

## Curricular Reform In The School Environment: The Added Value of Decentralisation in Cameroon

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**ABSTRACT:-** This article focuses on curriculum reform in the school environment: the added value of decentralisation in Cameroon. As a project of a society, the school curriculum finds its justification in taking into account social, cultural, economic and political parameters. Decentralisation, on the other hand, is the transfer of power from the state to the decentralised local authorities, which are the municipality and the regions, for their own development. However, the provisions of the texts governing decentralisation give priority to the administrative, financial and material aspects to the prejudice of the pedagogical aspect which is based on learning and is planned through the curriculum. The outstanding question is whether the curriculum should take into account the new territorial organisation (decentralisation) in order to contribute to its development? Taking the primary school curriculum as a reference, the main objective will be to examine the need for curriculum reform in the framework of decentralisation in Cameroon. In order to clarify this point, we opted for a qualitative study with recourse to documentary sources. It emerges from this that it is necessary, even imperative, to have a curricular reform that would respond on the economic, socio-professional, cultural, administrative, social and even pedagogical levels to the realities of Cameroon.

**Key words:-** curriculum, decentralisation and decentralised, local authorities.

### I. INTRODUCTION

From the earliest Greek cities to the present day, education has always existed and has never ceased to be directed towards a purpose defined by a specific society through educational action. It can be defined as the bringing of a person out of his or her primary state or the bringing out of him or her of what he or she has virtually (Tsafak, p.18). On the other hand, it can refer to a process, an action that consists of influencing a person (Mialaret, 1974) or the work of society that trains its members according to its expectations (Durkheim, 1911).

Thus, educational action takes place in accordance with a given educational policy in a society, to which an education system responds and which is responsible for implementing the policy through the teachers in the classrooms, thus justifying the consideration of the curriculum. Understood according to Demeure & Strauven (2006, p.11) quoted by Duroisin; Soetewey and Demeure (2013, p.111), as a plan of action that provides an overall, planned, structured and coherent vision of the pedagogical guidelines according to which the organisation and management of learning should take place in relation to the expected outcomes. Its nature reflects a school project that mirrors a societal project and leads to behaviours and practices that are anchored in a given educational reality; this could make it difficult to move a curriculum from one environment to another. To this end, the state of Cameroon, a “decentralised unitary state” (art. 1 constitution of 18 January 1996), is putting forward the political will to review the system of state administration by including new actors: the decentralised local authorities with the purpose of promoting development, democracy and good governance at local level.

Decree n° 2010/0247/PM of 26 February 2010 setting the modalities for the exercise of some skills transferred by the state to the municipalities in the framework of basic education and more precisely in the harmonisation and management of school curricula. The aim is to develop a forward-looking training plan for the trade sectors appropriate to the rural community. Curricula management involves designing the curriculum

according to the realities of the locality and selecting the needs of these environments so that the school can fulfil its regalian mission; that is, to enable individuals to solve the problems of our society.

In addition, decree no. 2004/019 of 22 July 2004 laying down the rules applicable to the regions sets out in its chapter 3 the skills transferred to the regions with regard to education. These are: training of educators, an exhaustive inventory of regional occupations and the drawing up of a directory of existing vocational training courses with an indication of the skills required and the training profiles; the development of a provisional training plan. More recently, Article 271a of the General Code of Decentralised Local Authorities contains the transferred skills. These are based on an exhaustive inventory of regional occupations and the development of a directory of professional training; the development of a provisional training plan.

The contribution of these communities to the emergence of education is more in terms of material, infrastructural and financial management than technical (pedagogical). There are only a few subparts that address the issue of the training device in an indirect way. If education is a tool for the development of a society, every society must define its expectations and needs according to the realities of that society. It would only be possible to achieve this by setting up a school curriculum that meets the standards of that society.

This new form of public management allows flexibility at the local level. Actually, the state transfers to decentralised local authorities the necessary skills for their educational development (art 17 of the law n°2019/024 of 24 December 2019 on the general code of decentralised local authorities). This gives each decentralised local authority the opportunity to implement the national educational policy taking into account the realities of the local authority. Consequently, is it possible to reform the school curriculum in the context of decentralisation in Cameroon?

## 1. Environmental framework of decentralisation in Cameroon

### 1.1. History of decentralisation in Cameroon

Decentralisation, contrary to some opinions, is not a new phenomenon. As such, one of the major consequences of the First World War was the splitting of Cameroon into two zones, an Anglophone zone under British colonial administration and the Francophone zone under French colonial administration. The first instances of decentralisation appeared in British Cameroon as early as 1922 with the creation of the “natives court” which led to the policy of “indirect rule”. From 1941 onwards, the trend began with the emergence of the mixed urban municipalities of Yaoundé and Douala, followed in 1961 by the establishment of the federal regime, which was the result of the sovereign will of the two political entities. A decade later, decentralisation was established by the organic law of 2 June 1972, which granted the municipalities the status of legal persons under public law with administrative, legal and financial autonomy.

However, in a context dominated by centralisation policies, the decentralisation process could not really prosper, due to the values bequeathed and imposed by colonisation, namely the promotion of the teaching of foreign languages (French, English, etc.), the abandonment of traditional African cultures and values in favour of Western culture and values.

The decade of the 1990s was a turning point in the progress of the decentralisation process. Actually, after the tripartite organised between 30 October and 17 November 1991, decentralisation took on a new impetus with the adoption of the constitutional law of 18 January 1996 which, in its article 1 paragraph 2, recognises the Republic of Cameroon as “a decentralised unitary state”. Thus, in addition to the municipality, a second category of decentralised local authorities is set up, the region. This constitutional law amends the form of the State, its institutional organisation and introduces a new public management.

According to the provisions of Article 5 of the General Code of Decentralised Local Authorities, and I quote, “decentralisation consists of the transfer by the State to local authorities of specific skills and appropriate means”, end of quote. In other words, it is a process of gradual transfer by the state to decentralised local authorities of appropriate skills and resources. It focuses on a set of principles such as the principle of free administration, the principle of administrative and financial autonomy and the principle of state supervision of decentralised local authorities.

Decentralisation takes into account several areas including the education area. The latter is regulated by a number of texts, namely the law on the orientation of decentralisation, the 2004 laws setting out the rules applicable to municipalities and regions, and finally law n°2019/024 of 24 December 2019 on the general code of decentralised local authorities. These laws show the commitment of the state to the education sector policy. These laws are a call to other entities such as decentralised local authorities to implement this policy in order to break with the centralised system that was previously the norm.

Decentralisation establishes a policy of proximity management of the concerns of the population at the basic level. Since it establishes a close relationship between decentralised local authorities and the basic level, decentralisation would facilitate the taking into account of realities at the local level with a view to improving the education system and, more specifically, to considering a reform of the school curriculum in Cameroon.

### 1.2. Principles of decentralisation

Article 55(2) of the Constitution states that "decentralised local authorities are legal persons under public law". As such, according to the mind and the law of the legislator, they are subject to three principles: the principle of free administration, the principle of administrative and financial autonomy and the principle of state supervision over decentralised local authorities.

The principle of free administration means that local authorities can manage the public affairs of the local authority. To this end, the elected council is given some leeway to promote the development of a number of areas, including the education area.

The principle of administrative and financial autonomy is a result of the principle of free administration. The autonomy granted to decentralised local authorities by the Constitution relates to administrative and financial matters. This means that, from an administrative point of view, local authorities require an administration and staff to manage regional and local interests. Financially, on the other hand, autonomy must take the form of "the exercise of fiscal competence and budgetary power at the local level" (Philip, 1992, p.454). This assumes the existence of a local tax, of a local or regional tax decision-making power; it also assumes that the state does not levy taxes on local tax resources, and that it respects the principle of free choice of local expenditure (Philip, 1992, p.456).

The principle of state supervision of decentralised local authorities implies that despite some degree of autonomy granted to decentralised local authorities, the state continues to exercise its supervision over them. Therefore, no decision is taken *ex nihilo*; all decisions taken at the local level have to comply with national policy.

## II. SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN THE FRAMEWORK OF DECENTRALISATION IN CAMEROON

### 2.1 School curriculum policy

The word curriculum etymologically comes from the Latin "*curriculum*" which means racecourse, racetrack, or race. This notion entered the vocabulary of education in the seventeenth century and up to the mid-twentieth century. It refers to a state-sanctioned educational project to educate citizens; this project is subject to official guidelines which are not binding, but which serve as a reference for stakeholders (teachers, parents, administrative staff). It consists of intentions, contents, organisation, methods, human and material environments and learning situations, as well as pupil assessment and teacher training facilities.

The curriculum is a technical agreement on public policy that takes into account local needs and expectations and reflects a model of society developed through teaching and learning processes. It is a far-reaching instrument that takes effect through two complementary dimensions: support and development of educational policies in a long-term vision; and assistance to teachers for the effective development of the learning process (Unesco-Bie, 2014).

According to the International Bureau of Education (2016) it is also referred to as a political and social agreement that reflects the shared vision of a society while taking into account local, national and global needs and expectations. In other words, the curriculum reflects the educational goals and purposes of a society. It is therefore an essentially cultural product, which means that it is relative to the contingent set of meanings. It is grounded in the aims of the education system, in the history of the education system and of the society in which it operates, and its content is dependent on the particular needs to which it strives to respond effectively.

### 2.2. Public policies related to the decentralisation of education in Cameroon

Cameroon is diverse in physical, human and economic terms. It is made up of more than 200 ethnic groups, hence the plurality of lifestyles, social, cultural, religious and linguistic organisations. It is in the process of reforming and decentralising its education system after the World Conference on EFA held in Jomtien, Thailand (1990). This reform is inspired both by the principles set out by this conference and by the realities imposed by the country's context.

The reform and decentralisation process can be divided into four stages. Among others, we have: the setting up of the orientations and basic principles of the reform during the National Education Forum organised in 1995 and the adoption of the legal text of the reform based on the law N°633/PJL/AN on the orientation of education in Cameroon, adopted in 1998, which sets the legal framework of this reform. We also can remark the drafting of a strategic document through the report " Stratégie du secteur (formel) de l'Education " (2001) and finally the development of the EFA national action plan.

The decentralisation of education in the Cameroonian environment has two main purposes. The first is to universalise and democratise basic education, which means placing the school back in the hands of the local community; involving the local community on a massive scale in the organisation of school life; and encouraging access for all children, particularly those from the most disadvantaged social strata, and thus reaching those excluded from the system. Hence the measures to transfer skills in the field of education to the

decentralised local authorities and the establishment of the educational community, which is defined as all the natural and legal persons contributing to the functioning and development of the school.

The second objective of decentralisation is to improve the performance of the education system. The performance of the system is assumed to enable young people to better cope with the competitiveness brought about by globalisation. This performance is not a matter of renovating school curricula, but it requires, as far as Cameroon is concerned, a redrawing of responsibilities on a human scale, with a recognised face and manageable scope, and a better controlled distribution of roles, functions and actions. The presidential decree N°2002/ 004 of 14 January 2002 on the organisation of the Ministry of National Education tries to implement this, notably by splitting up certain structures in the central services and specialising in the pedagogical follow-up of the different courses.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach adopted in this study is qualitative. We have mainly used documentary sources from the literature and legislation in force to confront existing preconceptions. We rely on the current primary school curriculum in Cameroon. Given the new ideology of public administration and its management principles (decentralisation), the possibilities and provisions offered by the latter in the education sector in general and in the use of the curriculum in particular are to be analysed.

### IV. SITUATED COGNITION THEORY, A CURRICULAR THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOCUSING ON DECENTRALISATION

Suchman (1987) quoted by Theureau (2004) is the founder of situated cognition he states the hypothesis according to which, knowledge or action is social to the extent that we understand its development according to the ways in which we have constructed it in the course of interaction with others. Actions or knowledge are influenced by many aspects inherent to the situation in which they are implemented. Cognition is not in the head, but between the stakeholder and the situation, which includes other stakeholders. We plan our problem solving when confronted with situations and contexts. As the situations and contexts differ, so do the solutions, including the learning process. Learning and knowledge are built up locally and respond to specific environmental realities.

Suchman's (1987) vision, quoted by Theureau (2004), is the one shared by Clancey (1997) when he thinks that this same theory claims that every human thought or action is adapted to its environment, meaning that it is situated, because what people perceive, how they conceive their activity, and what they physically do, all fall into place together. This means that all teaching and learning activity takes place in a specific context and the learning situations are in line with this social environment.

According to Moro (2001) situated cognition falls within the perspective of the Vygotskian historical-cultural paradigm. It emphasises the formative role of culture and social forms in learning and in the construction of knowledge. It reformulates the conception of learning in a radically environmentalist sense.

According to Jonnaert et al. (2004), situated cognition provides a view of cognition linked to social practice, and spread over the body and the activity of the person in the situation, over the situation itself and over its environment. Cognition is then at the heart of a network of dialectical relationships between the person in action, his or her own cognition and the situation and its social and physical context. Situated cognition sheds light on the primacy of the person who builds himself while constructing his environment, in a dialectical relationship with it, for the development of his skills.

It places the person in situations and their contexts with which it interacts constructively, providing an adequate framework for the development of skills. It also insists that the source of knowledge should be sought in the everyday, culturally and historically organised activities of the social group. This also means that the codified knowledge contained in the curricula and which are learnt is selected locally to address specific problems in the environment.

If situated cognition emphasises a local construction of knowledge and learning, the curriculum, which is the basis for planning this knowledge, should not deviate from this ideal. A curriculum is a local instrument. It meets a specific demand and is positioned in a cultural, social, political and economic environment. This means that learners should be provided with things that are socially valuable to them and that help develop their minds. This is because any curriculum relates learners to the social environment. The social and political environment determines the type of man to be trained and the requirements for his training. The development of a curriculum should depend on the type of society you are in. This same development must also necessarily be in line with the dynamic dimension of man. Man is in fact a project that is carried out every day in contact with personal and social stimuli.

In view of the administrative and governmental reforms calling for decentralisation, it is appropriate for the curriculum to converge towards this goal. Since it is necessary to develop decentralised local authorities, to achieve this, we need a curriculum that will take into account the specificities of each locality, its needs, its

assets, its culture, its history, its climate, its relief, its demography, its languages and its daily practices, in order to plan education in such a way as to provide appropriate solutions to development issues. A curriculum that is at the heart of decentralisation will take into account each historical, cultural, social and economic background of a society in order to provide the necessary resources to the individuals of that locality.

## V. Results of the study

### a. Existence of a link between decentralisation and the school curriculum

Provided that the curriculum is a technical agreement related to a public policy that takes into account local needs and expectations and reflects a model of society developed through teaching and learning processes, then it is an instrument at the service of society in general and the local community in particular. It therefore contributes to the development of decentralised local authorities. The curriculum should reflect and promote the economic, social, political and cultural development of local communities.

#### 5.1.1 Economic plan

One of the objectives of decentralisation is to enable the economic development of decentralised local authorities, aiming at stimulating or leading to national economic development. The aim will be to create jobs, increase local production through local entrepreneurship and investment in the regions, and exploit the regions' natural resources sustainably and profitably to create jobs and wealth. Generating wealth, increasing production, innovation and creativity for a sustained and sustainable economic growth of our regions depends on human resources, on human capital.

Local economic development requires qualified people to think, drive and implement it. They must be trained and skilled, and equipped with the various knowledge and skills to ensure this in their localities. Education is therefore the instrument by which this can be done, in general and the curriculum in particular. This is because the curriculum is operationalised on the basis of educational policy and contains programmes and develops strategies to be adopted for transmitting the various types of knowledge. The curriculum should be an instrument that meets the specific economic needs of these localities and contributes to the development of the places by taking into account their specificities instead of talking about economy in a strictly material way. A curriculum designed to be open to local specificities will make it possible to think about and train a human profile that meets the expectations of local economies, an economic actor capable of contributing to the production of wealth, employment and economic growth. If we look at the example of East Cameroon as a decentralised local authority, we would look for the assets and identify the needs of this locality and it would be possible to have a curriculum open to these regional specificities.

#### 5.1.2. Social and cultural plan

Each society has its own type of people to be trained according to its experience, its history, its specificities and its vision of the future. This type of people to be trained also corresponds to the social and cultural values of the society. In a decentralised system, local authorities (regions) have social and cultural specificities that should be taken into account for their development. These specificities are different from those of other regions. In order for these values to be better implanted and known by the populations that make up the school, it is necessary to adapt the curriculum to this reality by providing a margin of liberty that will allow the curriculum to be open to this specific context, because a curriculum is situated locally. By learning the local languages and culture, the people who make up this locality will become increasingly rooted.

A curriculum that serves decentralisation in the social and cultural sphere should contain lessons that highlight the social and cultural values of localities, such as local languages, gastronomy, customs, festivals and cultural ceremonies. It can also, because of its flexibility, allow teachers in different localities to adjust teaching to local realities, to build up values and cultures specific to those communities through teaching.

#### 5.1.3. Administrative plan

Beyond the transfer of resources, which is an obstacle to the optimal functioning of decentralisation, the training of local elected officials and the political culture of the populations in decentralised local authorities represent a real concern. Decentralisation implies the management of communities by local authorities elected by the people. Some of these authorities are not always trained and well equipped to perform these duties. This situation in the case of Cameroon led the government to the creation of the National School of Local Administration (NASLA) to train staff in charge of the management of local authorities and local affairs. This is welcome, but one must ask whether this training takes into account the realities of the different regions, which cannot be managed in the same way. The only way to respond effectively and efficiently to this managerial system is to have a curriculum that is open to local specificities and that integrates the realities, culture and other particularities of the community (region).

The content of the curriculum should develop in the learner the managerial skills, leadership culture and political culture that encourage and enable him or her to participate in politics and in the management of his or her locality. The curriculum could therefore be a channel for building future political and administrative leaders in the regions who are capable of undertaking the development of their local communities.

## 5. 2. School Curriculum as an expression of society's needs and a response to educational policy

Developing a curriculum does not happen by chance. It is based on the realities and needs of the society and the type of people to be trained. The curriculum of each society is thus developed according to the needs of the type of man to be trained. Education, through the school curriculum, aims at the training of a population capable of meeting labour needs, and a human capital capable of satisfying short, medium and long term socio-economic objectives.

Contemporary education systems are faced with complex situations which in many states require at least some adjustments and adaptations, and in some others significant curricular reforms. This involves providing education systems with a validated and operational curriculum reference framework. The latter would allow for the changes that states deem necessary to optimise their education systems. It is central to the debates and challenges facing education systems, as educationalists recognise that the curriculum is the cornerstone of any educational reform and development of a society (Jonnaert, 2015).

A curriculum is situated downstream of educational policies and upstream of the day-to-day actions of teaching and learning in the classroom. This makes it a kind of bridge between the major orientations defined by educational policies and their implementation in the classroom. A curriculum acts as a vehicle for educational policy and practice. A curriculum concerns, through academic and public debates, the school as much as society, the pupils as well as their parents and teachers, their social, cultural, economic, but also administrative and political environment. Educational policy is the starting point for the creation and implementation of the curriculum; it is a direction that the state gives to education. It is the set of visions issued by the leaders of a country in accordance with international prerogatives and which make it possible to train future citizens capable of meeting the current needs of society.

The curriculum reflects the kind of society to which we aspire. It is indeed an essential element of any educational process and has become for the education system what a constitution is for a democracy (Jonnaert et al., 2009). This conception guides and guarantees the organisation of the pedagogical and administrative action plans of the school system, ensuring the relevance of strong, coherent and effective curricular frameworks from early childhood. Given its importance in the training of the individual, the curriculum is a fundamental tool for defining and implementing educational policy in a long-term perspective, as well as for training teachers.

## VI. DISCUSSION: THE CHALLENGES OF A CURRICULAR REFORM ADAPTED TO DECENTRALISED LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Reforming the curriculum according to the realities of the decentralised local authorities in Cameroon is of great benefit to the education system in particular and the development of Cameroonian society in general. These can actually be observed on several levels.

It should be noted that this reform allows for curriculum policies to be adapted to local contexts, which improves the stability and development of democracy and the economy, strengthens social cohesion and accountability, and ultimately increases the confidence of the population in their government. Curricular reform adapted to decentralised local authorities is not an achievement in itself, it is a process. If a policy is aimed at improving learning outcomes, then, if the conditions are met, such as clear roles, sufficient resources and capacity, curriculum reform adapted to decentralised local authorities can be a means to this end.

More profit can be seen in the autonomy of schools. In fact, pedagogical autonomy is one of the most important elements, as it allows teachers to work more closely with the needs of learners, parents and the community. It can also meet the needs of different types of learners. The results of increasing school autonomy are generally better. This makes it possible to know that the teacher is competent to decide what is best for his/her learners. Schools that invest in capacity building perform well.

Curricular reform adapted to local authorities can enable the Cameroonian government to better develop its economic area. In fact, all the regional specificities will be highlighted for learning purposes. Depending on the realities, needs and strengths of each local authority, curricula are designed with these elements in mind, which will be learned in the classroom. This would lead to an increase in GDP at the national level.

It is also an opportunity to enhance culture through the learning of local languages, local cuisine, traditional dances, rituals and customs, crafts and cultural heritage in general. No country can have access to development without the marketing of its culture as a self-identity, a brand and a footprint. The example of countries such as South Korea, Canada, Morocco, to name but a few, which have a decentralised form of government

administration, through their education system, have used their culture as a fundamental element in the development process. This was of course possible through education.

Furthermore, a curriculum reform adapted to decentralised local authorities could have major advantages in that it would allow for the development and implementation of learning opportunities and processes adapted to learners, a considerable reduction in the rate of school failure, school dropout, and school wastage, and the ability of both teachers and pupils to better understand and adapt to the socio-cultural realities of the locality. Other examples include the easy social and professional integration of individuals and the promotion of local culture outside the locality. Although the list is not exhaustive, these are some of the issues that may arise in the implementation of a curriculum reform that takes into account the current context of decentralisation in Cameroon. It is therefore urgent for the public authorities and those in charge of education to convene a general assembly on education to enable our education system to respond effectively and efficiently to the current context. As a curriculum that is not relevant or responsive to the current societal context is meaningless and cannot be of any use to individuals (Jonnaert et al., 2004).

## VII. CONCLUSION

The final objective of this analysis was to show the need for curriculum reform in the context of decentralisation in Cameroon. In fact, decentralisation offers various opportunities for the development of company projects in all sectors of activity. This new form of the state is sufficient to raise awareness and take into account the needs and assets of each local authority. Therefore, a curriculum that takes into account the diversities of a society with the aim of improving educational policy-making can rightly be considered. The choice of a curriculum that is contextualised with regard to the cultural diversity, economic, social and political assets of each region is implicitly required by decentralisation, reflecting the political, economic, social and cultural reforms of society. In view of the circumstances facing us in the new public management, it would be appropriate to allow the school curriculum to take account of local and regional specificities. In fact, a region cannot be developed without an orientation on the reference ontology which is the kind to be trained. The latter is situated in the realities of its locality in order to provide solutions for its environment. A curriculum is situated and constructed locally. Consequently, the school curriculum is at the heart of decentralisation in Cameroon because it is the tool that will make it possible to improve the school system by bringing it closer to the realities of each locality. There is no question of adopting several curricula for each local authority. Rather, it will be up to the central level (ministries in charge of education) to provide the broad outlines that will allow each locality to adjust its school curriculum according to its own realities and problems.

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