

Models and Practice in Initial Secondary Teacher Education in Cameroon

By Leke Tambo

Introduction

Although teacher education is recognized world-wide as a key component in educational improvement efforts, the models and practices for producing teachers may differ from one country to another in terms of such factors as resources available, teacher supply needs in the schools, policy guidelines and goals of training, and whether initial teacher education is monopolized by one institution or shared by many. This paper focuses on models and practices in initial secondary teacher education in Cameroon.

It begins with a historical note on the evolution of secondary education in Cameroon, showing enrolment trends and implications for teacher supply needs. The response of the *École Normale Supérieure* (ÉNS), the sole institution responsible for secondary teacher education in Cameroon, to this need is indicated and shown to be inadequate. Two major models of secondary teacher education in Cameroon, the non-formal and the formal models, are identified and described. The non-formal model, which in some ways, is similar to in-service education, but differs from it significantly, relates to the Cameroon Government effort to meet the short-term needs of secondary schools in teacher supply. The formal model is based on the initial

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education program at ÉNS. Following the presentation of these models, some critical observations related their functioning are made. Subsequently, prospects for initial secondary teacher education in Cameroon are discussed with highlights on Government policy initiatives, cooperation with other Countries and institutions, as well as developments in the enrolment of non-government candidates at ÉNS.

Models and Practice in Initial Secondary Teacher Education in Cameroon

A world-wide consensus appears to exist about the key role of teacher education in educational development efforts. As Combs and associates (1974) emphasize, the really important changes in education will come about only as teachers change. Similarly, Goble and Porter (1977, p.12) argue that the competence of the teacher is an essential element in the operation of the school and in the accomplishment of necessary reforms. This view was upheld by the Pan-African Conference on Education held in Yaounde, Cameroon, 1984, when the Conference declared that “no educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers.”

Zumwalt (1986) expressed this key role of teachers in very strong terms: “There can be no excellence in education without first-rate teachers. One can change the curriculum, buy more materials, refurbish the physical environment, lengthen the school day, but without good teachers change will not produce the desired effect” (p.vii).

However, although a global consensus appears to exist regarding the key role teacher education plays in national education systems, there is no such consensus when it comes to the models and practices for implementing effective teacher education. In its attempts to respond to the teaching needs of different school system at their respective levels of development, the teacher education effort may pursue varied approaches or models in different countries. The models are often generated by policy decisions that are made in respect to issues such as selection, training, certification, and whether emphasis is being laid on the quantity or on the quality of the teachers to be produced. These issues constitute the framework for these discussions of models and practices in initial secondary teacher education in Cameroon.

This paper will identify and discuss major models of secondary teacher preparation that have been practised in Cameroon since the 1960s, the first decade of national independence. Subsequently, some critical observations related to teacher education in Cameroon as described in the models will be identified and prospects for the future of secondary teacher education in Cameroon.

Formal schooling, in the modern sense of the term, began in Cameroon in 1844, with the establishment of first primary school by the London-based Baptist Missionary Society. In 1939, the first secondary school was opened in the country. This

lag in the development of secondary *vis-a-vis* primary education is usually attributed to missionary and colonial government education policies which stressed basic education for the purpose of evangelization and colonial administration rather than liberal secondary and technical education. However, as the struggle for independence gained momentum after the second World War, it became clear to the different missionary bodies and the colonial governments of Britain and France that the country needed extended formal education.

Model of Secondary Teacher Education in Cameroon

Teacher education is often described in terms of: (1) formal processes related to the activities of teacher education institutions—that is, initial education; (2) organized experiences teachers continue to have in the field following their formal education in teacher education or certification institutions—that is in-service education.

As Sheffield and Dijomah point out (1972), in the context of Africa it is no longer possible to avoid the question of what is being done for the large numbers of people who do not follow a formal system of education or training to secure a job. According to Combs and Anmed (1974, p.8), non-formal education is any organized, systematic educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups in the population. Non-formal education may serve as an extension of formal schooling for those who need additional training to get into productive employment or as a means of upgrading the skills of those already employed (Sheffield & Diejomah, 1972).

The Non-formal Model

The idea that most students graduating in the faculties of Art and Science of the Cameroon University were, because of the acute shortage of qualified teachers in secondary schools, going to end up teaching in these schools made the bachelor's degree appear to be seen as a teaching degree.

Practice in terms of this model requires that graduates of these faculties who are interested in teaching apply for employment to the Ministry of National Education. Once employed, they are posted to Provincial Delegates of Education who, in turn, send them to secondary schools within their area of authority according to needs expressed by the various principals. The principals assign them to classes in the subjects of their specialization without any formal induction activities.

Once they are assigned to their respective teaching positions, the university graduate teachers are left to themselves most of the time. However, they are encouraged to join professional teacher associations in their disciplines and to participate in seminars and workshops organized by government inspectors and teacher groups. Occasionally, some university graduate teachers may be awarded

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technical cooperation scholarships made available by one or more of the developed countries friendly to Cameroon. Such an opportunity would lead to the candidate obtaining a Master of Education degree in their area of teaching. They may also go abroad on self-sponsorship while the Government guarantees their employment during and after the study period.

For the bulk of university graduate teachers, however, teacher education following employment is through participation in the activities of professional associations in their respective disciplines, in workshops and seminars organized by government inspectors and teacher groups, and personal efforts. I refer to these activities as non-formal rather than inservice education because up to this point the young graduates are not yet confirmed as teachers of secondary schools, since they were employed only on the basis of their academic qualifications.

The confirmation, or what is referred to as integration of university graduates as secondary school teachers, usually comes after they have participated in the activities described above for at least three years, have been formally evaluated on teaching effectiveness by a government inspector, and the report of the evaluation is accepted by the Minister of National Education.

It is indeed thanks to the above process that Cameroon educational authorities have managed to secure a minimum number of teaching staff in some of the secondary schools. One may ask here why the formal training system has not been expanded to respond more effectively to teacher needs in the schools. The reason has to do with the fact that students selected to pursue the teacher education course at ÉNS have till now been recognized automatically as civil servants and have received monthly salaries or allowances throughout their training period. This means that enrolment is strictly dependent on these financial resources made available every year by the Government.

The Formal Model

The formal model of secondary teacher education in Cameroon revolves on the work of the ÉNS which is, as has been mentioned, the sole institution responsible for secondary teacher education in the country. ÉNS was created by a presidential decree in 1961 and has subsequently been reorganized by other decrees in 1975, 1979, and 1988, respectively. Based on these instruments, secondary teacher education is arranged into two cycles.

Selection or recruitment of students for each cycle is by an entrance examination. For the first cycle, candidates must be holders of the *Baccalaureate* or the General Certificate of Education at the Advanced Level, and should be between the ages of 17 and 30 years. For the second cycle, the candidate must be a holder of a bachelor's degree or equivalent from a recognized university and should be between the ages of 20 and 32 years.

The entrance examination consists of the written and the oral parts in the

candidate's area of specialization or discipline, general knowledge, and bilingual (French and English) competence. At the end of these tests, the candidates are arranged in order of merit and the Minister(s) in charge of education decide the number to be admitted to the school for that year.

The training program consists of theory or content acquisition in the student's discipline or specialization, pedagogy, and psychology, as well as field experiences or teaching practice in the schools. The program lasts three years for the first cycle and two years for the second cycle.

At the end of these respective periods, the candidates are required to write a final examination in their areas of specialization. They are also examined for teaching skills by their professors, government inspectors, and selected classroom teachers in the secondary schools in which the students are doing their teaching practice. In addition, second cycle students are required to submit a thesis or dissertation.

The successful candidates at the end of this process receive certification for teaching at their respective levels at the secondary school and are duly posted to the different provincial delegations of education and secondary schools where they begin teaching as soon as the next academic year opens.

Some Critical Observations on Secondary Teacher Education in Cameroon

This section of the paper is devoted to initial issues related to secondary teacher education in Cameroon as I have described it in the two models identified above. These issues revolve around the three policy concerns of selection, initial education, and certification.

The selection process for both the non-formal and the formal models places too much emphasis on the academic qualification of candidates. There is no guarantee that those who possess the best academic credentials will necessarily be the best teachers. Candidates should be required to demonstrate some interest in teaching and should be screened through an interview process that emphasizes not only university qualifications but also their whole personality and attitude toward teaching and working with youngsters. At the end of such an interview, those selected could be required to sign some contract that would ensure their commitment to pursuing the various professional experiences that are designed for them in the field.

For the formal model the selection process has, in the past, not utilized the oral component of the selection examination effectively. Candidates have often been required to respond to the same kind of questions that were posed to them in the written part of the examination, the difference being simply that their response would be oral rather than written. If candidates must undergo an oral examination during the selection process, it may be more profitable for such an examination to

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focus on exploring competences other than purely academic ones. The point is that criteria for selecting student teachers ought to be more comprehensive in terms of expected teacher competencies.

Initial Education

Owing to a number of constraints, university graduates employed to teach through the non-formal model receive very little organized professional training during the so-called probationary period. Some of them tend to feel secure in the feeling that they have acquired adequate content knowledge in their disciplines and are resistant to suggestions for them to undertake activities geared toward their professional development. Others may be so burdened by a heavy daily teaching load that they are unable to find time to participate in professional development activities.

As a result of this situation, university graduates go on teaching the way they see fit, hoping for a favourable evaluation from the government inspectors through which they will be confirmed as secondary school teachers.

To improve the situation, it would seem necessary that a field experience package for the professional development of university graduates employed to teach be carefully designed by each provincial education authority or delegation and implemented through the use of selected experienced teachers as coordinators of training. Such teachers should work in collaboration with field inspectors to ensure adequate release time for the probationary teacher.

At ÉNS, initial education programs for teachers of different school subjects has been so academic-oriented that some have accused the institution of duplicating the programs of the faculties of arts and science of the Cameroon universities. This situation prevails, it is often argued, because most ÉNS faculty are academics with no pedagogic background related to their disciplines. Furthermore, disciplines related to the professional education of teachers such as educational psychology, philosophy of education, sociology of education, teaching methods, school administration, curriculum development, and others have, at ÉNS, been treated with contempt and grouped under one department labelled Sciences of Education (Ebode, 1987). This arrangement renders the teaching of education-related courses superficial and ineffective.

Another area of initial education that has received a lot of criticism is teaching practice. Although students are required by regulations to spend two hours per week each year for teaching practice in schools, this regulation is hardly respected and the organization of teaching practice in most departments leaves much to be desired. When students do go out for teaching practice, they are generally left on their own without adequate supervision from the faculty, the government inspectors, or the classroom teachers.

The decree of 1988 reorganizing studies at ÉNS—currently being implemented—attempts in a number of ways to address some of these problems. Thus,

sections responsible for teaching practice, in-service courses, and counselling, as well as courses in subject teaching methods, have been introduced. Developments in these areas are, however, still fairly timid and the overall emphasis in the initial education of the secondary school teacher remains for the most part on content acquisition in the respective disciplines.

Certification

In the absence of a viable teachers' union, and a comprehensive government policy, the secondary teacher certification process has been quite casual. As mentioned above, persons selected through the non-formal model become recognized as full-fledged secondary school teachers once they are confirmed on the basis of a government inspector's report. For those who follow the formal model, their certification is guaranteed once they succeed in the end-of-course examination.

Some would argue that this process is inadequate and appears to make a mockery of the teaching profession in Cameroon. What is needed in this respect seems to be a certification policy that encourages active participation of all partners, including teacher associations and unions, in ensuring that the young trainees are not only knowledgeable in subject matter but are committed to teaching and will receive adequate support and encouragement once they get to the field. Such collaboration in teacher certification may help in the design and implementation of support systems for the beginning teachers.

Some Prospects

The foregoing observations appear to paint a rather gloomy picture of secondary teacher education in Cameroon. In spite of these observations, there exists good prospects for a bright future. These prospects revolve around new Government policy initiatives, foreign assistance, and enrolment trends at ÉNS.

In addition to the new policy initiatives in relation to the provisions of the 1988 government decree or order, the Cameroon government is taking some other bold steps to increase training opportunities for university graduates who are interested in teaching.

At the beginning of the 1992-93 academic year, monthly financial allowances to government-sponsored students at ÉNS were cancelled. Henceforth, these students would only be guaranteed government employment after graduation. By taking off the burden of financial support to students during their initial teacher education, the government can now expand enrollment at the institution to more closely reflect the staffing needs in the secondary schools.

For the second cycle of training at ÉNS, more graduates of the faculties of arts and science are being recruited. Curriculum emphasis for these students is placed more on the acquisition of teaching skills, now referred to as "didactics of the

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disciplines.” This policy of recruiting university graduates for formal teacher education with emphasis on the professional disciplines would gradually lead to the suppression of the non-formal approach, whereby these graduates are employed and sent directly to teach in secondary schools.

Additionally, the government has in a recent program of university reform created a Faculty of Education in the University of Yaounde. Although the operation of this faculty is not yet clear, it is expected that it will exert considerable influence in secondary teacher education in the country.

Since independence, the Cameroon government has been receiving financial, material, and human resource assistance from friendly countries, universities, and international organizations in its teacher education efforts. In the first decades, this assistance emphasized quantitative priorities such as buildings, staffing, and other facilities. Since the 1980s, however, attention seems to be focused on qualitative concerns such as staff development, science and language laboratories, computer facilities, research, and so on.

In 1990, the Faculty of Education of the University of Regina, Canada, and the ÉNS of the University of Yaounde, Cameroon, established a cooperation project in secondary teacher education. The project, officially known as the Regina-Yaounde Project in Teacher Education, is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and will last, in its first phase, until 1994. The general goal of the Project is to improve the quality of the initial teacher education program at ÉNS. It also aims at creating an awareness of global education issues and concerns at the Faculty of Education, University of Regina. In terms of these goals, the major activities of the project have included annual seminars and workshops in Cameroon, exchange of professors and students between the two campuses, library resource improvement, and computer literacy at ÉNS.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on models and practices in initial teacher preparation in Cameroon. It began with a historical note on the evolution of secondary education in Cameroon. The response of the ÉNS, the sole institution responsible for secondary teacher education in Cameroon, was shown to be inadequate.

Two models of secondary teacher education, the non-formal and formal, were identified and described. The non-formal model, similar to inservice education, relates to the government effort to meet the short-term needs of secondary schools in teacher supply. The formal model is based on the initial education program at ÉNS. There was a discussion of prospects for initial secondary teacher education in Cameroon, with highlights on government policy initiatives, and cooperation with other countries and institutions, as well as developments in the enrolments of non-government candidates at ÉNS.

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