Analysis of Education Systems in South Africa and Cameroon

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Abstract

Education is a key factor in a country's development, including in South Africa and Cameroon. This study analyzes the education systems in both countries by highlighting the policies, curricula and challenges faced in their implementation. South Africa has undergone various post-apartheid education reforms, with curriculum changes from Curriculum 2005 to Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements aimed at improving the quality and inclusiveness of education. However, there is still an access gap between urban and rural areas. On the other hand, Cameroon faces greater challenges, such as limited infrastructure, a shortage of teachers, and the impact of the armed conflict in the Anglophone region that led to many schools being closed. Although primary education is compulsory, many children in remote areas still struggle to access proper education. To improve the quality of education in both countries, strategic measures such as investment in infrastructure, teacher training and more inclusive policies are needed. Support from governments and international organizations is also an important factor in building a more equitable and quality education system. With sustained efforts, South Africa and Cameroon can create better education systems for future generations.

INTRODUCTION

The meaning of education is often understood in various ways, depending on the point of view and theory adopted by each individual. Differences in interpreting education in an academic context are natural and can even enrich insights and contribute to the development of educational theory itself. According to Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, education is defined as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process that allows students to actively develop their potential. The purpose of this education is for students to have religious spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed in the life of society, nation and state (Geraldina & Sihotang, 2024; Karina et al., 2024; Santika & Eva, 2023; Yeni & Susanti, 2023).

South Africa has a 13-year education system that is divided into two forms: formal school education and training education. The country's education system is managed by two national departments. First, the Department of Basic Education is responsible for primary and secondary education. Second, the Department of Higher Education and Training which manages higher education as well as vocational training (Anggraini et al., 2023; Puspita & Andriani, 2021; Puspitaningrum, 2021).

In Cameroon, the education system is divided into levels: six years of primary education (compulsory), five years of secondary education, two years of high school and two years of university education. The school year in the country runs from September to June. One of the main challenges in Cameroon's education system is the high rate of teacher absenteeism, which is considered a major factor contributing to low quality. Based on the explanation above, the author raises the theme of the education system in South Africa and Cameroon. This study can be a reference to understand how the education system is implemented in both countries (Destiani & Ramdani, 2025; Junaidi & Artikel, 2022; Patridina & Listyaputri, 2022; Syifa & Irwansyah, 2022).

METHODS

This research uses the library research method, which is an approach that relies on literature studies as the main source. The hallmark of this method is its focus on readily available data or texts, rather than field data or direct evidence of an event. In this research, researchers interact directly with sources that already exist in libraries or documents that are ready to be used, and utilize secondary data as material for analysis (Akmal et al., 2024; Engkizar et al., 2025; Guspita, Rahman, et al., 2025; Istiqamah et al., 2024; Mahira et al., 2024; Wati et al., 2025). This research uses a secondary data collection method, which is the collection of information indirectly through a review of the object under study. After collecting various journals related to the education system in South Africa and Cameroon, the author analyzes the data using a qualitative descriptive approach through library research. The results of this analysis are in the form of descriptive data in the form of writing and an overview of the findings of previous research that has been conducted by researchers (Asril et al., 2023; Engkizar et al., 2021, 2023, 2024; Guspita, et al., 2025; Rahman, et al., 2025; Mustafa et al., 2025)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Education System in South Africa
History

Education in South Africa has been devastated by the apartheid system that discriminated against the population in terms of education (Ayu, 2023; Berlian & Febriani, 2025; Engkizar et al., 2022). At that time, the white population received the best education but the non-white population received the least education. Before the arrival of the whites, education in African societies emphasized aspects of tradition such as stories of warriors and traitors and folktales. In Khoisan and Bantu societies especially, cultural values and life skills are important education taught from one generation to another. In Nguni society, education is different according to gender. The men are taught life skills by scholars from military, religious and political leaders. Women, on the other hand, received education in domestic and agricultural skills. Traditional education was further eroded in the 19th and 20th centuries, when the white royal police forced black adults out of their villages to work in mines and industrial estates. In the late 17th century Dutch Reformed Church officials established the first schools in South Africa called European Schools. These schools played the most important role in honing the skills of church members. In the deepening area the teachers who taught were known as Meesters, these teachers

taught the principles of understanding and mathematical skills (Amiri & Ahmadi, 2023; Nuha et al., 2024).

Language has been a sensitive issue in education in the country. At least two English school lecturers operated in the interior of the Cape colony, but their presence was resisted by the Afrikaners, who considered the English language and curriculum irrelevant to their society. Therefore, many Afrikaners chose to teach their children at home or in their churches. Nevertheless, black people in South Africa, especially the Xhosa and Nguni clans, had received an English education. By 1877, almost 60% of children in Natal had enrolled in British national schools and preacher schools (Anwar et al., 2017; Ningrum et al., 2025; Ridwan & Hidayati, 2025). In contrast to the Afrikaner regions, student enrollment was very low at 12% in the Orange Free State and only 8% in the Transvaal. By the end of the century, however, student enrollment began to grow after the government introduced African languages in schools and gave more power to Afrikaners to control lower and secondary education. By the end of the nineteenth century, three types of schools had received royal support, namely inland schools, regional schools and some secondary schools in major cities. In addition, the four Afrikaner regions had opened enrollment for black students to the royal schools and they were only allowed to study in the preachers' schools, where the teachers consisted of the following In addition, the four Afrikaner regions had opened enrollment for black students to royal schools and they were only allowed to study in preacher schools, where the teachers were religious officials.

Higher education was restricted to whites, but in 1829 the Crown created a multi-national educational institution known as the "South African College", later to become the "University of Cape Town". By 1852 British officials in the Transvaal and Orange Free State had granted Afrikaners the right to establish their own institutions of higher learning, and the new British Governor Sir George Grey had set up a fund to assist such institutions. In 1855 the kingdom grew the "Grey College" later known as the "University of the Orange Free State" in Bloemfontein and came under the control of the Dutch Reformed Church.

After the end of apartheid, South Africa undertook educational reforms to address inequities and racial discrimination in the education system. These reforms included developing a new curriculum, restructuring the education system, and improving access and quality of education for all citizens. In 1996, the South African government launched Curriculum 2005 in an effort to replace the discriminatory education system. The curriculum emphasizes competency-based education with a focus on clear and specific learning outcomes. However, its implementation faced challenges, including a lack of teacher training and adequate resources. As a result, in 2002, the curriculum was revised into the Revised National Curriculum Statement to simplify and clarify educational standards.

Education reform also included restructuring the education system to eliminate racial segregation. Previously, there were 14 separate ministries of education based on race and ethnicity. After the reform, the education system was unified under one ministry to ensure equality of access and education standards for all groups in society. Efforts to improve access and quality of education were made through various initiatives, including school infrastructure development, teacher training, and support programs for students from underprivileged backgrounds. Nevertheless, challenges such as disparities in education quality between regions and limited resources are still faced.

Curriculum

The education system in South Africa has undergone significant transformation since the end of the apartheid era, with the aim of creating a more inclusive and results-oriented curriculum. The following is an overview of the

development of the education curriculum in South Africa: first, Curriculum 2005 In 1996, the South African government launched Curriculum 2005 in an effort to replace the previously discriminatory education system. This curriculum emphasizes the Outcome-Based Education approach, which focuses on the achievement of competencies by learners and encourages them to be more proactive in their environment and society (Arofah Eli Fitrotul, 2018). Second, Curriculum Revision: Revised National Curriculum Statement After its initial implementation, the 2005 Curriculum underwent a revision that resulted in the Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2002. This revision aimed to simplify and clarify standards and improve curriculum implementation in schools.

Third, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), In 2012, South Africa adopted the CAPS as a further refinement of the previous curriculum. The CAPS provide more detailed guidance on the content that should be taught and how it should be assessed, with the aim of improving the consistency and quality of education across the country. The education system in South Africa includes several main levels designed to meet the various educational needs of its people. Here is an overview of the types of education available in the country:

The main advantage of the Australian Qualifications Framework is its ability to provide flexibility for students to switch education pathways according to their interests and needs. In addition, the Australian Qualifications Framework ensures that education standards in Australia remain high and are widely recognized, both domestically and internationally. With the Australian Qualifications Framework, individuals who have obtained certain qualifications can continue their education to a higher level or directly enter the workforce with the appropriate competencies.

The third theme is spiritual activities. According to informants, this spiritual activity aims to develop character religion, and curiosity. An example of this spiritual activity is the cult which is held every night, and also attending lecture studies such as Islam pedia, tasqif. This spiritual activity will increase student knowledge and can also increase piety, so character religious will be attached to the student's personality. This theme was conveyed by informants as excerpts from the below:

Formal Education

Primary Education (General Education and Training): The school term lasts 13 years, which is divided into phases namely: Elementary Phase (grade 0 plus grades 1 to 3), Intermediate Phase (grades 4 to 6), and Senior Phase (grades 7 to 9), Further Education and Training: After the intermediate phase, students can continue or not continue to further education and training in grades 10 to 12. As for grades 10 and 12, these are elective classes where students can choose to attend or not attend the classes, Higher Education: South Africa has 26 public universities that are divided into three main categories: theoretical universities that offer theory-oriented degrees, technological or technical universities that offer vocational-oriented degrees, and comprehensive universities that are a combination of the two, offering both types of degrees (Syaadah et al., 2023).

Non- Formal and Informal Education

In addition to formal education, South Africa also has a range of non-formal and informal education programs aimed at improving people's skills and knowledge outside the formal school system. These programs include vocational skills training, community development courses, and adult literacy initiatives organized by both government and non-government organizations.

Special Education

To meet the needs of learners with special needs, South Africa provides special schools and inclusive programs in mainstream schools. In 2004, there were about 390 special schools catering to learners with different types of disabilities.

Private Education

In addition to public educational institutions, there are also private schools and universities that offer various educational programs. These private institutions often offer alternative curricula or specialist programs that are not available in public schools.

The education system in South Africa consists of several main levels designed to provide a comprehensive education for its citizens. The following is a breakdown of these levels of education: General Education and Training, Foundation Phase: Covers Grade R (equivalent to kindergarten) to Grade 3, Intermediate Phase: Covers Grade 4 to Grade 6, Senior Phase: Covers Grade 7 to Grade 9. Education at this level is compulsory and designed to provide a foundation of basic knowledge and skills for students.

Further Education and Training, Covers Grade 10 to Grade 12, At the end of Grade 12, students sit the National Senior Certificate examination which is required to progress to higher education or enter the workforce, Although this level is not compulsory, many students choose to continue their education to this stage to enhance career and further education opportunities, Higher Education and Training, Covers education at universities and other higher education institutions, both public and private, These institutions offer a range of qualifications, including diplomas, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees. The education evaluation system in South Africa has undergone various changes along with curriculum transformation and efforts to improve the quality of education. Here is an overview of the education evaluation system in South Africa.

Evaluation Approaches in Curriculum Since the introduction of the 2005 Curriculum which adopted Outcome-Based Education (OBE), educational evaluation in South Africa has focused on the achievement of specific competencies by students. This approach emphasizes formative and summative evaluation to assess students' understanding and skills according to expected outcomes. The Role of Evaluation in Mathematics Learning. In the context of mathematics learning, evaluation is used to measure students' concept understanding and problem-solving skills. Formative evaluations, such as quizzes and daily assignments, help teachers monitor student progress and adjust teaching strategies. Summative evaluations, such as final exams, are used to assess students' overall achievement of curriculum standards.

Although evaluation systems have been designed to support effective learning, challenges such as resource disparities between schools and the quality of teacher training can affect the consistency and effectiveness of evaluations. Continuous efforts are needed to ensure that education evaluations truly reflect students' abilities and support the overall improvement of education quality.

The education financing system in South Africa involves a combination of funding sources from the central government, provincial governments and private contributions. The central government sets national education policy and provides most of the funding, while provincial governments are responsible for the implementation of the policy and the management of funds at the local level. In addition, private schools and some public schools receive additional funding through school fees charged to parents. However, this system faces significant challenges related to inequalities in funding and quality of education between regions. Although the government has made efforts to improve access and quality of education since the end of apartheid, disparities are still evident, especially between urban and rural areas. Some schools in less developed areas often lack adequate resources, which impacts on the quality of education provided.

The cost of studying in South Africa is relatively easy, especially for basic needs because everything is subsidized by the government. A semester's tuition fee for public universities is around US$200-400, while for private universities it is

US$1,000-2,500. The cost of student accommodation varies widely, from US$100-1,000 per month. A rate of US$100-$200 per month is sufficient. Facilities include a bedroom with an attached bathroom and a kitchen. Student facilities are also highly prioritized. In fact, students here receive many conveniences in the form of price cuts of 20-70 percent to visit recreational places such as cinemas, museums, theaters, libraries, and even to buy books and other learning equipment.

Strengths and weaknesses of

include: i.) Education in South Africa has some notable advantages, including: Leading Educational Institutions: South Africa has renowned universities such as the University of Cape Town, which was founded in 1829 and is the oldest university in the country. The university offers Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degree programs and is known for its academic quality. ii.) Rapidly Growing Higher Education: Since the mid-1990s, the number of students at South Africa's public universities has doubled. This demonstrates the high interest in higher education and the country's commitment to providing access to education for its citizens. iii.) Development of Creativity and Critical Thinking: Education in South Africa is increasingly emphasizing the development of creativity and critical thinking skills. The aim is to create graduates who not only have academic knowledge, but also the necessary skills to face the challenges of the future. iv.) language of instruction in English: Most higher education programs in South Africa are delivered in English. This makes it easier for international students to adapt and participate in academic programs. The education system in South Africa faces various challenges that affect the quality and equity of education. The following are some of the major weaknesses that have been identified: i.) Apartheid Legacy and Educational Inequality. Although apartheid officially ended in 1994, its impact is still felt in the education system. Schools that used to cater for white students generally have better facilities and resources compared to schools that cater for black students. This inequality contributes to significant differences in the quality of education between different racial groups and regions.

ii.) Teaching quality and school management, Some schools in South Africa face problems in management and teaching quality. The appointment of principals who do not have adequate qualifications or experience can result in ineffective school management, which in turn affects the quality of education provided. iii.) Teacher absenteeism and teaching standards High teacher absenteeism rates are a serious problem. In 2007, South Africa recorded the highest teacher absenteeism rate compared to the other countries surveyed by SACMEQ III, and this trend has continued to increase after that year. In addition, low teaching standards, partly due to the poor quality of the past education system, affect student learning outcomes.

iv) Limited facilities and resources Many schools in South Africa lack basic facilities such as clean water, electricity, libraries and laboratories. These limitations hamper the teaching-learning process and restrict students' access to learning resources needed to achieve optimal educational outcomes. V.) Barriers to inclusive education Despite policies such as the "Education White Paper" that aim to provide educational equality for all children, the implementation of inclusive education still faces barriers. Limited resources, inadequate teacher training and discriminatory attitudes towards students with special needs are the main challenges in realizing effective inclusive education.

Education System in Cameroon

History

Education in Cameroon has a complex history, influenced by French and British colonization. After independence, two separate education systems were implemented: a system in the east that followed the French model and a system in the west that followed the British model. In 1976, the two systems were merged to

create one national education system. Before the arrival of European colonizers, education in Cameroon was informal and community-based. Education was provided by families and tribal leaders through a system of apprenticeship, mentorship and traditional rituals. Knowledge taught included agriculture, hunting, handicrafts, and social and cultural values.

In the late 19th century, Cameroon became a German colony (1884-1916). During this period, modern education was introduced by Christian missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant. The curriculum focused more on religion, German language, and basic skills such as reading and writing. After World War I, Cameroon was divided into two mandated territories under the League of Nations French Cameroon under French control and British Cameroon under British control. These two regions developed different education systems: In French Cameroon, the education system followed the French model, with a French language of instruction and a strict academic curriculum. In British Cameroon, the education system follows the British model which is more flexible and based on skills development and community-based education.

Cameroon gained independence from France on January 1, 1960 and from Britain on October 1, 1961, and merged into the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The education system faces the challenge of integrating two different colonial systems. Currently, education in Cameroon is regulated by the government through the Ministry of Basic Education and the Ministry of Secondary Education and Higher Education. Primary education is compulsory and free for children aged 6-12, but challenges such as lack of facilities, limited number of teachers and inequality of access are still major issues. Education reform in Cameroon has undergone various changes to improve the quality and relevance of the education system. Here are some of the reform efforts that have been made:

Introduction of competency-based curriculum Cameroon has adopted a Competency-Based Curriculum tailored to the need to produce graduates competent in knowledge, skills, and attitudes useful for solving social and economic problems. Integration of peace education concepts in the curriculum. From September 2018, Cameroon's Ministry of Basic Education introduced the concept of peace education in the new curriculum. The move aims to instill peace values in students from an early age, in response to the social challenges facing the country.

With French and British colonial legacies, Cameroon faces challenges in unifying different education systems and ensuring equal access to education. Education reforms have been put in place to improve the quality of education, although challenges such as lack of funding and infrastructure gaps still need to be addressed.

Curiculum

The education system in Cameroon combines elements of both French and British colonial heritage, reflecting its unique colonial history. Primary education in Cameroon is free and compulsory, with around 70% of children aged 6-12 attending school. The adult literacy rate stands at 67.9%. In 2018, Cameroon's Ministry of Basic Education introduced the concept of peace education into the new curriculum. The move aims to instill the values of peace and tolerance from an early age, in response to the social challenges facing the country.

In addition, Cameroon has adopted a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) tailored to the African context. This curriculum reform aims to produce graduates who are competent and prepared for the demands of the 21st century, emphasizing the development of practical and relevant skills. The education system in Cameroon is a unique blend of French and British colonial influences, which is reflected in the structure and types of education. Below is an overview of the types of education in Cameroon.

Formal Education

Primary Education: Primary education in Cameroon lasts six years and is compulsory and free. The enrollment rate is around 70% for children aged 6-12 years. Secondary Education: After completing primary education, students proceed to secondary education which is divided into two phases: First Cycle: Five years in length. Second Cycle: Two years in length. Higher Education: Upon completion of secondary education, students can proceed to university or other higher education institutions. In addition to formal education, Cameroon also has non-formal education programs aimed at empowering communities through skills training and adult literacy programs. Vocational and Technical Education: Vocational and technical education is provided to provide practical skills to students, preparing them to enter the workforce in various industrial sectors.

The education system in Cameroon consists of several main levels, namely: Primary Education: Compulsory and free for children aged 6 to 12, covering six years of education. Secondary Education: Divided into two stages: Junior Secondary Education: Five years. Senior Secondary Education: Two years. Higher Education: Includes universities and other higher education institutions.

Although primary education has been free since 2000, parents still have to bear the costs for uniforms, books and other necessities. In addition, the high cost of secondary education makes it unaffordable for many families. The adult literacy rate in Cameroon is 67.9%, with about 70% of children aged 6-12 years attending school. However, there is a disparity between the southern and northern regions, where in the more isolated northern region, the percentage of children attending school is lower.

The education evaluation system in Cameroon reflects the French and British colonial influences, which divided the country into two main education systems: Francophone and Anglophone. While there are differences in the structure of the curriculum, the two systems have similarities in the approach to education evaluation. Education System Structure and Evaluation.

Francophone system: Consists of six years of primary education, followed by four years of junior secondary education, and three years of senior secondary education. Evaluation is done through national examinations at the end of each level to determine graduation and continuation to the next level. Anglophone system: Consists of seven years of primary education, followed by five years of junior secondary education, and two years of senior secondary education. Evaluation is done through the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examinations at Ordinary and Advanced levels, which are held at the end of junior and senior secondary education.

The education system in Cameroon offers free and compulsory primary education for children aged 6 to 12 years. About 70% of children in that age range are enrolled in primary school. Primary school education has been free since 2000 however, families must pay for uniforms and book fees. School fees and secondary school fees are still unaffordable for many families. Since 2007, the Global Partnership for Education has provided support to the education sector in Cameroon, with total financing of US$100.7 million. According to UNESCO Cameroon's public expenditure on education in 2011, amounted to 3.7% of GDP.

Advantages and disadvantages

Cameroon is known to have one of the best education systems in Africa. Here are some of the main advantages of the country's education system: i) Free and Compulsory Primary Education: Primary education in Cameroon is free and compulsory, covering children aged 6 to 12 years. About 70% of children in this age

range attend school, with an adult literacy rate of 67.9%. Ii) Dual Education System: Cameroon adopts two main education systems, the French and British systems, reflecting its colonial heritage. About 80% of education follows the French system, while the remaining 20% follows the British system. This dual approach allows flexibility and accessibility of education for different groups of people.

Various languages of instruction: The language of instruction in Cameroon is either English or French, according to the education system followed. This gives students the advantage of mastering a major international language. Iv) High School Attendance Rate: Cameroon has the highest school attendance rate in Africa, indicating a strong commitment to education and active participation of the community in the education process.

Education in Cameroon, although considered one of the best in Africa, still faces several challenges that affect its quality and accessibility. The following are some of the major deficiencies in the education system in Cameroon: i) Regional Disparities in Access to Education, Although primary education in Cameroon is free and compulsory, there are disparities in access between the southern and northern regions. In the southern provinces most children of primary school age attend school. However, in the more isolated northern regions, the percentage of children attending school is lower. In addition, many children do not continue their education beyond the primary level. Ii). Impact of Armed Conflict on Education The ongoing Anglophone conflict in Cameroon has had a negative impact on human capital accumulation. Research shows that an increase in conflict-related violence leads to significant declines in reading and math test scores. The conflict has also resulted in high levels of teacher absenteeism and reduced access to electricity in schools, all of which contribute to the declining quality of education.

Limited Educational Infrastructure Some schools in Cameroon lack laboratories or have laboratories that are not well equipped. In addition, there is a lack of infrastructure necessary to provide quality education to students in accordance with their legally guaranteed rights. Education Inequalities Although education systems in developed countries are often of high quality, there are still inequalities in access to education. Factors such as economic, geographical and social background can affect access and learning opportunities. Limited Resources and Educators. Some schools in Cameroon face limitations in terms of resources and educators. This includes the lack of adequate teaching materials and qualified educators, which can affect the effectiveness of the learning process.

CONCLUSION

The education systems in South Africa and Cameroon face unique challenges but are similar in some aspects. South Africa has made major reforms in its education since the end of the apartheid era, with various curriculum changes such as Curriculum 2005, Revised National Curriculum Statement, and Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements. These reforms aim to create a more inclusive and quality education system. However, the inequality of access between urban and rural areas is still a major obstacle, especially in terms of the availability of teaching staff and school infrastructure. Meanwhile, in Cameroon, the education system is still faced with greater limitations, such as unequal access, lack of educational facilities, as well as the impact of armed conflict that has caused many schools to close. Both countries need to take strategic steps to improve the quality of their education. Investing in education infrastructure, improving the training of teaching staff, and strengthening more inclusive education policies are key factors in creating a better system. In addition, international support can also help in improving access to education for people in less developed regions. With sustained efforts, South Africa and Cameroon have the potential to build more equitable and quality education systems for future generations.

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