

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION IN CAMEROON: TRENDS AND PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Education is a fundamental driver of national development, serving as a lever for human capital development, technological advancement, and the reduction of socio-economic disparities. In Cameroon, both public and private actors have made significant investments in the education system, recognizing its pivotal function in driving socioeconomic growth. Public investment has predominantly targeted the expansion of access to basic education, teachers' recruitment, and student capacity improvement, in line with the government's commitments at the Transformation of Education Summit (TES). Concurrently, private investment particularly from faith-based organizations, community-led schools, and private universities has supplemented government efforts, often offering higher perceived quality and innovation. However, the educational investment landscape in Cameroon is marked by enduring structural challenges including demographic pressures, regional disparities, underinvestment in sub-sectors such as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and insufficient alignment and coordination among key stakeholders. This article examines the historical trajectory and recent trends in public and private sector investment in Cameroon's education system, highlighting shifts in funding priorities, the growing role of private actors, and the increasing need for sustainable financing models. The analysis also explores donor contributions, public-private partnerships (PPPs), and emerging initiatives such as digital learning and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Drawing on national policy documents, budget reports, global development benchmarks, the study assesses the implications of current investment trajectories for educational planning, with a focus on equity, quality, and efficiency. It

argues that future education strategies in Cameroon must prioritize National Education Accounts, stronger regulatory frameworks, improved resource allocation, and inclusive stakeholder engagement. Addressing these systemic issues, will enable Cameroon to effectively harness the transformative potential of education as a catalyst for inclusive, quality, resilient and sustainable development.

Key terms: public investment in education, private investment in education, trends, planning implications

1. Introduction

Education investment in Cameroon is vital for achieving sustainable development, alleviating poverty, and fostering national cohesion. As highlighted by Tchamyou et al., (2023), human capital development through education remains one of the most powerful tools for economic transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Cameroon, the government and a range of private stakeholders including religious institutions, community organizations, and commercial providers significantly invest in the education and training sector. Despite these efforts, Ngwafor & Talla (2022) note persistent disparities in educational quality, accessibility, and efficiency, particularly between urban and rural areas. These disparities threaten national development objectives and widen existing inequalities. The Government of Cameroon, through strategic plans such as the 2020 - 2030 National Development Strategy and the 2023 - 2030 Education - Training Sector Strategy, has reaffirmed its commitment to enhancing educational outcomes. These frameworks aim to align national efforts with global priorities, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG 4 focused on ensuring inclusive and

equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. However, as Fonkeng & Abongdja (2023) emphasize, evolving demographic pressures, limited fiscal space, and growing demand for post-basic education necessitate a more nuanced understanding of both public and private sector investment dynamics. The expanding role of private education providers and external development partners also introduces new planning considerations, particularly in terms of regulation, accountability, and equitable resource distribution. In this context, a critical assessment of investment trends is essential to inform evidence-based educational planning and ensure that future interventions effectively contribute to an inclusive, resilient, and quality education system in Cameroon.

2. Background and Context

2.1. Education - Training Sector in Cameroon

Cameroon education system operates under a bilingual dual-track structure English and French, reflecting its colonial heritage under British and French administrations. The Anglophone subsystem follows a structure based on the British model (Ordinary and Advanced Levels), while the Francophone subsystem is modeled after the French system, with distinctions in curriculum content, evaluation methods, and administrative structures. This duality is enshrined in Law No. 98/004 of 14 April 1998 to lay down guidelines on education in Cameroon, which promotes bilingualism and the coexistence of two education subsystems. While the model is intended to promote national unity and cultural inclusiveness, it presents significant

challenges in terms of harmonization, equity, and resource allocation. As Njong & Tchinda (2023) point out, managing two parallel education systems places strain on public budgets and policy coordination, especially in conflict-affected regions. Nevertheless, efforts to promote bilingualism and curriculum integration have gained momentum in recent years, with policy initiatives aimed at fostering a more unified and inclusive national education system.

Cameroon education system is structured into six subsectors: the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB) in charge of preschool, primary education and literacy, the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) in charge of general, technical and teacher education, the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP), the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP), the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Civic Education (MINJEC), the Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation (MINRESI), each with specific objectives and institutional frameworks.

Preschool Education (MINEDUB)

Preschool education in Cameroon is the first type of education. It officially hosts children of 4 years of age, for a duration of 2 years. It comprises two sub-systems (anglophone and francophone). It plays a key role in laying the cognitive, emotional, and social foundation for future academic success. Even though it is not compulsory, early childhood education (ECE) is increasingly recognized as an essential component of the national education agenda. According to Njukang & Fotso (2024), access to quality pre-primary education significantly enhances school readiness,

particularly among children from low-income or rural households, by fostering early literacy, numeracy, and socio-behavioral competencies. Despite growing policy attention, enrollment in ECE remains uneven and generally low, especially in the priority education zones (Far North, North, East, and Adamawa regions). MINEDUB 2024 revealed that national gross enrollment in pre-primary education stood at just 41,02% in 2023 - 24, with rural areas trailing significantly behind urban centers. Barriers include a shortage of trained early childhood educators, limited infrastructure, and a general lack of public awareness about the long-term benefits of early learning.

The 2023 - 2030 Education - Training Sector Strategy targets 70% of 5-year-old children to have access to at least one year of pre-school education by 2030, including the construction of child-friendly learning environments, making pre-school free of charge, and developing a culturally responsive program. As Mbida & Tabe (2023) argue, investing in pre-primary education not only supports individual learning trajectories but also contributes to national goals related to equity, poverty reduction, and human capital development.

Primary Education (MINEDUB)

Primary education was rendered constitutionally obligatory in 1998, and officially begins at the age of 6 s. It lasts for 6 years and concludes with the award of the FSLC (First School Leaving Certificate) in the anglophone sub-system and the award of the CEP (Certificat d'Etudes Primaires) in the francophone sub-system. The introduction of free primary education in 2001 significantly increased access and

contributed to a rise in gross enrollment rates nationwide. According to Mbah & Fonjong (2023), primary school gross enrollment reached 118.2% in 2022, reflecting efforts to universalize basic education in line with SDG 4 targets. However, increased access has not been matched by equivalent gains in quality.

Persistent challenges undermine the effectiveness of primary education in Cameroon. As highlighted by Ndifor & Tanyi (2024), many schools especially in rural and conflict-affected areas face acute shortages of trained teachers, inadequate infrastructure, and high pupil-teacher ratio. In the Far North, North West, and South West regions, where insecurity and displacement have partially disrupted education service delivery, learning outcomes remain particularly low. National assessments reveal that fewer than 40% of Grade 6 pupils meet minimum competency thresholds in literacy and numeracy (MINEDUB, 2023). Moreover, quality assurance mechanisms remain weak. Teachers often lack in-service training, and many rural schools operate without electricity, potable water, or gender-sensitive sanitation facilities. As Tabi & Eloundou (2023) argue, improving foundational learning outcomes in Cameroon will require not only sustained financial investment but also systemic reforms in curriculum delivery, teacher training, and school governance.

Secondary Education (MINESEC)

Secondary Education in Cameroon is organized into two distinct cycles, reflecting the country's bilingual educational framework and colonial heritage. The First Cycle (Lower Secondary) lasts four years and culminates in the General

Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O-Level) in the Anglophone subsystem or the Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle (BEPC) in the Francophone subsystem. This cycle is designed to build foundational knowledge across core subjects and prepare learners for specialized study in the second cycle. The Second Cycle (Upper Secondary) spans three years and concludes with either the GCE Advanced Level (A-Level) or the "Baccalauréat", which serve as critical qualifications for university admission or entry into professional and technical training programs (Nkengafac & Tchinda, 2024).

The importance of secondary education as a bridge between basic education and higher learning or the labor market, recent studies reveal persistent challenges undermining its effectiveness. According to Fonchingong and Ekane (2023), Cameroon continues to grapple with high repetition and dropout rates in secondary schools, particularly in the Anglophone regions affected by sociopolitical unrest. Additionally, there is a notable deficiency in vocational and technical pathways, which limits opportunities for youth who do not pursue academic tracks (Mbaku & Njoku, 2023). This mismatch between education and labor market needs exacerbates youth unemployment and underemployment. Addressing these issues requires enhanced investment in curriculum reform, teacher training, and the expansion of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs that align more closely with Cameroon's socio-economic context (Fonkeng & Abongdia, 2023).

Higher Education (MINESUP)

Higher education in Cameroon encompasses universities, professional schools, and vocational training institutions, forming a critical pillar in the country's human capital development framework. There are eleven (11) state universities. In recent years, there has been notable growth in private and denominational universities, which have expanded access to higher education, particularly in urban centers (Nkemngu & Essomba, 2024). These private institutions often focus on market-driven programs aimed at meeting emerging professional demands. Complementing university education, TVET programs, managed by the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training, play an indispensable role in equipping youths with practical skills aligned with labor market needs (Mbassi, 2023).

Parallel to public sector management, the private education sector has expanded significantly over the past decade and plays a crucial role in complementing government efforts to increase access and improve educational quality. Both denominational (faith-based) institutions and lay private providers operate schools and universities across urban and rural areas, often filling gaps left by limited public capacity. According to Ebot & Tene (2023), private schools now account for over 30% of total enrollment in some regions, driven by parental demand for perceived higher-quality instruction, bilingual education, and flexible curricula. Nevertheless, the rapid growth of the private sector raises concerns about regulatory oversight, quality assurance, and equity, as highlighted by Mundani & Fongang (2023), who call

for strengthened governance frameworks to ensure alignment with national education goals and standards.

According to Ngwa & Fonkeng (2025) the challenges of poor quality and inadequate institutional arrangements for research, lack of innovative curricular and teaching methods, low quality and limited research, lack of professionalization, unemployable graduates, brain drain, poor international exposure, exclusive learning and physical environments, and the lack of autonomy by most public university institutions in sub-Saharan Africa have been directly linked to the greater problem of funding. In that token, Cameroon state universities should exploit local financial strategies through commercial ventures (CVs) and Internally Generated revenue Strategies (IGRS) for university autonomy.

Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP)

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is recognized as a strategic pathway for addressing youth unemployment and supporting industrial development. However, as recent studies highlight, funding constraints, weak partnerships between educational institutions and industry, and low enrollment rates in technical and vocational fields continue to undermine the effectiveness of tertiary education (Nkongho & Talla, 2024; Fonkeng & Abongdja, 2023). Additionally, curriculum relevance and the quality of teaching remain concerns, limiting graduates' employability and contribution to economic growth. Strengthening tertiary education in Cameroon requires enhanced investment, innovative public-private partnerships, and robust alignment between academic programs and evolving

market demands to ensure a skilled and adaptable workforce capable of driving national development.

The main goal of this subsector is to provide specialized theoretical and practical training to young people and adults, whether pursuing initial vocational qualifications or undergoing retraining, enabling them to effectively acquire the necessary skills to seamlessly integrate into the labor market in alignment with the economic priorities and strategies of the country (MINEPAT, 2024). The government's efforts are focused on improving the balance between the supply of training and the demand in the labor market with the implementation of a targeted skills policy. This is achieved through the design and implementation of training and retraining frameworks that incorporate competency-based ISO57024 certification, design diversification to skilled labor requirements in the productive sectors, development and integration of retraining and learning on the job frameworks, and active engagement of Regional and Local Authorities (RLAs) to map out skills requirements in relation to the local economy. Active participation is also directed to occupational upgrading of trainers to make sure that quality teaching is rendered.

These interventions are structured around three strategic objectives: (i) improving access, equity, and inclusion in vocational education and training, (ii) increasing the supply of vocational programs available, and (iii) enhancing quality, relevance, and responsiveness of training provision, including the strengthening of vocational guidance systems (MINEPAT, 2024).

Civic Education and Extra-curricular Activities (MINJEC)

The overarching objective of this subsector is to strengthen civic education, foster national integration, and encourage youth participation and volunteerism, while promoting the core values of citizenship, social cohesion, democratic engagement, and economic, social, environmental, and political patriotism. The reform of civic education curricula—particularly through the development of the National Framework for Civic Education—provided a key opportunity to institutionalize these principles across all levels of education and socialization. This framework extends from nursery, primary, secondary, and higher education to extracurricular, professional, and community-based learning, ensuring inclusivity across age groups and social strata. It also emphasizes the role of urban and rural popular animation teams (EMAPUR) in supporting community mediators (MC) to strengthen grassroots civic engagement. The phased implementation of recommendations from the International Colloquium on Civic Education and National Integration led to the establishment of a National Committee for Civic Education and National Integration, complemented by regional, divisional, and sub-divisional structures. In the education system, this process gave rise to civic education and national integration clubs within schools and universities nationwide. At the community level, awareness campaigns and outreach initiatives have been organized to mobilize youth and the broader population around civic values.

The education sector strategy incorporates these interventions with the aim of advancing civic education,

deepening national integration, expanding youth participation and volunteerism, and consolidating the values of citizenship, solidarity, and responsible patriotism—economic, social, environmental, and political, by 2030. The long-term goal is to cultivate citizens who are culturally grounded, respectful of the common good and public ethics, committed to democratic principles, dedicated to peaceful coexistence, and open to global exchange.

Scientific Research and Innovation (MINRESI)

The main purpose of this subsector is to strengthen the structure of scientific research in order to enhance its coherence, visibility, and contribution to the development of a high-performing national research and innovation ecosystem within universities and research institutions. In Cameroon, research and development are articulated along three internationally recognized axes: fundamental research, applied research, and experimental research (MINEPAT, 2024). To fully assume its role as a catalyst for economic transformation, the national research and innovation system must:

- be positioned as a strategic instrument of economic competitiveness and national sovereignty, drawing upon domestic capacities and resources;
- be closely aligned with the country's socio-economic development priorities, while remaining responsive to cultural contexts and societal needs;
- actively engage in international scientific cooperation and knowledge exchange, leveraging global expertise

and fostering the transfer of technology and know-how.

Building a robust national research and innovation system requires integrating the productive, educational, and research domains. Priority actions include:

- strengthening the national research information system to map and monitor research activities;
- establishing a scientific observatory to track environmental, technological, and societal changes, thereby enhancing system resilience;
- valorizing research outputs to improve system performance and diversify funding through the commercialization of scientific results;
- reinforcing human capital development in research, innovation, and technology transfer;
- fostering stronger linkages between research institutions, universities, and the productive sector;
- advancing international cooperation and partnerships to promote effective technology transfer between academia and industry;
- improving governance, strategic planning, and performance management in research and innovation.

These initiatives will be carried out in close coordination with relevant national institutions and ministries, including MINRESI, MINMIDT, MINPOSTEL, OAPI, IRD, and CIRCB, ensuring an inclusive and cross-sectoral approach.

3. Public Sector Investment Trends

3.1 Budget Allocation Patterns

Cameroon budget for the Education - Training Sector reflects a consistent upward trend in recurrent expenditure across all sub-sectors from 2022 to 2025, indicating sustained commitment to human capital development (see table 1). According to Ekani and Mballa (2023), the national education budget has maintained a relatively stable proportion of total government expenditure, although annual allocations vary depending on macroeconomic conditions and policy priorities. MINEDUB and MINESEC absorb the largest budget shares, highlighting prioritization of basic and secondary education within the fiscal policy framework. The increase in the proportion of recurrent investment, from 22.9% to 25.8%, suggests a gradual improvement in resource allocation efficiency and operational sustainability. Investment expenditure shows greater volatility, with a sharp rise in 2025, possibly linked to capital-intensive infrastructure or modernization projects.

MINESUP and MINRESI exhibit significant growth in investment, reflecting a shift toward tertiary education and research-driven development. Meanwhile, MINEFOP and MINJEC maintain moderate yet consistent budgetary increments, indicating continued support for vocational training and youth empowerment. The share of total state investment attributed to education expands from 18.9% in 2022 to 20.0% in 2025, evidencing stronger prioritization of the sector within the national development agenda. Overall, the steady rise in total expenditure demonstrates

an expansionary fiscal stance favoring the Education - Training Sector.

Table 1: Budget allocated to the Education-Training Sector from 2022 to 2025 (MINEPAT, 2024)

Sub-sectors	Budget		MTBF	
	2022	2023	2024	2025
Recurrent expenditure				
MINEDUB	777.1	846.3	899.1	934.5
MINEDUB	210.3	234.7	256.4	261.3
MINESEC	429.1	451.8	480.6	502.9
MINEFOP	15.3	19.967	20.4	21.2
MINESUP	56.2	63.465	64.8	68.1
MINRESI	9.6	11.108	11.2	11.6
MINJEC	15.5	17.780	17.1	18.4
Subventions and contributions Chap. 60 of recurrent State expenditure	41.0	47.6	48.6	51.0
% of recurrent Investment	22.9%	24.7%	25.7%	25.8%
Investment Expenditure				
MINEDUB	67.7	54.4	63.0	104.6
MINEDUB	35.6	19.6	18.3	30.2
MINESEC	10.3	9.4	10.3	15.0
MINEFOP	6.3	5.499	4.7	8.5
MINESUP	5.5	10.000	16.8	27.2
MINRESI	1.6	1.700	3.9	8.4
MINJEC	8.4	8.230	9.0	15.3
% of State Investment	8.3%	10.4%	10.8%	14.8%
Total expenditure recurrent + capital	844.7	900.8	962.1	1,039.1
% of State Investment	18.9%	20.1%	20.4%	20.0%

The government projected figures for 2026-2030 reveal a steady and expansionary fiscal trajectory in the Education - Training Sector, reflecting sustained public investment in human capital development. Recurrent expenditure is set to rise from 998.6 to 1,306.2 billion, suggesting ongoing government efforts to enhance service delivery, wages, and

operational efficiency across education sub-sectors. The constancy of recurrent investment at 27% implies a stable ratio between consumption and productive expenditure, pointing to a balanced fiscal structure. concomitantly, investment expenditure increases progressively from 123.8 to 157.7 billion, indicating continued human capital development through infrastructure, technology, and teacher pre- and in-service training. The stable 15% share of state investment dedicated to education underscores the government's long-term prioritization of the sector within the macroeconomic framework. Total expenditure growth from 1,122.3 to 1,464.0 billion signals an expansionary budgetary stance consistent with strong principles aimed at stimulating aggregate demand and productivity. Furthermore, the rising share of education in total state expenditure from 20.2% to 22.2% reflects an intensifying policy focus on inclusive and sustainable development.

Table 2: Potential budget for the Education-Training Sector from 2026 to 2030 (MINEPAT, 2024)

Sub-sector	Budget Extension				
	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Recurrent expenditure					
MINEDUB	998.6	1,103.2	1,155.2	1,228.5	1,306.2
MINESEC					
MINEFOP					
MINESUP					
MINRESI					
MINJEC					
Subventions and contributions					
Chap. 60					

of recurrent State expenditure					
% of recurrent Investment	27.0%	27.0%	27.0%	27.0%	27.0%
Investment Expenditure	123.8	129.6	135.8	146.5	157.7
MINEDUB					
MINESEC					
MINEFOP					
MINESUP					
MINRESI					
MINJEC					
% of State Investment	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%	15.0%
Total expenditure recurrent + capital	1,122.3	1,232.9	1,291.0	1,375.0	1,464.0
of State expenditure (excluding debt)					
% of State Investment	20.2%	21.8%	21.9%	22.1%	22.2%

Over the past decade, public investment in education has gradually increased, driven by several key factors. First, there has been a sustained increase in enrollment rates, particularly at the primary level, largely due to the free primary education policy introduced in 2000. As Ngwa and Ambe (2024) note, this policy significantly expanded access but also imposed new demands on infrastructure and teaching capacity. Second, the government has responded to growing infrastructure deficits by prioritizing the construction of classrooms, provision of textbooks, and recruitment of teachers, especially in rural and conflict-affected areas. However, these efforts have not always translated into improved outcomes. Budget execution rates remain inconsistent, and concerns persist regarding resource efficiency and equity, with priority education zones continuing to lag in access and quality. The ongoing challenge is to ensure that increased investments are

matched with effective planning, accountability, and monitoring mechanisms.

3.2 Challenges in Public Investment

Despite sustained efforts by the Government of Cameroon and its partners to promote quality and quantity democratization of education, a number of persistent challenges continue to undermine the effectiveness of public investment in the sector. Recent studies and policy reviews have highlighted several critical issues:

Teacher Shortages and Uneven Distribution

There is a persistent nationwide shortage of qualified teachers, a challenge that is particularly acute in rural and conflict-affected areas. According to Ewane and Ndzie (2023), some rural districts report pupil-teacher ratios surpassing 1:80, which is more than double the UNESCO-recommended benchmark of 1:40. This severe imbalance not only undermines the quality of education but also places excessive strain on existing teaching staff, reducing their ability to provide individualized support to learners. Compounding the issue, many trained teachers are reluctant to accept postings in remote or insecure areas due to poor living conditions, lack of infrastructure, and safety concerns. This reluctance has resulted in an uneven distribution of teaching personnel, disproportionately affecting disadvantaged communities and exacerbating existing educational inequalities. The consequences are far-reaching: students in regions with low ratio face limited access to qualified instruction, which diminishes their academic outcomes and perpetuates cycles of poverty.

Addressing this crisis requires targeted policies, including incentives for rural deployment, improved infrastructure, and strategies for ensuring safety and support for educators in high-need areas.

Absence of National Education Accounts (NEAs)

The lack of National Education Accounts in Cameroon aggravates existing inequalities in the education system by compromising effective resource allocation, quality decision-making, and transparent accountability. Practically, it translates into under-funding of high-priority areas, continued infrastructure and instructional quality deficiencies, and an inability to monitor and address systemic challenges such as high dropout rates and gender disparities (UNESCO, 2016).

A national education account (NEA) intends to organize multiple data according to a structured methodology and uses a common set of definitions. It aims at capturing and gathering all financial flows within a coherent accounting framework to enable the education-training sector's economy to be analyzed, covering both the funding and the production costs of activities. It provides a global and comprehensive picture of the financing of the education system (Global Partnership of Education, 2019).

The negative consequences of the absence of comprehensive financial records in Cameroon education system encompass:

- ineffective resource allocation;
- compromised quality and access;
- unaddressed disparities;
- poor policy and strategic planning;

- erosion of accountability and transparency.

Low System Efficiency

Cameroon's public education system continues to grapple with deep-rooted inefficiencies that hinder its ability to deliver equitable and quality education. A prominent manifestation of these challenges is the persistently high repetition and dropout rates across various educational levels. According to the 2023 Education Sector Performance Report, repetition rates in primary education have remained alarmingly above 20%, signaling a systemic issue in early-grade teaching and learning. Equally concerning is the fact that the average completion rate for lower secondary education remains below 55%, indicating that nearly half of the students fail to transition successfully beyond basic education. These statistics underscore critical weaknesses in several core areas, including curriculum delivery, formative and summative assessment practices, and the availability and effectiveness of learner support systems. The lack of differentiated instruction, inadequate teacher training, insufficient school infrastructure, and limited access to remedial programs contribute to these inefficiencies. Consequently, many students either stagnate in their educational path or exit the system prematurely, compromising both individual potential and the nation's broader socio-economic development goals.

Insufficient Investment in TVET

While the government of Cameroon has formally prioritized TVET in its Education Sector Strategy 2022-2030, practical implementation remains significantly constrained

by underinvestment in critical areas such as infrastructure, modern equipment, and qualified personnel. Despite policy commitments to promote skills-based education as a driver of youth employment and national development, the reality on the ground reveals a persistent gap between intentions and outcomes. Teboh & Fonyuy (2023) highlight that many vocational training centers across the country continue to operate with obsolete tools and machinery, which fail to meet current industry standards. Furthermore, the lack of strong partnerships between training institutions and employers limits opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and practical exposure, thereby diminishing the relevance of training to labor market needs. This disconnect contributes to low employment outcomes for TVET graduates and reinforces public perception of vocational education as a second-tier or fallback option, rather than a credible and competitive alternative to traditional academic pathways. To fully realize the potential of TVET, a more holistic investment strategy is required, one that goes beyond rhetoric to encompass infrastructure modernization, industry collaboration, curriculum alignment with market demands, and continuous professional development for instructors.

These challenges highlight a critical paradox in the education sector: although public funding has increased in absolute terms over recent years, its overall impact remains limited due to persistent systemic inefficiencies. In many cases, resources are not optimally allocated, resulting in disparities in access, quality, and outcomes especially across different regions. Furthermore, the misalignment between investment priorities and actual educational needs such as

overemphasis on administrative costs rather than frontline teaching resources undermines the potential of public spending to drive meaningful progress.

To address these entrenched issues, more than just increased financial commitments are needed. Structural reforms must be undertaken to improve strategic planning, ensure transparent and results-based budgeting, and strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Equally important is fostering greater coordination among key stakeholders, including government agencies, local authorities, development partners, and civil society, to ensure that interventions are coherent, needs-driven, and sustainable. Only through such a comprehensive and coordinated approach can public education funding be transformed into a more equitable and effective tool for national development.

3.3 Donor and International Aid

Cameroon also benefits significantly from external funding and international development partnerships, which serve as critical complements to domestic investment in the education sector. These partnerships play a vital role in bridging persistent financing gaps and supporting systemic improvements. Among the most prominent contributors is the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), a multilateral initiative that has provided substantial grants aimed at advancing equity and quality in basic education. GPE support has facilitated reforms in curriculum development, teacher training, and the promotion of inclusive and gender-sensitive learning environments. According to Ndang and Kamta (2023), GPE funding has been instrumental in the

deployment of targeted interventions in priority education and crisis-affected areas where the education system has been severely undermined by armed conflict, insecurity, and large-scale population displacement. These interventions have included the rehabilitation of schools, the provision of psychosocial support for learners, the training of teachers in emergency contexts, and the distribution of learning materials tailored to vulnerable populations.

Moreover, bilateral donors such as France, Germany, Canada, and international organizations like UNICEF and UNESCO have contributed to strengthening institutional capacity, fostering policy dialogue, and scaling up pilot initiatives focused on digital learning and school governance. These combined efforts have not only expanded access to education but also contributed to improving learning outcomes and resilience in fragile regions. Nonetheless, sustaining the gains from international aid requires greater domestic ownership, long-term planning, and transparent coordination mechanisms to ensure alignment with national education priorities.

The World Bank has played a pivotal role in supporting educational reform in developing countries, particularly through landmark initiatives such as the *Cameroon Education Reform Support Project (CERSP)* and the *Transforming Education Systems for Results (TESR)* program. These initiatives aim to address systemic challenges in education by investing in governance reforms, enhancing accountability, and promoting equity in learning outcomes. PAREC has focused on improving educational planning, teacher training, and the rehabilitation of school infrastructure, while TESR emphasizes the use of results-

based financing to drive measurable improvements in student performance, especially in early grade literacy and numeracy. According to Biloa et al. (2024), these World Bank-supported interventions have led to significant progress in several critical areas. Firstly, the improvement of school infrastructure through classroom rehabilitation, provision of learning materials, and construction of sanitation facilities has enhanced the learning environment, particularly in rural and priority education zones. Secondly, the introduction of performance-based financing mechanisms has fostered greater accountability among education stakeholders by linking funding to specific, measurable outcomes. This has encouraged school administrators and teachers to adopt more effective teaching and management practices.

Moreover, the implementation of standardized learning assessments has provided education authorities with reliable data to monitor student progress and adjust interventions accordingly. These assessments serve not only as a diagnostic tool but also as a means to ensure that national education goals align with broader international benchmarks, such as the SDG 4 on quality education. In sum, the World Bank's multifaceted approach targeting both institutional reform and classroom-level outcomes has contributed to a more coherent and results-oriented education system, laying the groundwork for long-term improvement in learning achievements.

Additionally, bilateral cooperation with countries such as France, Germany, and China continue to play a pivotal role in shaping Cameroon's education landscape. France and Germany have been particularly instrumental in advancing

TVET, modernizing curricula, and strengthening institutional capacity through technical assistance and policy support. These efforts have aligned with Cameroon's strategic priorities of equipping learners with practical, market-relevant skills and fostering a more responsive and inclusive education system. Meanwhile, China has significantly contributed to infrastructure development by financing the construction and rehabilitation of educational facilities, particularly in priority education areas. It has also supported the digital transformation of education through the donation of modern learning equipment, including smart classrooms and e-learning platforms. Collectively, these partnerships have facilitated not only the expansion of access to education but also the enhancement of quality assurance mechanisms, the reform of teacher education programs, and the integration of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) innovations. As a result, Cameroon is progressively building a more resilient and future-oriented education system capable of meeting the evolving needs of its youth and economy.

4. Private Sector Investment Trends

4.1 Growth of Private Education

In recent years, the private education sector in Cameroon has witnessed remarkable growth, particularly in urban and peri-urban centers. This expansion is closely tied to widespread perceptions among parents and guardians that private schools deliver a higher standard of education compared to their public counterparts. Many families believe that private institutions provide not only superior academic

instruction but also better infrastructure, enhanced safety and discipline, and more rigorous pedagogical supervision. A significant attraction remains the provision of English-medium education in many private schools, which is increasingly seen as a strategic advantage in an era of globalization, international mobility, and English-dominated job markets. As noted by Ewane & Neba (2024), these positive perceptions have triggered a consistent rise in demand for private schooling, especially among middle- and upper-income households. These families, often dissatisfied with the overcrowded classrooms, inadequate facilities, teacher absenteeism, and low accountability prevalent in public schools, are turning to the private sector in search of a more stable and performance-oriented educational environment. The trend has also been influenced by the desire of parents to secure better examination outcomes and improved prospects for tertiary education admissions, both locally and abroad.

However, this rapid expansion raises critical questions about equity and access. While the private sector fills important gaps left by the public system, it also risks deepening educational inequalities. Low-income households are frequently priced out of the private education market, perpetuating a two-tiered system where quality is closely linked to economic means. This dynamic calls for careful policy reflection and potentially greater state oversight to ensure that educational opportunities are not disproportionately skewed in favor of the affluent. Overall, the growth of private education in Cameroon reflects broader societal trends concerning trust in public institutions, aspirations for upward mobility, and the

commodification of education in a competitive global economy.

As of 2023, private institutions represent approximately 33% of all primary and secondary schools across Cameroon, reflecting a significant contribution to the national education landscape (MINEDUB, 2023). This proportion is even more pronounced in major urban centers such as Douala, Yaounde, Maroua, and Bafoussam, where population density and parental demand for quality education drive increased enrollment in non-public institutions. The private education sector encompasses both secular (lay) private schools and faith-based institutions. The latter, often operated by religious organizations, enjoy longstanding reputations for academic excellence, moral discipline, and structured environments conducive to learning. Moreover, many private schools distinguish themselves through the adoption of innovative pedagogical approaches, including the integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs), diversified extracurricular programs, and enriched curricula that align with both national standards and global educational trends. These characteristics collectively contribute to the growing attractiveness and competitiveness of private education, particularly among middle- and upper-income households seeking alternative pathways to public education.

However, this growth is not without its challenges. Mbong & Tchuisseu (2023) emphasize that regulatory oversight within the private education sector remains inconsistent and often inadequate, particularly among low-cost private schools. Many of these institutions struggle to employ qualified teachers, frequently relying on undertrained staff,

which compromises the quality of education delivered. Additionally, infrastructural standards in such schools tend to be minimal, with some lacking basic facilities such as adequate classrooms, sanitation, and learning materials. This regulatory gap creates significant disparities in educational quality and raises concerns about the overall effectiveness of private schooling expansion.

Furthermore, the rapid proliferation of private education carries the risk of exacerbating existing social inequalities. Access to private schooling is predominantly determined by a family's ability to afford tuition fees, enrollment charges, and other related expenses such as uniforms and transportation. Consequently, children from lower-income households remain largely excluded from these educational opportunities, which may offer better resources or learning environments than many public schools. This financial barrier not only limits equitable access but also risks reinforcing a two-tiered education system where wealthier families secure higher-quality education while disadvantaged groups are left behind. Without targeted policy interventions to ensure affordability and quality standards, the growth of private education may inadvertently deepen socioeconomic divides rather than contribute to inclusive educational development.

To address these disparities in educational access and quality, there is a growing consensus among policymakers, educators, and development partners on the urgent need for enhanced public-private coordination. Such collaboration can leverage the unique strengths of both sectors public oversight and private innovation to create more inclusive and effective education systems. A foundational element of this

approach is the establishment of clear and robust accreditation frameworks that ensure private education providers meet defined quality standards, thereby safeguarding students' learning outcomes and promoting transparency.

Moreover, to specifically support underserved localities, targeted financial interventions such as subsidies or voucher schemes are increasingly recognized as essential tools. These mechanisms can reduce the economic barriers that prevent vulnerable populations from enrolling in quality private schools, thereby expanding equitable access. When carefully designed and implemented, subsidies and vouchers not only improve affordability but also stimulate competition and quality improvements among private providers. Together, strengthened coordination, accreditation, and targeted financial support from a comprehensive strategy to bridge educational gaps and promote equitable learning opportunities for all children, regardless of socioeconomic background.

4.2 Faith-Based and Community Institutions

Denominational educational institutions including Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Islamic schools continue to play a pivotal role in Cameroon's education landscape. These faith-based institutions have maintained a long-standing tradition of delivering affordable and high-quality education, often outperforming public schools in terms of student performance and discipline. According to Mbali & Ateh (2024), denominational schools consistently demonstrate higher pass rates in national examinations such as the GCE and Baccalauréat, particularly in the Anglophone regions.

Their ability to combine moral instruction, structured pedagogy, and community involvement contributes significantly to their educational effectiveness.

Furthermore, these institutions maintain a strong presence in rural areas, where government schools are often limited in number or lack essential infrastructure. As noted by Nkeng & Muma (2023), denominational schools are often the only viable education providers in remote and conflict-affected areas. These schools have stepped in to fill gaps left by public education systems, offering continuity of learning during crises, including the ongoing Anglophone conflict and post-COVID recovery period.

Despite their contributions, denominational schools face challenges such as inadequate government subsidies, aging infrastructure, and difficulties in retaining qualified teachers. Nevertheless, public-private partnerships and community support have enabled many to sustain operations and expand their reach, making them indispensable actors in Cameroon's efforts to achieve inclusive and equitable education by 2030.

4.3 Private Investment in Higher Education

In response to the growing demand for higher education that public institutions are unable to fully accommodate, private universities in Cameroon have witnessed significant expansion in recent years. Institutions such as the Catholic University of Central Africa, ICT University, St. Lawrence University, and the International University of Bamenda and more have positioned themselves as alternatives to the overburdened public sector, offering specialized programs, flexible schedules, and increasingly competitive academic

environments. According to Nguimkeu & Njong (2023), enrollment pressure on public universities, driven by a rising youth population, urbanization, and higher secondary school completion rates, has led to overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and limited program diversity, pushing students to seek private alternatives.

Private universities have responded by investing in infrastructure, introducing market-relevant programs (ICT, business, health sciences, and engineering), and leveraging international partnerships for quality enhancement. As Mbiatat & Tchuisseu (2024) observe, the agility of private institutions has enabled them to adapt more quickly to labor market trends and technological innovations, particularly in the post-COVID era where digital learning has become central. Moreover, these institutions increasingly attract international students from Central Africa, contributing to regional academic integration. However, challenges persist regarding regulatory oversight, accreditation standards, affordability, and equity of access. The growth of private universities, while easing pressure on the public system, has also raised concerns about quality assurance and social stratification in access to tertiary education.

4.4 Challenges in the Private Sector

Despite its expanding role in Cameroon's education landscape, the private sector faces several critical challenges that limit its effectiveness and contribution to equitable educational development.

Quality Control and Standards

A major concern in private education in Cameroon is the

inconsistency in quality assurance mechanisms. While many private institutions particularly denominational and international schools maintain high academic standards, a growing number of low-cost private schools operate without proper accreditation or qualified teaching staff. According to Mbile & Nkweteyim (2023), unregulated private providers often prioritize profit over pedagogy, leading to overcrowded classrooms, underqualified teachers, and poor student outcomes. This situation is especially prevalent in urban peripheries and conflict-affected zones, where public oversight is weak.

Regulatory Gaps and Governance

The regulatory framework governing private education remains fragmented and inconsistently enforced. Although the Ministry of Secondary Education and Ministry of Basic Education are responsible for licensing and inspection, limited institutional capacity results in sporadic monitoring and uneven application of standards. Tadfor & Ebai (2024) observe that regulatory delays and bureaucratic inefficiencies create loopholes that some operators exploit, leading to disparities in curriculum quality, fee structures, and learner protection mechanisms. Moreover, the absence of a unified accreditation system complicates data collection and policy planning at the national level.

Equity and Accessibility Concerns

Private schooling, particularly in urban centers, is often financially inaccessible to lower-income families. Tuition fees, levies, and uniform costs can constitute significant barriers to entry, reinforcing educational inequality. Abene

& Fotsing (2024) argue that the proliferation of elite private institutions contributes to the stratification of education in Cameroon, where access to quality learning is increasingly tied to socio-economic status. This undermines national goals of universal and inclusive education, especially for vulnerable populations in rural.

To address these challenges, there is a growing call for a more integrated policy approach that combines effective regulation, targeted subsidies, and public-private partnerships to ensure that private education complements rather than competes with national equity and quality goals.

5. Emerging Trends and New Investment Models

In response to persistent challenges in financing, access, and quality, Cameroon has witnessed the emergence of innovative investment models that blend public, private, and philanthropic engagement in the education sector. Three notable trends are particularly shaping the current landscape: Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), educational technology (EdTech) investments, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Public-Private Partnerships have gained momentum, particularly in the areas of TVET and educational infrastructure development. According to Mouafo & Ngalim (2023) and Shu & Fonkeng (2025), PPPs are increasingly being used to address resource constraints in public education and to enhance the employability of graduates through industry-aligned curricula and training facilities.

Notable partnerships between government bodies and private entities have led to the establishment of vocational training centers, skill labs, and apprenticeship programs. These collaborations aim to close the gap between academic training and labor market needs, a longstanding concern in Cameroon's educational system.

EdTech and Digital Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the adoption of EdTech solutions in Cameroon. In its aftermath, several private firms and NGOs have continued to invest in digital learning platforms, mobile-based content delivery, and virtual classrooms. Ebong & Tande (2024) and Engozo'o (2023) highlight that platforms such as Schoology and EducTech Africa have expanded their footprint in Cameroonian schools, often in partnership with ministries and local NGOs. However, the lack of a national policy on digital education, digital inequality and limited infrastructure in rural regions remain major constraints to equitable EdTech integration (Engozo'o, 2024).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives

Corporate entities, particularly in the telecommunications and finance sectors, have deepened their involvement in education through CSR programs. Companies such as MTN Cameroon, Orange, and UBA Foundation have provided scholarships, built digital classrooms, and supported STEM education projects. As reported by Kameni & Nguimfack (2023), these initiatives are playing a growing role in supplementing public investment. While CSR efforts are largely philanthropic, there is growing interest in

structuring them as sustainable partnerships aligned with national education priorities. Collectively, these investment models suggest a growing diversification of education financing and service delivery in Cameroon. However, as these trends evolve, Bikom & Tchuisseu (2024) caution that strong regulatory frameworks, transparency, and impact assessment mechanisms will be essential to ensure that such models contribute equitably and effectively to national education goals.

6. Implications for Educational Planning

6.1 Financing Reforms

To sustain and enhance educational outcomes in Cameroon, comprehensive financing reforms and national education accounts are urgently required. The existing model, which relies heavily on government allocations and external donor support, is increasingly insufficient to meet growing demands for quality, equity, and system-wide resilience. As Talla & Fombang (2024) argue, limited fiscal space, competing national priorities, and inflationary pressures have constrained public investment in education, making reform an imperative rather than a choice.

Diversification of Funding Sources

A sustainable education financing strategy must prioritize the diversification of revenue streams beyond traditional government budgetary allocations. According to Mbella & Nkengafac (2023), this includes expanding the role of education levies, diaspora bonds, and community-based financing models, especially in rural and semi-urban areas.

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) and blended finance models can also play a significant role in funding infrastructure, digital learning, and vocational training.

Incentivizing Private Sector Participation

The private sector remains underutilized in efforts to expand education access and quality in priority education zones. Ngwana & Ebong (2024) recommend the development of incentive schemes such as tax rebates, land grants, and startup subsidies to encourage investment by private and faith-based actors in priority education zones. These incentives should be tied to equity outcomes, such as enrolling vulnerable populations, promoting gender balance, and improving school completion rates.

Performance-Based Financing Mechanisms

Introducing performance-based financing (PBF) can improve accountability and efficiency across the education sector. Under a PBF model, schools and institutions receive funding based on measurable outcomes such as student retention, examination performance, and teacher attendance rather than fixed inputs. Kouam & Atemnkeng (2023) highlight the potential of PBF to shift the focus from enrollment expansion to quality enhancement. However, they caution that effective implementation requires robust monitoring systems and transparent performance indicators. A forward-looking financing reform agenda in Cameroon must blend innovation, inclusivity, and evidence-based planning, ensuring that financial resources regardless of origin are efficiently deployed to improve learning outcomes and bridge persistent disparities in the education system.

6.2 Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

To ensure quality, equity, and sustainability in the education sector, Cameroon must implement comprehensive reforms targeting private school governance, teacher standards, and technology integration. Firstly, strengthening regulatory oversight for private schools is essential to address disparities in quality and accountability. According to Mbua & Ngwane (2024), many private institutions particularly low-cost providers operate with minimal supervision, leading to inconsistent curriculum delivery, inadequate infrastructure, and unqualified teaching staff. The Ministry of Education must reinforce licensing procedures, enforce compliance with national education standards, and create periodic evaluation mechanisms to ensure private actors contribute meaningfully to national education goals.

Secondly, there is an urgent need to improve accreditation systems and teacher qualification standards across both public and private sectors. Ekema & Fombon (2023) highlight that a significant proportion of teachers, especially in rural and non-state schools, lack formal pedagogical training or certification. This affects learner outcomes and undermines the credibility of educational qualifications. A standardized national accreditation framework, accompanied by continuous professional development (CPD) programs and teacher incentive schemes, would help professionalize the workforce and reduce quality gaps between institutions.

Finally, Cameroon must develop a coherent national strategy for educational technology (EdTech) integration to leverage digital innovations in teaching and learning. As observed by Tadjo & Tchinda (2024), the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the digital divide and underscored the lack of infrastructure

and policy support for virtual learning. A robust EdTech policy should include investments in broadband connectivity, teacher training in digital pedagogy, and partnerships with private tech providers to create scalable, inclusive learning solutions.

6.3 Equity and Inclusion

To ensure equitable and inclusive access to education in Cameroon, targeted policy and financing reforms must be implemented. Allocating increased public funds for inclusive education, especially for girls, learners with disabilities, and children in rural or conflict-affected areas, is critical. According to Engozo'o (2025a), the education budget does not allocate specific funds for assistive technologies, leaving schools to rely on external donations, NGO support and parents, many of whom cannot afford the high costs of these tools. This financial gap limits the ability of even well-meaning institutions to provide the infrastructure and support necessary for equitable learning opportunities.

In parallel, Cameroon should expand social protection programs linked to education, such as school feeding schemes and conditional cash transfers (CCTs). These interventions have been shown to significantly improve school attendance and retention rates among vulnerable populations. A recent impact study by Ewane & Tchuente (2024) found that school feeding programs in the North and Far North regions reduced dropout rates by up to 18% among girls and internally displaced children. Similarly, conditional cash transfers targeted at low-income families can help offset opportunity costs associated with education,

especially for girls who often face early marriage or domestic labor burdens.

Lastly, it is imperative to mainstream gender-sensitive budgeting across all levels of education policy. As Ndang & Fon (2023) argue, gender-responsive budgeting ensures that financial planning actively addresses gender disparities by tracking allocations and outcomes across male and female learners. This approach enhances transparency and accountability while promoting fair resource distribution that aligns with the needs of both genders.

6.4 Regional Development Planning

Effective educational investment in Cameroon cannot be decoupled from broader regional development strategies, especially in priority education zones such as the Far North, East, and Adamawa regions. These areas continue to report the lowest educational indicators in the country characterized by high dropout rates, poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, and significant gender disparities (Ngwana & Wambou, 2023). Aligning educational planning with regional development needs is therefore essential to reducing spatial inequalities and promoting inclusive growth. Recent studies have emphasized the urgent need for place-based education financing, arguing that uniform national policies fail to address region-specific challenges such as insecurity (especially due to Boko Haram insurgency in the Far North), displacement, and socio-cultural barriers to school attendance, particularly for girls (Tchamda & Eloundou, 2024).

In this regard, decentralized planning and targeted investment such as school infrastructure rehabilitation,

teacher training, and mobile learning units for nomadic populations have been recommended as adaptive strategies. Furthermore, regional development planning should integrate multisectoral approaches, combining education with health, water, transport, and employment initiatives. For example, building schools in tandem with water points and feeder roads in remote communities improves both access and retention (Mbami & Fonka, 2024). These integrated models are central to Cameroon's 2023-2030 Education-Training Sector Strategy and its alignment with SDG 4 on reducing inequality.

The future educational investments must be spatially responsive and equity-driven, grounded in disaggregated data and developed through inclusive regional consultation. This approach ensures that lagging regions are not only recipients of aid but active participants in planning for sustainable and context-relevant educational development.

Conclusion

To sum up, investment in education by both public and private sectors in Cameroon has shown a steady upward trajectory over the past two decades, driven by increasing enrollment rates, rising demand for quality education, and national commitments to development frameworks such as Vision 2035 and NDS30. However, despite this progress, the quality, accessibility, and equitable distribution of educational opportunities remain deeply uneven across regions, groups, and gender lines. Urban centers, particularly in the Centre, Littoral, and West regions, have better ratios in terms of infrastructure and teachers'

allocation, while rural and priority education zones experience overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to qualified personnel. In this context, strategic planning and robust policy frameworks are essential to ensure that financial investments lead to improved learning outcomes and system-wide transformation. This requires a multidimensional approach, including: (1) organizing national education accounts to analyze the funding and the production costs of activities; (2) strengthening public-private collaboration to align resources, reduce duplication, and expand access in priority education zones; (3) prioritizing teacher training and continuous professional development, given the central role of educators in driving quality; and (4) exploring innovative financing mechanisms, such as education bonds, results-based financing, and public-private partnerships (PPPs), to diversify funding streams and ensure sustainability. As Tchamyou et al. (2023) and Fonkeng & Abongdia (2023) argue, building a resilient, inclusive, and high-performing education system in Cameroon will depend not only on increasing the volume of investment but also on improving its efficiency, targeting, and alignment with national development priorities.

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