

THEME

**BEYOND THE TEST: RETHINKING CLASSROOM ASSESSMENT TO FOSTER
HOLISTIC LEARNING.**

TOPIC

**The Compulsory Weekly Assessment System for Primary Schools in Cameroon: A Case
Study of Lethal Mutations in Education**

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BACKGROUND

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY CHALLENGES IN CAMEROON

- **National Challenges:** Poor quality education, weak governance, and fractured accountability undermine the sector.
- **Access vs. Learning:** Primary completion rose from 53% (2001) to 80% (2011); gross enrolment rate increased from 102.8% to 112.9% (2001-2011), but learning outcomes remain poor.
- **Data Gaps:** Limited measurement of learning achievement restricts evidence-based policymaking.
- **Accountability:** School-level data collection is weak; officials prioritize access over learning.

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THE LEARNING CRISIS IN CAMEROON

The dimension of the Global Learning Crisis in Cameroon is best understood in the context of Learning Poverty Brief.

- Learning profiles that track changes in children competencies per year of schooling in Cameroon show shockingly low learning levels. The World Bank and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2019) developed the construct of **Learning Poverty** (the ability to read and understand a simple text by the age of ten) to spotlight learning crises and put Cameroon's learning poverty at 77 percent.
- Learning poverty in Cameroon is today estimated at 80 percent. Simply put, only 2 in 10 children can read and understand a simple text by the age of 10. This indicator combines schooling and learning. It begins with a share of children who have not achieved minimum proficiency (as measured in schools) and is adjusted by the proportion of those who are out of school (and are assumed to not be able to read proficiently).

THE LEARNING CRISIS IN CAMEROON (CONTINUOUS)

- About 80 percent of Cameroonian children are learning so little in school that they are not better than kids who never attended school at all.
- World Development Report (2018) asserted from an assessment administered at the end of primary school education in Cameroon that only 5 percent of girls from the poorest quintile of households had learned enough to continue school.

PRIMARY SCHOOL ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE

- A joint order of the Minister of Basic Education and the Minister of Secondary Education fixing the Calendar of the 2023/2024 school year in the Republic of Cameroon instructs that;
- Article 15: (2) Every end of week, a weekly test is organized in the fundamental discipline of languages (French or English) and Mathematics.
- (3) At the end of each month, each level unit, under the coordination of the Head teacher, shall organize a monthly evaluation focusing exclusively on Fundamental Knowledge, namely: Language (French/English Language) Mathematics, Sciences and Technology, the second official language and ICT.
- (4) At the end of each term, a composition of all the subjects taught in each class shall be organized by the pedagogical units of each level under the coordination of the Head teacher.

PRIMARY SCHOOL ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE (CONTINUOUS)

- (5) At the end of the school year, an annual composition shall be organized for each class. This evaluation shall cover the entire annual program of the class concerned and the subjects shall be prepared by the Inspectorate for the Coordination of Education and forwarded by the Regional Delegate for Basic Education to the schools via the Divisional Delegations and the Sub-divisional Inspectorate for Basic Education.
- By the merit of this ministerial order primary school children in Cameroon are supposed to take not less than forty summative tests a year. Added to this is the fact the children are expected to take two high stakes examinations; the Government Common Entrance Examination for selection and the First School Leaving Certificate Examination for certification.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- ‘Lethal Mutation’ explains how evidence-based practices can become counterproductive if implemented top-down without teacher understanding.
- It is based on the concept that teachers need a degree of autonomy to adapt evidence-based practices and techniques to fit their unique classroom context.
- The danger here is that if teachers do not understand the principles behind such practices they may modify ideas and techniques to such an extent that the original concept and practice may become counter-productive.
- While formative assessment has been well supported and widely used the outcome has failed in many instances not because the research was flawed, or the strategies too difficult to implement but because the top-down implementation resulted in lethal mutations. Brown and Campione (1996).

PURPOSE, RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

- **Purpose:** To provide an overview of the weekly assessment policy of the Ministry of Basic Education in Cameroon and its impact on teachers' behavior, learners' motivation, and formative assessment practices.
- **Research Questions:** Focus on the effectiveness and relevance of the weekly assessment policy.
- **Methodology:** Content analysis of system-level policy document outlining classroom assessment schedule

CONTENT ANALYSIS

- Policy categorized as ‘Latent’ per World Bank (2012) framework lowest performance level. It represents absence of, or deviation from, the attribute.
- Assessment schedule provided, but no guidelines or rubrics for standards exist.
- No system-wide resources or mechanisms to develop teacher skills in classroom assessment.
- No structures to monitor quality of assessment practices.
- Assessment information is not disseminated to stakeholders nor used to inform policy.
- Policy leads to over-testing and misuse of tests.
- Assumes all teachers teach coherently and can change without support.
- Learning expectations are not explicitly communicated; absence of clear rubrics.
- Misconception that classroom assessment is problem-free because it is routine practice.

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

- **Teacher's beliefs-difficult to alter.** Reforms in education, especially classroom practices, succeed only when teacher's articulate beliefs and perceptions either during the planning phase or realization.
- **School Systems:** School are loosely coupled systems with strong teacher autonomy, complicating reform implementations.
- **System Stickiness:** Education systems change slowly; policy consistency is critical.
- **Professional Development:** Improving teacher assessment skills is difficult and costly.
- **Teacher Training:** Many basic-level teachers inadequately trained due to rapid recruitment to meet Education For All (EFA) goals.
- Over-testing and unclear assessment expectations adversely affect teacher behavior and classroom dynamics.
- Teacher beliefs and low assessment literacy reduce formative assessment effectiveness.
- Stress and cumbersome assessment processes undermine learner motivation.
- Lack of clear rubrics and standards prevents meaningful feedback to students.
- Current policy does not support formative assessment as a tool to enhance learning.

CONCLUSIONS

A comprehensive review of Cameroon's weekly primary school assessment policy reveals significant challenges including over-testing, lack of clear standards, and inadequate support for teachers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Establishment of robust frameworks, investing in teacher capacity, and fostering systemic monitoring mechanisms.
- Policymakers must prioritize learning outcomes over mere attendance and testing frequency, ensuring reforms are contextually adapted and teacher-driven to avoid 'lethal mutations'.
- Engaging stakeholders in policy dialogue, revising assessment guidelines, and integrating assessment literacy into teacher education to realize meaningful improvements in educational quality and accountability.
- Establish a standard document and framework articulating guidelines for classroom assessment in primary schools.
- Provide system-level resources and mechanisms to build teacher skills and expertise in classroom assessment.
- Develop varied system mechanisms to monitor quality of classroom assessment practices ensuring support for student learning.
- Incorporate learning assessment training into primary school teacher preparatory programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUOUS)

- Reconceptualization of the practice with emphasis on teacher autonomy.
- The study cautioned against imported blueprints and the dangers of copying educational practices fo developed countries.

**THANKS FOR YOUR
ATTENTION**

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