



IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULAR REFORMS TO BASIC EDUCATION IN CAMEROON: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PROFESSIONAL INVOLVEMENT OF ACTORS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract:

The article questions the operationalization of basic education curricula in Cameroon. For two decades, we have seen reforms in Cameroon, especially according to the APC, which implies a change of paradigm. The actors in the field seem helpless for its implementation, and there is a lack of synergy at the level of the educational chain. However, according to the systemic management approach, for there to be professional involvement, it is important that the curriculum framework process identifies the system to be considered. The study focused on five (05) professionals selected through the sampling technique by typical reasoned choice. The continuous thematic analysis made it possible to obtain the results, which reveal that the identification of the system to be considered has an impact on the nature of the professional involvement among the actors of the education system.

Keywords: curriculum; systemic approach; APC; curriculum reform; education system

1. Introduction

The curriculum reforms are in line with the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the United Nations for 2015-2030. Strengthening education systems is important. The educational system is the basis for the development of any society and individuals. This is how investing in education generates significant national benefits. Consequently, an increased level of education among the population suggests better

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living conditions, easier socio-professional integration, active democratic values, effective strategies for promoting justice, freedom, tolerance and solidarity. With this in mind, several governments of developing countries, with the support of international donors, are investing in the reform of their educational systems, aspiring to equip their country with a society project consistent with the expectations of civil society and the international community. The challenges are numerous and to meet them, it is necessary to question the strategies to be implemented in a given educational system to consolidate its coherence, efficiency and relevance of its programs.

In this movement, the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB) has embarked on a major project with the conviction that it is marking out the paths of the future for generations to come. The objective of reform by the APC leads to a paradigm shift. Consequently, it is no longer a question of transmitting knowledge controlled by the master; the role of the teacher changes and becomes that of a resource person, in the sense that he must react and adapt to the needs of the learners. Mgbwa *et al.* (2019) believe that with the APC, it is no longer a question of gorging learners with an insipid program, but of accustoming them to the delights of skills. Indeed, the role of the teacher would no longer be to transmit but to design, create learning conditions and pilot learning sequences in new situations, leading learners to act and interact. The task of the teacher is now that of building and organizing learning conditions likely to make the learner succeed in their learning. (Jonnaert and Vander Borgh, 2009; Altet, 2017).

It is in this context that the Minister of Basic Education, by adopting as a watchword to train learners and encourage them to become dynamic and creative, has *"undertaken the reform of the curricula for kindergarten and primary school, in order to contribute to quality education for all Cameroonian learners"* (MINEDUB, 2018, p. 4). Indeed, the curricula are designed with a view to *"developing skills in learners and laying the foundation for learning science, technology, engineering, and mathematics"* (MINEDUB, 2018, p. 3). In other words, the purpose of curricula is to ensure that learners build skills.

In their work, Mgbwa and Matouwé (2020) believe that the reform envisaged in education constitutes an action that should serve to enlighten the lantern of field actors on a daily basis in classrooms. It is for the teachers of basic education to be enlightened on the principles and strategic approaches to observe in order to successfully operationalize primary education curricula in Cameroon. In these reforms, according to Altet (2017), it is a question of moving from a traditional pedagogy, or 'pedagogy of teaching', to an active pedagogy, or 'pedagogy of learning'. Thus, explain Mgbwa and Matouwé (2020, p. 7), *"the need for teachers to develop new skills implies that they have analytical tools and can use a common pedagogical language to share their practices."* Which implies that the effective operationalization of the curriculum reform requires *"job changes"* from the actors of the education system that Perrenoud (1997) names teachers, managers, civil society, but also learners.

The work of Depover and Noel (2005) specifies that, *"to succeed in any educational change, it is essential ... to involve at all levels the people who will have to implement the reform on a daily basis (...) It is their adherence to the reform that its success will depend"* (p. 180). Thus,

in order to hope that the curricula of basic education can truly transform teaching practices, it would be necessary that school directors and teachers, considered as particularly important stakeholders, can participate in the development or revision of this curriculum. In this way, they would be actively involved in implementing the curriculum within schools and classrooms (UNESCO-IBE, 2016). The reforms must thus result from a constant work of evaluation of school structures and operating systems with all stakeholders (Ndjebakal Souck, 2020). It is a participatory development of the curriculum that solicits the point of view of each category of actors in the education system and, by ricochet, their active involvement in the project in question.

Then arises the question of taking into account the system to be considered in the curricular process. If the curriculum must be operationalized by field actors, what is the place given to them in the dynamics of curricular reforms? If it is true that every curriculum is subject to appropriation and interpretation by the actors, what constraints do teachers face? Why do some curriculum objects have trouble existing in classes?

The system to be considered is, according to Bériot (1992, p. 232), *"the whole made up by an observer from the relevant elements of the apparent system and the network of influence, in view of the results to be achieved."* The system to be considered thus refers to the envelope of the system to be taken into consideration, in order to obtain the relevant information for acting. It is all the people in relation to each other and having a link of coherence with the objective of the project, actors of the education system capable of converging towards the major objective of the request. Moreover, Bériot (2006) insists on the need to consider a change according to a systemic approach in order to mobilize the actors concerned in the direction specified by the applicant. Thus, for professionals to be involved in the effective operationalization of curricula, it is important that the different categories of actors concerned can participate in their development. Because, as UNESCO-IBE points out (2016), *"curricula must not [...] be developed 'behind closed doors' by education specialists."* Indeed, the involvement of parents, students, teachers, employers, communities and the government will allow us to find a balance between the different issues of the stakeholders and will promote the achievement of a national consensus. Within the framework of this research, the system to be considered involves the different actors; therefore, when it is well identified, it facilitates their professional involvement. It is a question for the planners and the actors on the ground to realize the individual skills of each actor involved in the process of curriculum reform. It is necessary to identify among the different actors, who can do what and how? Who can slow down or not complete a task ?

2. Material and Procedure

This study is of the comprehensive type. It seeks to understand how teachers proceed with the operationalization of new curricula. In other words, are all the links in the educational chain involved in the implementation process? Indeed, it should be noted that this article highlights the contribution of recurring relationships in the development

of new curricula for basic education with the entry by the APC (MINEDUB, 2018). The research is based on a qualitative design that highlights the experiential experience of the five professionals obtained through the typical reasoned choice (Fortin and Gagnon, 2016) at the public school of Biyem-Assi. All the participants, due to their particular character, were chosen on the basis of specific inclusion criteria: having at least 10 years' seniority in educational reform processes in Cameroon, having lived as actors-key, and having at least two experiences of framing reform policies in the Cameroonian educational system. The table below presents the characteristics of the participants.

Table 1: Distribution of Interviewers Sample

Participants	Sex	Age	Function	Seniority
Ange (AE)	Féminin	42 old	Teacher	13 years
Thomas (TS)	Masculine	47 old	IPR	20 years
Philippe (PE)	Masculine	55 old	CP	19 years
Solange (SE)	Féminin	53 old	Teacher	17 years
Stanislas (SS)	Masculin	49 ALD	Teacher	14 years

Source: Field data (2023).

The information collected from this category of professional was processed through sequenced thematic content analysis. This method makes it possible to classify the various elements of a message in order to better reveal its meaning (Paillé and Muchielli, 2016). It allowed the highlighting of the richness and diversity of the statements listened to and transcribed, because it focused on the contents of the speeches from the interviews. The intellectual operation consists of breaking down the information, breaking it down into categories according to the objectives of the study, and representing it in a form considered by indexing. The analysis grid (Table 2) includes the central theme and sub-themes. It is a question of identifying the verbatim of the participants who correspond to them and of dividing them in a transversal manner to facilitate the understanding of the information received.

Table 2: Analytical Framework

Grille d'analyse					
Theme	Code	Sous-thèmes	Observations		
			+	-	±
Identification of the system to consider	A	Brake actors/ resource actors in relation to the operationalization of new curricula			
	B	Challenges for the actors in relation to the operationalization of new curricula			
	C	Recurring relationships in the operationalization of new curricula			

Source: Present study (2023).

The sign + means completely adequate, rather adequate, the sign – means completely inadequate, rather inadequate, and the sign means more or less adequate.

3. Results

3.1 Empirical analysis of the system to consider in the operationalization of new curricula

The identification of the system to be considered contributes to the harmonization of professional interventions in the implementation of CBA as prescribed in the new curricula. This way of doing things allows one to question the contribution of different actors, their challenges and the collaborative work that is highlighted in its process.

3.1.1 Contribution actors brakes/actors resources in the implementation of new curricula

The analysis reveals that the operationalization of new curricula must focus on identifying resource actors and key players (A). The introduction of CBA in the Cameroonian education system adopts a "top down" approach, that is to say, it begins with the macro level, then the meso and finally the micro. The MINEDUB's curricula thus reveal a verticalist conception, because it is realized on the ground that there are biases at the level of professionals who present difficulties in their implementation. However, taking into account certain parameters would help each other to feel comfortable in professional practice and give the best of themselves for educational success. Let's listen to one of the participants: *"I have difficulties in certain aspects, such as the identification of know-how, but I do not always have the opportunity during seminars to express myself in this direction, because it is the domain of some professionals and the hierarchy encourages them in this direction"* (A+) (SS).

It should be noted that the identification of resource actors, just like the curb resources, is full of information, tools and human resources necessary for easy professional development. Indeed, the actions of resource professionals can be surmounted and possible solutions can be implemented to overcome them. To this end, the field professional should possess a great diversity of skills, because according to the speech of a participant, *"each professional is a link in the educational chain. If one is not useful in a given professional situation, it can be useful in the other. It is up to the managers to plan and involve all the actors in the field as needed, but we realize that there are affinities"* (A+) (SS). The words of this experienced teacher reveal an outdated management that does not highlight proven professional skills. However, taking professional skills into account would allow each professional to actively participate, and this would give rise to a diversity, a plurality of points of view essential in improving the educational issue.

Faced with the realities on the ground, what one believes to know clearly offends what one should know. The only possible method is then to list the concrete possibilities offered to each of the professionals and to try to concretely reconstruct their own environment. When the solutions offered to him can be listed, only then is it possible to make assumptions about the behaviors he will adopt and about the reasons for his choices. This is consistent with an analysis of the contributions of key players and resource actors who can contribute in their own way to understanding the new curricula.

All of the participants believe that each link in the educational chain has its contribution to the understanding of new curricula, *"because a slender actor who seems to confuse colleagues with incongruous remarks can become an aid in understanding new curricula (TS) A+".*

It is to be taught in this curriculum complexity, to work on the decision-making process with all stakeholders. Thus, the curricula would be legitimized, contextualized and not standardized. The understanding of the system identification to be considered consists of highlighting the key players that may belong to several centers of interest. This is why certain information systems are often neglected in the organization and later cause the project to lapse. The low involvement of some field professionals may be due to the management system implemented, which does not recognize the strengths of each professional.

3.1.2 Stakes of the actors: a determinant of professional involvement

The situations of action of field professionals are more determined by the opportunities offered than by their aspirations or needs. Thus, their individual acts are oriented by the context of action. Starting from the principle that resource actors pursue their own objectives, which are not necessarily compatible with those of the main actors, it remains wise to point out to each professional what the challenges of a good implementation or even the opportunities of the CBA. Referring to data from the field, it should be noted that the actions of the operationalization of new curricula are not significant for professionals. The same goes for the lack of consistency in the practice of professionals. On this subject, let's listen to one of the participants: *"really in my classroom, I use new curricula as I understand them. My only goal is to have the students learn. Apart from that, I don't know what this should be used for. It is understood that field professionals have no ambition with the new curricula. Which allows us to deduce that they are not involved in its management and operationalization."*

Indeed, talking about professional involvement amounts to establishing the link between reflective practitioners and the object of CBA in terms of social representations. Professional involvement should be understood as the way of being, expressing oneself and acting in the professional field, based on the activation of the three dimensions SRC: what is the meaning that teachers of basic education must give to the new curricula, having to enter CBA? What are the identified benchmarks? How to control one's feelings in its implementation? In this sense, involvement goes beyond a state, being able to report only on the subject taken in a context of complexity that exceeds it, to the point of not being able to extract meaning from it. Involvement is therefore considered here as a product and can be read as the relationship of a subject to its environment.

The professional here does not allow himself to be acted upon, but acts himself, because he is operative in the relationship of the subject to an object. The representations would then be a component contributing to the expression of involvement. The field professional cannot be a simple receptacle that simply receives injunctions, as is the case in the Cameroonian educational system. The circumstances that governed the process of

implementing curriculum reforms did not at all allow professionals to recognize themselves as full members. *"There are too many differences in understanding in new curricula, and I prefer to focus on what I know to help my students. Because if the administration were concerned, it would organize seminars if necessary. I don't consider anything else except the success of my students."* (B) (TS)

Through this speech, it follows that the participants in question are not at all involved from a professional point of view. Professional involvement would no longer be able to describe professionalism or a continuous professionalization process in a professional situation. The professional becomes unable to apply or implement the object of the curriculum reform process. This inability can expose him to a drift, that of transgression. He does not feel his subjectivity in the process. Responsibility is a personal commitment to the action taken, which unfolds among others, in the midst of all others, whether in a civil or professional context. Individual responsibility should lead to collective responsibility. This, of course, presupposes a homogeneity of thought and action between the legal entity on whose behalf the professional acts and the action of that professional.

This limit in the process of the reform project by the CBA can constitute a breach, insofar as the actors on the ground find themselves in a situation of imbalance, discomfort, or even presenteeism. Thus, professional involvement can only be successful through stakeholder principles. It is for the cameraman and planners to integrate any group or individual who affects the achievement of the objectives of curricular operationalization is affected. It confirms the words of the following participant: *"I think that each director at his level must organize the operationalization of new curricula in order to facilitate exchanges, consider pedagogical innovations and even possible new ones"* (C-) (PE)

Professional involvement allows one to restore meaning in what one wants to commit to or in the reform. It is, of course, necessary that the different actors have shared representations, so that the practices are conciliatory and coherent. Professional involvement in this context is therefore the result of a process of implementing outdated and linear curriculum reform, and would no longer allow for understanding the professional attitudes to which these actors on the ground will be subjected. The work of professionals requires sensitivity to the psychic life of the other, without which no work can be envisaged.

3.1.3 Recurring relationships as a commitment booster for professionals

The levers of productivity in the education system are based on field professionals, their determination and the ability of the system to adapt to the realities of the field. It is a matter of establishing a form of reciprocal loyalty in employment relationships, which could condition the real commitment of professionals. It is in this sense that the participant (SE) asserts: *"Professional commitment refers to a means which consists of explaining and understanding the conduct of a field professional in the relationships he establishes with new curricula and with other professionals on the ground"* (B). This professional stance reflects how education actors think and live the process of implementing new curricula

and to what extent they are involved in it. Professional commitment is projected forward in the search for quality and efficiency of the education system.

On this subject, it is important to understand that professional commitment is a managerial issue. When the operationalization process has failed, professional commitment becomes a lure. The managerial challenge lies in starting from understanding the needs of field actors at a given moment, as well as taking into account their future needs. This will be done through an action plan and debates during regular meetings that will allow for the deployment of techniques and tools, which will constitute an appropriate response to recurring relationships in the process of implementing new curricula. *"It remains difficult for leaders to organize seminars aimed at understanding and operationalizing the new curricula. Most often, it is the educational advisors and the IPR (Regional Educational Inspectors) who come to do it. We don't care about the realities on the ground. However, it would be wise for professionals to first organize themselves for an appropriate effort through the mutual aid of other colleagues"* (SE).

In this sense, it is up to managers to multiply meetings that will allow professionals to deploy on the ground. In other words, the professional should be above all in a profession of intellectual freedom, to learn to know, to learn to do, to learn to live together, to learn to be in the society of information, knowledge, intelligence, of complexity and collective intelligence.

The operationalization of new curricula is difficult on the ground, because it is always the top-down approach that has been advocated in this country, because if I remember correctly, foreigners have control over our educational system. You understand that even our managers act blindly, without being able to identify the constraints, the stakes, and without establishing the bridge between the already done and the envisaged. What justifies the posture of professionals regarding the use and operationalization of curricula. However, it would be important to allow field professionals to work in synergy with the aim of highlighting their experiences, which would facilitate their educational actions.

In this sense, professionals represent local managers, even if it turns out that they have less power in organizations. Traditionally, it was believed that their main role was to ensure the implementation of the objectives of the scoping process on the ground. Today, they are increasingly expected in strategic roles because, without them, the process of framing does not make sense. We understand that the emergence and transformation of collectives or networks of resource actors represent one of the fundamental phenomena, which must be fully grasped, to theorize collective action, new curricula and regulations for basic education. In this sense, the organization should become a space for collective action that is less and less static, whose constructed and artificial, temporary and fragile character can appear more and more clearly in the process of implementing new curricula. The professional as a resource actor, often considered as a central element of the educational system, would constitute the first element of study of the organization and would allow the grasp of the very nature of the CBA.

The system to be considered may have been identified, but appears unsatisfactory in technical and functional terms and creates reluctance among professionals. It is important to identify the system to be considered, which itself would sometimes be at the origin of shortcomings related to the operationalization of new curricula. In other words, the identification of key players and resource actors will determine the way of working, transcend the purpose of collaboration or cooperation, while making it possible to implement curricula in an operational manner according to the competency-based approach.

4. Discussions and Perspectives

The results of the analysis demonstrate that the change of paradigm must be based on the schemes of representations of professional actors with regard to their consideration in the curriculum process. It is about the evolution of the knowledge they have of the reform, about the construction of a pictorial representation that they make of it (Matouwé, 2022). Thus, commonly, the representation scheme would be the dynamic structure built during the experience of the curricular process and which evolves according to the recurring relationships that are woven between the different stakeholders. The operationalization of curriculum reform cannot be effective if field professionals retain even the essential elements that define the CBA.

The study led to reproblematicize the question of professional abilities that involve self-regulation, reflexivity among professionals in daily classrooms at basic education. There is a need to build and maintain a shared conception of managerial news in order to boost the professional involvement of actors in the education system. This possibility requires significant efforts in terms of systemic regulation, and many actors struggle to self-regulate, especially when professionals are ignored in the curricular process. The curricular process needs the synergy between the actors of the system to be considered. Synergy is when two or more entities (companies, services or even teams) work together to produce something of value. This notion is often misused, while it is inspired by ancient Greek philosophy, according to which "*the whole is more than the sum of its parts*".

There is a need to build and maintain a shared conception of managerial news in order to boost the professional involvement of actors in the education system. This possibility requires significant efforts in terms of systemic regulation, and many actors struggle to self-regulate, especially when professionals are ignored in the curricular process. The curricular process needs the synergy between the actors of the system to be considered. Synergy is when two or more entities (companies, services or even teams) work together to produce something of value. This notion is often misused, while it is inspired by ancient Greek philosophy, according to which "*the whole is more than the sum of its parts*".

In the literature (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977; Crozier, 1989; Mias, 1998, 2006) on managerial management processes, many works support the importance of taking into account the different stakeholders or actors in the process of implementing curricular

reforms and satisfaction, or motivation at work, notably professional involvement. Indeed, according to Ndjebakal Souck (2018), Demanou Tiffe (2018; 2019), the promotion of participatory administrative management allows professionals to have the right information and to be emotionally involved in their professional tasks. It also promotes the establishment of a climate of trust and a sense of psychosocial well-being at work. Thus, involving workers in the decision-making process allows them to be mobilized in the profession (Fournier, 2017). What contributes to the achievement of the objectives of the education system in terms of productivity, profitability and performance in achieving the SDGs. Because, as we know, the most successful companies are distinguished by their human resources. The more motivated, balanced and satisfied professionals there are, the more the educational system, through the curricular process, manages to achieve its goal: the professionalization of subjects in training situations, the efficiency of the system, and by ricochet the improvement of the quality of education.

According to Miled (2005; 2011), the involvement of field professionals in curricular reforms refers to the design, organization, planning, implementation and evaluation of teaching/learning activities, according to the educational pathway. This is a journey that brings together the statement of goals as well as the methods and means for assessing learners' achievements. Because its design echoes the curricular project, reflecting the societal project. However, the task has become increasingly complex in the curricular process, particularly with the introduction of the concept of competence, which requires actors to first reflect on the implementation of a logic for curricular organization (Mgbwa *et al.*, 2019). This is what would justify passive involvement behaviors as well as the feeling of uncertainty (Mias, 1998) among primary school teachers.

This study reveals, in this context, the importance of taking into account the modalities of the systemic approach on the part of cameramen or planners, as a potential lever for professional involvement. These are the modalities on which managers should focus, to encourage professionals to make more efforts, and better operationalize the curricula of basic education in Cameroon. The article thus contributes to broadening knowledge related to the concept of professional involvement with regard to the identification of the different actors involved in the purpose of the curriculum reform. This conceptual expansion seems significant insofar as it enriches, in this sense, the literature on professional involvement and provides new empirical insights into the impact of the dimensions of the curricular process.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no financial, professional or personal conflicts of interest relating to this scientific work.

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