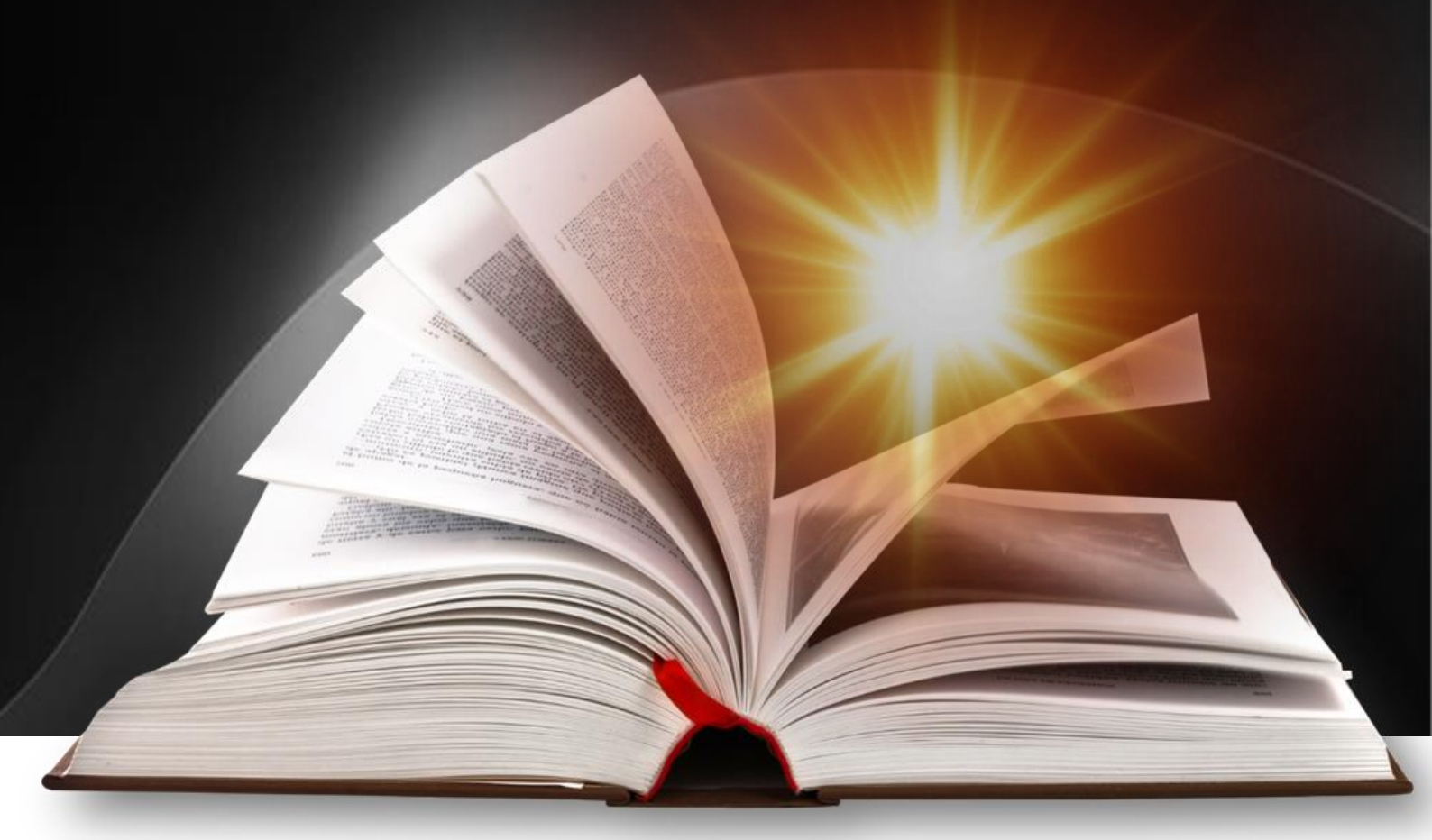
ISSN
: 2790-6248
: 2790-6256

RPJ

Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse

- Pan African Youth Journal -



Volume 4, n°1, Janvier- Avril 2025

EDITIONS LUMUMBA
Un nouvel élan de l'édition africaine

Association Panafricaine pour l'Encadrement et la Formation de la Jeunesse

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ISSN

: 2790-6248

: 2790-6256

Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse

- Pan African Youth Journal -

DOI : https://doi.org/10.58610/RPJ.2790.6248.6256.31

Editions Lumumba I Afriscience I Association Panafricaine pour l'Encadrement et la Formation de la Jeunesse

EDITIONS LUMUMBA

Un nouvel élan de l'édition africaine

Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse (RPJ)

ISSN : 2790-6248

e-ISSN : 2790-6256

© Editions Lumumba - APANAEFJ

Bibliothèque Nationale du Congo I Ordonnance loi n° 89-010 du 11 janvier 1989 – Permis d'implantation n° BNC/DPHK/08/2022

Afrindala Group

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Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse

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Revue scientifique internationale, interdisciplinaire et interactive

Périodicité : avril, août et décembre

Prix du numéro : 45 USD

Abonnement annuel : 100 USD

Version numérique disponible sur : www.afriscience.org

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Editorial

Chères lectrices, chers lecteurs,

C'est avec une ferveur renouvelée et un sens aigu de notre responsabilité intellectuelle que nous vous convions à franchir les portes de cet espace unique, dédié à la célébration de l'intelligence et de la créativité africaines dans toute leur splendeur. La **Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse (RPJ)** se positionne ici comme un carrefour où se croisent réflexion académique et innovation pragmatique, dans une quête inlassable de réponses aux défis multiformes de notre époque.

Dans un monde en constante mutation, cette revue se veut une boussole, orientant les esprits curieux vers des territoires inexplorés de la pensée critique. Chaque article, chaque réflexion, chaque témoignage publié dans ces pages transcende les barrières géographiques et culturelles, tissant une toile intellectuelle où l'Afrique dialogue avec le reste du monde. Loin des visions simplistes et uniformisantes, cette revue offre une lecture plurielle et nuancée, où la diversité des perspectives est érigée en moteur de compréhension et de transformation.

Ce numéro particulier s'inscrit dans une dynamique audacieuse : celle de faire rayonner non seulement l'ingéniosité scientifique, mais également la richesse des expériences humaines qui en sont le socle. À travers des contributions d'une rigueur exemplaire, nos auteurs dévoilent des idées qui jaillissent des contextes de résilience et d'espoir, et qui trouvent leur force dans l'intersection de disciplines, de cultures et de visions. Ces pages témoignent d'une Afrique en mouvement, une Afrique créative et porteuse de solutions pour un avenir plus inclusif et durable.

Loin d'être un simple réceptacle de savoirs, cette revue est un espace vivant, animé par une communauté d'auteurs, de chercheurs et de penseurs qui s'engagent à poser des jalons pour le développement scientifique et social. Ensemble, ils bâtissent des ponts entre l'universel et le particulier, entre le local et le global, démontrant que l'innovation africaine est non seulement pertinente, mais essentielle à l'évolution des sociétés contemporaines.

Notre comité éditorial, appuyé par une équipe scientifique d'excellence, veille à garantir une qualité irréprochable à chaque publication. Ce travail collaboratif, empreint de rigueur et d'éthique, reflète notre ambition de faire de la RPJ un vecteur de transformation sociale et une tribune où les voix africaines s'expriment avec force et conviction. Chaque numéro est une invitation à repenser les paradigmes dominants, à déconstruire les stéréotypes, et à envisager de nouvelles façons de concevoir le rôle de l'Afrique dans le monde.

Alors que vous parcourez ces pages, nous espérons que vous serez saisi(e)s par l'ampleur des idées, la profondeur des analyses et la portée des visions qui y sont présentées. Plus qu'une lecture, cette revue est une expérience, une immersion dans un univers où la science et la pensée critique façonnent les contours d'un avenir prometteur.

Plongez dans cette aventure intellectuelle, où l'Afrique se réinvente et inspire le monde. Ensemble, poursuivons le rêve d'un continent qui, par sa richesse intellectuelle et sa créativité, se hisse au rang des acteurs incontournables de la réflexion mondiale.

Bonne lecture et bienvenue dans cet univers d'idées, d'innovations et de découvertes !

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Revue Panafricaine de la Jeunesse
Revue scientifique internationale
ISSN : 2790-6248 I e-ISSN : 2790-6256
Editions Lumumba
Un nouvel élan de l'édition africaine
Email : contact@editionslumumba.com
Afriscience
African Scientific Universe

Rethinking education during crisis in Cameroon: reverting to community schools in rural communities in the North West and South West regions?

[Repenser l'éducation en temps de crise au Cameroun: un retour aux écoles communautaires dans les zones rurales des régions du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest ?]

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Abstract

This paper is premised on the fact that since education cannot wait during crisis, it must remain above politics and children must continue to learn as fulfilment of fundamental human rights. Therefore, reverting to community schools for effective education of the youth is a panacea to the educational equation in the North West and South West regions. The paper had as objective to provide an insight into the challenges of education, alternative learning modalities and strategies that can help sustain quality learning and teaching during crisis in rural communities in Cameroon. To arrive at the required results, the qualitative research method was used comprising of interviews, life stories, observations and focus groups where the respondents shared their experiences and the challenges of teaching and learning during crisis. The challenges range from limited, poorly maintained and unsafe infrastructures, the non-respect of state prescriptions, and the dilemma of school uniforms as a form of control in crisis period. This anchored on Dewey's theory of progressive education. The promoters of private education were obliged to innovate to remain in business and help sustain learning when the regular system became handicapped. The results showed that children with disability and young girls were stigmatized, marginalized and discriminated upon because of their nature and inability to access the complex education in crisis. Their plight left at the mercy of local councils whose activities in the community had also been delocalized because of the crisis. Hence, necessitating the social actions of humanitarian agencies in the domain to help promote community schools and private promoters of education to help the state accomplish its mission in the provision of alternative education to all in crisis.

Keywords: Rethinking, alternative education, reverting and rural communities

Résumé

Cet article part du principe que l'éducation ne peut pas attendre pendant la crise, qu'elle doit rester au-dessus de la politique et que les enfants doivent continuer à apprendre pour respecter les droits de l'homme fondamentaux. Par conséquent, le retour aux écoles communautaires pour une éducation efficace des jeunes est une panacée pour l'équation éducative dans les régions du Nord-Ouest et du Sud-Ouest. Le présent article vise à apporter un éclairage sur les défis auxquels est confrontée l'éducation, des modalités d'apprentissage alternatives et des stratégies qui peuvent aider à maintenir un apprentissage et un enseignement de qualité pendant la crise dans les communautés rurales du Cameroun. Pour parvenir aux résultats escomptés, une méthode de recherche qualitative a été utilisée, comprenant des entretiens, des récits de vie, des observations et des groupes de discussion au cours desquels les

personnes interrogées ont partagé leurs expériences et les défis de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage en temps de crise. Les défis vont des infrastructures limitées, mal entretenues et peu sûres, au non-respect des prescriptions de l'État et au dilemme des uniformes scolaires comme forme de contrôle en période de crise. Cette approche s'appuie sur la théorie de l'éducation progressive de Dewey. Les promoteurs de l'enseignement privé ont été obligés d'innover pour rester en activité et aider à soutenir l'apprentissage lorsque le système régulier devenait handicapé. Les résultats ont montré que les enfants handicapés et les jeunes filles étaient stigmatisés, marginalisés et discriminés en raison de leur nature et de leur incapacité à accéder à l'éducation complexe en crise. Leur situation critique a été laissée à la merci des conseils locaux dont les activités au sein de la communauté ont également été délocalisées en raison de la crise. D'où la nécessité d'actions sociales de la part des agences humanitaires dans le domaine pour aider à promouvoir les écoles communautaires et les promoteurs privés de l'éducation pour aider l'Etat à accomplir sa mission dans la fourniture d'une éducation alternative à tous ceux qui sont en situation de crise.

Mots clés : Repenser, éducation alternative, retour et communautés rurales.

0. Introduction

Prior to westernization, African Indigenous Education was community-oriented. That is geared towards solving the problems of the community. The instructional activities where directed towards the social life of the community so as to prepare the learners to fit in their community (MacOjong, 2008, Njoki et al., 2015; Ebot Ashu, 2016, 2020). This encouraged every person in the community whether young or old to put their competence and skills into the community.

After World War 1, Cameroon often referred to as "Africa in miniature" for its geologic and cultural diversity was divided between France and the United Kingdom as League of Nations mandates (Tchawa, 2012). This meant the adulteration and disruption of the most cherished African indigenous communalistic values and education. In 1960, the French-administered part of the country became independent as the Republic of Cameroon and the southern part of the British Cameroons federated with it in 1961 to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon. This reunification required the adaption of a national policy, which was to guarantee that none of the colonial identities dominates the other (Ngoh, 2001). In doing so, the Federal Republic adopted harmonization as policy framework for the establishment of a new national educational system that was unequivocally represents both colonial heritages without feelings of marginalization by any side. (Ngalim, 2014, 2015, 2017; Ndile, 2020). With this historical evolution of the country, it history exerts a powerful influence on education in the sense that educational development is a function of the societies' historical development: (Report of the International Commission on the Development of Education, UNESCO-Paris, 1972). The Federation was abandoned in 1972 as the country was renamed the United Republic of Cameroon and later the Republic of Cameroon in 1984.

This historic-sociological paper is coming after the backdrop of socio-political upheaval, which except for the major towns, have led to what has been termed the shutdown of the educational and judiciary sectors orchestrated by this historical evolution and its nomenclature. Unfortunately, these have degenerated into serious confrontation between Non-State Armed Groups and government forces with the thorny issue of the

two colonial heritages (British and French-Cameroons) coming up and hence affecting the communalistic values of the people. This, the former Southern Cameroonians argue that it is like reestablishing the political entity of the 1961 and the difficulties of managing the process of reforms which was to take into consideration equity in representation of the erstwhich colonial identities within the union (Ndile, 2020).

In order to provide an understanding of the history of education and the educational background in Cameroon, (Tchombe, 2001) present it in terms of independent government policy-making by way of dealing with the two inherited systems and ensuring an egalitarian representation as policy required remains an outstanding challenge. The socio-political crisis rocking the North West and South West regions that appears to be neglected and given little visibility for more than seven years now has been attributed to lack of this egalitarian representation in the educational milieu. It has affected education with more than 855,000 children remaining out of school in the North West and South West Cameroon (UNICEF, 2019). "Thousands of children in Cameroon are living in fear. They need peace so that they can resume their education and reclaim their future", UNICEP reiterated. Today, without urgent action and without a commitment from all parties to the conflict to protect education in all its forms, the future of the children is at risk. Whereas everyone has the right to education and education is supposed to be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages (Articles 26, UDHR). This is in conformity with the slogan "Education cannot" and it cannot wait especially in crisis period (UNESCO, HCR, UNICEF, NRC, PLAN, 2023). In 2019 in the heart of the crisis in some rural communities, UNICEF initiated community-run learning activities to ensure that children do not miss out further on education. What are the challenges of education in rural communities during crisis in Cameroon? How have the alternative educational strategies adopted help resolve the education equation during crisis period and its sustainability in Cameroon? The production, dissemination of literacy and digital lessons by radio, television and other audio visual means for children who remain at home and to those in disadvantages areas of the country appears to be a partial remedy for educational challenges during crisis period but not accessible to most of these rural communities in Cameroon. The slogan "Education must remain above politics" contextualizes this study and justifies the raison d'être for embarking on this paper.

1. Methodology

With the complexity of the historiography of the studied area, raw data for this paper was derived from archival sources. The qualitative research method was added comprising of interviews, life stories, observations and Focus Group Discussions where the respondents shared their experiences and the challenges of teaching and learning during crisis. This was done using the purposive snowball sampling technique. The research targeted Mezam Division with four sub-divisions. That is Bamenda 2, Santa, Bali and Bafut sub-divisions for the North West region and for the South West region; Fako Division was targeted with four sub-divisions made up of Limbe, Tiko, Muyuka

and Idenau. This could also be justifiable because these divisional headquarters coincidentally serve as the headquarters of the different regions whose results have been generalized. The choice of sample population was influence by its relatively calmness and data available on the existence of community schools and non-contextualized alternative learning modalities (UNESCO, HCR, UNICEF, NRC, PLAN, 2023). Data for this paper was collected between the 30th October 2023 and the 31st January 2024.

2. Results and discussion

Three principal articulations constitute the results of this research. That is, brief historiography of education in Cameroon, challenges of education in crisis period and alternative education in crisis with reverting to community schools as an empirical option.

2.1. Brief historiography of education in Cameroon

> *"[…] history exerts a powerful influence on education, in the sense that educational development is a function of societies' historical development: that education bears many traces of the past and finally that it is time for education to help make history by preparing for it"* (UNESCO-Paris, 1972).

The British Baptist Missionary Society introduced western education in Cameroon in the 1844. This was strengthened during the colonial period by the joint efforts of colonial government and missionary societies (Gwanfogbe, 1995). The colonial regimes, German colonial rule (1884-1916), French and British regimes (1916-1961) impact educational institutions in Cameroon as education under these regimes was provided largely by Christian missions that were sometimes neither of German, French nor British origin. They were at times treated with suspicion by colonial authorities (Njeuma, 1989; Gwanfogbe, 1995). Pre-colonial Cameroon therefore welcomed and internalized some values of western education disseminated by colonial and missionary education. The weaknesses and strengths of African indigenous education with reference to Cameroon were more attributed to the colonialists and the process of westernization.

The French program of assimilation produced Cameroonian educated elites who identified culturally and spiritually more with France than with the colonial society (Fanso, 1975). The centralized educational control of the French administration maintained goals that resulted to the establishment of the more uniformed educational standards than educational policies of the British. The decentralized educational control in the British colonies established local education authorities and introduced a sense of indirect guidance rather than the direct management by the local administration. Education in Cameroon became communal efforts especially under the Native Administration (NA) and mission system. The French system remained under the full control of the Government (Elango, 1987). The respect of traditional cultures resulting from the indirect rule in the British system lessoned the pressure on African leaders to demonstrate a break with the culture of the former colonial powers. So, the

resistance by the minority Anglophones and their continued attachment to the inherited English system of education may be associated with the patterns of colonial education that depended heavily on missionary societies and the Native Authority. Post-independence Cameroon witnessed a shift in the control of education from direct to indirect rule master minded by the developed nations and colonial masters.

The educational system set up since the colonial rule is still functioning today with a few resisted adjustments. Its inspiration is liberal. The Anglophone Cameroon system has nothing in common with the heavy, bureaucratic, over-centralized system set up by Jules Ferry, which France has bequeathed to its former colonies (Gwanfogbe, 1995)). The Anglophone system is adaptable, decentralized, and pragmatic. It is not meant to put teachers under the yoke of rigid texts often applied without judgement by a generalized meddlesome hierarchy. If the Francophone educational system, by leaving no initiative to teachers usually gives poor education, the Anglophone system trusts the teachers and they are free to take pedagogic initiatives. It is some of the initiatives that partially contributed to questioning that contributed to the present crisis. The Anglophone educational system was gradually set up through a succession of adjustments and not through a reform actually resulting in a change of denomination or initials as referred in the French system.

The period from the time of federalization to the time of unification from 1961 to 1972 is mainly characterized by unprecedented efforts to increase primary school attendance and to diversify secondary education. This was followed by a change in content and orientation of education. The government of the Federated state endeavored at very high financial cost to democratize primary education and defend the English language and culture. This, confirming its attachment to the imported foreign culture. Secondary school attendance found itself multiplied more than ten time, thanks to the missionaries and the Federal government. Technical education gained grounds but examinations were still prepared by external bodies. Following the law No 63/COR/5 of 1963, the time spent at primary school in West Cameroon dropped from eight to seven years in the 1964 and was supposed to drop further to six years by 1965. These were efforts toward harmonization so as to have the same level as East Cameroon. (Ngalim, 2014, 2015, 2017; Ndile, 2020). The main objective was to implement the Federal law and to create room for mass education. Domestic science Centers and vocational schools for those who did not want to further secondary school or to become teachers were created. This growth in school enrolment extension in infrastructure hence a need for partnership with the community hence community schools return (Njeuma, 1989). The government requested UNESCO to advise on a three year junior secondary programme to be followed by a two year vocational education aimed at agriculture, technical and commercial training. There were also propositions for bilingual schools but cautioned against the hasty introduction of French in schools within the regions that might cause problems effectively one of the remote causes of the upheaval in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. The idea of setting up a bilingual school in Buea embracing the culture of the Francophone and Anglophones could have created a nucleus for national

integration and thus contributes to socio-cultural understanding of the nature of national integration and the problem of education. But, the policy flopped and did not provide any mechanisms to motivate those who became interested. Consequently, the students tended to revert and refocus on their original educational systems .Thus, the school and subsequent ones have failed to fulfil the objectives of developing strategies for harmonizing the two systems. They became two schools representing the two systems in the same campus.

The crisis in the North West and South West regions emanating as a historical evolution of Anglophone Cameroon has affected education with more than 855,000 children remaining out of school in the North West and South West Cameroon (UNICEF, 2019). Education in Cameroon remains a sector in crisis (NRC, 2023), as schools continue to be under attack. As of 2022, these attacks involve shooting, killing, arsons, abductions resulting in 3.285 schools closed down across Cameroon in the North West and South West regions. This insecurity and violent attacks have resulted in massive population movements with over 900.000 people displaced within the country with majority being children in need of schooling. (NRC, Oct.2023). 68% in the North West and 39% of the schools in the South West are non-functional. By the end of 2022 Academic year, 2,245 schools where still not functioning in the two regions while "Thousands of other children were living in fear. They need peace so that they can resume their education and reclaim their future and without urgent action and without a commitment from all parties to the conflict to protect education in all its forms, the future of the children is at risk. (UNICEF, 2022). Whereas everyone has the right to education and education is supposed to be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages (Articles 26, UDHR).

In other African countries like in Ghana, when Kwame Nkrumah had to reform education in Ghana, he blamed British colonial education for being an ineffective means of African social and political integration and for being inappropriate in terms of economic development (Arthin, 1993). When Nyerere wanted to reform education in Tanzania, he regarded colonial education as the colonialist attempts to refuse Africans the type of education that could ensure progress of the African continent (Nyerere, 1964). Abangma in his study towards ruralization of the school curriculum in English speaking Cameroon, examined reforms directed towards ruralization of education in order to make it relevant to the masses (Abangma, 1981).

2.2. Challenges of Education during crises in rural communities in Cameroon

Dewey's position on effective progressive education was that the school was a central institution of a democratic society where students learn by performing tasks that are related to their own interest in a convivial environment (Brooke and Bruder, 1996, p.160) but there are limited, poorly maintained and unsafe school infrastructures in several villages in the study area. As of 2022 3,285 schools remain closed down across the two regions (NRC, 2023), some totally destroyed, some abandoned like GHS Kwang, GTHS Kwang, GSS Buchi in Pinyin and GHS Muwengne, and even GBHS Santa that has been saving as a military camp for years now, some hideouts for destabilisers.

In Bali like in Bafut Sub-divisions of the North West region where this study was conducted, harbour displaced persons, facing the same and similar infrastructural challenges (Ngwa and Mbelle 2023). Hence, these infrastructures need maintenance, renovation and reconstruction to provide a safe and secured learning environment for those children, parents and teachers who have decided, "Education cannot wait", refused to move out of the crisis regions and can break the ought's by going to school. The analysis of these educational challenges faced by men, women, youths and children in crises period where based on many field conductors amongst which was: How have the educational challenges made you unable to cope with educating your children? Again, education in these areas is facing almost the same challenges like in the hinterlands. This unsafe environment and influx from nearby villages puts severe constraints on education in both the villages and the sub-divisional headquarters and consequently they face multiple vulnerabilities.

Some remote and unsecured areas of the North West and South West regions have not seen a qualified teacher for the past six years (UNICEP, 2023). Insecurity prohibits some of these qualified public servants in the teaching domain to exercise their duties nor to move. Some of these teachers who have been assisting in education even in private schools have escaped. The promoters of private education rely on community teachers who are lacking the necessary training and knowledge to promote the required standards of teaching and learning in the community schools. The philosophy of the destabilizers of public schools in these areas has reawakened the idea of community schools in the minds of some promoters of private education in the region as they struggle to stay in business. This raised challenges as to the quality of education that children in rural areas during crisis acquire and whether the curriculum is respected. Not only staying in business but there is need for equity pedagogy where all learners are given equal opportunities and privileges to develop their potentials (McCarthy, 2006, Ngalim, 2014) as their peer counter-parts else way. Quality education, respect of curricula is determined from the fact that the learners acquire the necessary skills to enhance their full integration into the community.

The respondents acknowledge the presence and the challenges of the displaced in their communities but decried that no special status is given to the displaced, not even the special status given to the North West and South West regions. But, the status that takes care of their vulnerability challenges. There is the disregard and non-respect of state measures to assist crisis victims and the displaced (Afu and khan 2020). The plight of the displaced is not taken into consideration and hence the unaffordable school fees and the Parents Teachers' Association levies prohibit some children who had to break the ought's to go to schools. At the beginning of the School year, the state issue circulars to functional public schools in crisis areas to admit displaced children for free but in some of the schools in Bamenda 2 and Limbe Sub-divisions that is relatively calm, it is not the case. The census of internally displaced children in the different schools is a reality on yearly basis but no follow-up mechanisms are put in place to ensure that ministerial instructions and exceptions of these vulnerable children from certain exigencies are put in place. The management of the schools from

registration, paying of fees, late coming, and supply of food, language, sanitary items, and socialization does not take into account the plight of the displaced. Their plight in some of the schools are left at the mercy of guidance councillors who are not even available in some of the private institutions. Where they exist, they are unable to cope with the growing number of the displaced children on a one-to-one mapping for psychosocial and financial support (Khan et al. 2023). The last time the respondent heard of this concept of internally displaced persons was when a list was sent round in some sampled schools for them to indicate whether they are internally displaced or not. This further exposes these children and precipitates some of the dropout cases who in return opts for alternative forms of learning.

The distance to some non-functional public schools serve as a veritable challenge to rural children who cannot afford daily transportation talk less of the risk, vulnerability they take on "ghost-town" days to go to school. Primary government schools that are supposed to be free, are situated very far from their homes as most of the rural parents cannot afford transportation for their children on a daily basis. Those in secondary schools are either forced to trek for long distances to government schools that are relatively cheaper, drop out of school or again being exposed to a very high risk of attack, assault, kidnapping on their way too or from school. More to that, the poverty situation of the rural parents does not permit them to send their siblings to these far off schools. They barely only have what to eat and even eating well is a challenge.

With this scenario, the parents are left with no option than to adhere to the ideology of community schools, as there is as well pressure on private education especially in Bamenda 2 municipality (Beche, 2020). This then increases their rate of vulnerability and high risk of school dropouts; delinquency and the tendency for the children to get involved in drugs as only a few can afford these amounts. The few respondents who decided to send their children to schools say they do not have a choice. So, the rural parents matter less about the quality of education their children acquire at this level. They matter less about the type of education whether it is grammar, commercial or technical education but concentrates more on the proximity to their places of residence and the low fees in the said educational institutions. A call to question of the quality of education that their children get as prescribe in the law of orientation (Law No 98/004 of 14th April 1994 laying down guidelines on education in Cameroon). The challenge here is as well related to educational inequalities, since the education orientation places school furniture's as a major priority and a state regalia duty, guaranteeing access.

However, school uniforms and textbooks are further challenges for the English Sub-system of education in crisis period that place the educational community in a dilemma. The challenge of school uniforms as a form of control. Before and after World War II in Africa, school uniforms became popular as they were used to control young people. The Nile Journal reports that the pioneering works of the missionaries throughout Africa started the history of school uniforms as a sense of commonality, build community in a school as students of all ages kept school uniforms striving in Anglophone Cameroon. These uniforms helped increase students focus when students

do not have clothing to notice. In this perspective, they spend more mental energy on learning, a sense of disciplined learning; just as uniform reduces inequality, some argue that school uniforms promote neatness, cleanliness and safety in conflict areas where students may be gang-involved. But, this idea of uniforms in the study area is becoming a matter of the past. The few learners who brave the odds are hardly identified as students and pupils because they are dressed in assorted for fear of being identified.

Since the advent of the crisis, children have been kidnapped, some molested, sexually harassed on their way to and from school. In 2020, students were stripped naked in Fako division, with a good number from Bilingual Grammar School Buea and some from schools in the neighborhood. Still in 2020, gunmen attacked Mother Francisca International Bilingual Academy Kumba and killed over a dozen schoolchildren attending classes and in uniforms. In the same year, children were attacked and killed in Ekondo-Titi still in the South West region by gunmen and in the North West region in November 2021 specifically in Metta quarters Bamenda II council area, a stray police bullet targeting a runaway driver picked a seven-year returning from school and in uniform. These killings of schoolchildren in uniform instill fear and insecurity in the few who had to brave the odds to attend school and consequently reduce the wearing of school uniforms in these areas. Some school administrators who think that the non-wearing of school uniform is yielding to the demands of the Non-State Armed Groups in the localities of Bamenda II, Limbe and Tiko have made the wearing of uniforms mandatory. This exposing some of these children who brave the odds to trek for long distances in search for education to adopt different strategies by putting their school jackets in shopping bags or disguise as if they are going to the market or to farms to end up in the school environment that is a bit secured before wearing their uniforms. This action of school administrators has exposed some of these children to more vulnerability and has precipitated many more school dropouts in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon. Today therefore, school uniforms are probably more prevalent in Africa than else way in the world despite its negative connotation in crisis periods in Cameroon.

The challenge of education of children with disability and the lack of care for the disabled during crisis. Anne M. Hayes and Jennie Bulat (2017) on Disabilities Inclusive Education Systems and policy Guides for Low-and middle-Income countries says "[…] having a disabilities can be one of the most marginalizing factors in the child's life". Therefore, finding ways to meet the learning needs of students with disability during crisis is challenging with severe limited resources. With few representatives of Non-governmental Organizations in these rural communities in the South West and North West regions to care for the disabled, the disable children face all forms of vulnerability in the society as a whole and in the educational environment in particular. They are stigmatized, marginalized and discriminated upon as their plight is only left in the hands of the local councils whose activities have also been delocalized by the crisis. The disabled face high rate of morbidity and displacement challenges in the educational community.

Prior to their displacement, some have been disfavored by their educational community by not considering their plight and by not sending them to school nor giving them informal education. As a process, challenge children, youths are in the process of displacement to different destinations facing different problems that render them more vulnerable as displacement itself is already a challenge and vulnerability. If the normal persons are being displaced and they faced challenges a respondent cried out. What about the physically challenged? (Khan, 2023) response to this that during the socio-political impasse plaguing these two regions, people with disability especially the physically displaced are often left behind as their families flee. Those who successfully move faced additional threats but during their movements and in their displacement, challenges to the disabled and their children are enormous. They are already vulnerable group, the disabled, the physically challenged are often unable to move with their luggage, unable to bring along their wheel chairs, clutches, tricycles or move fast as others to take safer routes, faster to distance schools or escape from attacks (WHO, report 2019). This leaving them with nothing, not even educational items, to fatal attacks and confrontations between the Non-State Armed Groups and the military. The situation becomes preponderant to few who need access to distance community schools or expensive private schools with imposition of parent teachers levies in the form of fees. However, some of these disable children facing educational challenges brave the odds and attend community schools for to them disability is not inability.

There was the challenge of education to those disadvantaged by gender in crises period and hence gender stereotyping. In most of these rural communities like Santa, Bali, Bafut in the North West and Tiko, Mutengene and Idenau in the South West regions, unwanted pregnancies, early marriages have been rampant because of the discrimination meted upon the girl child in crisis period by not letting them go to schools. Some have been considered unclean because a natural challenge to them in crisis period is the fact that they menstruate. They need education on their natural status, as they are considered most susceptible to vulnerability. Some are stigmatized because of their poor status and worse still cannot afford hygiene resources and ladies' pads. Some are oblige to indulge in to delinquent activities to afford money to purchase these basic sanitary pads, not to talk of getting access to schools and education. Whereas education empowers young girls and women in the rural milieu by increasing their chances of getting jobs, staying healthy and participating fully in the society (UNESCO, 2013). Hence, providing alternative education to the rural community in crisis era provides safe space for young girls, children and youth to learn. This can minimize their exposure to physical danger during crisis, rape, to violence, and exploitation associated with human conflict. Youth, both male and female are less likely to be recruited for armed groups, sexual exploitation if they continue alternative education in the rural communities, as the females are more vulnerable than the males. On the contrary, dropouts, and out-of school young girls and children affected by the crisis are more likely to be at risk of violence, rape, prostitution and life threatening criminal activities. Without access to alternative education in crisis period in rural communities in Cameroon, children may forget what they learned in school in the

previous years. This could be in conformity with Albert Einstein view that "Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school". Therefore, this alternative education like system of education before the crisis should be respected and the regular curriculum followed for continuity. For, if they remain out for long, they will became frustrated, and it will be harder for them to come back to school. This is not only dangerous for the future of these young girls and children but also a serious challenge for the educational system that was meant to transmits positive values.

2.3. Reverting to community schools as alternative measures in crisis

Contrary to the insistence of some state actors in the educational milieu on the need for the learners to wear uniforms, the initiatives of the few operating community schools exonerate the pupils and students from wearing school uniforms. The promoters of these community schools or transformer of private schools to community schools have understood that to remain in business as one of the private school promoters in the Bamenda II asserts;

> *"[..] you need to understand the rule of the game by respecting instructions from both the State Actors and the Non-State Armed groups with caution so as not to totally take sides. We do not want the Non-state armed group who infiltrate in the general population to identify and attack our students. Anonymous numbers have even called us to tell us that know that we are operational and that we need to comply"* (Ruben, private education promoter, Nov. 2023).

This is an indication that the fears of these promoters of accepting the non-uniform policy in crisis is genuine. They are in a dilemma to function so as to remain in business but at the same time they are being harassed and asked to comply as they also protect their students and pupils. With the shift of uniform before the crisis to the non-uniform policy during crisis, the respondents estimate that it has been difficult for them to adapt to this policy and to differentiate between student and non-student during their routine checks at the gates makes control difficult. They think that the increased complains of stolen school items during classes, unkempt nature of some of the pupils and students and increased juvenile delinquency out of the school environments is attributed to this non-uniform policy. It is commonplace to see students changing on campuses, in tailoring workshops around the campuses, restaurants beside the campuses and some even in drinking spots situated around road junctions. Some of the pupils and students in assorted end up not entering the school campuses in the morning and after school. Some do not go back to their homes as they end up in open space playing ball, some in drinking spots and others in gambling houses at the road junctions. To them, the rate of delinquency, drug abuse, sexual harassment, school dropouts is rampant in the crisis area today because of this non-uniform policy contrary to what prevailed before the crisis.

Some parents still complain that some schools refuse or complain of the quality of school uniforms not got from the school. Despite, the governments ban on the sales

of uniforms and textbooks, some school heads still do that and oblige parents to sign at higher prizes. Worst still, they silently do that in the school milieu or set up their make shift tailoring/designing workshops in their cars. Some even transform their cars in to mobile tailoring/designing workshops with textbooks for all the classes or school uniforms of different sizes, shapes for all the age groups. This, they only exploit parents but internally displaced parents cannot cope with such acts and the result is school dropouts. Internally displaced parents also presented as challenge that predispose them to vulnerability, the imposition of sports wears, some sold in campuses and changing them almost every year. The sales of textbooks in schools as well as each teacher in the secondary schools in some community schools writing their workbooks and imposing on children was a challenge to most of these internally displaced parents who cannot afford them and the question of these didactic materials being in conformity with the programs resurfaced. They thought it was a good opportunity for them to expose their problems. A reasonable number of internally displaced persons interviewed showed that during school resumption, they find it very difficult at the level of school furniture. Access to exercise books to the few that are ready for school resumption is easier and makes the community concept a reality.

The school is therefore, thought of as something indispensable and generations of people, parents, educators, students, and politicians, bureaucrats to believe that without schools and conventional education, the society will collapse (Ivan IIIich, 1971). He stressed on the fact that without community schools in crisis period there will be a Deschooling Society. Crisis as the case in the North West and South West regions that have put children off formal institutions warrants this rethink of the alternatives to keep children educated. Apart of reverting, confessional and private schools cater for children during crisis especially the displaced. Children whose families did not have the possibility to move to safer areas attend operational schools outside of their communities and face enormous risks on their way to school on a daily basis. Due to "ghost towns" and recurrent lockdowns, children were prevented from accessing schools for more than two months at the beginning of each academic year; children were prevented from schooling (NRC, lockdown and ghost town monitoring for 2022). The situation in the rural areas of the two regions became more pronounced with the destruction of some of the state owned school infrastructures.

To avert the formal school concept in crisis and to remain in business, some promoters of vocational education in the crisis area have resort to creation of centers like the *Center For continuing Education* and the *Building My School, Myself* in the Bamenda 2 who embraced the concept of alternative education. To them, they imagine a world where every child has an opportunity to access education and more to that to quality vocational education but it's not a reality for every child, conflict has shut down classrooms for thousands of children in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon. As alternative measures they opted for vocational continuing education and the "Build My School, Myself" community education projects that empowers students from disadvantaged rural communities in the North West to volunteer their time thereby gaining hands-on-skills in building classrooms and constructing benches for

themselves (Sama, Oct.2023) and using them. On the current educational curriculum, they appreciated it as good but stressed on the fact that it is "like an oversized pant" for it does not fit the vocational nor technical needs of the learners in crisis as it contributes to the deteriorating state of the nation because of over reliance on the state owned institutions. The vision to create a Votech-S7 Academy, a model institution in crisis that uses relevant educational technologies to meet the vocation and technical needs of learners who have been displaced and have been out of school for years because of the crisis they reiterated is coming to fill the void. Hence, directly embracing the idea of proximity education and reinforcing the return to community-oriented education for those living in the crisis zones.

As a response amongst others, the remoteness of the rural crisis, inaccessibility of schools because of atrocities during crisis, this alternative measures can help sustain learning when the regular system becomes handicapped. Since most teachers have been obliged to moved, the promoters of private education are also obliged to innovate so as meet with the demands of the time. This innovation in crisis period have obliged them to return to the Indigenous People's Education, Basic Literacy Programs, Religious Value Education, Adolescent Reproductive Health Education, Family Basic Literacy, Parent Education, Alternative Delivery Modes, Instructional Management by Parents, Community and Teachers and embracing Distance Learning. These ties with the projections of Kirk, 2018 on alternative education modalities. With these, mixed alternative teaching and learning discovery modalities could be developed such as home schooling, the use of self-directed learning models, online learning sessions, radio and TV broad caste and blended distance learning. Although, all of these came with their own challenges, one or the other approach satisfies the maxim that "Education cannot wait." To the promoters of community-oriented education and of private education in these areas, their vision and mission has been diagnosed to be two folds: Viz to provide education to the hundreds and thousands of those affected by the crisis and to remain in business thereby facilitating meaningful learning experiences in such difficult times.

The state school authorities in these rural areas are in a dilemma. They need to provide education in these crisis areas and at the same time state infrastructures and children are disturbed from attending schools by the activities of the Non- state Armed Groups. With insufficient funds, the promoters of the community-oriented concept, private schools are pushed to temporary operating in state institution. Apparently, the state has validated this since it's the duty of the state to provide education for all as these promoters are just partners accompanying the state attain its objectives. This again is interpreted to mean administrative tolerance hence legalizing the illegal. For, quality learning opportunities for all ages in situation of crisis, early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocational, higher adult education is an imperative. This by implication means that "Education in emergencies and crisis provide physical, psychosocial and cognitive protection that can sustain and save lives" (INEE, Minimum Standards for Education, 2010). Without necessarily being humanitarian in nature, its strategies for life sustaining and lifesaving are enormous.

This alternative education is life saving and life sustaining for the children affected by the crisis. Today, it might be spontaneous but activities should be anchored on human rights, the right to education for all affected by crisis must also be given access to learning opportunities (UN General Assembly, 2010). For, whatever challenges the rural communities are facing, education must continue, education cannot wait, and learners cannot wait. Children and young people are prioritized based on vulnerability criteria, such as not attending school, being over the required age for access to primary school, and children and young people with disabilities, with a particular focus on girls.

3. Conclusion

In this article, I argue that education is a reality in the North West and South West regions of Cameroon as some schools are operational. Nevertheless, the situation is so pathetic in the study area where most of the schools operational are either community schools or private schools. A simple conversion of some private schools into the nomenclature of community schools and on the other hand a complex conversion by limitation of government or state run structures into community schools to satisfy the urging need of those who brave the odds in the crisis to go to school. At such adopting a learning schedule in crisis and alternative education that could be interpreted, (O'Donnell, 1997: 6, Walsham, 1991) to signify success, resilience, regularity, structural change that could portray a gradual sense of return to normalcy in the crises area.

In that perspective, learners can renew their connections with the educational community. If done properly, either the return to community schools in Anglophone Cameroon or the alternative forms of education during crisis can help children affected by the crisis overcome. This is because the number of children affected by the crisis urging to go to school are increasing daily but unfortunately, these schools are disrupted by the activities on the Non-State Armed Groups that increases their vulnerability. The question of qualified personnel's, respect of the curriculum, the quality of teaching/learning, the thorny issue of uniforms as a form of social control becomes preponderant with respect to the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Therefore, the urgent need to rethink education in crisis periods in Cameroon and the way forward is to revisit the idea of community schools. This has urged the promoters of private education to adopt alternative measures and strategies of education for all during crisis in Cameroon. These measures have been able to provide a return to familiar routine in some schools and instil in the learners hope for the future, mitigating the psychosocial impact of violence and displacement. This community schools and education provided during conflict can also counter the underlying causes of violence and foster inclusion, tolerance, human rights, awareness and conflict resolution-supporting the long-term processes of rebuilding and peace-building" (Talbot, 2013). The sense of normalcy and the opportunities for socialization has been provided by a learning community environment and has help learners affected to recover from trauma and improve their psychological wellbeing. These measures cannot stop the crisis that created this educational imbalance but opens the door for education for the

affected; a step towards equity education during crisis in Cameroon for Annette Dixon, the Vice President of Human Development for the World Bank affirmed that, "It's never too late for young people to have opportunities to learn. Our youth deserve to be equipped with the skills they need to thrive in an increasingly demanding and uncertain job world. Given that today's students will be tomorrow's citizens and leaders, a good and relevant education is essential to turn aspirations into reality" (Annette Dixon, 2019).

4. Recommendations

Given the essential role that education plays, addressing learning in crisis period and proposing a sustainable educational model for hand-to-reach areas requires; primo, supporting teachers, who brave the odds to teach and who are the single most important driver of how much students learn in school. This, with the understanding that some educational institutions as has been established charge higher fees for these children on displacement. Hence, the need for an emergency educational response that requires rapid teacher training, follow-up mechanisms to put in place to ensure ministerial instructions are followed to the later, construction of temporary learning spaces, and reorganization of dilapidated recreational activities. Secondo, it requires support for formal education with the distribution of school kits, teaching materials, provision of tables and benches, capacity building for teachers on teaching methods, etc. Lastly, non-formal education requiring implementation of the Accelerated Education Programme (AEP), implementation of remedial courses, and community participation. An analysis of the opportunities and challenges for a tailored Accelerated Education programme as an alternative education learning opportunities outside the formal school system to address the needs of out of schoolchildren. The identification of these alternative approaches and many more are imperative. For close to eight years today, the "Anglophone Crisis" has dominated politics in Cameroon but (UNICEF, 2019) maintains, "Education must remain above politics", during crisis periods following strike action initiated by lawyers and teachers in the two English-speaking regions of the country.

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Tél. : 00243 90 433 70 19
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Imprimé en République démocratique du Congo

©Edition Lumumba, avril 2025

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