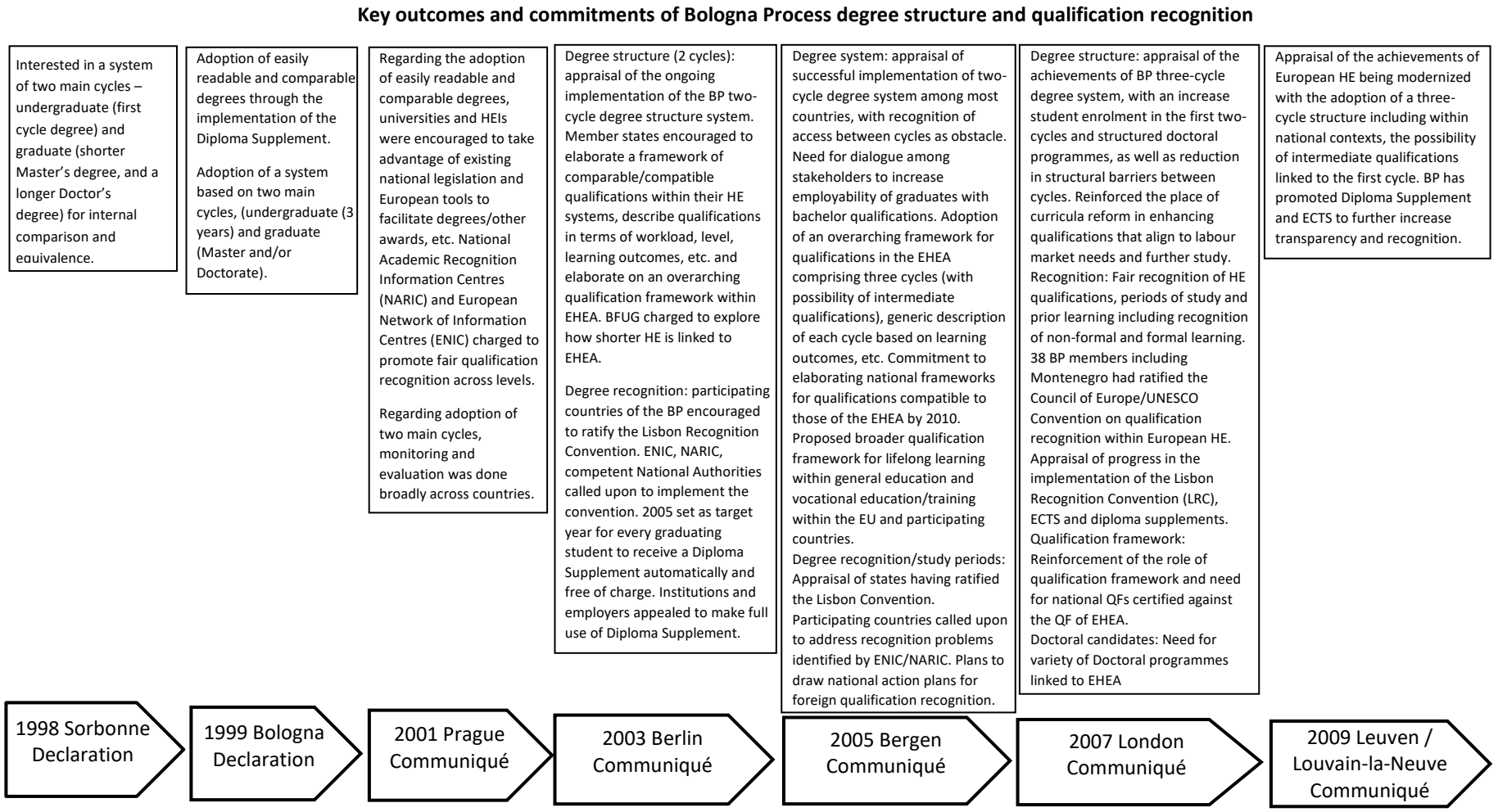
Global HE has been enhanced by ensuring international standards in the past decades (Huisman & van der Wende, 2004, p.133). Degree recognition in HE across the globe has always been at the heart of multinationals, especially UNESCO, since the 1970s. Examples

of UNESCO legal instruments governing recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas in higher education include: UNESCO (1974) '*Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean'*; UNESCO (1976) '*Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States Bordering on the Mediterranean'*; UNESCO (1978) '*Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States'*; UNESCO (1979) *'Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States belonging to the Europe Region'*; UNESCO (1981) '*Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in the African States'*; UNESCO (1983) '*Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific*'; UNESCO (1993) '*Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education'*; UNESCO (1997) '*Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region'*; UNESCO (2011) '*Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education';* and UNESCO (2014) '*Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States*'. The 2014 convention is aimed at enhancing quality management within continental, regional, bilateral and national contexts through organized and reinforced mutual recognition of studies, degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic credentials within HE.

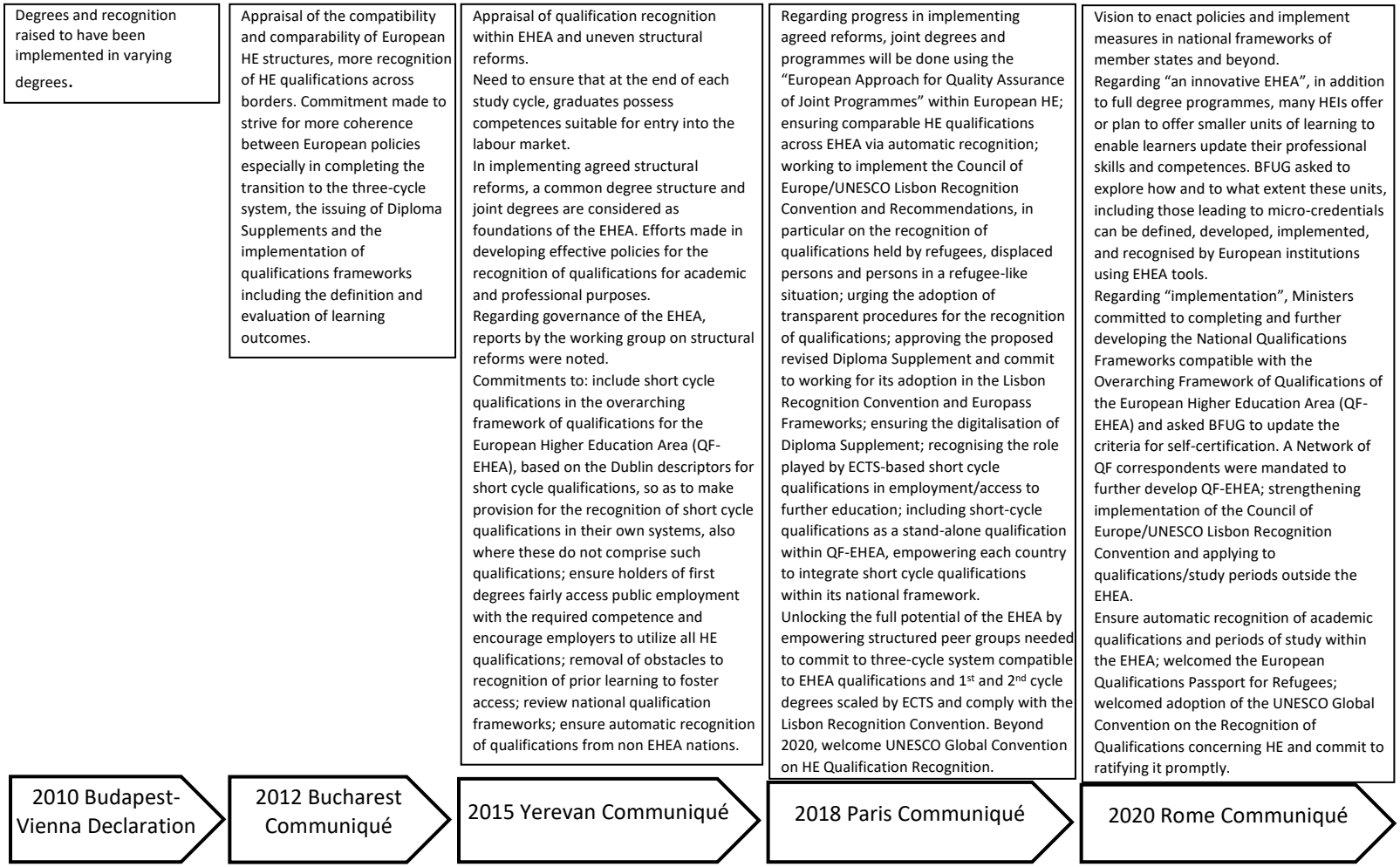
The slogan 'as knowledge becomes important, so does higher education', has triggered the need for nations to educate most of their youths to relatively high standards since degrees are presently fundamental qualifications needed to acquire many skilled jobs (The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000, p.9). With the institution of 'Recognition Convention', students have benefitted in many ways because, as qualification holders of a given nation, they could have easy access to an assessment of their qualifications in other nations without discrimination as to social, ethnic, national, political opinion, religion, language, disability, colour, race, and gender (Cippitani & Gatt, 2009, p.390). According to Tuck (2007, p.iii), one of the major global reforms in education and training systems since the late 1990s has been the creation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF); which originated in English-speaking developed nations and has now spread to not only developing nations but non-English speaking nations. Tuck sees 'qualification' as 'a package of standards or units judged to be worthy of formal recognition in a certificate. Despite these advancements, there are still problems relating to degree and recognition across global HE systems. The drive to enhance a common degree structure has had varied implications across nations as while some nations have experienced a mild re-schedule of their existing HE structures, for others, there has been a massive restructuring of the entire university system as these nations have changed the structure and duration of their study programmes (Cappellari & Lucifora, 2008, p.1). Additionally, the massification of higher education and demand for more qualifications have made demand to outstrip supply (Bawa, 2017), making it difficult to handle degree qualifications in HE systems.

2.2 Degree and qualification recognition from a European perspective

Figure 1: The evolution of degree structure and qualification recognition within the Bologna Process (1998 – 2020)



Key outcomes and commitments of Bologna Process degree structure and qualification recognition *(Figure 1 Continued)*



BP Communiqués and Declarations

Source: Adapted from the BP Ministerial communiqués and declarations by the authors.

Over the last two decades, the European Bologna Declaration of 1999 has reinforced the place of first degrees as adequate qualifications needed to enter the labour market, with the slogan 'degrees fitness-for-purpose for market demands' becoming a common theme in subsequent communiqués (Sin & Neave, 2016, p.1453). Although the BP aims at developing a common degree structure in European HE and changing the nature of university studies (structure and duration of study programmes), it has also triggered 'economic incentives to go to college' (Cappellari & Lucifora, 2008, p.21). Degree recognition has always been a chief concern in all BP communiques (Voegtle *et al.,* 2011). Figure 1 above shows the evolution of degree structure and qualification recognition of the BP from its inception (1998) to the 2020 Ministerial Communiqué.

From the foregoing figure, what is spectacular about the BP is that European Ministers of HE initially stressed in the BP communique the adoption of a system of two main degree cycles (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998; Bologna Declaration, 1999; Prague Communiqué, 2001; Berlin Communiqué, 2003) with a third-degree cycle added in the Bergen Communiqué (2005). Since then, BP has been promoting a three-cycle structure including undergraduate (first-cycle), graduate (second cycle) and doctoral (third cycle) programmes, with the possibility of intermediate (short-cycle) qualifications linked to the first cycle (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, p.94).

The qualification framework of the EHEA has been structured as follows: first-cycle (HE) qualifications are made up of 180 to 240 ECTS credits; first-cycle (shorter HE) qualifications comprise of 120 ECTS credits; second-cycle (higher education) qualifications comprise of 90-120 ECTS credits beyond the first cycle with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the second cycle; and no proposal has been made for associating credits with third cycle (HE) qualifications (Bologna Working Group, 2005). The table below represents these.

Table 1: Qualification framework within the EHEA

Cycle of study	**Years needed for completion**	**ECTS required (60 ECTS per year)**
Short cycle	1-2	120
First cycle	3-4	180-240
Second cycle	5 (1, 1 1/2 or 2)	60-120
Third cycle	3-4	Not specified

Source: Eta (2018, p.22)

As revealed by Cippitani and Gatt (2009, p.389, 390), there was a legal concern within the BP which was that of qualification recognition within and beyond the EHEA which pressurized not only member states but other Bologna signatories to be engaged in a legal act by signing the following international legal documents inter alia: *Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Convention)* (Council of Europe/UNESCO, 1997); *Recommendation on International Access Qualifications*, adopted by the Intergovernmental Committee of the Lisbon Recognition Convention in Vilnius on 16 June 1999; *Recommendation on the Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Periods of Study* (2001); *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education*, adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee at its second meeting in Riga (Council of Europe, 6 June 2001); and *Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees* (Council of Europe, 2004).

Despite Bologna's efforts to institute degree structure and recognition, many problems still exist. Employers are widely unaware of the present degrees, and the failure to recognize these degrees is noted for being a handicap to graduates' prospective employment (European Student Information Bureau (ESIB), 2005, p.21; Sin & Neave, 2016, p.1451). Other challenges of the current BP era include inconsistency or lack of implementation at the national level, lack of independent reporting on its progress; poor follow-up of commitments; and the pushing of national reforms under the pretext of the BP (European Student Union (ESU), 2014, p.1) – thus, having implications for degree and qualification recognition. However, it has been argued that 'the Bologna process is not intended to lead to the standardisation or greater uniformity of European higher education provision. It is more a framework designed to ensure the highest level of quality, consistency and coherence between Europe's respective national systems and between individual institutions (UK House of Commons [HC], 2007, p.17), and about comparability, compatibility, recognition, mobility and not uniformity or standardization due to diversity.

2.3 Degree and qualification recognition from an African perspective

In 1972, nearly a decade before the adoption of the Arusha Convention, member countries of the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (known in French as *Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Superieur*, CAMES) signed a convention to harmonise higher education and research in Africa by agreeing to mutually recognise qualifications awarded by their higher education institutions. Since then, CAMES' evaluation and recognition of qualifications have been carried out every two years. CAMES has recognised nearly 500 degrees and certificates from its inception to 2013 (Mohamedbhai, 2013, p.12). Later, a Regional Convention on the recognition of studies and academic qualifications in HE in African states was adopted in Arusha, Tanzania, in 1981 (also known as 'Arusha Convention') as part of UNESCO's efforts towards the promotion of international academic mobility (Mohamedbhai, 2013). The Arusha Convention provided guidelines for member states to recognise the academic studies,

degrees, and professional qualifications of other signatory states. Based on the Convention, each member state is obliged to identify or create a National Information Centre responsible for collecting and disseminating information on the recognition of qualifications, quality assurance mechanisms, as well as institutional and programme accreditation (Mohamedbhai, 2013, p.10 & 11). Alongside the Arusha Convention was the introduction of the 'Tuning Africa' project linked to the recognition of qualifications at the national, regional, and continental levels. Tuning Africa uses an internationally established methodology to enhance degree comparability and promotes the development of learning outcomes for various degree programmes (ibid. p.13). Due to the shortcomings of the Arusha Convention, some of its functions were delegated to subregional structures (Mohamedbhai, 2013), like CAMES. The LMD reform was introduced in Francophone Africa by CAMES, having been adopted and adapted from the European BP (Eta, 2015). HE degree structures within the CEMAC subregion, for instance, according to Eta (2015, p.144), were modelled around what was obtained in France prior to the 1984 reforms, which led to what was the precursor to the LMD in France. This was made for a multiplicity of cycles of studies and degrees as was obtained in the pre-1984 in France such as 'Diplome d'Etudes Generales (DEUG), 'Licence', 'Maitrise', 'Diplome d'Etudes Approfondies (DEA), 'Doctorat de troisieme cycle' and 'Doctorat d'Etat.

To Davies and Guppy (1997, p.435), although reforms are never identical in terms of content, through the need for innovations, governments have politically borrowed models from one another to improve their HE systems. The LMD is thus the main reform in Francophone HE institutions in West Africa geared at transforming and aligning academic structures to the *Bachelors'-Masters-Doctorate* degree structure, otherwise known as *Licence-Master-Doctorat* in French (Mohamedbhai, 2013, p.10). LMD is coordinated by UNESCO and supported by UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union). Although almost all member countries are at various stages of transition within the LMD system, there is hardly any information available on the development of NQFs in these countries (ibid. p.17). In this regard, the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI)-Africa and UNESCO have networked to monitor the progress of regional and national action plans on student mobility, quality assurance, and degree recognition (ADEA, 2011, p.3).

Despite these efforts, qualification and degree recognition in African HE are still a challenge. For instance, there is external poor recognition of qualifications obtained in Africa (ADEA, 2015, p.2); existing Qualification Framework (QF) may be restricted to the title and contents of the qualification obtained without specifying the exact learning outcomes that lead to them (Mohamedbhai, 2013, p.14); educational corruption linked to the buying of diplomas and bribing of teachers for marks and grades (Rumyantseva, 2005); and poor ICT infrastructural development making degree production and verification problematic (Mohamedbhai, 2013, p.14). Thus, mutual qualification recognition and sub-regional qualification frameworks are not only effective instruments for HE regionalization within Africa and other world regions (Shabani & Okebukola,

2017, p.135) but are needed to solve these challenges. The control of QF and national assessment should also be done by governments because, through national assessments, educational institutions across a given nation would acquire a 'common language of standards and achievement' in order that national performance would be comparable with those of others (Sun *et al.,* 2007). Instituting common QFs also facilitates recognition of degrees, certificates and diplomas and serves as instruments in achieving comparability and transparency within a higher education area (Mohamedbhai, 2013).

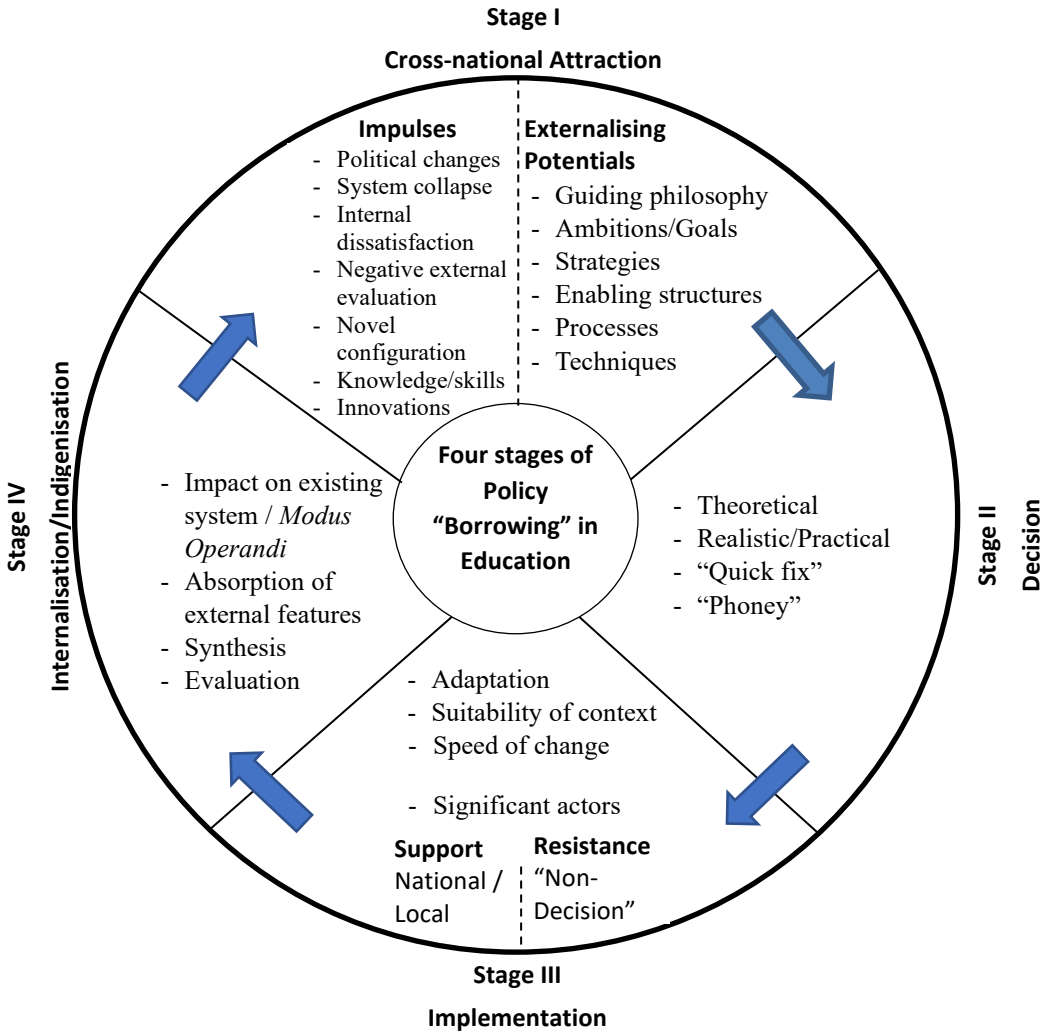
3. Theoretical Framework

Phillips and Ochs' (2003) circular model of policy-borrowing has been used in this study to provide insights into how the European BP has gained prominence as a "borrowed" policy reform within HE across contexts (e.g. Cameroon). According to Phillips and Ochs (2004), policy borrowing has been widely used compared to other policy models as it provides a solid theoretical framework for policy analysis within comparative education. It also provides reasons for borrowing (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004), which are important in transnational exchanges (Davies & Guppy, 1997). The model has four main stages including: cross-national attraction, decision, implementation, and internalization/indigenization.

Cross-national attraction is the first stage of Phillips and Ochs' policy borrowing model. According to Steiner-Khamsi (2012), there has been a shift from concrete lessons learnt from a given educational system to a general discourse on global standards by policymakers, which justifies reasons for cross-national attraction. The BP has enhanced the attractiveness of European HE (Bologna Declaration, 1999), leading to its adoption and adaptation by other global regions, for example, LMD in CEMAC (Eta, 2015). Cross-national attraction comprises impulses and externalizing potential. Impulses initiate cross-national attraction and can take various modes such as internal dissatisfaction from educational stakeholders (e.g. in Cameroon, the LMD reform was adopted to solve problems owing to the duality of its HE system; Eta & Vuban, 2017); policy and other imperatives (e.g. the political decision to create a CEMAC space for HE using the LMD; Eta, 2015); knowledge and skills (e.g. the need for innovations to realize Bologna goals and for universities to align themselves within a society that is knowledge-driven; The Commission of the European Communities, 2006), etc. Externalization is a typical situation in which borrowing is limited to policy discourses and a reference sometimes used to glorify practices of local systems (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Externalizing potentials consists of guiding philosophy, ambition and goals, strategies, enabling structures, processes and techniques. Guiding philosophies are educational policies that may be considered vital for borrowing from other contexts. Strengthening regional ties in Europe through the lens of European HE systems using the BP (Bologna Declaration, 1999) is an example of a guiding philosophy through: goals (e.g. the creation of a European Higher Education Area – EHEA; Sorbonne Declaration, 1998); strategies (e.g. increasing

membership of different states through Open Method of Communication (OMC) and governance; Klemencic, 2009), among others.

Figure 2: Policy borrowing in education: composite processes



Source: Phillips & Ochs (2003 & 2004, p.779)

The decision is the second phase of the model and comprises of theoretical, realistic and, practical, quick fix and phoney categories. The quick fix category, for example, is mostly used by politicians for immediate results, e.g. the signing of the LMD reform inspired by the BP in Libreville by CEMAC heads of states to augment the status quo of their university education system to that of the original founders in Europe (CEMAC, 2006) is perceived as a quick fix policy reform (Eta, 2018).

Implementation is the third phase of the model (Phillips & Ochs, 2004). This phase is dependent on conditions which are contextual to the country involved in borrowing. According to the model, adaptation, suitability of context, speed of change, and significant actors affect implementation. The rate at which change occurs depends on the attitudes of important actors, which may be institutions or individuals that have the

power to resist or encourage development and change (Mngo, 2011). The implementation of the BP has been highly decentralized, with actors such as European Ministers of Education, BFUG, ENIC, NARIC, etc., each having specific roles to play in the life of the ongoing policy reform (see Bologna Process Communiques).

The fourth stage is that of internationalization, also known as indigenization and comprises of four parts, namely, impact on existing system/modus operandi, absorption of external features, synthesis, and evaluation. The BP is known to have impacted on global HE systems, with these systems absorbing Bologna's 'external features' like student and staff mobility. The circular model becomes complete when one considers all the stages and their respective parts or steps. The arrows suggest temporal linkages and not causations (Phillips & Ochs, 2003).

4. Methodology

This paper comparatively examines the evolution of HE systems in Cameroon and the UK in terms of degree structure and recognition in accordance with LMD and BP reforms, respectively. We argue that comparing the BPs' impact on degree structure and recognition in HE systems in Cameroon and the UK provides valuable insights into what initially transpired in the HE systems of these countries and how these HE systems have implemented and adapted the BP degree structure. Studying HE systems in both Cameroon and the UK is also important because it provides, through comparison, a clear picture of the effect of BP degree structure across divergent contexts, with Cameroon being a non-signatory state and late adopter of the BP reform while the UK is a signatory state and an early adopter of the BP.

As justified above, a comparative research design was used in the analysis. According to Crook and McCulloch (2002, p.397), comparative studies have often been conceived in terms of comparing systems of education as they have developed in different countries. Thus, to understand the nature of degree structures in HE in the pre-Bologna and Bologna era as well as pre-LMD and LMD era, documents addressing degree structures in HE in the UK between 1997 – 2017, and those in Cameroon between 1999 – 2017, respectively, have been analyzed. This means a temporal comparison approach has specifically been applied whereby time is used as the unit of analysis to examine changes in education policy regimes that follow each other – particularly changes related to degree structure. To Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2006), concerns within comparative education at large and policy borrowing focus on what happens to existing practices once a reform has been imported – are they replaced, reinforced, or modified?

To achieve the study's objective, the researchers carried out documentary analysis of secondary data contained in relevant reports, BP communiqués, newsletters, journal articles, theses, textbooks, and other online sources, as indicated in the table below:

Table 2: Text documents used for analysis

Types of texts documents	**Titles**
Other Reports	House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2007)
Bologna Process communiques/ LMD reports	Cameroon Ministry of Higher Education (2007), CEMAC Council of Ministers (2006)
Newsletters	University of Buea (2008)
Journal articles	Doh (2008), Eta (2015), Eta and Vubo (2016), Eta and Vuban (2017), Vuban and Mekolle (2022)
Theses	Doh (2007), Witte (2006)
Textbooks	Huisman and van der Wende (2004), Vubo (2011)
Other online sources	Fearn (2008), Sweeney (2017), Torotcoi (2017), UK HE Europe Unit (2005)

The above data sources are important as they capture the dynamics in HE in the UK and Cameroon with respect to the objective of interest and as a consequence of the BP and its related LMD reform. Anonymity concerns were not a factor in the analysis, as actual names of authors and institutions of existing were utilized, given that these sources are all publicly found online.

5. Findings

The findings present degrees and degree structures in Cameroon and the UK HE system, which have implications for recognition. Degrees and degree structures have been presented following the pre-LMD and LMD era in HE in Cameroon and pre-BP and BP era in HE in the UK. Within Cameroon, both the French-speaking subsystem of HE and the English-speaking subsystem of HE have been presented.

5.1 Degree Structure and Recognition in HE in Cameroon

Arrête No. 99\0055\MINESUP\DDES of November 1999 cited in Doh (2007 & 2008) stipulated that before the adoption of the 2007 LMD reform, the organization of Cameroonian HE was designed and modelled to reflect its colonial heritage – French and English. The LMD in Cameroonian HE was aimed at harmonizing its dual degree structure among its other objectives (Vuban & Mekolle, 2022). The co-existence of two systems of education has brought in two separate structures: programmes and examination systems. The Cameroon Ministry of HE (2007) guidelines for the adaptation of the BP degree structure in universities in Cameroon have been formulated from the CEMAC Council of Ministers directive (2006) for the organization of university studies in the CEMAC region, which used the framework of the LMD.

French universities offered *Diplôme d'Études Générales* (DEUG), *Licence, Maîtrise, Diplôme d'Études Approfondies* (DEA), *Doctorat de Troisième Cycle,* and *Doctorat d'État,* which had to be eroded to be in line with the LMD three-staged degree structure. The reason for harmonizing the numerous degree structures such as *Maîtrise, DEUG* and *Doctorat de Troisieme Cycle* was to curb dropout rates due to economic constraints

involved in acquiring these certificates (Doh, 2008, p.90). In addition to this, at the global level, student mobility was problematic due to confusion about what the *Doctorat de Troisieme Cycle* meant (Eta, 2015). In practice, *DEA* and *Maîtrise* took two years to be completed; *Doctorat de Troisieme Cycle* took two to four years to be completed; and *Doctorat d'Etat* took between three and five years to complete (Vubo, 2011). Meaning to have a *Doctorat d'Etat* prior to the LMD, an individual was to spend between 10-and 12 years (Doh, 2007).

Despite many degree structures that existed in French universities in the pre-LMD era, the post-LMD era still issues pre-LMD degrees, such as *DEUG* within the first two years of the first cycle while *Maîtrise* and *DEA* which were done in the pre-LMD era, have been replaced with Masters' degree in the post-LMD era. The Master's degree consists of *Masters I* and *Masters II*. Master I and Master II did not originate in Cameroon as it was a CEMAC regional decision which coincidentally was first birthed in France (Eta, 2015, p.157). *Masters I* has no selective criteria and is issued to those who are not eligible for *Masters II* but intend to use this degree to seek jobs or take national competitive examinations into professional HE institutions. *Masters II* has selective criteria and is offered to those who successfully completed the second year of the Master's programme (Eta & Vubo, 2016). While some policymakers perceive such division from an abstract perspective which merely distinguishes the first and second-year Masters, others perceive the division to be representative of *Maîtrise* and *DEA* of the pre-LMD, leading to a conclusion that the adoption of the LMD seems not to have replaced any old practice as the former and present systems have been adjusted to accommodate one another (Eta & Vubo, 2016).

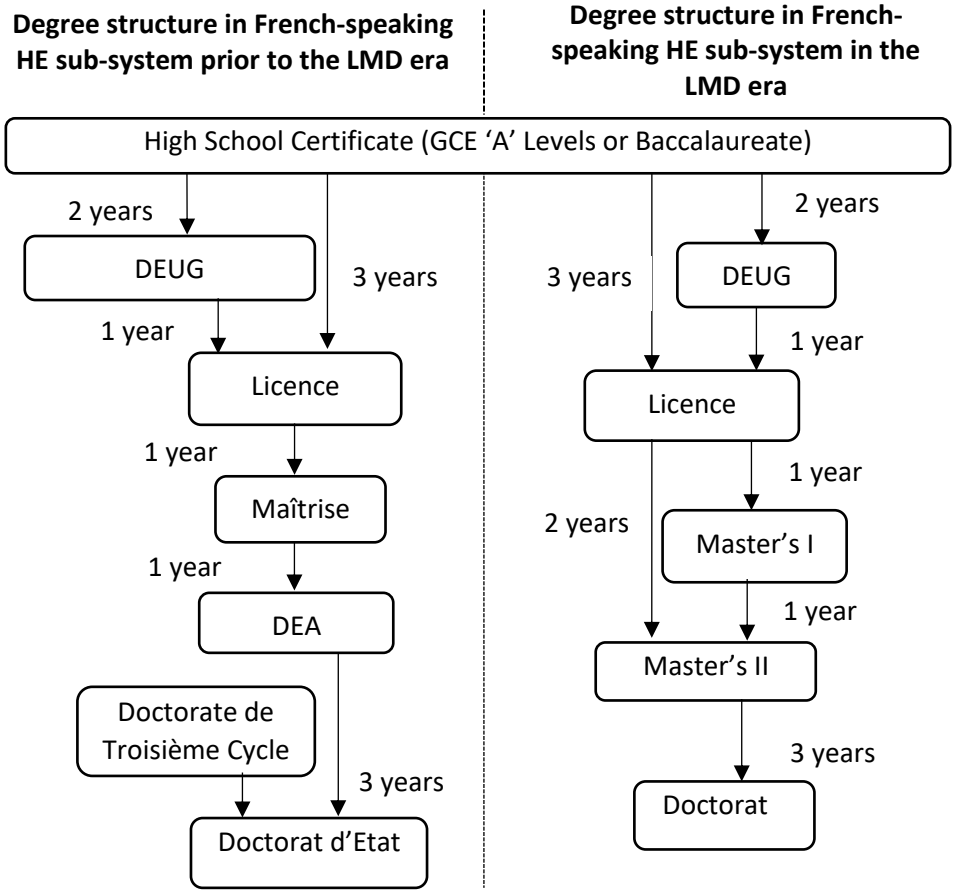
The adaptation of degree structures in Cameroon has been triggered by job market needs. Such is the case with the adaptation of degrees like *Maitrise* and *DEUG* (Eta & Vubo, 2016). A degree like *Maitrise,* for instance, has been important as it is a basic requirement to qualify for some professional schools like the National School of Administration and Magistracy, while *DEUG* is still recognized by some public sectors. It has not also been easy to scrap off old degrees like *Maitrise* and *DEA* as old habits do not die easily, meaning that the best alternative has been the adaptation of these degrees by using Masters' degree divided into *Masters I* and *II* (Eta & Vubo, 2016, p.507 & 508).

There are many problems plaguing degrees, degree structures and recognition in the French HE system in Cameroon. According to Doh (2008, p.90-91), the LMD's degree structure of 3+2+3 poses problems for French-speaking universities in the domain of quality. The *Doctorat* degree, for instance, has been perceived to have raised quality concerns for future graduates of the new system in the wake of scanty certificates. Concerns exist as to whether universities can afford the logistic and financial costs of supervising doctorate students within just three years. Also, the new degree structure is equivalent to the loss of the cultural elements of the former HE system, which may be described as 'academic colonization' (Doh, 2008, p.91). Furthermore, the LMD is governed by individuals who lack mastery of the BP, which explains the retention of degrees like *Maîtrise* and *DEUG* (a colonial practice from France – reasons why the LMD

has been criticized for "*Frenchifying*" or "*Francophonising*" the HE system in Cameroon; Eta & Vuban, 2017, p.355) and the inefficiencies that characterises the system.

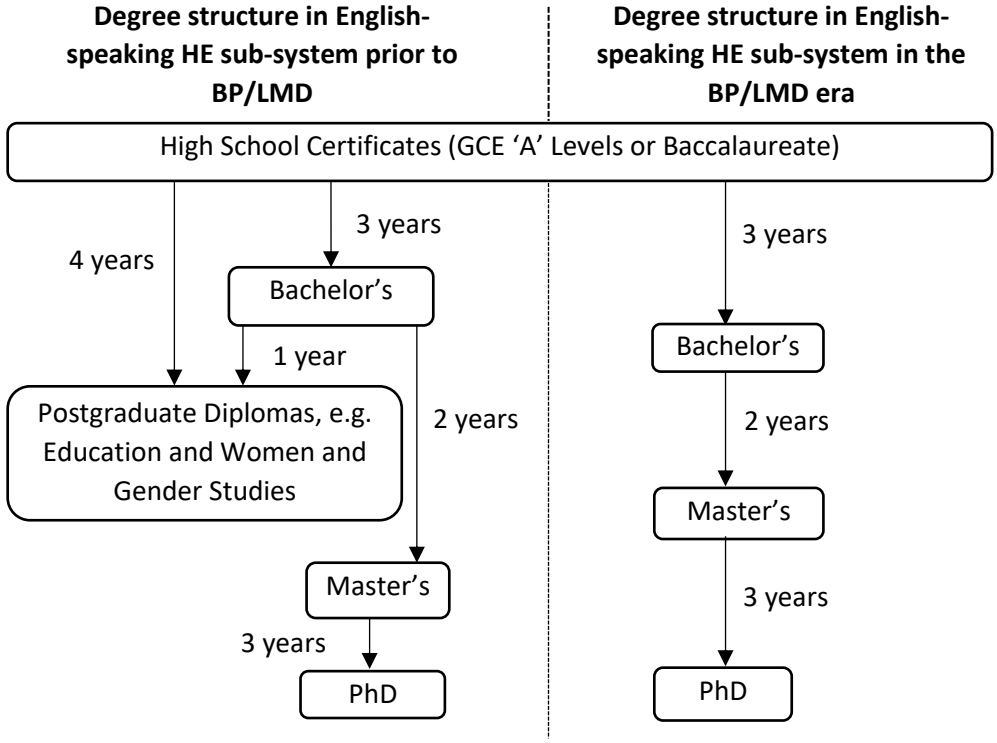
The University of Buea (UB), which happened to be the lone Anglo-Saxon university before the adoption of the LMD in Cameroon, was originally established following the Anglo-Saxon tradition of university education in terms of degree structures (Eta & Vubo, 2016, p.501), meaning there was a Bachelors' (three years), Masters (two years) and PhD (three years). UB also offered Postgraduate Diplomas, which were intermediaries between first and second degrees in disciplines such as Women and Gender Studies and Education in the pre-LMD era, which LMD has dissolved to retain a strict 3-2-3-degree structure. The LMD has been criticised for not favouring professional programmes such as Nursing, which require extensive timeframes for clinical and coursework as it has been compressed to match the three-year study cycle (Doh, 2008, p.90). Figure 3 below illustrates the change in degree structure following the introduction of the LMD in French universities, while Figure 4 diagrammatically presents the degrees and length of the study cycle of the English-speaking HE subsystem in Cameroon in the pre-LMD and LMD era.

Figure 3: The evolution of degree structure of French-speaking HE sub-system in Cameroon



Source: Adapted from Eta (2015), Eta and Vubo (2016)

Figure 4: The evolution of the Anglo-Saxon (English-speaking) HE degree structure in Cameroon



Source: Adapted from Eta (2015, p.115), Eta and Vubo (2016)

Generally, while the diploma supplement has been deemed an integral part of the LMD in Cameroonian universities necessary to enhance mobility and credit transferability, it has been reported that this aspect of the reform has not yet taken off as no university in the country is known to be issuing it because to issue it means there is need to qualify for it in some form (Eta & Vubo, 2016). Despite the adoption of the LMD in HE in Cameroon, the existence of a dual degree structure and grading system still pose challenges, such as the search for degree equivalences needed, particularly for mobility purposes from one sub-system to the other (Doh, 2008). Degree usability and recognition among Cameroonian graduates is still a major problem because it is commonplace to hear Cameroonians with master's degrees complaining that they do not know what to do with their qualifications, which is perceived as an aberration (Achobang, 2015). Despite professionalization in Cameroonian HE, intended to professionally prepare students for the job market, present-day Cameroonian HE is still posing novel challenges for the government because there are still a large number of unemployed youths, despite having professional bachelor's degrees and diplomas, as the job market remains tight.

5.2 Degree Structure and Recognition in HE in the UK

In the UK, the early 1998s (pre-Bologna), according to Witte (2006, p.316-318), was characterized by the conventional tradition of English HEIs where there existed no regulatory framework that prescribed a national degree structure. Many professionally

oriented 'sub-degree level' qualifications existed below the Honours level. For instance, one-year *Higher National Certificate (HNC)* and two-year *Higher National Diploma (HND)* (Witte, 2006, p.317). These qualifications were jointly offered by colleges of HE and validating university partners and were accredited by a private commercial body called *EdExcel*. *HNC* and *HND* curricular programmes were practically inclined, involved internships, and offered collaboration with employers. These were considered separate programmes for students who were less academically inclined, but also a gateway to the Honours degree. HNC was mostly offered by employees with assistance from their employers on a part-time basis. There was also a one-year *'Certificate of Higher Education'* as well as a two-year *'Diploma of Higher Education'* beside the *HND* and *HNC* offered by British universities, which provided the possibility of certifying learning towards an incomplete *Honours degree* (Witte, 2006, p.317).

Witte (2006, p.316-317) notes that normative degrees offered at British universities were '*Bachelors with Honours' (or 'Honours degree'),* which were offered after three years of full-time studies. *Bachelors' degrees* did not usually make provisions for specialization, e.g. Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelors of Science (BSc). Professionally-oriented programmes like Bachelor of Education' (BEd), 'Bachelor of Engineering' (BEng), 'Bachelor of Laws' (LLB) were also provided. Common in the Arts and Music were four-years programmes which needed a mandatory Foundation Year. In the same light, programmes which combined different subjects, particularly those involving an integrated year abroad needing the learning of a foreign language or knowledge of a second discipline also required four years. In addition to these were four-year undergraduate programmmes (for instance, Engineering Education, which led directly to the 'Master of Engineering' - MEng). MEng served as an alternative to one-year practical training on top of BEng – considered an important transition into employment. MSci, MPhys, and MChem were other examples).

At the graduate level, there existed as transition between Bachelor's and Masters' degree other diplomas known as '*Postgraduate Diploma'* and *Postgraduate Certificate' (PGC),* which were widespread in education, healthcare and other disciplines, and whose content were elements of modules offered correspondingly to Masters programmes (Witte, 2006). Masters' degrees were done immediately after the '*Honours*', or after years of working experiences, lasting for a year or two and consisted of research leading to a doctorate (Witte, 2006). The Masters' level was not different as it offered a 'Master of Arts' (MA), 'Master of Science' (MSc) and special professional specializations (e.g. 'Master of Finance', 'Master of Public Health' and 'Master of Social Policy'). The '*Master of Philosophy'* (MPhil) was a common degree – a two-year programme perceived as a step towards the doctorate. The doctorate (PhD, DPhil) was offered after an additional two years on top of the MPhil (Witte, 2006). What was particular about the British HE system was the existence of the '*Oxbridge tradition'* of granting Master's degrees after gaining some professional experiences by graduates as an indication of special honour or maturity. Cambridge and Oxford nonetheless offered 'regular Master's degrees' like other UK universities (Witte, 2006, p.318). All in all, to enhance the consistency of the

British degree structure and titles offered by its HEIs nationally, the Dearing Report suggested that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QQA) should adopt a national framework for HE qualifications (Dearing Report, 1997). **T**able 3 below illustrates the degrees and length of the study cycle in the UK in the Pre-BP era.

Table 3: UK degree structure and length of study cycle in the Pre-BP era

Degree structure in the UK (pre-BP Era)	**Length of study cycle**
HNC	1 year
HND	2 years
Bachelor's with Honours (academic and professional Bachelor's)	3 years (full time)
	4 years (1 Foundation year + 3 years) requiring a combination of different subjects like English Language, particularly those involved in integrated study abroad
	4 years (3 years Bachelor's + 1 additional year leading to Master's degree) e.g. Bachelor's in Engineering (BEng) and Master's in Engineering (MEng)
Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate	Intermediate between Bachelor's and Master's degrees (vary)
Master's degree	1 or 2 years (research inclusive)
Master of Philosophy (MPhil)	2 years
Doctorate	MPhil + 2 additional years

Source: Adapted from Witte (2006, p.316-318), HC (2007), Fearn (2008), Huisman & van der Wende (2004).

With the onset of the BP after 1999, Dow (2006, p.10 & 11), Huisman and van der Wende (2004, p.131) and Torotcoi (2017) argues that this reform was not quite controversial in the UK as it already was implementing the three-degree cycle of Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate. The UK has not been subjected to the same quantity of change in comparison to other signatory states as most of the Bologna action lines fitted squarely with existing HE policies in the UK, such as degree structure, graduate employability guidelines and quality assurance (Torotcoi, 2017). However, the UK has also been known for its ever-shrinking degrees (Fearn, 2008). The EHEA QFs lodges short degree cycles such as Foundation Degrees, Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) (HC, 2007, p.80), and it has been suggested that these certificates should be recognized within and beyond the EHEA (HC, 2007, p.53).

The UK offers *two-year Foundation degrees*, which are below *Honours degree* levels. According to HC (2007):

> *"Foundation degrees are employment-related higher education qualifications just below honours degree level, designed in conjunction with employers to meet skills shortages at the higher technician and associate professional level. They are high-quality courses, delivered in innovative and flexible ways to reduce the practical barriers to learning and to make them accessible to people of all ages and circumstances, many of whom might not otherwise have considered higher education. They are thus an important steppingstone to higher education and particularly useful in the context of widening access."* (p.110)

Although *Foundation degrees* have been theoretically criticized for not being in line with the BP, in practice, it is perceived that they are in line with it, justified by the following reasons (HC, 2007, p.110; Sweeney, 2017): First, the degrees are not to replace conventional undergraduate Bachelor's degrees, e.g. BSc and BA but to exist alongside these. Second, most students can smoothly transition from Foundation degrees to Bachelor's degrees. Third, it is impossible to transit from Foundation Degrees to Master's degrees in the absence of a Bachelor's degree. According to HC (2007), shorter HE will not affect *two-year Foundation Degrees* because the Bergen communiqué included a specific statement to allow intermediate qualifications (of which Foundation Degrees are an example) within national contexts, and the UK HE Europe Unit is 'working with stakeholders to promote intermediate qualifications and their continued recognition in the European Higher Education Area' (p.53). Although a detailed analysis of *Foundation degrees* has not been provided, these degrees would need serious negotiations within the EHEA (Huisman & van der Wende, 2004, p.132).

UK anticipated having *Two-year Accelerated Degrees* (Huisman & van der Wende, 2004, p.132). This means in accordance with UK's minimum length to obtain a Bachelor's degree (three years), a fast-track initiative of two-year honours degree through the '*Flexible Learning Pathfinder Projects'* sponsored by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is underway (HC, 2007). However, concerns have been raised about whether the two-year accelerated degrees would be accepted or recognized within the EU. Thus, according to the UK Europe Unit,

> *"… despite UK pressure for European HE systems to fully embrace learning outcomes under the Bologna Process, it is not at all clear that European partners will be prepared to recognise a two-year Bachelor's degree as equivalent, in terms of learning outcomes (or credit points) to a three or four-year continental first cycle qualification."* (HC, 2007, p.54)

However, it has been recommended that these certificates should be recognized by employers and HEIs within and beyond the EHEA (HC, 2007, p.80).

Most universities within the EHEA have Master's programmes lasting for two years, while it is one-year minimum for many UK universities (HC, 2007, p.80). However, the *one-year Master's degree* has been criticized for being lazy or "lightweight" owing to study hours, which contradicts what Bologna stipulates (Fearn, 2008; HC, 2007, p.80). Dow (2006, p.11 & 12) reiterated that 'the threat to Britain's HE systems is very real if it fails to appreciate these new continental dynamics' as the country faces intense competition for international students. However, UK stakeholders argued that these Master's programmes have fostered lifelong learning, provided income to universities offering them, and have been an option for many international and European students for so long (HC, 2007, p.12). The UK also argued that the Bologna agreement did not spell out any required length for the second cycle and suggested that learning outcomes which enhance capabilities should be prioritized over study hours (HC, 2007, p.80; UK HE Europe Unit, 2005, p.18 & 21). Besides, the two-year Master's also has the potential of

reducing the number of students doing Masters in the UK (Fearn, 2008). However, the issue is that the one-year Master's degree would need serious negotiations (to be recognized) within the EHEA (Huisman & van der Wende, 2004, p.132).

UK also provides a *four-year integrated Master's degree* (Huisman & van der Wende, 2004, p.131), which is perceived to be in line with the Second Cycle Master's level within the EHEA (HC, 2007, p.80). For instance, MEng, MPharm in England, Wales and Ireland. Integrated Master's in Scotland is five years (Fearn, 2008).

At the *doctorate,* the BP encourages research collaborations (Sweeney, 2017), which has encouraged staff and student mobility and the development of programmes to facilitate cooperation within the EHEA and to develop a European Research Area – ERA (UK European HE, 2005, p.36). According to the Bergen Communiqué (2005, p.4), it is a must to avoid overregulating doctoral programmes. Although the doctoral level or third cycle is under formulation within the BP, the UK uniquely provides professional doctorates in disciplines like Education, Engineering and Business (HC, 2007, p.52-53; Huisman & Van der Wende, 2004, p.132). Concerns have been raised on the grounds that European norms risk being incompatible with the UK's present HE practices, which may work counterproductive for the reputation, integrity and quality of its doctoral degrees (HC, 2007). However, this fear has been suppressed by the perception that some Europeans might lack information or misunderstand the UK doctorate degrees, and there is no doubt with respect to the quality of the UK's professional doctorates (HC, 2007, p.52-53). Table 4 which follows illustrates the degrees and length of study cycles in the UK in the BP era.

Table 4: UK degrees and length of study cycle in the BP era

Degree structure	**Length of study cycle**
Foundation degree	2 years
Bachelor's degree	3 years
'Two year accelerated degree' (fast-track initiative to reduce duration of Bachelor's degrees)	2 years (3 years Bachelor's – 1 year Bachelor's)
Master's degree	1 year
	4 years (integrated Master's e.g. MEng, MPharm in England, Wales and Ireland)
	5 years (integrated Master's in Scotland)
Doctorate (Professional Doctorate in Education, Engineering and Business)	3 – 4 years full time
	5 – 6 years part-time

Source: Adapted from Huisman and van der Wende (2004); UK House of Commons (HC, 2007); and Fearn (2008)

UK universities have not fully met with the commitment of issuing diploma supplements as in 2005, just one-third of its universities were involved in issuing it while others intended to do so thereafter (HC, 2007, p.58; Huisman & van der Wende, 2004, p.131). This is because of the issue of resources and the adaptation of information management systems within institutions when producing diploma supplements. However, the production of diploma supplements has been enhanced by the Europe Unit via its

influence on manufacturing a 'Guide to the Diploma Supplement' and the national description of the UK's HE system in terms of the diploma supplement (HC, 2007, p.58). The UK also intends to include diploma supplements in the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), which would be compulsory for all graduates, coupled with their degrees (Sweeney, 2017). The 'Measuring and Recording Student Achievement' steering committee in England is also reviewing diploma supplements in line with its degree classification and has recommended merging UK transcripts with diploma supplements, which means transcripts awarded to graduates would have elements of diploma supplements (HC, 2007, p.58).

6. Discussion of Findings

Based on the comparative analysis above, HE in Cameroon and the UK exhibit commonalities, differences, and challenges. In terms of commonalities, they have both scrapped off, modified, and retained some old degrees that existed in the pre-LMD and pre-BP era, respectively. Examples of pre-LMD degrees scrapped off in HE in Cameroon in the French subsystem within the LMD era include *DEA, Doctorate de Troisieme Cycle* and *Doctorat d'Etat.* Postgraduate diplomas within the Anglo-Saxon HE subsystem in Cameroon that existed in the pre-LMD era have also been scrapped off in the LMD era. *Maîtrise* of the pre-LMD era in the French HE system in Cameroon has been adapted to *Master's I* and *Master's II* in the LMD era. On the other hand, in the UK, the HND and HNC qualifications of the pre-BP era have been replaced with Foundation degrees in the BP era. The UK has introduced a two-year accelerated programme in the BP era, which was absent in the pre-BP era. HE in Cameroon and the UK both have features of the Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degree framework aligning to the three-cycle degree structure of the BP (London Communiqué, 2007) and LMD (Libreville Declaration, 2005) reforms. Additionally, none of the countries have yet fully implemented the diploma supplement. Within the BP and LMD era, degree recognition still poses challenges for graduate employability.

However, HE in Cameroon and the UK differ in the types of intermediary degrees offered and the duration of their study cycles in the pre-LMD/LMD and pre-BP/BP eras. These differences can be explained using BP discourses found in its communiques and declarations. Thus, UK's focus on continuous degrees (HC, 2007) and Cameroon's emphasis on intermediate degrees (Eta & Vubo, 2016) can be attributed to the Prague Communique (2001), which encouraged higher education institutions to take advantage of national legislation to facilitate degrees and other awards, and the Bergen Communique (2005) which adopted an overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles – including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications. The BP emphasizes competitiveness, aimed at assisting individual countries in developing degree structures that cater for the needs of the international student market and the competitive agenda**.** This has necessitated flexibility and dynamism to accommodate a variety of models that allow different students to

achieve equivalent learning outcomes within varying time frames - thus promoting divergence of degree structures rather than convergence.

To cope with existing problems facing degree structure and recognition across HE in Cameroon and the UK, it is worthy to revisit Figure 1 and BP communiques/declarations to know what European Ministers have adopted with regard to degree structure and recognition which can be applicable across contexts. For instance, Ministers suggested that first and second-cycle degrees should have different orientations and various profiles to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p.4), while doctoral degrees need to be fully aligned to the EHEA overarching framework for qualifications using the outcomes-based approach (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p.4). Ministers encouraged 'recognition' by encouraging the recognition of non-formal and formal learning, removing obstacles hindering recognition, encouraging the need to work together towards automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees, building on the tools of the Bologna framework, and encouraging HE institutions and quality assurance agencies to assess institutional recognition procedures (Bucharest Communiqué, 2012, p.4). European Ministers recommended that national governments should remove legal obstacles to degree recognition (Berlin Communiqué, 2003, p.6) and encourage the recognition of joint degrees (Bergen Communiqué, 2005, p.3). Ministers emphasised the digitalisation of the Diploma Supplement to ensure that the exchange of student data is secured, machine-readable and interoperable format in line with data protection legislation (Paris Communiqué, 2018, p.2).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2006), concerns within comparative education at large and policy borrowing, in particular, focus on what happens to existing practices once a reform has been imported. The authors question whether such reforms are replaced, reinforced, or modified. The author's concerns have been partly answered in this paper, having been illustrated using the BP and LMD reforms in HE in both the UK and Cameroon respectively. In other words, this paper comparatively analyzed HE degree structure in the pre-LMD and pre-BP era as well as in the LMD and BP era in Cameroon and UK HE, respectively – denoting BP realities in national contexts. In line with this, Furlong (2005, p.53) noted that the relevance of the BP does not only lie in the agreement and implementation of the reform but also in the justification it provides for diverse national adaptations, which are known to drive an extensive change process amongst numerous signatories who have limited capacity to affect the reform details.

Succinct elements made it relevant for these two countries to be placed side by side and their situations examined. Thus, Cameroon is a late adopter and non-signatory member state of the BP reform (known in Francophone Africa as the LMD), while the UK is an early adopter and signatory member state of the BP reform. Cameroon is part of the

CEMAC space for HE governed by the LMD (having been inspired by the BP), while the UK is a member of the EHEA governed by the BP reform.

From the analysis presented, both Cameroon and UK HE systems have commonalities in terms of the Bachelor's, Master's and Doctorate degrees, which are in line with the three-cycle architecture of the BP reform (London Communiqué, 2007). Both have also scrapped off, modified and retained some old degrees that existed in the pre-LMD and pre-BP era in the LMD and BP era. Both HE systems have also reinstituted new degrees, such as *Master's I* and *Master's II* (also considered adapted degrees from *Maîtrise)* in the French HE subsystem in Cameroon and Foundation degrees in UK HE. Within the LMD and BP era, none of the countries have fully implemented the diploma supplement, and degree recognition still poses challenges for graduate employability.

HE in Cameroon and the UK differs in the type of intermediary degrees offered and length of study cycles. These differences could partly be explained by the Prague Communique (2001), which encouraged HE institutions to take advantage of national legislation to facilitate degrees and other awards, and the Bergen Communique (2005), which adopted an overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles – including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications. Additionally, Cameroon and the UK have unique contextual realities with respect to problems, needs and priorities, which necessitated that the implementation of the LMD and BP reforms were indigenized or domesticated in ways that best serve the needs of each of the two countries as suggested in the third and fourth phases of Phillips and Ochs (2003) model of policy-borrowing.

It is worth mentioning the fact that the effective implementation of some BP agreements has been particularly challenging for some countries (e.g., the case of degree structure and recognition in Cameroon and UK HE). In this regard, European Ministers have agreed to use policy dialogue and exchange of good practices to help member countries facing difficulties in implementing the agreed goals (Yerevan Communique, 2015, p.3). Ministers met in Tirana, Albania, between 28 – 30th May for the 2024 edition of the BP ministerial conference (ehea2024tirane.al.programme/). Discussions during the 2024 ministerial conference were planned to focus on challenges related to the implementation of key BP commitments and the recognition of academic qualifications, among others (ehea2024tirane.al.programme/). Thus, analysis presented in this paper has the potential of providing some of the required information needed in monitoring and evaluating the progress of the BP relative to degree structure and recognition across signatory and non-signatory member states of the BP reform. This is required for the stocktaking task of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) mandated by European Ministers to oversee the progress of the BP reform across Ministerial Conferences.

Recommended is the need for HE policymakers in Cameroon to engage in policy dialogue, exchange of good practices, and effectively collaborate with UK HE institutions and those of the entire CEMAC space for HE and EHEA in a bid to mitigate barriers to degree recognition and to produce an overarching qualification framework that can be adapted in national HE systems. These are needed to promote student mobility,

encourage mutual recognition of degrees and qualifications, as well as enhance academic cooperation. HE authorities in Cameroon, the UK and beyond should invest in capacity building and training of academic staff on the principles governing the BP system to ensure effective adoption and adaptation, and implementation of the BP framework. Other BP objectives and action lines should be examined from a comparative and non-comparative perspective in future research and publication.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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