

## Unable to Lead, Unwilling to be Led: Contesting the Villainization of School Leadership Appointments in Cameroon

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### Abstract

*Cameroon operates two subsystems of education which have emerged from French and British Colonial rule (Tchombe, 2014). However, the French educational concepts of management in the school system dominate school leadership in Cameroon. In its current form, school leaders in state institutions are appointed by the state and view themselves as administrators and representatives of the state. Their practices are regulated by a centralized state control which allows them to be responsible for the implementation of national legislation and the ministry's directives. School leaders, therefore, function as pedagogical and educative pilots of schools in a top-down approach (Ambassa et al. 2011). One of the challenges of this leadership approach is in the appointment of school leaders in various public schools. This paper uses an interdisciplinary approach to critique and contest the appointment of school leaders of state schools in an autocratic and centralized management structure. The study interrogates practices, policies, and outcomes of leadership appointments in a centralized state management structure. It posits competing tensions in the context of equality and equal opportunities for various educational actors in the school system. The study concludes that an unfair state policy of appointment of school leadership negatively impacts on meritocracy and elaborately builds a superclass of privileged education professionals whose focus is the advancement of allegiance and pacification of the political elite that appointed them.*

**Key words:** schools, leadership, meritocracy, centralised, particularism, universalism.

### Introduction

In the context of schooling and education, leadership is one of the instruments that drive pedagogical processes and school improvement. School leaders contribute to the conditions that affect teaching and student achievement by influencing the school's goals, vision, classroom conditions, teachers' professional development, parent commitment and involvement, resources, and culture (Adeyemi, 2008; Adeyemi & Oyetade 2011). Thus, the processes, criteria, and mechanisms of appointing school leaders are fundamental to the health of the school especially in the context of the core activities of schools: learning and teaching. Although Cameroon operates an education system built on the colonial legacy of Britain and France, there are contextual and cultural differences in the mechanisms and criteria implemented in the appointment of school leaders. Officially, school leaders were appointed as a reward for their longevity of service and professional competence as teachers (Tchombe, 2014). That has changed to an unaccountable appointment practice that is dependent on the minister of the education and the political orientation of those vying for leadership appointments. This has become the unofficial system whereby the relationship between the appointee and the minister determines the appointment criteria (Ambassa et al. 2011). And this has placed more strenuous expectations on incompetent school leadership to raise performance in a failing education system.

Gradual negative perceptions of the Cameroon education system continue to emerge within a political system that has led to social unrest and violence in the Great Northern regions as well as in the North and South-West regions of Cameroon (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Such violence provoked by bad governance, allegations of marginalization, extremism from Boko Haram, and the secessionist threats from the English-speaking regions of the North West and South West all hurt the standing of educational quality in Cameroon. When there are relative peace and stability, there is the expectation that school leaders will drive performativity to compensate for school boycotts and rescue falling standards in the schools. This, in addition to the fact that one of the grievances of the teacher's strike that led to the four years running conflict in the English speaking regions of the North West and South West regions of Cameroon had to do with the appointment of school leaders and the way schools, were managed. There is therefore little doubt on the increased pressure throughout Cameroon for meaningful reforms in education including the appointment of school leaders. There is a greater need to scrutinize and address the methods used to appoint school leaders and how candidates are certified as competent to lead a school as determined by the ministers of the specific school sector. There is relevant literature into management styles of school leaders in Cameroon but there is very little literature on the appointment of school leaders in the country. This study hopes to contribute to the debate on reforming education in Cameroon in particular and in other developing communities in general. The study is mindful that cultures differ from community to community and it becomes immensely imperative to elaborate on the socio-historical context of Cameroon to provide a background context relevant to its appointment culture of administrators.

### **Cameroon: Historical and Political Background.**

Cameroon with a population of over 23 million inhabitants is located in the Central West of Africa bordered by French-speaking countries of Chad, Central African Republic, Gabon, and Congo; a Spanish speaking country of Equatorial Guinea and an English speaking country of Nigeria (World Population Review, 2020). Of the estimated population above, over 70 % is made up of French-speaking Cameroonians (Francophones) who make up 8 of the 10 governing regions of the country. The English-speaking Cameroonians make up less than 30% of the total population and occupy 2 of the 10 administrative regions of the country. Founded in 1472 by a Portuguese navigator called Fernando Po Cameroon has passed through the colonial rule of Germany, Britain, and France (Fonkeng, 2007; Lee & Schultz, 2012).

The defeat of the Germans in 1916 during the First World War paved the way for Cameroon to be divided between Britain, and France, and administered first under the League of Nations mandate and later under the United Nations trusteeship. Britain got 1/3 of the country in which the north was called "Northern British Cameroons" and that to the south was called "Southern British Cameroons" (Fanso, 1989; Echu et al., 1999). The French got 2/3 of Cameroon and administered it as an independent territory, whereas the British administered theirs from Lagos in Nigeria. French Cameroon became independent on 1st January 1960. On 11 February 1960, British Southern Cameroons voted to start unification negotiations with The Republic of Cameroon which already had independence from France. This commencement of the desire for unification between the two entities was decided in a United Nations plebiscite on 1st October 1961 in which a federation made up of two states called West Cameroon and East Cameroon was created. The federation survived till 20th May 1972 when a unitary State made up of provinces was created (Fanso, 1989). And later in 1984, the number of provinces (now called regions) was increased to ten through a Presidential decree which also changed the name of the country from The United Republic of Cameroon to The Republic of Cameroon (Fonkeng, 2007)

Therefore, although Cameroon has been a product of two equal states of two different colonial cultures of English and French, the realities in the country render a verdict of opportunities to one culture and marginalization of another (Ngoh, 1987, Kum, 2018). It is therefore common to see teachers appointed as school leaders in a subsystem that is different from theirs, and the most common trend is to have French subsystem education professionals appointed by the dominant French political elite to serve as leaders in the English sub-system schools. This is common especially if such schools are in affluent urban communities (Tchombe 2014).

A major area of conflict in the country relates to this colonial history, with the two English speaking regions fighting to preserve the English subsystem of education predicated on the British education system. This adds to the linguistic tensions because the country operates a form of official state bilingualism of French and English (the minority two regions are the English-speaking regions). In 1962, while opening the Bilingual Grammar School in Buea, the first secondary education institution in the country located in the English-speaking region, Ahmadou Ahidjo, Cameroon's first President stated that 'By bilingualism we mean the practical usage of our two official languages, English and French, throughout the national territory' (Ayafor 2005:127).

That statement defined the official language policy of Cameroon which was enshrined in its constitution. Thus, State bilingualism functions within a complex framework of over 270 indigenous languages, several regional lingua francas, and a quasi-national Pidgin English (Koenig, et al. 1983). It is what Manga (1973) describes as the presence of French and English in a multilingual setting. This complex post-colonial set up has led to, among another individual discontentment, several complaints of sociolinguistic disadvantages by various groups that affect the people's interaction with one another, their choice of identity, and their socio-economic opportunities (Anchimbe, 2014).

When education professionals delegates, inspectors, principals, vice-principals, discipline masters/mistresses, bursars, stores accountants, headteachers, etc.) from the French subsystem of education are appointed to schools modeled on the English subsystem, the language conflict emerges within the leadership ranks where managerial instructions are not often well written, poorly translated with wrong instructions are passed down to the school community. It is understood that when a leader is from a different subsystem, it also becomes apparent that they translate political power which further leads to more appointments of their subordinates or teachers from the French subsystem into the English subsystem. This results in French-speaking teachers teaching English speaking students, exams written in English but marked by French speakers and staff meetings of English-speaking schools presided over in French by French school heads.

The broad stratification of Cameroonians into two major linguistic subgroups often referred to as Francophone and Anglophone have built identity boundaries around them which have become predominantly exclusionary in a country whose political catchphrase is 'national integration' (Fanso 1989). It has led to tensions where the minority English speaking (Anglophones) view their majority Francophone counterparts as a privileged neo-colonial clan that is determined to assimilate and stifle the Anglophone culture. On the other hand, the majority Francophones view the minority Anglophones with suspicion as an emerging force that seeks the reterritorialization of itself into social, political, and economic spaces that were earlier dominated by the Francophones.

In most social, economic, and political spheres, English speaking Cameroonians are disadvantaged and therefore feel compelled to speak French to be recognized as Cameroonians within Cameroon (Kum 2018). It is common to see English speaking teachers try to speak French with their Francophone counterparts who show no desire to value any effort in speaking English. This communication tension is experienced in official school management meetings and leads to open frustrations among the marginalized English-speaking school professionals. In high profile professional schools like the National School for Administration and Magistracy (ENAM), the National School for Police, the Military Academy (EMIA), Advanced School for Mass Communication (ASMAC), and the International Relations Institute (IRIC) at least 80%, all appointed directors are Francophones and a majority of the courses are taught in French (Mforteh 2005). Where similar schools exist in English speaking territory, there are often devalued to first cycles and often annexed to the main schools in French-speaking Cameroon, managed by Francophones. This phenomenon resonates well with Bourdieu's (1977) theory of language, power, and politics. For Bourdieu concludes that language is not only a means of communication but also a medium through which power is enacted.

The ruling elite of Francophone Cameroon has protected the status of French above English to assert their authority and influence over Anglophones. And that is seen in the intentional appointment of French leaders in English speaking schools. French doubles up as a medium of communication and as an oppressive weapon to marginalize Anglophones (Kum, 2018). This is one of the grievances that has led to the current socio-political crisis where the English-speaking Cameroonians are calling for cessation from the union with French-speaking Cameroon. The teachers' trade unions of English-speaking extraction decry the continuous appointment of French-speaking school managers to schools of the English subsystem and the consequent utilization of French as a medium of expression. This is most visible in technical schools where school leaders and most teachers are French-speaking, using French to teach English speakers. Consequently, there is a cultural conflict where management styles and practices conflict within subsystems of the country's education. As the education crisis (among others) has led to four years of school boycott in most parts of the two regions of English-speaking Cameroon, the appointment of school leaders remains a very contentious policy issue that this paper explores.

### **Appointment of Administrators in Cameroon. A top-down culture.**

Cameroon is referred to as an autocratic state with a quasi-democracy headed by a president who has ruled the country since 1982 (Manga, 1993; Kum, 2018). It is a centralized bureaucracy with all the powers in the hands of the president who makes all political appointments. Where powers are delegated to ministers, appointments made by these ministers are under the instructions and approval of the president, who can appoint and dismiss any state employee with or without notice (Republic of Cameroon, 1998; 2005). The current president was appointed by his predecessor, late Ahmadou Ahidjo in 1982 in contradiction to the constitution that stated that the speaker of the national assembly

becomes president upon a presidential vacancy (Fonkeng, 2007). The speaker who should organize elections after 90 days was from the Anglophone regions and was least expected to become president. The resigning president bypassed the constitution and appointed his prime minister (a Francophone) who has ruled the country for over since 1982. This political episode points to the superfluous powers invested in the executive branch of the country, where the president's word is 'law'. No doubt, if Francophone school leaders are appointed to head English speaking schools, the affected English-speaking population is reluctantly persuaded to accept this on grounds that the president runs the country under the guise of a policy of national integration. The top-down appointment policy is replicated in all public sectors/institutions including education.

The natural experiment to divide Cameroon between France and England has created boundaries that cut across tribal and administrative divisions and have become increasingly objectionable (Fanso, 1989; Tchombe, 2014). The country has witnessed French-speaking governors appointed to the two English speaking provinces and French-speaking officials appointed to manage parastatals in English speaking regions. Not only are leaders with a different socio-cultural background and upbringing appointed to offices in cultures that they do not understand, but these leaders also are not proficient or fluent in the English Language. This arbitrariness in the appointment of the administrator derives from the French colonial policy of direct rule and assimilation. In a speech in France in 2019, Cameroon's president recognized that every effort has been made to assimilate the English speaking population. Appointments of Francophone managers are one weapon of the dominant Francophone ruling elite which reproduces the scars of colonial conflict with France. It is important to state that English colonial policy was an indirect rule that allowed power in the hands of the local leaders, and this would offer an alternative to the current reproduction of French direct rule in Cameroon, this time French direct rule of assimilation perpetuated by Francophones on Anglophones.

Education in Cameroon is broadly divided into state, private, and faith schools (Tchombe, 2014). Faith and private schools have their management structures and boards and make decisions relevant to the character of their institutions. These forms of schools receive state subventions and follow a state prescribed national curriculum with all students taking national state exams. But these schools subscribe to the national dates, assessments of the various ministries of national education (now divided into basic, secondary, and higher education by extension). The state authorizes the schools to be operational in the country and the state can terminate the license of any institutions on policy differences or malpractices (Cameroon Ministry of Basic Education 1998, 2010). The window of independence in faith or privately owned schools is controlled by national state policies and management while budget issues and internal recruitment of staff and leaders is carried out by the proprietors or school boards.

Although the state controls the nature of independence of Faith and private schools, this study focuses only on appointments in state secondary and presecondary schools. School leaders of basic and secondary public schools are appointed by the minister of basic education - for pre-secondary and the minister of Secondary education - for secondary schools (Ambassa et al. 2011). There is the ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation which controls appointments in their respective sectors). Two other ministries that have a significant relationship with education are the ministry of youth affairs and the ministry of sports and physical education. These are also independent of the Ministry of basic education and the ministry of secondary education. All appointments are made from the upper hierarchy and no transparent criteria is presented to elaborate on qualities of appointees or justification for their appointments (Tchombe, 2014).

### **Appointment of School Leaders and Transparency: Walls Apart.**

Cameroon has no formalized procedures for appointing school leaders. Appointments are by ministerial decrees, and appointing ministers to seem to work on the belief that a classroom teacher essentially makes an effective school administrator (Cameroon Ministry of Basic Education 1998; 2010). Consequently, heads are frequently appointed on the presumption that they have a successful record as teachers and that this offers a successful pathway of becoming a good school leader (Besong, 2013). The selection and recruitment of headteachers are, therefore expected to be based on a teacher's seniority in rank and teaching experience, which is not often the case. For example, anyone can become a school leader with or without a teaching qualification or relevant teaching experience as officially expressed (Tchombe 2014; Besong, 2013). There are three key unofficial appointment channels to school leadership offices. These channels are effectively explored by interested Cameroonians especially considering that there is a financial incentive in the form of duty post allowances, managing a school-based budget, taking bribes, and using the school head position as a way to access those in higher decision making ranks within the ministries. Appointments to school leadership roles are often an opportunity for further appointments up the hierarchy in the same or similar ministries.

School leaders can be appointed because of their unflinching and vocal support of the government in power. This support is manifested through open allegiance to the ruling political party and for campaigning during major national elections. Support in the form of public demonstrations to enhance the popularity of the regime in power is also recognized and sometimes rewarded. It is difficult to confirm that there is an appointed school leader who is not a member of the party in power, or who openly supports an opposing political party. Secondly, school appointments can be made based on the personal relationship between the appointee and minister or people in power with access to the minister. This includes being a childhood friend, neighbor, girlfriend, or boyfriend, attending the same church or social group with the minister or person in power, agreeing to run an errand of a dubious nature to the benefit of the person recommending the appointment. Similarly, persons who played a role in the appointment of the recommending person or minister could in turn be rewarded with school leadership positions. Thirdly, originating from the same village or community with the minister or recommending a person in power can secure a school leadership appointment. These appointments are often seen as a reward for a relationship, kinship, or an act of favor that was carried out to the advantage of those in a position of power. It is also established that individuals sometimes take material resources to bribe those in control of appointments to be appointed or promoted to higher positions. These bribes are sometimes extended for considerations in transferring school leaders from rural to affluent areas where there are more material opportunities for the appointee.

In some cases, spies for the regime are appointed in schools where there is an emergence of opposition activities threatening the regime in power. It is difficult to exhaust a discussion on how school leaders are appointed in Cameroon. The undisputed fact of school leadership appointments in Cameroon is that these positions are never advertised, nobody applies, there is no transparent appointment procedure and there is never any justification for an appointment or dismissal of an appointed school leader (Besong, 2013)

Appointments in Cameroon schools presume that there are made based on the criteria of effective leadership qualities, experience, and qualifications. The realities immensely contradict this assumption, although these researchers cannot confirm authoritatively that there are no meritocratic appointments. For example, it is possible to have a recently graduated student from a teacher training college appointed as a school head in a school with many senior teachers serving in the same school as classroom teachers. This often happens when the appointee meets one or more of the above appointment criteria other than seniority. Similarly, an individual can be appointed in a school as principal, vice-principal, or headteacher without a teaching qualification. Lumby et al., (2008) indicate that interested and experienced teachers with a proven track record in teaching and getting things done in schools appear to be discouraged by what they see as a confused and disorganized system, with a distinct lack of transparency over the development of policy, the allocation of resources and the appointment of headteachers.

The government of Cameroon defends its appointment culture on two keywords: promotion and experience. Ambassa et al. (2011) seem to consider the official state position on appointments when they state that school leaders are often appointed and promoted based on academic qualification and a successful record of teaching experience. They assert that the selection and recruitment of school leaders are mostly based on a teacher's experience which is deduced from years of services and career advancement evaluations submitted through records of classroom outputs (school management review index). The authors offer no evidence of this consideration and this writer concludes that these are often political explanations offered by ministers when defending the lack of transparency in school leadership appointments. As a starting point, there is no defined career profile for school leaders. Without a clear job description for various school leadership positions; without a person specification in each leadership role and with the generalized assumption that all schools are the same (therefore a school leader will be so good in any school they are sent to), it is objective to conclude that appointment of school leaders in Cameroon is heavily flawed, subjective and non-meritocratic. There is no elaborate basis from which to assess the relative suitability of candidates considered for appointments.

Philip (2005) elaborates on the relationship between African countries and their formal colonial masters and discusses a framework for policy borrowing in education. As stated earlier in this study, Cameroon is a product of two colonial western powers (Britain and France) and Cameroon has borrowed two official languages of French and English, two education subsystems; political structures among others. School leadership appointments seem to be one of the policy areas that Cameroon has declined to evolve with France and Britain. For example, in France, prior to taking up a position as a headteacher, the successful candidate first must go through twenty weeks of practical training experience at a school as well as undertaking a theory program (Slovakia et al., 2003). In the UK, Rhodes et al. (2009) the NPQH

(The National Professional Qualifications and Transitions to Headship) qualification provides enough confidence building, networking, and contact with incumbent and new school heads to address competency gaps and professional

visions in succeeding as a school leader. Cameroon has rather maintained a defunct colonial policy such that, since independence in 1961, there are no school leadership specifications, no recruitment criteria, and no accredited leadership certificate courses for school leaders.

The World Bank (2012) concludes that the recruitment and selection processes are key aspects in determining the effectiveness of improvements, but from the discussion above, Cameroon does not seem to envisage school effectiveness through improved management reskilling. Appointments are a top-down ministerial and politicized procedure often described as a nascent form of administrative deconcentration. As the appointment procedure is subject to corruption, nepotism, tribal considerations; so too are the appointed officials prone to corrupt practices to please their appointing agents or ministers. Appointment of school leaders on grounds of personal relationships, political affiliation, ethnicity, or some indices of culture or religion' recreates the same vices that negatively impact on school effectiveness. Personal factors and affiliations become more important than leadership capability when such appointments are made and consequently the school leaders use up school resources to solidify their relationships with the appointing officers, sustain positive links with their appointing masters and roll out punitive measures to other teachers who do not support the political ideologies of their ruling party. With no emphasis on school leadership qualifications, the appointment procedure simply comprises of moving teachers from training institutions or classrooms to leadership positions.

### **Theoretical Conceptualization: Particularism and Universalism and the ethics of care and Justice**

Appointments of school leaders do not follow universally prescribed checklists that each country or context needs to complete. And as Barber et al. (2010) specify each country has its practices/policies and there are often cultural and contextual differences between systems. What works in one system may not work in another which justifies why policy learning works better than policy learning (Philip, 2005). The previous section has elaborated on the weaknesses of the top-down procedure of school leadership appointments in Cameroon. This section uses philosophical thought to critique the appointment procedure of school leaders in Cameroon. Philosophical thought draws on Philosophy to critique concerns of thematic notions, cultures, collective intentionality, social structures and practices, and forms of social reasoning (Sewell, 2005; Reich (2010). Logic and intersubjectivities are balanced to effectively arrived at decisions that can be understood across different settings.

Drawing from the theory of particularism, it is often difficult to answer the question about what makes something morally right and another morally wrong which is a fundamental conflict between particularism and universalism (Mungu et al., 2009). For example, if most western countries that have been consistently ranked in the upper 20 percent of quality educators have researched and concluded that school leaders subscribe to a person specification, a role description, and an accredited training program to refine them into the good leaders, should that necessarily become a policy that Cameroon can borrow or learn? Having such a conclusion will be an endorsement that school leadership is an art as well as a science (Coughlan, 2019; Bryan, 2008; Leibowitz, 2009). From a universalist point of view, that every role, in humans that extend to the society, needs to be structured by rules, codes of practice, and laws which although enacted in one context, can easily be understood in another context. That requires expert knowledge because expertise professes a degree of consistency that cuts across groups within that profession.

France, Belgium, Italy among others have national competitive exams for school leaders and this is successfully replicated by many successful countries that devise their education policies based on meritocracy. For example, in the UK, school leaders are those who have completed an accredited school leadership course in addition to qualified teacher status (Dering et al. 2005; Bryan, 2008). That does not necessarily lead the qualified teacher to automatic appointment into a leadership position. The position must be advertised with a person specification and essential skills relevant to the context of the school or local Education Authority. And applicants are shortlisted from a range of those who have qualified as school leaders. Other individualized credentials could be considered to work to the advantage of a specific application in the selection and interview process. This process is overseen by independent recruitment teams or in the Scandinavian countries the selection committees in the oversee these recruitments. Such merit-based procedures fall in line with generalism (Dancy, 1993) which affirm that what matters somewhere must matter elsewhere in the same way on every recurrence.

Although Dancy (1993) questions whether there are best practices in management that are universal and can apply elsewhere, the context of policy learning illustrates that good practice can be shared in a transparent context.

As earlier suggested in this study, Cameroon is a former French and British colony and has embraced French and British subsystems of education, judiciary culture, official languages, democracy but despite being walls apart in school effectiveness and performance, the Cameroon government since independence carries out appointments of leaders

(school leaders included) on the premise of particularistic procedures rather than being influenced by universalism theory. Its centralized, non-merit-based appointment policy of school leaders becomes skewed in the conceptualization that differences in contextual practices, customs, and cultures are the only useful tenets of good leadership. (Barber et al. 2010). That explains why kingships, affiliations, partisanship, and political considerations seem to influence the appointment procedures of school leaders.

Relationships influence judgment about what is good because loyalty and not competence becomes the focus. In a system where school leaders are appointed with the criteria of appointment only known to the minister, it creates a deprofessionalized professional culture where rules are flexible (Kum et al. 2010). In line with particularism, some people become more equal and more important than others based on personalized, individualized skewed judgments (Pudelko 2006). It is important to acknowledge that good performances of a leader in one role can lead to an appointment in a higher role due to existing networks built up in their previous role. However, this is good practice in which the higher appointment stems from productivity rather than personal relationships. Personal and family loyalty rather than the social contract theory remains a major policy determinant in Cameroon as far as our discussion on school leadership appointments is concerned (Leibowitz, 2009; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2005).

The challenge on whether adoption of particularism or universalism or both is an effective lens on management can be extended to wider moral theories that critique human relationships elaborate on the centrality of care and loyalty in human relationships. Examples include Kantian moral theory, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics (Held, 2004). And the Kantian moral theory is very important in espousing the competing tensions inherent in human relationships.

The Kantian moral theory is seen as a morality of universal principles to which all, considered as free, equal, and autonomous individuals choosing impartially, can agree. Exploring relations is perhaps why utilitarianism is grounded on the idea of maximizing the utility of all taken as individuals pursuing their interests. On the other hand, meritocracy requires justice which is built in its requirement that the utility of everyone is to be of equal importance to that of any other. Thus, actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness and wrong as they tend to promote unhappiness. Appointing or promoting a less qualified school leader over a qualified, performative and trained school leader negatively impacts on the profession, the school culture, and the schooling and education of students who would become school leaders in the future. In brief, an ethic of justice focuses on issues of fairness, equality, and individual rights, seeking impartiality and universality of principles like in meritocratic appointments (caring for others). In contrast, particularism subscribes recognizes one's emotions as in the ethic of care and focuses on trust, social bonds, cooperation, caring relations, and responding to needs (caring about others).

There is a distinction between benevolence, or caring about others, and beneficence, or caring for others (Kum, 2018). Caring for others requires people in a position of power to be accountable to those they are bound to protect, to provide equal opportunities for the development of the potential of everybody, and provide an enabling environment where peoples' needs, and rights are problematized over individual benefits. With this consideration, policy enactment (appointments included) would be predicated on transparent procedures that are clear, objective, and acceptable by the community which is meant to consume the policy. Caring about others goes a step further and focuses on recognizing bonds, affiliations, and promoting personal relationships as active kindness. As Smith (2000) writes, there is a moral motivation involved when individuals are induced actively to care for others (i.e. to move from benevolence to beneficence). Historically, to favor people of 'our' community has been an understandable convention that has generally prevailed while care for the 'other' (not one of us) has been confined to codes of hospitality (Smith, 2000). Care for others essentially refers to the 'felt concern for the good of others and community with them', a warm virtue as supported by Baier (1987, 43).

Underlying this ongoing discussion is a normative tension between an ethic of care and an egalitarian theory of justice. As noted earlier, justice refers to the practice of approaching moral issues with universal principles rather than parochial decisions (Zembylas, 2010). The tension between care and justice highlights another common dualism: between relativism and universalism or, more precisely, between the abstract universalist ideal of impartiality and the particularism sentiment and practice of partiality (Smith 2000). Partiality is expressed in the inclination to favor our dearest (often our relations) people; impartiality is about treating people, the same in the same circumstances, irrespective of the status, wealth, race, gender, or other characteristics (universalism). Or, to turn the issue round, are universal similarities enough to transcend local particularities?

For example, should we ignore relationships and focus on a nominal set of rules to govern the appointment of school leaders? or can the conflicting claims of partiality and impartiality be reconciled in appointing school leaders (Silk, 2000)? in appointing school leaders?

Appointed school leaders are different from factory managers because they deal with vulnerable learners (with emotions) who look up to them for guidance. Students in traditional communities and perhaps in mot learning communities look up to school leaders as father or mother figures. Although difficult knowledge is premised on reason and rationality in school settings, emotions are often a necessary appendage on which professional relationships are built-in schools. Therefore, actions on emotions are an integral part of a learning environment that provides a focus on why the ethic of care is considered in the appointment of school leaders. But embedding emotions and care in school leadership qualities can only go as far as the concept of human relationship is concerned and not personal relationships. This is not an attempt by these authors to objectify subjectivities but rather it's the application of the philosophical critique approach which helps to show the limits and strengths of particularism and universalism as theoretical lenses worthy of consideration in school leaders. The 'who we are' needs to align with an elaborate set of person and role specification, code of conduct, and essential criteria in the appointment procedures of school leaders.

## **Conclusion and Implications for Policy**

### **Career Profile and Empowerment of School Boards/Management Committees.**

During the early independence years, Cameroon had a federal government whereby each system of education maintained its own colonial culture. The French had a highly centralized administration in line with the colonial policy of direct rule. But the British allowed some degree of autonomy in line with their colonial policy of indirect rule (Fonkeng, 2007; Lee & Schultz, 2012). The centralized (French) and the decentralized (British) administrative procedures clearly illustrate a great difference between the British and French systems of education. Harmonization of the systems presents structural and organizational problems, and this provoked the teachers' strike in 2016 which has paralyzed educational activities for four years in the English speaking two regions of the North West and South West of Cameroon (Fonkeng, 2001). One of the main grievances of the English-speaking teachers is the appointment of French-speaking teachers in English speaking schools. Whether or not, the appointing ministers are aware that their French-speaking appointees sent to English speaking schools cannot express themselves in the language of instruction in those schools remains outside the remit of this study. Having a school boycott affirmative action successfully implemented in the English-speaking subsystem in Cameroon for four years confirms that the school leadership appointment policy in Cameroon needs to be revised to include the cultural and social realities of the two English speaking regions of the country.

The appointment of school leaders in Cameroon has often followed political principles rather than educational ones. Often appointments are imposed by the Ministry of Education without consideration of its effectiveness in the school environment (Tchombe, 2014). Most meritocratic appointment systems are based on the accumulation of points in which courses and masters and doctoral degrees are recognized with a huge component in school administration (Ambassa et al. 2011; Besong 2013). There are specific accredited courses for school leaders before and during their role in schools. This ostensibly is a meritocratic approach based on competence (Dering et al. 2005). However, in Cameroon, these posts are often assigned to friends, family members, party members, with bribery and corruption inherent in appointment negotiations. This often causes criticism, disapproval, and even disappointment from personnel in schools and teachers pursuing a headship ambition. Nonadministrative staff and the public are aware of the obscured appointment channels and this leads to them losing confidence in the appointees, thereby rupturing professional relationships.

This study recommends a radical overhaul of the appointments policy which should remove the unwritten and unofficial political clientelist functions of appointing ministers (Biamba, 2008; Agezo, 2010; Bush, 2011). There is a need to establish a new professional career profile for school leaders in various departments (delegates, inspectors, principals, vice-principals, headteachers, discipline masters, bursars, stores accountants, heads of departments, etc), and the policy needs to recognize the fact that each position has its specificities and the school culture, context and demography needs to be analyzed. School boards and management committees could be empowered to serve as recruitment hubs and elaborate on the specific needs of their schools when considering the selection of a school leader. This will reduce the use of teachers and school leaders for overt political means. This would enable competently recruited appointees to focus on school administration rather than devoting time to political party campaigns and serving their political hierarchies.

Even when experienced educators and skilled senior classroom teachers become included in an appointment cycle, the ministers do not possess any objective judgments to know that the appointee is motivated to be a school leader (Adigbesan, 2013). Furthermore, the appointees are never consulted, but plunged straight into a school management duty with no induction, no training and often not offered an option to decline the appointments. It is the position of these authors that not every experienced and qualified teacher is a good school leader and not every qualified and



experienced teacher wants to be a school leader. These appointments are often presented by ministers as rewards for experience and professional diligence. If this argument were to be sustained, these authors still assert that there are alternative ways of incentivizing experienced teachers while allowing learners to continue to benefit from the accrued experience of these teachers. These alternative measures can include a pay rise, free enrolment into professional development programs, increased holidays, paid mentoring roles, provision of office spaces and workspace resources, performativity pay codes, membership to professional bodies among others (Bush 2011; Donkor, 2013). This will allow teachers who do not want to become school leaders to continue to develop as teachers while allowing opportunities for those vying for leadership roles to get the chance.

### **Implications for Training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)**

Appropriate training for school leaders is required to fill the competence gap between experienced and inexperienced leaders. School leaders in Cameroon need to be equipped with updated knowledge and skills in management and leadership to enable schools to improve in performance. Even where training opportunities are available, there are often voluntary, a one-off, short and do not adapt to the specific needs of the school leaders (Bush and Oduro, 2006) In their research Bush and Oduro (2006) and Zame et al (2008) found that the training usually occurs after appointment, leaving new principals unprepared for their responsibilities. Developing structured and coherent programs to prepare school principals is essential to promote school improvement throughout the region. School administrators who have had no training in school administration and selected to head schools are forced to take up these responsibilities and try their expertise and gain experiences through trial and error. They are hardly held accountable for the job they do (Bush and Glover, 2003). Lack of accountability allows school leaders the option of attending the few and short CPD programs. Senior school managers should be trained to regularly evaluate the performances of appointed managers. Official state examination results are not necessarily a testament to the leadership performances because summative assessments (often with the end of year/course exams) do not often assess other non-content based educational objectives. Therefore, for the performance of the school leader to be evaluated, a holistic rather than a compartmentalized approach is required.

There is a need for structured leadership programs on a continuous basis to closely align with internationally acclaimed best practices and especially targeted at aspiring headteachers. These should be aimed at combining governance skills with a more global outlook of education. Leadership is seen as central to school effectiveness and there is a correlation between leadership development programs and enhanced school effectiveness (Rhodes et al., 2009). In other words, if an appointee understands the role and importance of the leadership position, they should come up with developmental goals and performance management targets that contribute to school effectiveness. There are bound to be cost and time factor implications in accessing CPD programs, but these can be mitigated by an allocation of a specific personnel development fund for school leaders. Parent Teachers' Association (PTA) could also permit a fraction of its levies for leadership training seminars. This is a positive investment because effective leadership leads to improved quality learning provision and high standards. Effective leadership development of school leaders is an important element of the transformation of the central educational system.

The overarching question in this study is about the persistence of a top-down, centralized, and obscured leadership model of school appointments in Cameroon against an overwhelming discontent among educators and persistent calls for reforms in education. The study has critiqued the appointment procedures within the of a conflicting Cameroon education system built on a colonial context of the French subsystem and English subsystem of education. The study demonstrates that appointments are highly centralized and often negotiated through relationships thereby recreating a toxic school culture. The appointment procedure has been critiqued within the theoretical lenses of particularism, universalism in an extended debate involving moral theories of utilitarianism, care, and justice. The philosophical thought approach has led to a reconceptualization of school leadership appointments in Cameroon in line with successful international models that are tied to school effectiveness.

It is the position of this study that school leadership should not be an additional job description for teachers who are sometimes compensated through appointments into leadership positions.

To sustain an effective community of practice in schools, the government of Cameroon will be more responsive to the needs of school communities by devolving appointments of school leaders to local authorities and school boards. This will require broad descriptive professional requirements for each role but full and specific job description, role specification, person specification, open interview appointment procedures, accountability of managers, and regular continuous professional development should be enforced by these local bodies. To improve management in school cultures, institutional leadership requires focusing on innovations, productivity, accountability, and transparency (Bush & Oduro 2006). This is one way of ensuring recruitment of school leaders is based on who knows what and not about

who knows who (Bush, 2011; Donkor, 2013; Adeyemi & Oyetade, 2011) For as Maxwell asserts: ‘the single biggest way to impact an organization is to focus on leadership development. There is almost no limit to the potential of an organization that recruits good people, raises them as leaders, and continually develops them.’ (Maxwell, 2001:185)

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