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Skills Acquisition in Cameroon: How well does the Secondary School System Equip School Leavers for Employment? A Case Study of Two Regions

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to explore the level at which the acquisition of skills relevant for the workplace by students is facilitated by the curriculum of secondary general education in Cameroon. This is in the context of the link between education and employment, as well as the concerns raised by employers, as seen in the literature review, that school leavers of the curriculum of secondary general education lack skills relevant for the workforce. There is an increasing necessity for the curriculum of secondary education in the 21st century to provide school leavers with skills and attitudes relevant for employment, hence helping to resolve the challenges of youth unemployment, which has seen the government of Cameroon, with the support of the IMF/World Bank, implement educational reforms aimed at solving the problems of unemployment and promoting social development in the country. For example, Vision 2035, as presented in the Strategy for Growth and Employment Paper (GESP) of 2010, aims at elevating the country to an emerging economy status by the year 2035, thus demonstrating the commitment of the country towards strategic transformation for economic and societal progress.

A considerable number of school leavers in Cameroon, particularly those from the secondary general education sector, encounter difficulties in securing employment due to a lack of adequate employable skills developed during their formal schooling. Despite governmental reforms aimed at restructuring the educational system and redefining its goals to reduce youth unemployment and promote social development, data from the World Bank indicate that these initiatives have achieved limited success. The incorporation of vocational education within the Cameroonian school curriculum remains underexplored and is often regarded as optional rather than an integral part of curriculum design. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the views of educational stakeholders on the development of a broad curriculum in secondary schools in Cameroon.

A qualitative case study approach, utilising questionnaires and interviews as data collection methods was applied in the research to 232 students, teachers, and Pedagogic Inspectors. Through thematic analysis of collected data, participants' perceptions of their lived experiences and how secondary school stakeholders need to respond to the issues of skills acquisition and youth unemployment or underemployment were examined. Through the evidence obtained and analysed, four overriding themes emerged. These include Theme 1: Youth unemployment and Skills Development; Theme 2: Curriculum Development and Pedagogy; Theme 3: Support Mechanisms; Theme 4: Implications for Curriculum Review

The existing body of literature is supported and expanded upon by the elucidation and clarification of the diversity and variety of the links that exist amongst these themes. The information discussed under the four themes is applicable to the diverse stories of the study participants. The findings indicate vital links between curriculum development, the acquisition of employability skills, youth unemployment, and the effectiveness of the

school system. It is recommended for government and educational authorities to concentrate more precisely on identifying and enhancing specific skills that could contribute to minimising youth unemployment. Such efforts may, in turn, improve curricular design and produce more favourable outcomes for students. If the inputs from secondary schools are not reinvigorated, school leavers of the secondary schools' sectors will continue to drive up unemployment and underemployment rates in the country. Consequently, it is suggested that policy definitions and curricula be modified to reflect local realities, that policy implementation regarding curriculum development be enforced, and that government, secondary schools, and businesses form partnerships with the goal to enhance skills acquisition.

Keywords: Curriculum Development; Employability Skills; Secondary Education; Vocational Education.

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Dedication

This work is respectfully dedicated to the memory of my late father, Pa Boniface Seh Nkamta, whose steadfast support and enduring confidence in my achievements have continually inspired me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Recent research highlights a growing emphasis on employability skills, prompting several countries to reassess the aims and value of their education systems (Peeters et al., 2019; Artess et al., 2017). However, the literature reviewed, particularly that relating to Cameroon (Ngouhou et al., 2021; Angyie et al., 2022), suggests that the views of education stakeholders, such as students and teachers, regarding curriculum development are often overlooked. This research examines how students, teachers, and Pedagogic Inspectors experience employability skills in education. Utilising interviews and questionnaire data, the thesis explores their perspectives and attitudes on unemployment, employability skills, and the school curriculum in Cameroon. The introductory chapter of this thesis presents an overview of the research project, facilitating the reader's understanding of the study's context, the applied methodology, and the overall thesis structure. It begins by outlining the rationale behind the research, followed by a discussion of the problem statement. Subsequently, it details the formulation and progression of the research questions and justifies the selection of the methodology. The chapter also addresses relevant theoretical considerations, provides definitions of employability and employability skills, and clarifies the study's contribution to existing knowledge. Additionally, it acknowledges the research's limitations and concludes with a description of the organisation of the thesis. This study investigates the extent to which the secondary education system in Cameroon contributes to the development of employment-related skills among students. The exploration of this thesis' topic and research in general is not an arbitrary or spontaneous process (Crawford et al., 2020); rather, it necessitates deliberate decisions. The research was initiated with the aim of gaining deeper insights, particularly concerning students in the secondary compulsory sector, where significant experience has been acquired. Despite the plethora of existing research on skills acquisition and the secondary school system from the literature read (see Chapter 3, Literature Review, Sections 3.1 to 3.5.1), there remains scope for further investigation. From the broad search of literature undertaken, there seem to be a

perceived gap in the literature regarding how the curriculum of schools could be developed to incorporate relevant skills to enhance students' employability. Notably, the transition from school to work depends on various factors, including personal skills and educational attainment levels (Impetus, 2014). However, nurturing students' employability competencies and skills is crucial for enhancing their employability (Impetus, 2014). Consequently, upon completing school, students face increased competition for jobs from potentially more qualified or experienced candidates with relevant skills, alongside increased expectations from employers regarding their readiness for work.

In the contemporary global economy, employees' ability to effectively apply knowledge and skills at an advanced level is indispensable for employees (Schwab and Zahidi, 2020). As school leavers enter the workforce, there is an increasing demand for them to possess a broader range of attributes beyond those typically developed during secondary education (CBI, 2018). Employers now prioritise candidates who demonstrate the ability to engage in and adapt to less predictable work environments (Mann and Huddleston, 2016) – (See chapter 3 section 3.4). Despite the consensus regarding the evolving nature of employability, the literature offers diverse interpretations, complicating its practical definition (Tymon, 2013). While identifying the requisite skills and competencies for employment is not inherently complex, the diversity of perspectives and descriptions available online can make it difficult to ascertain which skills are crucial for success in different professional roles. Consequently, there arises uncertainty among schools and young individuals regarding which skills are important and how they can be effectively developed. Notably, the challenge with employability does not stem from a lack of understanding of employers' preferences or the qualifications necessary for the workforce, but rather from the lack of well-researched and universally accepted terminology among stakeholders (Tymon, 2013).

Drawing on the existing literature and data collected for this research, this thesis delineates fundamental skills and competencies associated with employability. It explores the influence of the secondary school system in Cameroon on the acquisition of these skills and its impact on youth employment. Consequently, the study draws evidence-informed literature about secondary schools and gathers primary data from 4 secondary

schools (teachers, school counsellor, head teacher, secondary school students) and pedagogic inspectors within the Ministry of Secondary Education) to understand their role in fostering the skills and abilities often emphasised by employers, aiming to identify where young individuals receive support for developing these competencies. Moreover, the process reflects the iterative nature of the investigation characterised by recurrent oscillations between various fluid stages, often revisiting and rephrasing concepts to gain fresh insights.

1.1 Background and Motivation

The first-person pronoun is used sparingly in this section to describe previous education and experience, the motivations underpinning my decision to undertake this research, and the formulation and evolution of the research question. As indicated by Hyland (2022), an instance in which the use of the first person is permissible is when the researcher demonstrates personal interest in the research topic. The limited use of the first person has enabled the establishment of a rapport with the reader, thereby encouraging deeper engagement with the research and ultimately facilitating the communication of the concepts inherent in written text (Harwood 2005; Hyland, 2022). Furthermore, the use of the first person is justifiable where it serves the purpose of distinguishing the author's insights and interpretations from the existing body of literature (Hyland 2022).

Educators have the potential to develop their professional practice by participating in research or undertaking their own inquiry, whilst schools could become self-improving organisations (Konstantinou, 2018). Research enables educational practice to draw on innovations in the field and could contribute to improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching, enhance students' examination outcomes, and their overall wellbeing through the systematic exploration of new approaches, some of which may not prove effective (Konstantinou, 2018). Hence, I concur with Konstantinou's standpoint, as engagement with evidence-based education has the potential to contribute to enhanced practical outcomes.

Having worked as a teacher in the UK, I have developed a good understanding of theoretical frameworks relating to vocational education, particularly those that relate to skills development. My experience of teaching in secondary schools and postsecondary educational institutions has also provided me with insights into the intricate relationships that exist between curriculum development, its practical implementation, and the process through which students acquire employable skills. As outlined earlier in section 1.0, identifying the skills essential for preparing students to navigate the evolving economy poses a significant challenge (Impetus, 2014). It is reasonable to argue that success in any industry or chosen vocational path is, to some extent, dependent on competencies such as effective communication, collaboration, and proficient problem-solving, commonly referred to as soft skills or employability skills (Impetus, 2014). In response to growing pressure from employers experiencing difficulties in recruiting individuals who possess these skills, educational institutions are intensifying their efforts to develop students' employability skills (Blades et al., 2012). Globally, secondary school curricula are evolving towards broader, adaptable frameworks that emphasise foundational skills and practical, non-occupation specific abilities, thus fostering students' capacity for continuous adaptation (Blades et al., 2012). For example, high-performing education systems, particularly those in Finland and Singapore, demonstrate this shift by promoting broad, transferable knowledge through teaching methods such as learning through projects, group work, and thematic lessons (Hodgson and Spours, 2014a). This emerging educational approach aims to equip students with the flexibility and adaptability required to navigate complex rapidly changing circumstances across diverse career and personal pathways (Blades et al., 2012). There is, therefore, a prevailing perspective that educational institutions play a vital role in nurturing employability skills among young people. Indeed, Blades et al. (2012) argue that the acquisition of employability skills represents a crucial initial step on the path to future employment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is acknowledged that employers continuously seek employees who possess skills such as interpersonal, problem-solving, and communication skills, yet the secondary school curriculum remains academically focused, resulting in high youth unemployment and

underemployment in the country (ILO, 2013). This situation is further exacerbated by the lack of vocational training, which is vital for equipping students with employability skills (Penn, 2016). The mismatch between education and job market demands suggests the need for curriculum reform, especially at the secondary school level, to integrate vocational and technical training that could reduce youth unemployment (Mbangwana, 1996). Parents also emphasise the importance of vocational skills to ensure their school-leaver's economic independence, highlighting the economic reliance on skills-based labour (Mbangwana, 1996). Despite the global nature of youth unemployment, Cameroon faces particularly high rates, with underemployment reaching 6.23% (Macrotrends, 2024). In addition, Macrotrends (2024) details that from 2021 to 2024, Cameroon has experienced a consistent downward trend in youth unemployment. The unemployment rate among young people decreased from 7.24% in 2021 to 6.62% in 2022 (a drop of 0.62 percentage points) and then decreased slightly to 6.58% in 2023 and 6.23% in 2024. The continuous, albeit small, reduction in youth unemployment over this 4-year period suggests some improvements to integrating young people into the job market, but the limited scale of change each year reinforces the real challenges of youth employment in Cameroon. Research supports the idea that secondary education could focus more on practical skills, helping young people to transition into employment or self-employment (Winch et al., 2000; Unwin and Wellington, 2001). Following data collection and analysis, this study equally aims to propose practical recommendations to Cameroon's Ministry of Secondary Education to enhance the curriculum for the future, ensuring that it better equips students for the job market and facilitates meaningful development. By incorporating employability skills in the curriculum, it is hoped that schools could offer a broader range of opportunities, better aligning education with the nation's economic and social goals.

1.3 Formulation and Evolution of the Research Question

Creswell (2014) highlights that formulating a research question serves the primary purpose of channelling diverse areas of interest into a singular realm of investigation. Bouchrika (2020) supplements this notion by suggesting that a research question refines a broad sphere of curiosity, honing it down to a more precise focus that clearly emphasise

the phenomenon under study (Kross and Giust, 2018). This highlights the importance of research questions and hypotheses in shaping the direction and scope of a study. Indeed, research questions delineate the scope and coherence of the study, thereby influencing key aspects of the research process such as design, sample selection, data collection, and analysis (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011). Although the formulation of effective research questions is crucial, Sandberg and Alvesson (2011) note that there is limited guidance available on how to develop new research questions. Lipowski (2008) asserts that crafting effective research questions is not an inherent talent but rather a learnable skill. Qualitative research can comprise of either a broad or a more narrowly defined scope and, like quantitative research, is closely linked to the overall research design. However, unlike quantitative research questions, qualitative inquiries tend to be more flexible, adaptable, and less rigid (Creswell, 2013). Consequently, qualitative studies often seek to understand phenomena, provide explanations, or undertake exploratory investigations (Creswell, 2013).

Ritchie et al. (2013) categorise qualitative research questions into several types, including contextual research questions, which aim to characterise existing phenomena; explanatory research questions, which seek to explain observed occurrences or examine relationships between current elements; and exploratory research questions, which investigate lesser-known aspects of a given subject, among others. In line with these distinctions, this study explores the acquisition of employability skills, with a focus on assessing how effectively the secondary education system in Cameroon prepares students for future employment.

It is noteworthy that the rationale of this study did not emerge fully developed; rather, it evolved progressively through diverse experiences and engagements. As discussed in section 1.1 of this chapter, my experience as an educator in England over several years has increased my awareness of skills acquisition within the secondary education sector. For instance, in the UK teachers utilise sessions outside of specific subject areas, such as tutor periods, to provide students with insights into the labour market and enhance their communication abilities. Additional school-based activities and work placement opportunities in years 10 and, occasionally, year 11 (Dixon, 2022), together with interactions with peers, contribute to the development of interpersonal and collaborative

skills. In the context of secondary schools in Cameroon, Egebe (2017) asserts that the guidance counsellors' placement service plays an importance role in facilitating students' acquisition of job-related skills. Such services are intended to support students in choosing appropriate study programmes, career paths, or work-study opportunities. However, the availability of fully qualified counsellors is limited across secondary schools in Cameroon, thereby restricting students' access to various counselling services (Egebe, 2017). Egebe (2017) further notes that although many individuals in Cameroon possess advanced degrees in guidance and counselling, a significant proportion pursue employment opportunities outside the school setting (Akinade, 2012). Against this background, this study explores the role of curriculum within the broader context of enhancing employability. Consequently, it focuses on secondary education, and involves engagement with secondary school educators, students, and pedagogic inspectors.

1.3.1 Research Aim(s) and Research Question(s)

The present study seeks to offer a broader perspective on the experiences of stakeholders in relation to the secondary school curriculum, teaching practices, employability skills acquisition and curriculum design. The research addresses the following research questions which are informed by themes identified from the review of literature:

1. What is the perception of current students (Form 5, 15-16-year-olds), teachers and pedagogic inspectors on the types of knowledge and skills they need from the curriculum to gain employment?
2. What is the relationship between curriculum development and youth (15-24) unemployment from participants' (teachers, students, pedagogic inspectors) perspectives?
3. How can employability skills be integrated in the curriculum of schools in Cameroon to improve employability skills for students (15-16) from participants' perspectives?

To address these questions, this study examines the experiences of these stakeholders. By eliciting their diverse perspectives, the study offers insights into the day-to-day realities of secondary education and employability skills acquisition.

1.4 Overview of Research Methodology

This study adopted a case study research approach using qualitative data gathering methods. Chapter 4 explains the rational for selecting this approach and describes the research instruments and their development process. It outlines the sampling procedures as well as ethical considerations underpinning the study. The data analysis approach is discussed and justified, while the limitations of the research approach and research tools are acknowledged, together with measures taken to address them.

The methodology for data collection is discussed and justified in Chapter 4, Section 4.8, which provides an explanation of the rationale underpinning the selected approach. Given that qualitative methods facilitate the investigation of human-centred topics that may be difficult to capture through quantitative approaches, Dabic and Stojanov (2014) note their increasing relevance within educational research. Qualitative data typically take the form of unstructured or semi-structure textual data (Dabic and Stojanov, 2014), with the data gathered in this study deriving primarily from the participants' experiences. Consequently, the validity of the study's findings depends on the rigorous application of established data collection and analytical procedures. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative research adopts a contextual approach grounded in the physical environment, positioning the researcher as an active observer within this setting. It involves examining and interpreting texts and other forms of empirical material to develop an understanding of the world. A defining attribute of qualitative research is its occurrence within natural, real-world contexts.

Accordingly, the primary method for gathering qualitative data involved fieldwork that required the researcher to spend time in the environment being studied (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Selecting appropriate methods for qualitative data collection requires an understanding of participants' social contexts. Data were therefore gathered in ways that facilitated a deeper understanding of participants' everyday experiences (Dabic &

Stojanov, 2014). Nevertheless, qualitative researchers may not always know at the outset of a study where they will obtain their most reliable data. To obtain comprehensive and reliable empirical data, Dabic and Stojanov (2014) highlight that researchers may draw on multiple sources of data, with information from one source often guiding the identification or exploration of other sources. Qualitative data may therefore be derived from a range of sources and subsequently transcribed into textual form for analysis. Rigorous qualitative data collection focuses primarily on naturally occurring, everyday activities in natural settings, enabling researchers to develop a more grounded understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

1.5 Theoretical context – Consideration of, and Rejection of Theory

As Bendassolli (2014) observes, the relationship between theory and qualitative studies can be fluctuating and, at times, problematic when compared with quantitative studies. Leeming (2018) adds that evaluating theoretically generated hypotheses, including the idea that Y will occur if X occurs, is undertaken through the development of quantitative methodologies. For instance, in quantitative research, the theory under investigation is typically clarified following the introduction of the proposed hypotheses, although some theoretical investigations examine the results of interventions (Leeming, 2018). Nonetheless, Leeming (2018) contends that, in qualitative research, the role of theory is not always as clear-cut or consistent. Developing new theories is occasionally the goal of research; however, this must be achieved by ensuring that theories are derived from the evidence rather than from the researcher's own thoughts (Leeming, 2018). In other instances, the design of qualitative research is greatly influenced by previous theory or broader theoretical frameworks, which provide direction for data collection and/or analysis (Leeming, 2018). Rather than using findings to test theory, as in quantitative research, several theoretical notions may be applied to make sense of the findings (Leeming, 2018). A crucial objective of this study is to explore the link between skills acquisition and employment.

The following section examines the use of theory in qualitative research and explores how employability has been conceptualised through theories associated with employability skills acquisition including the human capital theory. It presents arguments for rejecting

theories as foundational for this study. It is important to note that although the human capital theory has been employed in previous research to examine the link between education, skill acquisition, employability and economic outcomes (see section 1.5.1 below), this thesis reviews it as a theoretical perspective rather than as the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

Before exploring human capital theory, it is crucial to acknowledge the foundational theories that laid the groundwork for its development and refinement. For example, classical economic theory, exemplified by the works of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, provided initial insights into the relationship between education, skills, and economic prosperity (Smith, 1776; Ricardo, 1817). This theory proposed that investments in education and training could enhance the supply of skilled labour, potentially leading to increased wages. However, classical economic theory did not fully recognise the pivotal role of education in improving individual productivity and driving overall economic growth. Similarly, neoclassical growth theory, advocated by economists such as Robert Solow, emphasised technological progress as a significant factor in economic development (Solow, 1956). While acknowledging the importance of education in enabling innovation, neoclassical growth theory primarily focused on physical capital accumulation, thereby overlooking the contribution of human capital. These early theories provide fundamental context for understanding the development of human capital theory. They are further examined and explored in the literature review (Chapter 3, Section 3.1), although they were rejected for the reasons advanced below.

1.5.1 Human Capital Theory

Before the advent of human capital theory (HCT), a series of earlier economic theories paved the way for understanding the dynamics between education, skills, and economic prosperity. Classical economic theory, rooted in the works of economists like Adam Smith and David Ricardo, posited that individual earnings were primarily determined by the interplay of supply and demand within the labour market (Smith, 1776; Ricardo, 1817). According to this perspective, investments in education and training were perceived as mechanisms for increasing the supply of skilled labour, potentially leading to higher wages. However, classical economic theory did not explicitly acknowledge the

contribution of education and training in enhancing individual productivity and promoting economic growth (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

In contrast, neoclassical growth theory, which gained prominence in the mid-20th century through the work of economists such as Robert Solow, emphasised the significance of technological progress and innovation in driving economic growth (Solow, 1956). While acknowledging the role of education in fostering technological advancement and innovation, neoclassical growth theory predominantly focused on physical capital accumulation as the principal driver of economic development (Jones, 2001). By prioritising the accumulation of physical capital, such as machinery and infrastructure, this theory tended to understate the role of human capital in promoting long-term economic growth and development (Lucas, 1988).

In addition to classical economic and neoclassical growth theories, the concept of human capital began to take shape through the seminal contributions of scholars such as Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker in the mid-20th century (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). Schultz introduced the term ‘human capital’, highlighting the critical role of investments in education, training, and health in enhancing individual productivity and earning potential (Schultz, 1961). However, Schultz's conceptualisation of human capital was criticised for its narrow focus on education and training, overlooking other important aspects such as health and social capital (Sen, 1999). Becker expanded on Schultz's framework, proposing a comprehensive model that integrated human capital into economic analysis and underscored the multifaceted nature of human capital investments (Becker, 1964). Crucially, human capital theory was developed in the early 1960s and popularised by Becker (1964) as a way of understanding why the level of physical resources available fails to fully explain organisational performance or national productivity (McCracken et al., 2017). Despite its advancements, Becker's human capital theory has faced scrutiny for its inherent individualism and its tendency to overlook structural barriers and inequalities that impede equitable access to education and training (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Thus, while human capital theory has significantly enhanced understanding of the relationship between education, skills, and economic outcomes, it remains subject to ongoing critique and refinement in contemporary economic discourse.

Thus, according to human capital theory, the educational goals and aspirations of students, employers, researchers, policymakers, governments, and other stakeholders are central to the debate surrounding employability skills. Human capital theory recognises that people are important resources for organisations and countries and that they add varying amounts of economic value depending on their knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes (Hooley, 2020). Importantly, the theory acknowledges that human capabilities can be developed through education and experience. Given its economic framing, human capital theory conceptualises human development as the formation of human capital through investment in education and training (Hooley, 2020).

The underlying principle of the theory is that people constitute a form of capital that contributes to economic growth and societal development (Ahmed et al., 2017). Education is perceived as a direct and purposeful investment in the labour market because it enhances human development (Ahmed et al., 2017). Consequently, the benefits derived from education and training are understood as investments that can generate economic and social returns. This perspective helps to explain the emphasis placed by nations and policymakers on educating and developing their workforce. Accordingly, ensuring that key stakeholders have a clear understanding of the capabilities required by students and employees to succeed is a crucial component of contemporary education and training.

1.5.2 Human Capital Theory and Secondary Education

This section discusses how the human capital theory fails the realism question because of methodological flaws such as the utilisation of a single theoretical lens (Baker, 2011). The complex transition between disparate forms of education and employment is imposed by human capital theory as a single linear route. It fails to comprehensively clarify how schooling increases productivity. This section thus argues against the human capital approach to schooling and skills acquisition. It is however recognised that theories offer in-depth conceptual understandings of phenomena that are difficult to define, such as how societies function, how organisations function, and why people interact in particular ways (Baker, 2011). Thus, theories offer researchers various lenses that allow them to see challenging questions and social issues, concentrating their efforts on various facets of

the data and offering a framework that allows them to perform their research. Although theoretical approaches have value in their own contexts, this section postulates the argument that a qualitative approach can be strengthened by a focused application of the conceptual framework.

Human capital theory is founded on the assumption that humans intentionally invest in the development of their own productive abilities, usually through schooling, training for employment, specialised certification, along with other forms of acquisition of skills, with an expectation that such investments will lead to higher economic returns in the long run (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011). As stated by Sultana (2014), higher levels of educational achievement increase a person's labour market worth, making them more appealing to employers and enhancing both salary prospects and possibilities for employment. Based on a human resource management standpoint, human capital is described as the combination of individuals' skills, knowledge and abilities that have demonstrable economic significance to organisations (Hooley 2020).

However, components of the human capital theory are the linkages between education, know-how, productivity, and the labour market that are supposed to exist in ideal economies (Sultana,2014). The core premise when employing the human capital theory is that skill underutilisation is driven by value creation instead of value realisation and that job seekers possess perfect knowledge and are extremely adaptable in the employment market (Wilson, 2012). Human capital theorists contend that there needs to be a closer link between education and employment because they assume that skills and information learned in school will be both indirectly and directly applicable to the workplace. They claim that a population with a greater level of education and competence is necessary given the economy's advancement of technology transformation.

Secondary schools undoubtedly have a primary role in making certain that pupils have the numeracy and literacy skills necessary to thrive in a technically advanced culture. Yet it is at best debatable to claim that secondary schools are responsible for the current problem because they do not offer the necessary skills to help pupils find employment. The prevailing ideology in the debate over the nature, aim, and content of secondary education in Cameroon has consisted of the idea that education is a key determinant of

labour economic development and productivity. From this viewpoint, it could be argued that financial support for education ought to result in some measurable increase in output. Criticism of the education system's inability to achieve this goal has escalated as Cameroon's economic situation has worsened and youth unemployment has grown (Essongo, 2017). Although it is contended that the education system cannot resolve the overall issues of unemployment, particularly among young people, educational institutions are urged to develop fundamental abilities and perspectives so that students become more aware of the implications of emerging innovations.

Tan (2014) claims that human capital theory provides a single, overarching paradigm for understanding social phenomena. Dow (2012) identifies a dualistic epistemological premise that influences the theory: the belief in a single, absolute truth about social events that has ultimate power over competing viewpoints. Dow (2012) argues that this presumption is essential to the utilisation of a limited theoretical lens, in which the researcher adheres to a predefined paradigm and a set of methodological tools. Within this approach, empirical observations are made in a variety of situations, each of which is assumed to be equally open to the basic assumptions of human capital theory. Nevertheless, the theory's scope restricts observation to only those instances that correspond to its predefined categories. As a result, the research approach focuses on identifying and confirming theoretical constructs within the framework, rather than investigating wider or alternative perspectives on the events under investigation.

Creswell and Poth (2018) contend that the epistemological premise of undertaking a qualitative investigation entail attempting to establish a personal connection with the subjects of the study. Qualitative researchers undertake their research in the places where participants live and work, as these settings are crucial for understanding what respondents are expressing. Researchers develop knowledge based on first-hand evidence to a greater degree depending on how long they remain in the field or engage with the participants of the study. An extended stay in the field is required for a good ethnography, as Wolcott (2009) asserts. The researcher attempts to minimise the distance or objective separateness between themselves and the participants in ethnography, as asserted by Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011).

Yet, this reality in human capital theory seems largely unrelated. The theory appears to interfere with the development of a social science of education and work at a real-world level of complexity because of its claim to universal applicability and the intellectual and policy dominance it has long held. Goodman (2014) asserts that the relationship between work and education is undoubtedly heterogeneous. Furthermore, their relationships are never fully resolved or amenable to resolution in practice, and if a final resolution is attempted in theory, something could be obscured. Additionally, there are specific contexts in which education and employment relationships exist. These differ by nation, setting of study, method of financing education, profession, place of work, and over time. Considering that schooling involves a variety of complex and interrelated phenomena and that no single theory can encompass all these phenomena while maintaining confined cohesiveness, it follows that different descriptions of these connections can each offer different perspectives that can be helpful.

It is essential to recognise that the inclusion of human capital theory (as discussed above) within this dissertation was, on one hand, motivated for its potential influence on education and labour market policy. Human capital theory suggested that devoting time and resources to education may enhance individual productivity and economic return (McKee-Ryan & Harvey, 2011; Sultana, 2014). Given the dominant discourse in Cameroon, which subsequently framed education as an important driver of labour market outcomes (Essongo, 2017), HCT was also a useful theoretical framework to interrogate the perceived link between secondary schooling and youth employability. On the other hand, HCT did not provide a suitable theoretical lens because of its epistemological assumptions and methodological rigidity. Specifically, using a single and linear model to theorise education-to-employment transitions overlooks the complexities and often non-linear everyday experiences of young people in Cameroon (Baker, 2011; Wilson, 2012). In addition to the issues outlined above, other general assumptions responded by HCT, such as the labour market in which everyone has complete knowledge of what each occupation entails and can be generalised across contexts, ignore socio-economic boundaries and contextual variations (Dow, 2012; Tan, 2014). The elements of HCT related to the skills acquisition-employability connection were retained as part of the

broader conceptual domain for this dissertation; however, it required critical engagement within a qualitative case study which emphasised context, lived experience, and multiple interpretations of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011).

1.5.3 Using Theory in Qualitative Research

To Saldaa and Omasta (2018), a theory constitutes a broad generalisation about social life which combines research findings into a coherent framework applicable across various contexts, populations, and potentially historical periods (p. 257). Anfara and Mertz (2015) identified three principal roles of theory within qualitative research: first, theory that underpins the research paradigm and methodology (Glesne, 2011); second, theory that emerges from the data collected; and third, theory that directs the research process:

Firstly, a valuable resource for dissecting the different components that comprise a theoretical framework is Glesne's (2011) presentation of philosophical frameworks, methodological considerations, and related theorists. Glesne indicated that it is up to researchers to determine their own positions on research ethics and politics. The main connection therefore made by this approach is between the researcher's epistemological stance and the idea of a theoretical framework.

Secondly, in relation to theory development resulting from data collection, Maxwell (2013) asserts that although qualitative research using any methodological approach may lead to theory formation, some qualitative methodological approaches, such as grounded theory, specifically require the creation of a theory from the results of the research. Saldaña (2015), however, questions the idea that the main form of theoretical thinking in qualitative study design ought to involve theory formation and encourages researchers to consider using the frameworks of well-known theorists to direct qualitative investigations. Regardless, some academics, including Lincoln and Guba (1994), have described theory as being intrinsic to the process of gaining knowledge, emphasising the impact of theoretical considerations on the formulation of observational claims (Flinders and Mills, 1993), and characterising facts as theory laden.

Furthermore, Maxwell (2013) argues that a conceptual framework functions as an operational theory related to the phenomenon being studied, directing different elements of the research design. Maxwell (2013) also notes that the terms theoretical framework or conceptual context for the research are occasionally used interchangeably with conceptual framework. Accordingly, using this theory helps investigators define objectives, formulate questions for the study, make methodological decisions, recognise probable validity threats, and show how the research is relevant (Maxwell, 2013). The use of theory will be enhanced by differentiating and clarifying various applications; this part provides a wide overview of several generalist qualitative research literature methodologies (see Chapter 4 – Methodology, sections 4.3 & 4.4). The various methods discussed in these sections provide background information for a more in-depth discussion and clarify certain issues and introduce fresh ideas for qualitative researchers.

1.5.4 Conceptual Framework

Maxwell (2013) characterises a conceptual framework as an initial theory concerning the phenomena being studied, which shapes multiple elements of the research design. He further notes that this construct may also be referred to as the theoretical framework or the contextual idea within the research setting (p. 39). According to the research of Maxwell (2013), the foundation of a conceptual framework does not necessarily derive from a pre-existing theory. Nevertheless, constructing both theoretical and conceptual frameworks remains an important part of the research process.

The following discussion explores both the differences and similarities between conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Adom et al., (2018) clarify that despite their similarities, the terms have diverse meanings when it comes to research inquiry principles and functions. Crawford (2020) compares the theoretical framework to a base for a building, offering crucial assistance for the research components and enhancing the reader's appreciation of the study's context. Theoretical frameworks establish the variables to be measured and the statistical relationships to be sought (Tamene, 2016). A conceptual framework provides an explanation regarding why the research is significant, whilst a theoretical framework represents the work the researcher does to apply a theory

in each study as well as what new insights these findings bring to the body of knowledge (Varpio et al., 2019).

Crawford (2020) argues that it is crucial to have a conceptual framework when there is no overarching theory used in the study. The manner wherein the data are gathered and evaluated, according to Ngulube (2018), hinges on the researcher's conceptual or theoretical perspective. This underscores that each phase of the research process is linked to the preceding one. Though they differ from one another, theoretical and conceptual frameworks raise the validity of a study endeavour (Adom, Hussein, and Agyem 2018). Accordingly, researchers ought to be clear about the frameworks they are using in their studies and be precise about how those frameworks connect to the specific research challenge. In research, it is critical to avoid the problem of utilising the concepts interchangeably.

The conceptual framework employed in this research provided essential guidance, ensuring that the study was conducted systematically and presented in a manner accessible to its audience. Rather than being a mere compilation of arbitrary concepts intended to address every conceivable issue (Maxwell, 2013), the framework was deliberately constructed. As stated by Marshall and Rossman (2011), a conceptual framework should illustrate the researcher’s approach to examining a specific case within the context of a broader phenomenon. By linking particular research questions to overarching theoretical models or salient policy concerns, the author clarifies how detailed investigation contributes to understanding wider challenges and potential relevance for the discipline.

Following the selection of the study topic, a literature review was undertaken to assess previous research in the area (Collins and Stockton, 2018). This process enabled the identification of key concepts within the existing scholarship, their interrelations, and potential gaps in knowledge. Moreover, the conceptual framework proved instrumental in delineating how the chosen methodologies respond to the research questions and in articulating the practical and theoretical significance of the topic under consideration. It facilitated building on prior knowledge as the research developed (Ravitch and Riggan, 2016).

Thus, the framework served as an instrument for establishing both an epistemological perspective and a pragmatic worldview in relation to the problem under investigation, benefiting both the researcher and the reader. Crucially, Ravitch and Riggan (2016) emphasise how a conceptual framework enables researchers to locate and defends their research in terms of its novelty and contribution to a field or set of fields of inquiry; potentially new contexts, questions, or perspective (see Chapter 3, Section 3.14).

1.6 Defining Employability and Employability Skills

Conceptions of employability and employability skills have been explored in the literature review in Chapter 3, Section 3.3. Employability is acknowledged across the literature as the conceptual basis for the discussion of skills and for this study. However, according to several academics, there is no universally recognised definition of the concept of employability (Suleman, 2017), as demonstrated by numerous studies employing disparate and conflicting interpretations (Fajaryati and Akhyar, 2020). Concurring with Lowden (2011), employability is perceived as a set of abilities, understandings, and personal qualities that increase students' chances of obtaining successful employment opportunities in their desired fields, which contributes to the economy, the labour market, society, and themselves (Yorke, 2004; Lowden et al., 2011).

However, an individual's employability is based on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they possess, the ways in which they use and demonstrate some of these skills to potential employers, and the circumstances in which they seek employment (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Employability and work-readiness are terms that are frequently used synonymously (Rowe and Zegwaard, 2017). Rowe and Zegwaard (2017) argue that work-readiness is a collection of factors required for securing initial employment, whereas employability is a collection of skills that are needed but are not necessarily sufficient for obtaining employment. According to Jackson (2013), it is necessary to establish whether students apply the skills, knowledge, and understanding gained during their education (Jackson, 2013; Paadi, 2014). Educational attainment, career management skills, and labour market awareness all contribute to employability (Jackson, 2013; Paadi, 2014).

From this study and the existing literature, it can be understood that the concept of employability is complex, as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.1. Employability is not only about possessing the required technical skills but also about being able to use these skills effectively in different working environments. It also involves the acquisition of skills that can be transferred across different situations, such as critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills, which are required for success in different employment opportunities (DeRosa and van de Walle, 2016). Employability also involves the ability to learn continuously and adapt to the ever-changing needs of the labour market (Hillage and Pollard, 1998).

This study takes a similar stance to Gibb (2002) and considers employability as being closely related to the alignment of educational curricula and labour market needs. Like Hager and Holland (2006), it recognises the significance of work-integrated learning and practical experiential learning as an important part of enabling student to attain workplace competencies that are relevant. As noted by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997), structured career guidance is necessary to enable students to make informed career decisions and to develop the skills and dispositions needed for employability.

However, the study dismisses overly narrow definitions of employability that focus solely on technical abilities or distinct job-related skills without considering broader personal attributes and socio-economic factors (Yorke & Knight, 2004). Additionally, it may challenge notions that place much emphasis on individual responsibility for employability, overlooking systemic issues such as unemployment rates, labour market trends, and structural disparities (Brown et al., 2003). Correspondingly, in respect of positionality, this study adopts a critical stance towards employability, conceding its importance while also recognising the complexities and challenges inherent in its attainment in the Cameroonian context. It affirms the influence of socio-cultural elements, educational policies, and economic conditions on individuals' employability prospects, advocating for a holistic or inclusive approach that addresses both individual and systemic barriers to employment.

1.7 Contribution to Knowledge

As elaborated in detail in Chapter 6, section 6.4, this research significantly contributes to the literature on secondary education and employability by addressing gaps in research, particularly within the Cameroonian context. The potential to make generalisations from research findings of this study has been discussed in chapter 6, section 6.5. Its main contributions however include the formulation of a conceptual framework explaining the disconnect and mismatch between secondary education and employability skills, expanding research on skills acquisition in Cameroon, addressing the issue of skills mismatch, and offering practical implications for policy and practice. The study thus advocates for a revision to policy frameworks and curricula for better local socio-economic context integration, developed mechanisms for curriculum implementation, and established sustainable partnerships between government, secondary education institutions, and industry stakeholders for skills development and employability outcomes.

1.8 Limitations

Chapter 6 section 6.3 discusses the limitations of this research. Greener (2018) emphasises the idea that acknowledging research limitations not only demonstrates rigour but also identifies future research opportunities. Accordingly, this research faced challenges, particularly in interviewing Ministry of Secondary Education personnel due to the sensitive nature of the topic, leading to some participants' refusal to participate despite confidentiality assurances. Time constraints, due to the researcher's part-time PhD and full-time job, limited reflection between interviews. Additionally, while bias could arise from the small sample size of the research, efforts were made to ensure transparency and the participants' views were considered reliable (Miles, 2017).

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

This section describes the rationale behind the chosen structure of chapters in the thesis. The structure of the thesis reflects a journey, mirroring the thought process and evolving understanding of the explored concepts. There is no distinct beginning point, nor a predetermined conclusion; the concepts are continuously revisited as perspectives

evolve. Nevertheless, the organisation of chapters and the presentation of the work are significant decisions. While the initial chapters of the thesis establish the study's context and explain the development of the study objectives, this chapter represents a guide for the subsequent chapters, providing readers insight into their interconnections and anticipated content. It constitutes a crucial initial step for the research, as it provides clarity regarding the focal points of the main body and contextualises the research within the broader educational system. It achieves this by discussing how the secondary school system equips students for employment as they transition from school.

Chapter 1 – Background and Overview

This opening chapter of the thesis introduces the context of the study and establishes the background to the research question. The chapter also serves as a navigational guide to the remainder of the thesis, allowing the reader to understand how the subsequent chapters are structured and what to expect from each of them. The chapter provides an important foundation for the study by outlining the key issues addressed in the research and situating the study within the broader education context. It examines the position of employability skills acquisition within secondary education and provides an overview on how these skills are understood and developed within the secondary school system.

This chapter identifies the factors that influenced the choice the of research methodology, and it provides readers with a deeper understanding of the researcher's positionality in the research process as well as its influence on the development of this chapter, and the presentation of the findings. This chapter also provides insight into the deliberate methodological decisions made throughout the research process. By outlining these considerations, this chapter equips readers with the required information to assess the significance of the research, and to critically assess the findings and their credibility.

Chapter 2 - Historical, Socio-economic, and Political Context of Cameroon

Chapter 2 briefly discusses the historical, political and socio-economic landscape of Cameroon. It provides an insight into the country's colonial past, highlighting its diversity and peculiar geographical position at the crossroads of different African regions. The chapter explores how colonial influences from European nations such as France and

Britain have shaped Cameroon's identity and system of education, resulting in two distinct subsystems. Additionally, it provides an overview of the structural framework of education ministries in Cameroon; examines the secondary school curricula introduced in Cameroon since the 2014/2015 academic year, emphasising the Competency-Based Approach and alignment with international education goals. The curricula are categorised into five areas of learning, focusing on developing subject-specific competencies and cross-disciplinary skills to prepare students for further education or entry into the field of work. Through this exploration, Chapter 2 sheds light on the complex contextual factors defining Cameroon's educational landscape.

Chapter 3 - Literature Review

Chapter 3 places the research within the existing body of academic literature, starting with the crucial need for employability skills by young people, moving through previous government initiatives at enhancing the acquisition of employability skills and ending with contemporary literature linking skills acquisition and curriculum development. The breadth of literature examining employability is noteworthy as it demonstrates how an issue once regarded to be of ancillary interest, has developed into a significant focus of policy. The chapter demonstrates how young people need to adapt rapidly to the demands of the workplace, particularly in response to the transformations in the nature and range of occupations resulting from technological advancements and the expansion of the global labour market. As a result, governments worldwide are developing policies and educational strategies to equip young people with the knowledge and skills required to respond to these changing demands. The chapter also explores and defines key concepts relevant to the subject.

Chapter 4 – Research Methodology

Following the review of literature, the subsequent chapter is an account of the study's methodology (Chapter 4). The positioning of the methodology chapter reflects the progression of the research processes and the trajectory of the research journey. It serves as the pivotal point at which the transition was made from formulating a research agenda to making crucial decisions relating to the execution of the research. It was therefore

imperative that methodological considerations be addressed after establishing the important context. Furthermore, positioning this chapter immediately before the examination of the research findings facilitates a direct link between the research methods employed and the resulting outcomes.

Chapter 4 outlines and justifies the methodological choices underpinning the study including the selection of research methods and instruments used to address the research questions. Given the exploratory nature of the research and its engagement with participants, the chapter also examines the ethical considerations that arose during the research process and the measures taken to address them.

Chapter 5 - Findings of Thematic Analysis of the Interview and Questionnaire Data

Given the interrelationship between the themes and their significance to the overall thesis, a deliberate decision was made to present the findings, along with subsequent discussion, within a single chapter. Separating the themes into distinct sections was considered likely to disrupt the links between them and result in an artificial fragmentation of the findings. Presenting the findings and discussion within a unified chapter thus facilitates coherence and enables meaningful connections to be established across the thematic headings.

Chapter 5 presents a range of views, incorporating verbatim quotations from research participants as well as the researcher's interpretation and commentary. This approach was deliberately adopted because participants' own words provide direct and authentic representations of their experiences and perspectives. Although their responses could have been paraphrased, retaining their original expressions was considered more appropriate for conveying the richness and meaning of their accounts.

The chapter presents a critical discussion of the study's findings, drawing inferences from the responses to the research questions and considering their implications for future research. It situates the results within the context of the study, revisiting the aims, objectives, and guiding questions to maintain alignment between the research design and outcomes. The discussion interprets the themes derived from the data analysis and

reflects on the conclusions they suggest, thereby clarifying the key issues raised throughout the research.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion and recommendations

Chapter 6 reflects on the main themes and findings presented in Chapter 5 and serves as the concluding chapter of the thesis. It revisits the overarching research question and considers the implications of the findings for future research and practice. The chapter evaluates the broader impact of the research, including its influence on the researcher, research participants, and the wider community. It also considers a reform agenda for secondary school curriculum development, informed by both optimism and ambition for future change. Finally, the chapter synthesises the study's contribution to knowledge by bringing together the research objectives, empirical data, relevant literature, and conclusions drawn from the study.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter's objectives were to provide the reader with sufficient information to develop an understanding of the context of the study. The chapter discusses how the research questions were conceived and developed provides an overview of the main decisions made regarding the structure the thesis including the justifications for these decisions. As the introductory chapter, it serves as a guide to the thesis by providing a concise overview of the content and purpose of each subsequent chapter. Accordingly, it is intentionally brief and does not attempt to provide comprehensive details of the study Rather, it offers a focused introduction to the study and establishes the context within which subsequent chapters should be understood.

The study adopts a qualitative approach that places participants' perspectives and experiences at the centre of the study. It allows researchers to learn about the experiences of others and to understand the world from their point of view. Accordingly, the study has centred on the participants' in-depth, individualised accounts, to bring their opinions and first-hand knowledge to the forefront, perspectives that may not be captured as fully by other methodological approaches (Punch, 2013). In particular, the

study provides secondary school teachers, secondary school students, pedagogic inspectors an opportunity to express their view and experiences of the role of the secondary school system in preparing school leaver for employment.

Chapter 2. Historical, Socio-economic, and Political Context of Cameroon

2.1 Historical Context

A knowledge of Cameroonian history is crucial for understanding the educational subsystems that have evolved and are currently in existence. Cameroon, as reported by the World Bank (2021), is characterised as a lower-middle-income nation, with a population exceeding 27.2 million people in 2021. It is situated in the Sub-Saharan region of Africa and stands out for its remarkable diversity. According to Mala (2017), this diversity derives from its unique geographical location at the crossroads of West Africa, Southern Africa, East Africa, and North Africa. This has earned Cameroon the nickname "Africa in miniature", highlighting its multifaceted nature, comprising diversity in its people, climate, and biogeography. Like many other Sub-Saharan African countries, Cameroon has a colonial history, having been under the rule of European nations, including France and Britain (Mala, 2017).



Figure 2.1: Map of Cameroon Showing the 10 Administrative Regions. Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-Cameroon-Showing-the-10-Administrative-Regions-Source-Author-adapted-from_fig1_353414194

Throughout the history of Cameroon, a series of involvements by European nations has played a pivotal role in shaping the country's heterogeneity. In the 14th century, the country had its initial encounters with Europeans. These Europeans were predominantly missionaries and traders from Portugal, who established coastal bases in the region (Banfegha, 2014). Cameroon's original name was derived from the Portuguese term "Rio dos Cameroes", which translates to "river of prawns" (Banfegha, 2014). Subsequently, under British rule (1916–1961), the region was renamed the Cameroons. Following the German occupation of Cameroon (1884–1918), its name was changed to Kamerun, and the French (1918–1960) later adapted it as "Cameroun" after displacing the Germans. According to Banfegha (2014), this historical narrative highlights the evolution of the region's nomenclature under the influence of different colonial powers.

Cameroon's demographic indicators have displayed consistent growth over time. For example, in 2011, the country's population stood at 20 million (Ministere de l'Economie, 2013-2020), with an estimated annual growth rate of 2.1% for the period 2010-2020, equivalent to an annual population increase of nearly 420,000. Notably, this population expansion is most noticeable in the younger age groups. Data reveals that 50% of Cameroon's population falls within the category of youth (Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development, MINEPAT, 2013). These demographic trends constitute significant implications, particularly in terms of the demand for higher education and the response of public authorities to formulate effective education policies with suitable and successful curricular orientations, as suggested by the demographic statistics (Banfegha, 2014).

Cameroon's educational system, unsurprisingly, has its roots in the historical influence of both English and French colonial legacies. The system is characterised by two subsystems, each accommodating different teaching orders and languages (Mala, 2017). Mala (2017) further indicates that these two subsystems encompass a range of educational philosophies, including both public and private schools. Beyond this diversity, the central authority of the state exerts control over the direction of Cameroon's education system through the enactment of laws and regulations governing textbooks and curricula. Consequently, the Ministry of National Education (MNE) assumes responsibility for the design and development of the school curriculum. Crucially, this process entails close

collaboration with curriculum experts and pedagogic inspectors based at the Ministry of Secondary Education in Yaoundé, Cameroon's political capital (Mala, 2017).

Apple (2013) suggests that changes to a nation's educational curriculum may occur due to multiple factors, influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external dynamics. He further argues that factors such as technological advancements, cultural shifts, ideological considerations, political influences, and economic considerations regarding the role of education in society often serve as catalysts for educational and curriculum enhancements. This implies that these factors lay the groundwork for the implementation of reforms and provide a foundation for the reform process. Thus, the underlying assumption is that planned curriculum reform can positively influence the educational system in which it is implemented (Apple, 2013). Alternatively stated, curriculum reform constitutes a valuable tool for addressing deficiencies and inefficiencies in content, instructional methods, and assessment techniques to ensure the delivery of high-quality education. This was the primary objective of Cameroon's 1998 Education Orientation Law. However, evidence presented by Mala (2017) indicates disparities between the official materials designed to reshape the curriculum and the actual situation in the field.

Banfegha (2014), highlighting key events in Cameroon's history, notes that French-speaking Cameroon declared its independence from the United Nations Trusteeship, which was under French administration, on 1 January 1960, adopting the name La République du Cameroun. In October 1961, British Cameroon gained independence from the United Nations Trusteeship under British supervision and became known as West Cameroon, marking the formation of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Following independence, North Cameroon, the former British colony, was annexed by Nigeria. The French-speaking regions of Southern Cameroon and the English-speaking Southwestern Highlands region subsequently pursued distinct development paths. A decade later, on 20 May 1972, the Federal Republic of Cameroon underwent a name change, becoming the United Republic of Cameroon. In 1984, the United Republic of Cameroon further changed its name to the Republic of Cameroon.

Ultimately, Fonkoua et al. (2007) maintain that an analysis of Cameroon's history underscores the substantial influence of external factors on the country. This influence is

evident in the mandates and trusteeship territories established by the League of Nations and the United Nations Organisation in the former French and British Cameroons. These developments contributed to Cameroon's emergence as the first bilingual country in Black Africa. As indicated in the map in Figure 2.0, Cameroon is divided into ten administrative regions, comprising two Anglophone regions in the Northwest and Southwest and eight Francophone regions in the Far North, North, Adamawa, Centre, Littoral, Western, Eastern, and Southern regions. These regions are overseen by appointed governors, alongside divisional and sub-divisional authorities, with executive powers vested in the President of the Republic. The primary determinant of Cameroon's bicultural identity is its colonial legacy (Banfegha, 2014). According to Banfegha (2014), across many African nations, including Cameroon, formal education is provided at multiple developmental stages, encompassing pre-primary, primary, secondary, and university levels.

In countries such as Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria, where a single official language prevails, a uniform educational system exists (Banfegha, 2014). Conversely, bilingual countries such as Cameroon have two educational subsystems, namely the French and English subsystems. As noted by Tangwa (2011), the expectation is that these two subsystems coexist while maintaining their respective principles. The coordination of curricula across schools within these two subsystems represents a key educational objective of the nation. Nonetheless, numerous challenges have influenced the full realisation of this objective as a policy (Tangwa, 2011).

2.2 Socio-economic and Political Context

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC, 2019) reports that Cameroon, classified as a lower-middle-income country, faces a myriad of structural, economic, and governance challenges. While the country has historically confronted issues of poverty and inequality, it has experienced significant humanitarian crises in recent years (NRC, 2019). Externally driven crises, including an influx of refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) and attacks by armed groups, notably Boko Haram from Nigeria, have resulted in large-scale displacement (OCHA, 2019). For example, Cameroon has experienced a domestic crisis in the Northwest and Southwest regions since 2017, resulting from political protests arising

from perceived marginalisation of the Anglophone population (NRC, 2019). Cameroon's ethnic diversity, comprising 250 groups, as noted by NRC (2019), is accompanied by linguistic divisions, particularly between English and French speakers. The Anglophone regions have experienced increased political tensions due to perceived neglect of their education and legal systems. NRC (2019) highlights that the repression of these protests escalated into widespread civil conflict, characterised by human rights abuses, movement restrictions, and the destruction of vital infrastructure, thereby aggravating an already economically productive region.

The established political and economic system has not responded effectively to growing inequalities, linguistic fragmentation, and regional disparities (NRC, 2019). Progress in poverty reduction has not been consistent or evenly distributed, with economic growth concentrated in central regions and urban areas. As a result, rural communities have lagged behind, while disparities in wealth and education have increased (IMF, 2018a). These economic disparities directly translate into unequal access to educational opportunities and poor-quality educational experiences. Regions experiencing extreme poverty, particularly rural and linguistically marginalised regions, often lack trained teachers, adequate physical school infrastructure, and learning resources, leaving schools underfunded and underprepared to support their students. Economic uncertainty also affects the condition of schools and the availability of essential resources. Furthermore, the precarity of the poor, many of whom reside in environmentally fragile regions subject to climate-related risks, restricts children's ability to attend and complete schooling, as households must prioritise survival over educational planning.

As frustration with the state intensifies, particularly due to centralised power and patronage systems, expressions of dissent manifest through political protests and opposition to the government, as observed in recent elections (NRC, 2019). These tensions, compounded by the country's position within an unstable region affected by the crises in the Lake Chad region and the Central African Republic (CAR), disrupt economic activity and create insecurity that directly affects education. Armed conflict and displacement often lead to school closures, teacher shortages, and the diversion of public spending from education to security, thereby undermining both local and national development. In such a context, education is not only a casualty of instability but also a

potential long-term solution, provided that equitable access and quality can be ensured across all regions.

2.3 Educational context of Cameroon

As discussed in Section 2.1 of this chapter, Cameroon, formerly a British and French trustee colony, inherited its current secondary education structure from these nations. In Cameroon, secondary education covers the ages of 11 to 16, similar to the UK system. Although secondary education is not compulsory, primary education is. Following six years of primary schooling, education remains mandatory until the age of 14, which includes the early years of secondary education. However, secondary education in general, technical, commercial, and vocational fields is neither free nor compulsory (Scholaro Database, 2023). The costs associated with secondary education, particularly in religious and private institutions, are prohibitively high for many families. Students can continue their secondary education beyond the age of 16, progressing to sixth form, comprising lower and upper sixth, before proceeding to university (Mekolle and Kinyuy, 2025). At the secondary level, Cameroonian students are assessed nationally through the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examinations, administered by the GCE Examination Board at the end of their fifth year (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below). Additionally, students undertake termly examinations throughout their secondary education, which determine their progression to the next class.

Cameroon's bilingual context has led to the development of two distinct educational sub-systems, creating a unique situation characterised by both advantages and challenges (Ministry of Education, 2008). These sub-systems consist of the French (Francophone) Cameroon education system, which follows the French model, and the English (Anglophone) Cameroon education system, modelled after the British system. Both operate under a centralised framework divided into four Ministries of Education: Basic Education, Secondary Education, Employment and Vocational Training, and Higher Education (UNESCO, 2011). While they share some common features, notable differences exist in areas such as school culture, scheduling, curricula, pedagogical approaches, student assessment, and certification processes.

In the Francophone subsystem, French is the language of instruction, while English is mandated as a compulsory subject throughout secondary education. Conversely, the Anglophone subsystem uses English as the medium of instruction and requires students to study French during secondary schooling (Kouega, 2011). Although both subsystems are governed jointly, they differ in terms of curriculum design, evaluation strategies, teacher training, and methods of student assessment.

Regarding secondary education, both subsystems offer a maximum of seven years divided into two cycles, although their organisation differs markedly. Anglophone students spend five years in junior secondary education (Forms 1 to 5), followed by two years in senior secondary education (Lower and Upper Sixth). Francophone students, on the other hand, complete a four-year first cycle before progressing to a three-year senior secondary phase. An additional point of divergence concerns specialisation. Anglophone students may choose to specialise in either science or arts as early as their third year (Form 3), typically undertaking up to eleven subjects at Ordinary Level and a minimum of three at Advanced Level. Francophone students, by contrast, are required to study all subjects without specialisation during the corresponding stages.

Assessment in the Francophone system involves the Brevet d'études du Premier cycle (BEPC), which is awarded based on the average performance across all subjects (Nuffic, 2011). Successful candidates then proceed to the Baccalauréat (BACC), which is completed after three additional years and is considered equivalent to the General Certificate of Education A-level (Kouega, 2011; Nuffic, 2011). Tables 2.1 and 2.2 provide detailed overviews of the primary and secondary educational subsystems.

Table 2.1: Nature of primary education in Cameroon (Source: Adapted from MINEDUC (2008) and Ministry of basic education 2011)

Francophone system			Anglophone system		
Year	**Class**	**Certificate**	**Year**	**Class**	**Certificate**
1	**SIL**		**1**	**Class 1**	
2	**CP**		**2**	**Class 2**	
3	**CE1**		**3**	**Class 3**	
4	**CE2**		**4**	**Class 4**	
5	**CM1**		**5**	**Class 5**	
6	**CM2**	**CEP**	**6**	**Class 6**	**FSLC**

Table 2.1 shows that the educational subsystems in Cameroon each comprise six years of primary education, culminating in the award of the CEP in the Francophone system or the FSLC (First School Leaving Certificate) in the Anglophone system. Similarly, as indicated in Table 2.2, secondary education in both systems extends over a period of seven years.

Table 2.2: Nature of secondary education in Cameroon (adapted from the Ministry of Education 2008).

Francophone system			Anglophone system		
Year	**Class**	**Certificate**	**Year**	**Class**	**Certificate**
1	Sixième		1	Form 1	
2	Cinquième		2	Form 2	
3	Troisième		3	Form 3	
4	Quatrième	BEPC	4	Form 4	
5	Seconde		5	Form 5	G.C.E O/L
6	Première	Probatoire	6	Lower Sixth	
7	Terminale	Baccalauréat	7	Upper Sixth	G.C.E A/L

Table 2.2 presents the distinctions within the Francophone sub-system, which includes three certifications: the BEPC, corresponding to the completion of the first cycle; the Probatoire, marking the end of the Première Class; and the Baccalauréat, indicating the conclusion of the second cycle. By comparison, the Anglophone sub-system comprises two certificate examinations: the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level,

concluding the first cycle, and the GCE Advanced Level, marking the end of the second cycle.

Although the Cameroonian education system is officially bilingual, its practical implementation does not fully align with this characterisation. One reason for this disparity is that students tend to develop competence primarily in the language associated with their respective instructional system, reflecting the dominant colonial language of the region. Even within institutions designated as bilingual, where both systems operate on the same campus, there is often an absence of coordinated efforts or established protocols to implement a genuinely integrated pedagogical approach that embraces both systems. This shortfall hinders the development of students who are proficient in both languages. The Anglophone system predominates in the Southwest and Northwest regions, corresponding to the former British colonial areas, while the Francophone system operates across the other eight regions of Cameroon.

2.4 Education Ministries in Cameroon: A Structural Outline

Ngajie and Ngo (2016) describe the governance of education in Cameroon as distributed across five ministries, each responsible for specific sections of the education system. The Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB) oversees nursery and primary education, as well as teacher training programmes. Responsibility for general and technical secondary education is assigned to the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC). Higher education, comprising both university-level and professional training, is administered by the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP). Additionally, the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFP) focuses on providing vocational training to school leavers to facilitate their integration into social and professional environments. Lastly, the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education (MINSEP) oversees youth sports activities.

Of the ministries outlined above, the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) is responsible for the design, implementation, and evaluation of government policy in the areas of general secondary education, technical secondary education, and teacher training. These ministries operate within the framework of Cameroon's education law. However, a recent assessment by the Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Regional

Development (2013) highlighted concerns regarding the multiplicity of ministries, noting that this affects seamless operations and complicates coordination within the education sector. The report further emphasised the challenges associated with accessing sectoral statistics due to the fragmented nature of the sector, with information systems organised by subsector, making the regulation of necessary data flows challenging.

In response to these challenges, there is a growing consensus on the need for structural reforms. Recent discussions at both regional and national levels have suggested the creation of a centralised Ministry of National Education, supported by subordinate departments operating at regional and divisional levels. This proposed consolidation aims to enhance coordination, streamline operations, and facilitate more efficient statistical data management within the education sector.

2.5 Overview of the Curricula for Secondary Schools

This section attempts to delineate the secondary school curricula introduced in Cameroon during the 2014/2015 academic year, replacing the syllabuses that had existed over the preceding three decades. Alemnge (2021) argues that the modern curriculum was developed to reflect learning realities within the country and globally, with consideration given to knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Moreover, with the integration of the Competency-Based Approach into teaching methodologies, Alemnge (2021) argues that the curriculum is aligned with the education vision set out in the Education for All (EFA) goals (Humanium, 1990), the framework of action established by the Dakar Framework (UNESCO, 2000), and the Sustainable Development Goals, which advocate inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, the curriculum is aligned with national education policy and the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) (MINEPAT, 2010), which is consistent with the country's Vision 2035.

The curriculum is divided into five major areas of learning, with different areas of emphasis, and focuses on the development and implementation of teaching and learning activities. This strategic framework aims to enable students to develop not only subject-specific competencies but also interdisciplinary skills (Alemnge, 2021). The roles of

learners, teachers, parents, and the community are also articulated to facilitate implementation.

In the scholarly work of Luke et al. (2012), a syllabus is construed as both a map and a comprehensive descriptive exposition of the curriculum. Accordingly, it serves as a methodically organised synopsis or outline of the content to be imparted and acquired throughout students' educational journey. The document functions as an overarching framework outlining the expected knowledge, skills, competencies, and performances, accompanied by specific details relating to the standards expected for each aspect (Alemnge, 2021). Crucially, the academic outcomes achieved by students throughout a term or academic year, regardless of the subject, result from the interplay between individual student initiative, inherent abilities, instructional methodologies employed by teachers, and the intrinsic nature of the subject matter (Alemnge, 2021). Consequently, the design and content of a subject syllabus are vital to pedagogical delivery across all disciplines.

As outlined by Alemnge (2021), during the initial phase of Secondary General Education in Cameroon, the syllabi consist of a two-tier structure comprising Level 1 (Forms 1 and 2, corresponding to Years 7 and 8 in the UK secondary school structure) and Level 2 (Forms 3, 4, and 5, corresponding to Years 9, 10, and 11 in the UK secondary school structure). The syllabi are systematically organised around five distinct areas of learning. Each area comprises various interconnected disciplines, represented by a specified weekly work schedule and the anticipated learning outcomes upon completion of each level. Students are not only expected to acquire knowledge, competencies, and attitudes within each subject and area of learning but are also expected to develop additional proficiencies referred to as cross-curricular competencies (Alemnge, 2021). These supplementary skills extend across intellectual, methodological, social, and personal domains of learning. The curriculum for the initial phase of Secondary General Education in the Anglophone region is structured into five learning domains, with each domain encompassing a specified number of disciplines, as illustrated in Table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3: The 5 areas of learning in the secondary school syllabi

Areas of learning	Disciplines
1- Languages and Literature	French English Living Languages II Ancient Languages -Literature(in English and in French)
2- Science and Technology	Mathematics The Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, Technology, Life and Earth Sciences) Computer Science
3- Social Sciences/Humanities	History Geography Citizenship Education
4- Personal Development	Sports and Physical Education Manual Labour
5- Arts and National Cultures	National Languages National Cultures Arts

The first phase or cycle of secondary general education serves as an educational gateway for students transitioning from primary schools, typically ranging in age from ten to fourteen. The overarching objectives of this educational tier extend beyond the cultivation of intellectual, civic, and moral aptitudes in these adolescents. It aims to instil competences and foundational knowledge that will equip them for continued education in the subsequent cycle or facilitate a seamless transition into the professional sphere following vocational training.

Based on the outlined syllabi, students are expected, by the end of the first stage of secondary schooling, to effectively utilise the skills they have acquired to address

problems in various life contexts (Ministry of Secondary Education- MINSEC, 2014). These situations are systematically illustrated in the accompanying table, highlighting the practical application of knowledge and skills gained throughout their educational journey.

Table 2.4: Example of competences to solve problems through family of situations relating to domains of life.

N°	Domains/Areas of life	Families of situations to be treated in the 1st cycle
1	Family and social life	• Taking part in family activities • Maintaining good professional relationships (Social integration)
2	Economic life	- Finding ways to earn income - Learning about the job market, different social roles, and various professions - Building self-confidence, recognising personal talents and potential, and setting goals (Developing healthy eating habits)
3	Environment, health and well being	- Protecting the environment - Seeking a healthy way of life (Choosing and following healthy habits)
4	Citizenship	• Understanding the rules and norms that guide life in Cameroonian society (Exploring the cultural values and customs of Cameroonian people)
5	Media and Communications	Exploring the world of media (Exploring Information and Communication Technologies)

To achieve these specific objectives, learners are required to demonstrate their capacity to effectively apply relevant resources encompassing knowledge, skills, and attitudes across various disciplines and structured learning areas outlined in the syllabi (MINSEC, 2014). For example, within the Languages and Literature learning area, the following table provides an overview of the objectives, demonstrating the broad scope of the subjects. In

addition, the detailed syllabus for each subject identifies the competencies to be developed at different levels, as well as those expected by the end of the first cycle of learning.

Table 2.5 Example of overview of objectives for Languages and Literature

Areas of Learning	Disciplines	Expected outcomes at the end of the 1st cycles
-Languages and Literature	**Living languages:** English, French , German, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Etc.	**French and English , L1** Receptive skills: reading and listening Engage independently with diverse text types relevant to the life domains outlined in the syllabus; Listen and understand texts related to the same areas of life. Productive skills: speaking and writing Create different kinds of texts of moderate length that relate to these areas of life. Use language tools properly to both produce and understand texts appropriate for this level.
	English to Francophone learners French to Anglophone learners	Communicate clearly and smoothly using all four basic language skills; Apply the knowledge gained in class to real-life situations outside the classroom; Handle and manage problem-solving situations effectively.
		Living languages II Receptive skills: reading and listening Read and understand straightforward texts about social life, citizenship, the environment, wellbeing and health, media, and similar topics. Listen carefully to oral information to participate simply in conversations related to different areas of life. Productive skills: speaking and writing Sing, recite, act out scenes, and answer questions aloud

Areas of Learning	Disciplines	Expected outcomes at the end of the 1st cycles
		about various everyday topics covered in the syllabus. Write brief texts on familiar subjects.
	Ancient languages: Latin, Greek **National languages** **Literature** Cameroon Literature; French Literature; Francophone Literature; Other literatures	Gain a broad understanding by studying ancient languages and cultures and learn about the roots of the French language to improve your linguistic skills. Carry out basic translation tasks.

Students are required to harness resources across various disciplines and areas of learning. Therefore, the implementation of these syllabi is crucial not in isolation, but through the integration of interconnected subjects. This equally applies to both subject-specific and cross-curricular competences, emphasising that their development should take place through the instructional activities encompassed by different subjects. The development of both subject-specific and cross-curricular competences extends across the entire educational spectrum, serving as a catalyst for shaping an educational project and facilitating the integration of extracurricular activities (MINSEC, 2014). Ultimately, upon completion of the first cycle, these syllabi aim to empower students to achieve self-reliance, develop sustained learning abilities, contribute actively to sustainable development, and become responsible citizens (Alemnge, 2021).

2.6 Impact of the Historical Nature of Secondary Education on Curriculum Design and Delivery in Cameroon

As already discussed in sections 2.1 and 2.3 (Chapter 2), the evolution of secondary education in Cameroon is closely linked to its colonial past, starting with German rule and later influenced by French and British administrations, each leaving its mark on educational frameworks and philosophies. During the German era, primary schools run by missionaries focused on cultural integration and moral education (Mala, 2017). After Germany's defeat in World War I, the British and French mandates brought in different educational approaches. The British colonial policy emphasised adapting to local needs, encouraging vocational training and the use of local languages in rural communities. On the other hand, the French system established a centralised, academically rigorous model aimed at assimilating students into French culture through a structured, teacher-led approach (Yaro, 2020; Ndille, 2018). Alemnge (2021) notes that these differing legacies have persisted even after independence, making it a politically and culturally complex task to harmonise the educational systems. While the formal merging of Anglophone and Francophone systems in 1976 was a step towards national unity, Alemnge (2021) argues that meaningful integration in teaching methods has been limited. Consequently, Cameroon's dual colonial background continues to influence how curricula are designed and delivered, leading to both persistent structural patterns and ongoing educational challenges.

It is important to recognise that historical factors continue to influence contemporary curriculum development, contributing to both complexities and potential advantages. Reform efforts, such as the 1998 Orientation Law and the shift to competency-based education in 2012, were aimed to addressing the issues of rote learning and disjointed systems by highlighting local cultures and skills-based learning (Mala, 2025; Alemnge, 2021). However, the implementation of these reforms varies by region: the Francophone system often adopts centralised, lecture-oriented approaches, while the Anglophone system tends to adopt more diverse and participatory methods. Both systems, nonetheless, face challenges in translating policy into practice (Mekolle & Kinyuy, 2025). Consequently, these historical legacies are evident in the way learners and educators

engage with and at times resit traditional paradigms (Galindo-Silva & Tchuente, 2023). For example, in Anglophone regions, ongoing conflicts and marginalisation have disrupted educational delivery, further deepening the gaps in access to quality education and the development of human capital (Galindo-Silva & Tchuente, 2023). As a result, understanding curriculum design in Cameroon goes beyond just a technical or bureaucratic exercise; it also embodies the country's historical wounds and aspirations for the future. However, to develop an effective curriculum, it can be asserted that an understanding of both the colonial origins of educational systems and the real-life experiences of various communities is important, ensuring that the education system not only meets institutional objectives but also truly empowers the students it serves.

2.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter Two's historical, socio-economic, and political context demonstrates a strong relationship between the Cameroonian educational system and concerns about unemployment. Admittedly, the English and French colonial legacies have resulted in two parallel English and French educational subsystems, with differences in curricula, educational philosophies, and languages. It can be argued that this educational fragmentation poses challenges to national cohesion and the development of a common approach to skills development. Various structural issues, including inequalities in economic development, regional disparities, and a lack of coordination between education ministries, illustrate how the education system may struggle to prepare students with relevant skills. As a consequence of this educational fragmentation, students may leave school under-skilled and under-qualified because their qualifications have limited alignment with labour market realities. This disconnection between educational outcomes and employment opportunities has contributed to unemployment and underemployment among many Cameroonian youths. These realities underscore the historical, socio-economic, and political challenges associated with the misalignment between educational outputs and employment opportunities. Consequently, it is unsurprising that school leavers may struggle to find work despite having attained formal education, particularly in the context of limited economic diversification. These structural issues reinforce the short- and long-term need for an education system that not only

develops young people's intellectual capacities but also aligns education with labour market needs to support sustainable employment.

Cameroon, classified as a lower-middle-income nation, had a population exceeding 27.2 million in 2021. Located in the Sub-Saharan region of Africa, Cameroon's diversity has earned it the moniker "Africa in miniature". Its colonial history, shaped by European nations such as France and Britain, has played a pivotal role in shaping the country's identity. This chapter explores Cameroon's demographic trends, with particular emphasis on their implications for education policies. The educational system reflects the influence of both English and French colonial legacies, resulting in two subsystems characterised by diverse teaching orders, languages, and educational philosophies. The socio-economic and political context of Cameroon reveals several challenges, including structural issues, economic disparities, linguistic divisions, and regional inequalities. The chapter also outlines the structural framework of the education ministries in Cameroon and highlights calls for reforms to enhance coordination and efficiency within the sector.

This chapter also presented an overview of the secondary school curricula implemented in Cameroon since the 2014/2015 academic year, replacing previous syllabuses. The current curricula, designed to align with domestic and international learning realities, incorporate the Competency-Based Approach and adhere to the Education for All goals, Sustainable Development objectives, and national policies. Categorised into five areas of learning, the curricula emphasise the development of subject-specific competencies and interdisciplinary skills, fostering a holistic educational experience. The syllabi for the first cycle of secondary education outline dual-tier structures, focusing on diverse disciplines and cross-curricular competences. The overarching objectives include developing intellectual, civic, and moral aptitudes, preparing students for further education or entry into the professional sphere. The syllabi emphasise practical application of knowledge and skills across various life domains, promoting self-reliance, sustained learning, and responsible citizenship upon completion of the first cycle. The interconnected nature of subject-specific and cross-curricular competences underscores the integral role of instructional activities in shaping an inclusive educational project.

Chapter 3. Literature Review

3.0 Introduction

Through this chapter, a critical discussion of the main bodies of literature underpinning this study is presented, examining the effectiveness of the secondary school system in Cameroon in preparing school leavers for work. The literature review is structured around three core areas related to the research questions: employability, vocational education, and curriculum development, particularly in the context of Cameroon. These bodies of literature provide the basis for examining how students are prepared for the transition from education to work.

The first area, employability, is critically examined with a focus on the evolution of the term and the skills that are now considered essential for transitioning from education to work. There seems to be a consensus among researchers that qualifications alone do not prepare young people for the current labour market. There is an emerging focus on important higher-order cognitive skills, such as critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving, and personal and social attributes, such as motivation, flexibility, teamwork and communication (Gardner, 1999; Goleman, 2000; Pink, 2005; Jerald, 2009; Zhao, 2009; Robinson, 2011; Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023; Ismeirita et al., 2025). Employers seek individuals who demonstrate not only competence in subject knowledge but also confidence, responsibility and work-ready dispositions (Hansen, 2010; Nayan, 2010).

Despite this shift, there is concern within the literature that schools are still predominantly focused on academic achievement and exam success, perhaps at the expense of general skill development. For example, a report by Career Colleges Trust (2015) indicates that most students in the UK perceive their schools as focusing on grades rather than developing them for careers. These problems resonate more broadly with complaints about formal education systems in high-income and low-income contexts regarding their unresponsiveness to the demands of the job market (Wright & Lee, 2014; Robinson, 2011).

The second area, vocational education, is therefore examined as a pathway for enhancing employability, especially within low- and middle-income countries. Vocational education is examined through its historical and policy contexts and as a pedagogical strategy aimed at narrowing the divide between educational institutions and the workforce. Attention is directed towards its role within the Cameroonian educational framework, alongside an analysis of its conceptualisation and implementation in practical terms.

The third area, curriculum development, is examined as a dynamic and contested concept that reflects broader societal, political, and economic values. The review considers several models of curriculum design, including those focused on knowledge transmission, skills development, and learner-centred approaches. These models are examined in relation to how curriculum is shaped and implemented in different contexts, including Cameroon. Specific emphasis is placed on how employability is (or is not) embedded in national curricula, and how curriculum development intersects with issues of youth unemployment and educational relevance.

This chapter draws on existing research in employability, vocational education, and curriculum development to establish a critical basis for evaluating how the secondary school system in Cameroon contributes to student preparation for the workforce. These bodies of literature shape the study's conceptual framework and provide essential reference points for the analysis of findings discussed in later chapters.

3.1 Concepts Relevant to the Study

To discuss the efficacy of the Cameroonian secondary school system in equipping students for the workforce, an exploration of important related concepts is imperative. Therefore, this section undertakes an examination of these concepts to demonstrate understanding of key concepts such as employability skills in secondary education, vocational education, and the prevalent issue of youth unemployment. This groundwork establishes a foundational understanding prior to exploring the field of curriculum studies**.**

3.2 Conceptions of Employability and Employability Skills

To gain insight into scholars' views on the topic and provide the context of this research, this section reviews the literature relating to employability skills. Attention was paid to the applications of employability skills and their potential value as an exploratory concept. The literature offered helpful insights into the relevance of the topic. Within the body of scholarly work, there are contrasting perceptions and understandings of employability. Holmes (2017) asserts that discussions of employability seldom communicate clearly what the concept is. Likewise, Cranmer (2006) highlights issues relating to its definition, measurement, development, and transferability. To Cranmer (2006), employability is a vague notion to clarify and likens it to a 'chameleon concept' (p. 6). This assertion is supported by Boden and Nedeva (2010), who affirm the challenge of defining the content of employability due to the heterogeneity of employers' needs and individuals' attributes, which are likely to change over time.

The lack of conceptual clarity surrounding employability is particularly relevant when considering how employability skills are addressed within education. Despite the plethora of research on the subject, it was difficult to locate specific studies on teaching employability skills in secondary education, suggesting that policymakers and lobbying groups may be more interested in the topic than curriculum developers. Intriguingly, the literature on employability skills seemed to obscure associations between vocational education and employability skills. Aligned with Ainley's (1990) perspective on the pre-vocational aspect of education, it was acknowledged that making vocational education a meaningful part of the school system was imperative. The focus was on examining the integration of employability skills into the curriculum, aimed at providing students with the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills for securing employment.

Although employability and employability skills are recurrent in the literature, they are notoriously complex concepts to define. However, multiple researchers have proposed definitions of employability. Yorke (2010) makes a distinction between work-readiness, understood as a set of conditions for securing initial employment, and employability, which refers to an essential set of skills but is not sufficient to gain employment. Nonetheless, it is crucial to holistically recognise that young people need to be both

employable and work-ready to maximise their chances of gaining employment (Sachs et al., 2017). The conceptions of employability have, in recent years, expanded to include technical skills and attributes essential for individuals to be considered work-ready, as well as non-technical skills such as networking (Bridgstock, 2017) and professional identity (Zegwaard, Campbell, and Pretti, 2017). Interestingly, these conceptualisations stress an individual's 'potential' of gaining employment, which is different from 'realised employability', where the focus is on the actual acquisition of work (Wilton, 2014, p. 246). In the context of Cameroon, this distinction is particularly relevant because the emphasis on an individual's potential to gain employment needs to be considered alongside the actual employment opportunities available to school leavers. Thus, international conceptions that emphasise work-readiness and individual potential provide useful ways of understanding employability, but they do not, on their own, account for the circumstances within which young people in Cameroon seek to translate these skills into employment.

Hillage and Pollard (1988) frame employability as encompassing the capacity to obtain initial employment, sustain that employment, and transition to new job opportunities as required. Knight and Yorke (2006, p. 8) similarly define employability as a set of achievements, skills, knowledge, and personal qualities that help people not just get a job but also do well in their careers. They further acknowledge that employability generates advantages extending beyond the individual, benefiting the workforce, society, and the economy. Nonetheless, both perspectives have been criticised for their emphasis on the individual's capacity to gain employment, which fails to account for the wider social and structural factors that can influence employability outcomes (Moreau and Leathwood, 2007). Such factors, for instance, comprise an individual's ethnic background, gender, social class, disability, or age. This criticism corresponds with Brown et al.'s (2003, p. 110) distinction between the 'absolute' and 'relative' aspects of employability: while the 'absolute' approach attributes responsibility for employability to the individual alone, the 'relative' dimension recognises that employability fluctuates in response to wider economic circumstances and social inequalities. This distinction is significant in relation to Cameroon because an emphasis solely on the skills, knowledge, and personal qualities of school leavers risks locating responsibility for employment outcomes primarily with

individuals. The relative perspective, by contrast, provides a basis for recognising that employment outcomes are also shaped by the wider circumstances in which individuals seek work. Consequently, the international criticism of individualised approaches to employability has direct relevance to examining employability within the Cameroon context.

In response to criticisms of the employability discourse, some scholars have suggested alternative approaches within this domain. For instance, Cashian (2017) promotes a critical realist analysis that situates social reality between the perspectives of interpretivism and positivism (Cashian, 2017, p. 112). From this critical stance, the notion of 'student employability' is associated with how students interpret and respond to the prevailing employability structures. Challenging the predominant focus on skills and attributes in employability research, Holmes (2015; 2017) proposes an approach that emphasises identity and related factors (Holmes, 2015), thereby establishing a framework that incorporates both structural and agentic dimensions. These dimensions relate to the ways in which individuals perceive and navigate their employability across different national contexts (Tholen, 2015). Despite these broader conceptualisations, a gap persists in understanding individual experiences related to the employability agenda. Jackson (2016) also notes that, despite the emergence of these varied interpretations, they remain fragmented and advocates for an integration of these diverse aspects into a more cohesive definition of employability. For Cameroon, these perspectives are useful because they move the discussion beyond the acquisition of skills alone towards consideration of how individuals experience and respond to the structures surrounding education and employment. This is particularly relevant where employability is discussed through the language of competence, as in Cameroon (Essongo, 2017), because it raises the question of how competency development within education relates to the circumstances in which young people subsequently seek employment.

The concept of employability skills varies across different countries. In the United Kingdom (UK), these skills are generally regarded as generic, distinct from vocational, job-specific, or technical skills (Haasler, 2013). They involve the capacity to integrate fundamental functional skills such as numeracy, information technology, and language with personal attributes (Haasler, 2013). While the functional skills are clearly defined,

the personal attributes constitute a broad range of elements, including attitudes such as honesty, conscientiousness, and punctuality; social skills such as teamwork and communication; and individual traits such as self-confidence, self-control, and self-management (UKCES, 2009). It is acknowledged that employers often value this combination of skills and attributes (UKCES, 2009). The notion of employability can thus be framed as the ability to demonstrate these qualities, effectively persuading an employer of one's suitability for a role rather than the opposite. Within the literature, although employability skills are still to emerge as a clearly defined concept, the notion of individual employability revolves around competence (Haasler, 2013). Like the British notion, individual employability signifies a mechanism of empowerment in which one develops skills that students can effectively apply to adapt and leverage as assets for gaining employment. Blancke et al. (2000) defined employability as the capacity to offer labour based on an individual's subject-specific skills, productivity, and their ability to maintain employment or secure new job opportunities when required. However, the UK conceptualisation of generic employability skills needs to be distinguished from the Cameroon context, where 'competence' is often used to refer to employability (Essongo, 2017). This difference in terminology is significant because it demonstrates that the way employability is conceptualised and expressed is shaped by the educational context in which it is discussed. Consequently, the British distinction between generic and vocational skills cannot simply be assumed to represent how employability is understood within Cameroon.

The relationship between employability and competence therefore presents a compelling area, as *'competence'* is often used to refer to employability in Cameroon (Essongo, 2017). According to Moon (2007), competency-based education tests an individual's achievement on a collection of competency criteria rather than against another individual's results. Moon (2007) adds that it offers possibilities for individuals to acquire skills applicable to the workplace, thus facilitating a connexion between the requirements of education and the workplace. The Competency-Based Approach (CBA) to learning is intended to develop individuals' skills, knowledge, and attitudes in a manner that contributes to Cameroon's progressive transformation by 2035, as outlined in the government's 2009 Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) for education. The

GESP specifies policy initiatives designed to reduce unemployment, focusing particularly on the challenges faced by the country's youth. Among these initiatives are systematic recruitment efforts, including the hiring of 25,000 young people in 2020, the appointment of 1,000 teachers for basic education, and the recruitment of 2,000 doctoral degree holders within higher education institutions (Pinilla et al., 2020). The Cameroon context therefore provides a specific educational and policy setting in which the relationship between competence, employability, and employment is articulated through the CBA. This contrasts with international literature in which employability is frequently conceptualised through individual skills, attributes, work-readiness, or professional identity. In Cameroon, these ideas intersect with an explicitly competency-based educational approach and policy initiatives directed towards youth unemployment.

The relationship between employability and competence is important in that it demonstrates the way job market requirements are expressed in comparatively recent educational paradigms, many of which may be located within the broader educational field. Indeed, terminology and ideas emerging around 'competence' present approaches to learning and skills training, as opposed to the traditional qualification-based approaches that focused on job-specific activities requiring specific skills, thereby restricting the term 'skill' to the workplace's practical needs (Haasler, 2013). The notion of possessing job-specific knowledge seems to override the learning approach centred on interaction, reflection, and developing the capacity to learn (Haasler, 2013). Rather, priority is given to the individual's self-learning capacity rather than reproducing specific knowledge. Continuing learning is thus gaining importance, although becoming more complex and demanding. In relation to Cameroon, the emphasis on competence is therefore not simply a matter of adopting an international understanding of employability skills. Rather, it is connected to the CBA through which skills, knowledge, and attitudes are intended to support the relationship between education and workplace requirements. The relevance of international literature consequently lies in its ability to illuminate different dimensions of competence and employability, while the Cameroon context determines how these dimensions are understood within the education system.

These trends suggest a need for flexibility that corresponds with the emergence of new jobs demanding different skill profiles. This requirement covers a range of job-specific and

transferable skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, flexibility, and the ability to think in an integrated way (Bolton, 2004). Westwood (2004) further highlights the relevance of service-oriented or softer skills, such as customer service skills and aesthetic attributes, qualities individuals bring into organisations, such as appearance, body language, and composure (Nickson et al., 2003). Such traits are consistent with the broader concept of competence, which includes a more comprehensive understanding of skill and competence development beyond the immediate work environment (Haasler, 2013). Consequently, this shift redirects attention from a purely organisational perspective towards the individual, thereby highlighting the subjective dimensions of skills, competence, and learning. In this regard, Erpenbeck and Heyse's (2007) concept of the 'biographical notion' is particularly important, as it reflects the individual capacity to consciously engage with and adjust to the complexities arising both within and outside work contexts. This notion also relates to an individual's disposition to respond and adapt to their environment, and the ability to recognise and act effectively in response to unstructured, unpredictable, and evolving needs (Weinert, 2001). In Cameroon, these international perspectives on transferable skills and adaptability are relevant to the competency-based emphasis on developing skills, knowledge, and attitudes. However, the literature also demonstrates that such competencies need to be understood in relation to the particular circumstances in which individuals seek to apply them. Thus, the acquisition of transferable skills does not in itself explain the employment outcomes of young people.

Although not exclusive to the notion of competence, Thijssen et al. (2008, p. 174) suggest three conceptual elements as a concentric circle in understanding employability: the restrictive definition of core capacity to perform a given task, 'employability radius'; an individual's capability to embrace opportunities apart from their core employability radius because of wider competencies and transferable skills, 'employability competence'; and personal, job-related, as well as organisational aspects impacting on the individual's present and future job perspectives, 'contextual conditions'—factors that affect the job market situation. Employability radius is the most prominent aspect in current descriptions of employability that has not eluded any author. Scholars such as Forrier and Sels (2003) and Kirschner and Thijssen (2008) perceive the second core component as

limiting and have broadened it to include personal competencies referred to as employability competencies. These competencies or skills influence individuals' ability to take up opportunities beyond their employability radius. The third and broadest component considers personal and contextual factors that impact on employment market perspectives. Although it is acknowledged that these factors are significant and can influence future employment circumstances, they are hardly encompassed in the employability discourse (Forrier and Sels, 2003). This framework is particularly relevant to Cameroon because it provides a basis for distinguishing between what an individual can offer in terms of skills and competence and the contextual conditions that influence whether those capabilities can be translated into employment opportunities. Thus, the framework provides a more substantive basis for considering the Cameroon context than approaches that focus predominantly on individual employability.

Nonetheless, McQuaid and Lindsay's (2005) broad-based description of employability associates employability and long-term unemployment. Adopting a broader perspective, McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) contended that employability ought to consider personal circumstances, unique circumstances, and external factors, recognising the significance of both supply-side and demand-side influences. An individual's capacity to obtain or accept an employment opportunity is affected by several factors, such as personal issues like an inadequate level of appropriate skills, institutional ones like the availability of adequate childcare or transportation in their area, and labour demand factors like employer preferences, such as discrimination or only shift work being feasible (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). A person's capacity to find work or transfer to a better-suited position may be significantly impacted by these and additional characteristics, either separately or in combination. The relevance of this perspective to Cameroon is that it challenges an interpretation of youth unemployment that places responsibility primarily on school leavers and their possession of employability skills. Instead, it supports consideration of the relationship between individual capabilities and the personal, institutional, and labour-demand factors that shape opportunities to obtain and sustain employment.

However, it can be argued that a working definition of employability should consider not only the capacity to find employment but should also consider what transpires after an individual finds work. It is equally crucial to recognise that the ability to secure and

sustain work hinges on a range of other factors, of which some are directly linked to the personal traits of the individual. In consequence, with regards to this study, the following working definition is proposed: Employability constitutes an individual's capacity to obtain work, maintain employment and progress with regards to career and/or personal development for the length of time in employment. The possession of this ability by the individual is linked to several interconnected individual factors, personal circumstances, and external factors as highlighted by McQuaid and Lindsay (2005). It is, however, recognised that arriving at this working notion of employability is not necessarily uncomplicated in terms of the relationship between employability and its impact on schooling or education. Thus, prior to developing a conceptual framework for this study, it is useful to consider other components such as vocational education, the nature of youth unemployment, and the field of curriculum studies.

3.3 The Understanding and Relevance of Employability in the Context of Schools

Sermsuk et al., (2014) asserts that education has an important influence on skill development and attributes of individuals in line with the needs of organisations. As expected, some fundamental skills like literacy, numeracy and technology could also be crucial in seeking employment. It seems necessary, however, to ensure that the people entering employment possess general skills to enable them to prepare for more specific training (Vishnich, 2009). Skills like personal abilities, cognitive processes, learning capabilities, and attitudes are recognised as critical components of employability (Martin et al., 2008). The acquisition of these skills has emerged as an international concern, becoming an integral element of curricula in both developed countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and various European nations, as well as in developing regions. This curricular emphasis aims to enhance students' capacity to attain the skills necessary for employment (Sermsuk et al., 2014). These skills are often described as general or generic skills, distinguishing them from vocational or technical skills (Cleary et al., 2007). Developing and nurturing such generic skills is considered essential for improving students' employability, thereby contributing to increased productivity and success in the workplace. In reviewing the literature, it became clear that many institutions and companies encourage schools to focus on enhancing students'

employability skills, aiming to lower the chances of unemployment (Lee, 2011). To develop an effective plan to implement the learning of employability skills requires cooperation from all parties with schools to play an important role (Sermsuk et al., 2014). Therefore, an understanding of strategies for embedding employability in the secondary school curriculum provides a framework to develop students' efficiency and required skills (which this study intends to accomplish).

A review of the literature on employability skills revealed a substantial body of work within this specific context (Haasler 2013; McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). However, when focusing on the development of these skills within the school environment, a report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2013) titled 'Employers are from Mars, Young People are from Venus' highlighted a disparity between the skills possessed by young people and those expected by educational institutions. The document specifically examines the challenges related to teaching and acquiring employability skills among students. The report not only highlighted the disparities between employers' expectations of young individuals entering the workforce but also what is expected from these young individuals. It emphasised that young people often encountered difficulties in securing employment due to a lack of confidence and experience in addition to the requisite skills for work. Furthermore, it recommended amongst other the inclusion of training on relevant interview skills such as appropriate attire and expected conduct during work interviews.

Atkins (2013) discusses the uncertainty faced by young people who leave school at 16, particularly around employability skills and vocational education. She indicates that many risk being excluded from both further education and the labour market. Atkins (2013) maintains that the notion of employability should serve as a form of social control, a way of guiding and supporting young people so they can participate meaningfully in society, rather than as a mechanism that further marginalises them. Without this supportive role, employability risks reinforcing existing inequalities by trapping disengaged young people in low-skilled, low-paid work (Atkins,2013). Besides, concerns about these issues are raised not only by politicians and employers, who worry about skill shortages, but also by students themselves, who report how limited time is spent preparing them for future employment. For example, as indicated earlier, in a UK study of 1,001 school pupils

undertaken by Career Colleges Trust, it was found that students disproportionately assumed that they were being trained to pass examinations instead of learning new skills for their potential career or workplace readiness (Career Colleges Trust, 2015). Ensuring that students acquire employability skills is not just essential for employers in the short to medium term. Research has demonstrated that learning these skills at school can also be correlated with solid economic performance and job outcomes (Carneiro et al. 2007; Taylor, 2017; Prince's Trust, 2016). Increasingly, research also highlights the role of 'non-cognitive' job skills, as well as social skills and leadership qualities. It is expected that these skills will equip individuals with the capacity to carry out their role to the best of their abilities. This is drawn from the pioneering research of Heckman (1995), arguing that wage rewards are probably shaped by a variety of skills, as cognitive capacity accounts for a small proportion of the variance in these outcomes (Heckman and Kautz, 2012). From these standpoints, there is currently no more pressing concern within the field of education than the readiness of students and young individuals for the job market. It is also apparent that employers have expressed dissatisfaction with the employability skills exhibited by young individuals as they enter the workforce (Tushar and Sooraksa, 2023). Nevertheless, the differing viewpoints on the necessity of these employability skills represent a reasonable effort to narrow the divide between the skills expected by employers from young individuals in comparison to the skills nurtured within the educational system. While this does pose several challenges, it is imperative to surmount them to adequately prepare students for the life they will lead after completing their schooling.

3.4 The Notion of Vocational Education and Vocationalisation

Vocational education, also referred to as Vocational Education and Training (VET) or Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), includes instructional approaches designed to equip individuals with the specific skills and knowledge necessary for varying occupations. As indicated by UNESCO (2023a), VET aims to develop proficiency in various trades, crafts, and professions through formal, non-formal, and workplace-based learning modalities. In the context of the United Kingdom, secondary-level vocational education is delivered through qualifications like BTECs, City and Guilds, and

NVQs. These qualifications, regulated by Ofqual, prioritise workforce readiness over purely academic progression (Cedefop, 2019). More recently, the UK government introduced T Levels, a two-year technical qualification developed in collaboration with industry stakeholders, regarded as a Level 3 alternative to A Levels. This programme integrates classroom teaching alongside substantial work placements (Department for Education [DfE], 2022).

In Cameroon, vocational education, officially known as Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) or l'enseignement et la formation techniques et professionnels (EFTP) in French, operates alongside general secondary education. It leads to certifications such as the GCE Ordinary and Advanced Level Technical, Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP), Brevet de Technicien, and Baccalauréat de Technicien (World Education Services [WES], 2021). At the post-secondary level, Cameroon offers diplomas including the Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (BTS) and the Higher National Diploma (HND), both administered by the Ministry of Higher Education which incorporates practical internships alongside academic study (WES, 2021). While vocational education is present across primary, tertiary, and professional training stages, its definition and scope differ among countries. For the purpose of this study, however, the focus is confined to secondary-level vocational education, aligned with the research objectives.

Among the principal sectors of education and training in Europe, vocational education and training exhibits the greatest heterogeneity. Defining VET as a distinct category presents challenges due to its frequent intersection with other educational and training components. To address this complexity, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop, 2019e) characterises VET as education and training intended to provide individuals with suitable knowledge, competencies, and skills required for a particular occupation or, more broadly, participation in the labour market. Although this definition offers a sufficiently broad framework and has been adopted by various stakeholders, it remains limited in its capacity to fully delineate the essential characteristics of vocational education and training according to several international perspectives. A multifaceted approach combining three partly overlapping perspectives is proposed to include a pedagogical perspective; a system and institutional perspective; and a socioeconomic and labour market perspective (Cedefop 2017). Whereas the

pedagogical perspective accentuates vocational education's ability to promote skills growth and competences, the system perspective draws attention on the providers and how they are structured (Cedefop 2017). The socio-economic perspective relates to the social and labour market activities of VET (Cedefop 2017). It may be asserted that the culture of vocational education is embedded in the development, representation, use and transfer of distinctive skills, which can be linked with distinct forms of teaching and learning (Cedefop 2017). From a pedagogical perspective, these accounts can be considered as a tacit understanding view as opposed to a cognitive view (Neuweg, 2004). A cognitive perspective perceives knowledge as explicit, abstract, structured, and impersonal. This implies that knowledge is generated by scientific disciplines and applied in practice. Teacher-centred learning will be most effective for such skills, as teaching could be regarded as providing organised information to be interpreted by the students. The result of learning is also clear knowledge which can be evaluated with paper and pencil/pen (Neuweg, 2004). Conversely, the tacit perspective of knowledge, views knowledge as experience and emphasises that knowledge is primarily about know-how, skills, knowledge that is implied, personal, and context dependent (Neuweg, 2004). Learning is therefore seen as a social activity that happens in communities that operate through socialisation and entails learning by doing. Creating an instructional environment that allows pupils to acquire skills is the overall objective of teaching.

An educational viewpoint examines institutional evolution over time; however, VET is conceptualised as institutions through multiple approaches (Brockmann et al, 2011), including VET as a sector, VET as a system, VET as an organisational field, VET as a community, and VET as a culture (Heikkinen, 2004). A synthesis of these approaches in the literature facilitates a convergence of these approaches which constitutes VET, and the relationships between its elements. Institutional strategies examine organisations that represent a recognised area of organisational life such as suppliers, customers, regulatory agencies, VET providers, types of programmes, target groups, and management structures (Brockmann et al, 2011). In this approach, VET is defined in statistics and constitutes part of the institutional perspective.

From a socioeconomic and labour market perspective Green, (2013) maintains that VET is a contributory factor to social inequalities, offering access to different career pathways,

as well as promoting the social replication of economic activity. It promotes knowledge and attitudes needed by organisations and their work processes, enabling employees to meet the demands of their workplace, while enabling skills acquisition. Here, organisations represent the demand and supply component of the skills market (Green, 2013). VET, therefore, offers incentives for both organisations and employees. Whilst these perspectives are partially overlapping and not autonomous from each other, they permit us to construct the different characteristics of VET so that we might establish an overall picture (Green, 2013). Nonetheless, research into vocational education highlights the need for educational practices to help young people to acquire skills to enhance their employment.

Maclean and Wilson (2009) reiterate the important function of vocational education and training (VET) in supporting school leavers to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for employment, thereby contributing to the establishment of sustainable livelihoods. According to Rauner and Maclean (2008) and Scott and Sarkees-Wircenski (2008), VET provides learners with practical, non-academic training that imparts specialised vocational skills required for entry-level positions within various trades or occupations. This implies that it is designed taking the individual's needs and the societal needs into consideration.

3.4.1 The Relationship between Vocational Education and Employability skills

Oni (2007), in his definition of vocational education, noted that vocational instruction is one that is aimed at preparing the individual to enter the workforce as a semi-skilled worker, technician, or sub-professional. The focus of vocational education provides an important emphasis on the practical knowledge and skills that students need to be effective workers. In this respect, vocational skills procedures and techniques for doing specific activities are tangible, measurable, and less challenging to teach students than broader employability or core skills, such as problem-solving or communication (Oni, 2007; Audu et al., 2013). However, as Shakir (2009) points out, employers value these skills, but they are poorly represented in school curricula. This gap presents a challenge to how classroom practice needs to change from a teacher-centred approach of delivering large amounts of information to a more student-centred approach that helps develop

practical work skills to enable students to prepare for employment (see chapter sections 5.6 and 5.9).

Dacre and Sewell (2007) characterise employability skills as an integration of skills, knowledge, understanding, and personal qualities that enable individuals to obtain employment, function competently in work settings, and find fulfilment in their chosen career paths. These skills are often grouped into three main categories including interpersonal abilities, problem-solving capabilities, and decision-making competencies (Audu et al., 2013). Similarly, Bennet, Dunne, and Carre (2000) propose a classification of generic skills into four dimensions: self-management, managing others, managing tasks, and managing information.

Therefore, vocational skills should be considered alongside employability skills, as they tend to complement each other. Ali et al., (2012) suggested that a combination of specialised vocational skills and generic employability skills are necessary to achieve optimum performance at work. The additional generic skills influence vocational competence by enhancing an individual's employability and adaptability (Schulz, 2008). Barrie (2005) has identified teacher failure to develop employability skills in pedagogical, learning, and assessment practice, particularly in African contexts. For instance, in Ghana, new employees were identified as having weaknesses in problem-solving, organisation and planning, communication, teamwork, and digital literacy (Boahin et al., 2010). Similarly, analysis of this study's data highlights that employers value a broad set of employability skills. These ranged from a range of attitudinal employability skills e.g. reliability, enthusiasm and willingness to learn, to some practical skills e.g. interpersonal, organisational and communication (see chapter 5, section 5.6). The evidence has suggested that vocational education needs to move beyond technical development and focus on providing opportunities for individuals to develop a wider range of employability skills that are fundamental to workplace readiness (Ali et al., (2012).

3.5 The Nature of Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment poses significant challenges to many societies around the globe (Kipesha and Msigwa, 2013). Whether young people are enrolled in schools, receiving training, or employed, has remarkable implications for future economic development and stability. Youth unemployment could potentially have serious social consequences if overlooked. Investing in job creation ventures for youths through education could bring about more prosperous societies and stability. In its report on World Economic Situation and Prospect, the United Nations (2019) stated that youth employment remains a policy challenge with 21.2 per cent of young individuals not in employment, education, or training - NEET. Globally, above one-fifth of all young people (aged 15-24) were neither acquiring skills through education or job training in 2018. The report however, attributed this decline in labour participation of youth to extended school systems implying postponement of entering the job market as well as a decrease in youth holding down part-time jobs alongside their studies. Such figures support the idea that unemployment among young people is an issue worthy of consideration. Unemployment propagates poverty; therefor, reducing it in general could minimise poverty rates (World Bank 2006). Furthermore, the International Labour Organisation, in its Global Employment Trends for Youths report, asserts that the problem of youth unemployment is an endemic feature of the employment scene across the globe, driven by the lack of skills, employment experience, and employment search skills of the youth, as well as the lack of resources needed by the youth to pursue employment opportunities (ILO 2009). The problem is exacerbated in developing countries by the socio-economic pressures created by the increasing number of people willing to work. The rising trend of youth employment in consequence, merits imperative attention. Further, the trends of youth unemployment as provided by the World Bank data for Cameroon from 1991 to 2019 showed an average value during that period was 8.41 percent with a minimum of 4.57 percent in 2007 and a maximum of 12.22 percent recorded in 1999. Subsequently, the situation of youth unemployment in Cameroon according to the World Bank (2019) was 5.69 percent in 2019 for young people aged 15-24. The situation may be compounded if the 15-24 age group (defined by the World Bank as youthful) is extended to 32 which represents the age threshold for obtaining employment into the public sector in Cameroon. According to

Macrotrends (2024), youth unemployment in Cameroon was recorded at 6.46% in 2023, marking a slight decrease from 6.61% in 2022. These fluctuations are indicative of broader economic and social challenges faced by Cameroon, including limited job creation, economic instability, and inadequate vocational training aligned with market needs.

Undoubtedly, youth unemployment has been a source of major debates, prompting a considerable number of policy changes to stop this growing trend. When, in 2010, the Cameroon government published the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) (MINEPAT, 2009a) it identified the youth unemployment problem as a key priority. GESP of 2020/2020 aimed to address these issues through policies designed to limit general and youth unemployment. It sought to mitigate youth unemployment through varied approaches, primarily focusing on entrepreneurship promotion, skills development, and inclusive growth policies. It advocates for creating an enabling environment for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises - SMEs, facilitating access to finance, and promoting innovation within the entrepreneurial ecosystem (MINEPAT, 2009a). Additionally, the strategy emphasises the significance of ensuring alignment between education and labour market demands, enhancing technical and vocational training programmes, and addressing structural barriers to employment, such as gender discrimination and regional disparities. However, while the GESP outlines comprehensive measures, it acknowledges the need for greater investment, coordination, and monitoring to effectively address youth unemployment in Cameroon (MINEPAT, 2009a). These measures include special recruitment drives for public service positions and large-scale infrastructure projects intended to create job opportunities for the growing youth population (Pinilla et al., 2020; Talom, 2020). It is important to observe that, like many developing countries, the age distribution is marked by a high proportion of individuals under 35 years old, accounting for over 60% of the total population (Statista 2019). A steady increase has been observed in the proportion of young people in the country in the last decade and it is approximated that this trend will continue compared to the other age groups. High birth rates, according to Beninguisse and Mbarga (2023), have been identified as a contributory factor leading to high population growth, which will indeed put a tremendous strain on educational infrastructure and the weak job market economy.

Together with the fragility of Cameroon's economy, Essongo (2017) associates the problem of youth unemployment to the mismatch between skills gained through secondary education and the skills required to meet the demands of the ever-demanding job market as well as the growing number of youths in the general population. This raises questions on the efficiency of the school system, or the overall quality of training received in schools in preparing young people for employment. It is however recognised that is not only typical to Cameroon, but also a recurrent phenomenon in most African countries and other developing countries (Essongo 2017). However, unemployment and underemployment among young people in Cameroon remain significant challenges. The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2013) highlighted that many young Cameroonians are unemployed despite being able and ready to work. This issue is further exacerbated by the insufficient technical and professional education available to young people, particularly those completing secondary schools. As Penn (2016) points out, this educational gap is seen as a main reason for the high youth unemployment rate in the country. Although Cameroon has a strategic institutional framework (such as the GESP discussed above) to address issues affecting young people, the mismatch between education and market demands persists as a critical concern (Penn, 2016).

3.5.1 Education and Youths' Employability in Cameroon

Furthermore, Angyie et al. (2022) reinforced that unemployment, particularly for the youth, is a worldwide crisis. Individuals aged between 15 and 24 make up over 60% of the global population, equivalent to more than 800 million young people facing unemployment, a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Talom, 2020). This increasing youth unemployment has prompted global leaders to reassess and review their approach to education, aiming to better align it with the evolving demands of the workforce (Takam, 2020).

Colin (2014) contends that in the African context, where the youth demographic is considered a significant asset, the continent's population of about 506 million is expected to double by 2030. However, this demographic is affected by challenges, as 21% of Africa's employable youths are unemployed, 61% engage in vulnerable informal sector employment, and only 18% secure employment (Talom, 2020). To Ndobia (2017) the

average youth unemployment rates in certain African countries, such as Botswana and Namibia, are notably high at approximately 37.9% and 39.5%, respectively. In other parts of the world such as the Arab nations, youth unemployment has been linked to the cause of protests. For example, the Arab Spring of 2020 underscored the potential consequences of youth unemployment for political stability. Crucially, the Arab Spring was a series of uprisings that occurred across the Arab world in 2010-2011, sparked by socio-economic grievances and demands for political reform. While unemployment, among other factors, was often cited as a driver behind the unrest, some studies suggest a weaker link between unemployment and political instability than previously assumed (Paasonen, 2020). The World Bank Survey (WBS) of 2016 (Nkengim, 2016) indicates that limited employment prospects contributed to the involvement of approximately 40% of youths in rebel groups across Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), and the Boko Haram jihadist movement. Moreover, youth unemployment in Africa is associated with a significant brain drain, as a considerable number of the continent's most skilled individuals opt to migrate to Western countries. As indicated by the Ibrahim Foundation, 2019 and African Leadership Magazine, (2020), youth unemployment in Africa has led to a significant departure of talented individuals, as many of the continent's most skilled professionals move to Western nations seeking better economic opportunities, living conditions, and career advancement. This migration is primarily driven by a shortage of job openings, poor infrastructure, and political uncertainty in their home countries (Ali, 2020). Although this trend results in a loss of capable professionals, it can also have positive effects such as remittances that bolster local economies and the possibility of knowledge transfer if these migrants decide to return (African Leadership Magazine, 2020). Despite these potential benefits, concerns about the long-term effects on Africa's development persist (Ibrahim Foundation, 2019).

The nature of the unemployment problem in Cameroon, as depicted by Tamghe (2019), is like the nature of the problem on the African continent. The country's youth unemployment rate is approximately 6%, which translates to 1.2 million youths between the ages of 15 and 25 years who are out of employment. The relatively high levels of youth unemployment in Cameroon can be attributed to several factors, including the country's population growth rate of 2.6%, economic fragility resulting from a limited

industrial base, ongoing conflicts in the Anglophone regions, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a disconnect between educational attainment and job market demands (Talom, 2020). The 2020 Growth and Employment Strategy Paper (GESP) delineate specific policy measures aimed at addressing both general and youth unemployment within the national context. These include the recruitment of the country's youths to the public service, special recruitments, and large-scale projects to help create employment for the country's population of youths.

Consequently, scholars like Parcarella et al. (2015) have underscored the vital role of education in reducing the levels of unemployment. The direct positive influence of education on employment status, through the improvement of the skills of the individual, underscores the importance of education in the labour market. In Cameroon, the education system includes general education, technical education, vocational education, and apprenticeship, with the latter being legally recognised as vocational education (Nkengim, 2016). To equip students leaving school with the skills needed for gainful employment or self-employment, the Cameroonian government has instituted four ministries responsible for education, as highlighted by Ndinka (2016). These are the Ministry of Basic Education (MINEDUB), the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC), the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP), established in 1972 (uniRank, 2024), and the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training (MINEFOP), which was created in 2004 (Kom, 2024). These institutions are provided with significant funding, which amounts to 14.2% of the budget in 2020 (Takam, 2020).

Primary education in Cameroon, under the responsibility of MINEDUB, has witnessed an improvement in enrolment and completion rates due to the government’s free primary education policy introduced in 2000. Nevertheless, difficulties persist in deciding between general and technical secondary education, as well as in addressing disparities in enrolment (Takam, 2020). Higher education in Cameroon was initiated in 1962 with the establishment of the University of Yaoundé. While the original intent was to professionalise the curriculum, currently over 70% of students enrolled in higher education institutions pursue general or academic programmes, whereas only about 30% engage in technical vocational education and training (TVET) (Takam, 2020). The creation of MINEFOP in 2011 sought to standardise apprenticeships and advance technical and

vocational education and training (TVET) to reduce unemployment, particularly among young people. Collaborations with international organisations enabled the creation of vocational training centres, alongside the development of initiatives like the National Employment Fund (NEF) and the Integrated Support Programme for the Informal Sector (PIAASI), aimed at resolving unemployment difficulties. Despite these government initiatives, youth unemployment persists in Cameroon, raising questions about the effectiveness of such interventions (Angyie et al., 2022).

3.6 The Field of Curriculum Studies

This section reviews the literature related to curriculum to locate my study within the existing studies. An overview of the concept of curriculum is examined tracing it from its roots prior to presenting two main models of curriculum design including two others which suggest how they are implemented in varying contexts. The nature of curriculum development in the context of Cameroon is discussed, attempting to establish the link between curriculum development models and vocational education.

3.6.1 Curricula Conceptualisations

There is a consensus that the fundamental aim of schooling is to enable the recipients to have access to knowledge and behaviours that are culturally valued. As argued by Moss (2013), Stambach (2010), and Bates (2009), the students who have undergone this process could understand concepts, carry out activities, and experience changes in their attitudes. Therefore, a structured curriculum through schooling is essential to induce these behaviours and enable the acquisition of higher-level skills. it is worth noting that the term ‘curriculum’ has been subject to contestations just like several other concepts in the academic and professional fields of study.

The word "curriculum" was derived from the chariot tracks of the Greeks (Kelly, 2009; Marsh, 2004). The Latin word "currere," which means "to run," was later used to represent the concept of curriculum; thus, the curriculum was equated to running a race. In the school context, the students were perceived as a group that is undergoing a series of activities to enable them transition into adulthood within society. Nonetheless, and as

reported by Xing (2017), the current curriculum theory was founded by Franklin Bobbitt. Xing (2017) further remarks that a widely accepted belief holds that Bobbitt's theory developed in two different phases: the 1st stage, which was centred on social efficiency and used a mechanical and behavioural approach, and the 2nd stage, which was considered more progressive and took consideration of the students' real-world experiences. However, Xing (2017) argues that this is a misconception, as evidenced by a careful reading of his supposedly pivotal paper, which essentially constructed an organic unity in his theory from the start. According to Marsh (2004), Bobbitt's view of curriculum includes the scope of formative activities and experiences both inside and outside the school context, including unplanned learning activities referred to as the hidden curriculum. On this view, it could be asserted that school activities are comparable to those in a racecourse, where winners are those who overcome barriers on the way, and the variety of subjects, tests, and examinations set by the educational systems.

During the period when Greek civilisation was expanding, philosophers sought to systematise various curricular subjects presented in gymnasia in response to societal demands. For example, Sparta, as an authoritarian military polis, emphasised rigorous physical training for young males, focusing on sprinting, jumping, discus throwing, and gymnastics with the objective of developing highly skilled soldier-citizens. Education in the arts, including music and dance, was integrated to support this martial purpose. In contrast, Athens, Sparta's rival, adopted a broader educational approach encompassing the arts to prepare citizens for both peace and wartime contexts. Students were trained in calisthenics, various games, musical instruments, vocal performance, poetry, and oratory skills (Ackerman, 2003). To equip the youth for potential military engagement, instruction in sprinting, boxing, wrestling, and javelin throwing was provided. This dual focus suggests that elements linked to peace and war functioned as cultural components within Greek society, and the deliberate emphasis on these subjects indicates a selective transmission of certain cultural values in preference to others. Scholars such as Bryce and Humes (2003), as well as Devine and Wormald (2012), argue that Western educational curricula have been substantially shaped by Greek and Latin philosophical traditions, which continue to influence the structure of courses offered.

The concept of curriculum has undergone continuous expansion, with diverse interpretations emerging among both professionals and the public. Some view the curriculum primarily as the teaching and instructional activities directed toward students, while others associate it with the documented guidelines provided to schools, which are then translated into meaningful knowledge (Kelly, 2009:7; Murphy and Moon, 1999:2). It should be noted that educators themselves often hold differing perspectives on the curriculum. For instance, Marsh (2004) highlights that some teachers perceive the curriculum as the daily lessons delivered, the skills imparted to students, as well as the plans devised to achieve specific lesson and institutional objectives. Meanwhile, Martin and Goodman (2001) observed that following the progressive education movement in the United States, a degree of consensus emerged around two fundamental aspects of the curriculum: planning and provision. This perspective suggested that the content of the planned curriculum should be drawn from the broader cultural context of society, while instructional methods should be adapted to align with prevailing cultural practices. Additionally, the planned curriculum was expected to consider students' interests, values, and abilities. From these considerations, three dimensions of the curriculum can be distinguished: the intended curriculum, which encompasses official directives such as government-prescribed subject syllabuses; the enacted curriculum, referring to the material that is actually taught; and the attained curriculum, which concerns the knowledge and skills students ultimately acquire.

These variations underscore the significance of both the content delivered in schools and the approaches employed in teaching. Thus, the material designated for student learning and the instructional strategies are not arbitrary; they require deliberate planning and organisation to meet educational objectives. Some conceptualisations adopt a more progressive, future-oriented perspective by emphasising learners' needs and values. For instance, Quicke (1999:1) defines curriculum as a framework guiding learning that specifies the knowledge and skills perceived as important in relation to students' needs as well as the broader social and political milieu in which education operates. This definition addresses both the substantive content (what) and the pedagogical processes (how) of learning, incorporating experiences that occur formally and informally, both within and beyond school settings. The suggestion that curriculum comprises informal learning, as

highlighted in Quicke's inclusive definition, necessitates further consideration, given its potential implications for the data collected in this study. This aspect aligns with the concept of the hidden curriculum, which refers to lessons that students learn through the way in which the official curriculum is implemented and organised. Although students, as recipients of the enacted curriculum, do not participate in its design, they are presumed to acquire social roles, attitudes, and values through this process (Kelly 2009). Within the Cameroonian context, the school curriculum is mandated by the government through the Ministry of Secondary Education. Forzie (1990) emphasises that the minister exercises full control over the ministry's activities, as well as its interactions with the public and political entities. This situation invites critical reflection on the government's educational intentions and the extent to which these align with actual practices across diverse settings.

3.6.2 Traditional and Progressive Points of view of Curriculum

The curriculum models discussed in chapter 3, section 3.7, highlight two predominant perspectives: the traditional view, often referred to as the product approach, and the progressive view, corresponding to the process approach. These perspectives can be further examined through various curriculum models, each reflecting distinct educational philosophies (Drake and Reid, 2020). Advocates of the traditional perspective argue that the curriculum consists of a fixed set of subjects, characterised by prescriptive syllabuses and detailed teacher guides. From this standpoint, education authorities determine the content delivered to students based on criteria they consider suitable. Nevertheless, as educational thought evolves, concerns have emerged regarding whether such curricula adequately address student needs. Shoenberg (2009) and Nussbaum (2009) suggest that these concerns have contributed to the development of liberal education, which seeks to broaden students' exposure to diverse knowledge, transferable skills, values, ethics, and civic responsibility. Critics of liberal education, such as Schwab (1983), stress that curriculum comprises what is communicated to students to varying degrees by committed teachers using appropriate materials and methods. This includes established domains of knowledge, skills, and the potential for action and response. Schwab (1983)

argues Schwab (1983), these components are selected intentionally after careful deliberation and collective input from educators familiar with the student group involved.

Schwab (1983) argued that curriculum development was increasingly viewed as inadequate due to its limited capacity to generate meaningful educational outcomes. He suggested that such critiques prompted a shift in educational focus toward intellectual formation within disciplines like grammar and literature, as well as foundational areas including philosophy, history, psychology, and sociology, alongside other subjects commonly found in modern schooling. By contrast, progressive philosophers maintained that a curriculum should extend beyond the mere listing of conventional subjects; it should include what students are able to learn and how their school experiences enhance critical inquiry through reflective thought. Baldacchino (2014) and Quay and Seaman (2013) observed that progressive thinkers, notably John Dewey, advocated a learning philosophy that emphasised experiential education. This perspective integrates elements such as entrepreneurship, critical analysis, problem-solving, collaboration, social skill development, and the deliberate cultivation of understanding, rather than concentrating solely on memorisation, testing, and examinations.

Ornstein and Hunkins (2009), as cited in O'Neill (2010), emphasise that although curriculum development models offer valuable guidance, they often fail to account for the inherently human dimensions of teaching, including the values, emotions, and personal beliefs educators bring to their practice. The models discussed in section 3.7, while technically informative, should not be regarded as rigid frameworks. Rather, they demand a critical and adaptable approach that acknowledges the professional judgment and individual perspectives of educators endeavouring to make informed decisions aimed at enhancing student learning (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2009).

3.7 Curriculum Theories and Models

McCitcheon (1982) defined curriculum theories as an academic field focused on examining and shaping educational curricula, facilitating the analysis, interpretation, and understanding of curricular phenomena. These phenomena include both the explicit (overt) content and the implicit elements, as well as those excluded from formal study,

commonly referred to as the null curriculum. Pinar (2004) views curriculum theory as a complex study of educational experience. Table 3.0 presents a summary of the various curriculum phenomena.

Table 3.1: The Curriculum Phenomena

The Curriculum in use	The Curriculum as enactment
i. The curriculum development process,	i. Teachers' planning
ii. The politics of curriculum argumentation	ii. How teachers enable learners to access materials
iii. Social forces - state mandates, local regulations, court or board of education decisions)	iii. Received curriculum - the sense learners make of it.
iv. The sociology of knowledge	iv. Relationship among the enacted curriculum, society, human development and learning theory;
v. The type, nature and the process of developing the teaching-learning materials i.e. type	iv. Organisation of the curriculum
	v. Influences on its use - teachers' conception of schooling, parental pressure on teachers and learners to deviate from the norm;
	vi) The learning that students get from the hidden curriculum

Source: McCutcheon (1982)

McCutcheon's (1982) categorisation of curriculum theories plays a pivotal role in directing teaching methods, informing educational research, shaping school curriculum development, influencing policy decisions, and guiding educational administration. These theories serve as frameworks that incorporate various perspectives, thereby supporting diverse approaches to education. Furthermore, McCutcheon (1982) notes that curriculum theories allow educators to anticipate the potential outcomes of different alternatives,

critically reflect on their own practices, and make informed decisions regarding their actions. In essence, such theories contribute to a more profound comprehension of curricular issues, which in turn can enhance both educational thinking and practice (McCutcheon, 1982: p. 20). Furthermore, they aid curriculum designers in systematically and transparently articulating the rationale behind selecting teaching, learning, and assessment methods (Schunk, 2013).

The origins of curriculum theories can be traced back to Aristotle's classification of knowledge, where he distinguishes between two forms of thinking: practical and technical (Kemmis, 2007). Technical thinking involves a structured procedure that follows an established framework and employs various strategies to achieve specific objectives (Kemmis, 2007). This process can be assessed to determine whether the anticipated goals have been met and adhered to. In contrast, Kemmis (2007) describes practical thinking as involving actions that may entail risk, are guided by ethical considerations, and can sometimes be contradictory. Thus, moral value judgments within this domain depend on interpretations of what is considered right or humane (Kemmis, 2007). Nevertheless, Kemmis does not entirely dismiss the role of moral judgments in technical decisions. He argues that technical choices incorporate social and moral consequences, situated within a framework of ethical values, even though these decisions are not directly linked to the technical means by which objectives are accomplished. This introduces moral questions concerning the appropriateness of the methods employed. Scholars such as Trohler (2013), Green (2013), Cook (2007), and Cubberley (2005) have echoed similar perspectives in clarifying the aims of education. Their contributions have subsequently formed the foundational principles of educational practice in the Western context. Moreover, these ideas significantly influenced education in developing nations, where they were adapted during periods of colonial rule.

In contrast, models serve as representations of complex realities by highlighting key structures and elements that facilitate understanding. Accordingly, curriculum development models depict the curriculum process in a more accessible manner. As noted by O'Neil (2010), the curriculum process can be distinguished by two primary models: the Product Model, concerned with planning and intended outcomes, and the Process Model, which centres on activities and their effects. The following four curriculum

models are grounded in this distinction, illustrating various approaches to curriculum principles that guide the content of the school curriculum.

3.7.1 Model I: Curriculum as a body of knowledge

According to Kelly (2009), the model primarily emphasises content, defining curriculum as the subject matter contained in various subjects. The focus is on the syllabi of these subjects, with their content being delivered to students followed by evaluation. Within this model, a syllabus specifies aspects like the course title, description, delivery methods, objectives, topics along with their scheduling, recommended textbooks, assessment strategies, course validation, and additional remarks; it may also outline the order in which topics should be addressed. This approach implies education is the transmission of predetermined content to students using the most effective methods available (Blenkin et al., 1992). Kelly (2009) further notes that this perspective excludes teachers from participating in the curriculum development process, expecting them instead to implement the curriculum prescribed by educational authorities. One could claim that when thinking of a syllabus as attached to the school curriculum, its design becomes constrained primarily to the selection and arrangement of content or subject matter. Thus, it may be advisable to focus more broadly on pedagogic matters, learning objectives (as opposed to content), and assessment matters - rather than being restricted to this narrow position.

3.7.2 Model II: Curriculum as a product

The curriculum as product model, also referred to as the objective model, can be traced back to the foundational work of Tyler, notably in his publication Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction (Tyler, 1949; 2013: pp. 59–68). Tyler's contributions significantly influenced the development of curricula in the United States (O'Neill, 2010). This model focuses on the pursuit of a predetermined and prescribed outcome. Its primary components include situation analysis, the identification of aims and objectives, the selection and organisation of content, designing and organising educational tasks, and the implementation of assessment. The product model seeks to address four fundamental questions (Keating, 2006):

1. What educational purposes does schooling serve?
2. What experiences need to be provided to meet these purposes?
3. In what ways can these experiences be effectively organised?
4. How can one assess whether the intended purposes have been fulfilled (Tyler, 2013)?

Fotheringham et al. (2012) and O'Neill (2010) remark that a key aspect of the model lies in its emphasis on plans, intentions, and the establishment of objectives related to behaviour. Students are expected to display some form of behavioural change after the lesson. It can be argued that the product model enhanced competencies in job-related skills. Fotheringham et al., (2012) describe this relationship by highlighting the fact that curriculum is often perceived as a product and seen as considerably discipline focused. The programme organisation and content are heavily defined by the standards of industry and professional bodies; therefore, this view of curriculum engages closely with professional organisations, and with an emphasis on employability. In this context, the design of the school curriculum development was viewed as a systematic, planned process, culminating in students' assessment of their learning to demonstrate attainment. The design process was predominantly technical, emphasising behavioural objectives, and communicating learning intentions to students so that learning can be more intentional. The stages of design allowed for the careful selection of curriculum structure and what could be included in the instructional context, thus allowing for a much clearer judgment in relation to students' performances. The model closely resembles the employability agenda.

Eisner (2001) critiques the product model since it places importance on assessment primarily at the conclusion of learning experiences, thereby prioritising summative evaluation while giving insufficient attention to the processes occurring during learning. Similarly, Knight (2001) argues that the model fails to provide a clear societal context to inform curriculum development. Additionally, Ackerman (2003) notes that the model's focus on objectives has become outdated, as educational trends since the 19th century have increasingly valued experience, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, problem solving, and collaborative learning. Moreover, Hussey and Smith (2008) contend that the model's

focus is on learning outcomes tends to be unpredictable and difficult to implement effectively.

Maher (2004) identifies several limitations of this model, including challenges in applying its focus on behavioural objectives to subjects related to aesthetics. Additionally, the model poses difficulties for teachers during lesson planning. Furthermore, it tends to position learners in a relatively passive role within the learning process.

Despite some of the inherent weaknesses of this model, several scholars (Gosling, 2009; Hussey & Smith, 2008; Maher, 2004; Hussey & Smith, 2003) argue that it has also provided notable benefits. Hussey and Smith (2008) argue that the model has played a significant role in conveying clear outcomes to students and has promoted a more structured approach of delivering instructional content. Furthermore, Hussey and Smith (2003) argue that acknowledging student motivation is central to learning and educators need to be willing to frame outcomes more freely in terms of engagement and enjoyment, even if student assessment becomes more challenging (p. 367). The implication of this is that, when writing learning outcomes, care should be taken not to be too prescriptive.

3.7.3 Model III: Curriculum as a process

To address certain limitations associated with the product model, Stenhouse (1975) proposed the process curriculum development model. This model is grounded in his conceptualisation of curriculum as an effort to communicate essential principles and elements of an educational plan in a manner that permits critical examination and practical implementation. Unlike the product model, the process model adopts a more open-ended approach, stressing continuous development aimed at fostering potentials such as critical thinking (Sheehan, 1986). Sheehan argued that while students may acquire knowledge as a finished product, essentially the outcomes of others' reasoning, knowledge acquisition itself is an active process requiring learners to formulate their own strategies. Building on this, Stenhouse (1975) characterised curriculum as an interactive process encompassing both classroom experiences and extracurricular activities. This active learning process involves sustained engagement among learners, knowledge, and

cultural contexts. Hence, classroom instruction seeks to create authentic scenarios that encourage students to analyse critically, articulate their thoughts, act, and reflect on their learning journey.

Fotheringham et al. (2012) note that Stenhouse's conceptualisation emerged partly in response to the static orientation of Tyler's curriculum model, which prioritised content and structure rather than interaction and community. They further indicate that the process model offers a more expansive and nuanced understanding of curriculum, integrating content, learner characteristics, and pedagogical approaches. Compared to the product model, this perspective adopts a process-focused lens, thereby embracing a broader view of the teaching and learning context. Such an approach enables varied student experiences, which learners can construct and mediate themselves (Fotheringham, 2012:1). Supporting the process curriculum model, Knight (2001) contended that curriculum planning should begin by considering the engagements and processes that lead to effective learning. This perspective requires careful deliberation regarding the diversity of school subjects and the learning environments involved. Knight (2001) describes an effective curriculum development model by highlighting the facilitation of learning within communities of practice. Such a curriculum would incorporate group collaboration and peer assessment as routine elements, encourage frequent interpersonal interactions, and foster broad networks of engagement (Knight, 2001:377). He asserts that it is sensible to design the curriculum in this intuitive way and that what matters is getting the processes, messages, and context right while trusting that positive outcomes will be achieved. Hence, instead of working in a more product model of learning outcomes, it is crucial to consider what is to be achieved in the learning activities prior to writing learning outcomes.

An additional key component of the process model concerns the provision of feedback on students' strengths and the identification of areas requiring improvement (Stenhouse, 1975). According to Stenhouse, this model facilitates interaction among students, teachers, the curriculum, and instructional materials. Consequently, students assume an active role in the learning process, rather than being passive recipients who simply express opinions about the instructional approach. Classroom activities are thus regarded as mechanisms for translating educational concepts into empirically testable practices,

giving teachers the authority to make decisions regarding instructional content. Unlike the product model, which tends to reject critique, the process model permits and incorporates it.

Although the process model possesses certain inherent advantages, it has faced criticism from scholars such as Ornstein and Hunkins (2009) and Thijs and Van den Akker (2009). They note that, despite its comprehensive perspective and emphasis on human capacities, maintaining the model's coherence is challenging because these capacities often represent interconnected tendencies and abilities. Additionally, the model poses challenges for those seeking a higher level of uniformity in curriculum content, since it values meaning-making and cognitive engagement, treating learners as active subjects rather than passive objects. This orientation can complicate student assessment, particularly in developing countries, where examination standards may overshadow subject-specific criteria, potentially compromising quality. Nevertheless, Stenhouse (1975) argues that this does not imply that student assessment should be abandoned. He points out that examinations, targeting specific outcomes, must be integrated thoughtfully; accordingly, it may be challenging to enable less proficient students to succeed under an examination system consistent with the process model.

3.7.4 Model IV: Curriculum as praxis

The curriculum-as-praxis model underscores a comprehensive perspective on educational practice within society. Curricula developed according to this model encompass not only clearly defined plans but also deliberate and engaged actions, as noted by Grundy (1987). It focuses on ongoing social processes defined by human interactions, values, and attitudes, which educators actively enact. Importantly, this model should not be understood merely as a collection of plans to be executed; rather, it entails a continuous, dynamic process in which implementation, planning, and evaluation are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Yek and Penny, 2006).

The curriculum as praxis model focuses on generating and applying knowledge collaboratively within student groups. Group members work on real-world problems embedded in authentic contexts, integrating critical analysis, reflection, and skill

acquisition. This interactive approach allows students to develop a clearer understanding of their specific pedagogical responsibilities and the goals they are meant to achieve. Grundy (1985) introduces the idea of curriculum as praxis, emphasising a deeply human-centred approach to education that focuses on both individual and collective freedom. Instead of viewing the curriculum as a rigid set of content or objectives, this viewpoint sees it as a dynamic, reflective journey shaped by the experiences of teachers and students alike. It's through open conversations and negotiations that these experiences are examined, challenged, and reimagined. This model according to Grundy (1985), importantly acknowledges the inherent tensions and difficulties in the educational relationship, framing the curriculum as a space for critical engagement, mutual understanding, and the potential for genuine transformation.

Carr and Kemmis (1986:190) contend that a curriculum conceived as praxis revolves around practical activities stemming from engaged practitioners. They argue that curriculum planners must consider the influence of social and historical contexts. This perspective suggests that curriculum development entails a dynamic interplay between action and reflection, rather than merely devising plans for teachers to implement (Yek and Penney, 2006). Within the praxis model, curriculum design is viewed as an active, continuously evaluated process. The model thus integrates practice with theory, extending beyond the traditional process model. It addresses elements often overlooked by the process model, including societal transformation and the need to confront emerging challenges. McCutcheon (1985) acknowledges the significance of curriculum theories but highlights a persistent disconnect between these theories and classroom practice. Consequently, teachers often rely less on theoretical frameworks and more on alternative resources to address practical problems and challenges.

From the above discussion, it should be noted that traditional curriculum aligns with the Curriculum as Product and Curriculum as Body of Knowledge models. In this framework, education is perceived as a means of passing down a set body of knowledge, placing a strong focus on essential subjects like math, science, and literature (Pinar, 2004). This curriculum is organised, centred around content, and directed by teachers, with students expected to assimilate information and demonstrate their understanding through standardised tests (Tyler, 1949). The Curriculum as Product model views education as a

means of delivering predetermined knowledge, measuring success by how well students can reproduce this information in exams or tests (Schwab, 1973).

Alternatively, the Progressive curriculum aligns with the Curriculum as Praxis and Curriculum as Process models. In this approach, education is seen as a lively, student-centred, and interactive journey, where learners dive into inquiry-based activities, problem-solving, and teamwork (Dewey, 1938). The Curriculum as Praxis model highlights the mutual relationship between teaching and learning, with both students and teachers playing active roles in the educational experience (Grundy, 1987). Meanwhile, the Curriculum as Process model suggests that learning is adaptable, evolving, and influenced by context, focusing on the overall development of students intellectually, socially, and emotionally (Stenhouse, 1975). In this model, assessment often takes a formative approach, using projects, portfolios, and self-reflection instead of traditional tests (Freire, 1970). Consequently, the Progressive curriculum promotes the development of critical thinking, encourages creativity, and supports learners in actively constructing their own knowledge. This approach differs markedly from the Traditional curriculum, which tends to be fixed and cantered around teacher-led instruction.

It is important to highlight that, based on the preceding discussion of curriculum models and the analysis presented in Chapter 5, Section 5.1, this study draws on the praxis model due to its emphasis on a dynamic interplay between reflection and action, where action entails commitment rather than mere response (Grundy, 1985). The praxis model situates students in contexts that prepare them to engage effectively with contemporary global challenges. It prioritises experiential learning through problem solving, experimentation, project work, collaborative group activities, and the integration of multiple disciplines to address problems in an interdisciplinary manner. These characteristics are not only significant but also shape the way curriculum is conceptualised and structured, influencing pedagogical practices and learning outcomes (Arnold and Mundy, 2020). Furthermore, the previous discussion on curriculum models contributes to understanding curriculum in a way that facilitates a deeper understanding of both the potential and the constraints involved in educational reforms, which is central to the focus of this research.

3.8 Curriculum Development

Smith (2000) and Kelly (2009) describe curriculum development as a structured process that involves making decisions regarding the selection, organisation, and assessment of learning experiences aimed at achieving particular educational objectives. This definition aligns with the curriculum models developed over the decades, especially Tyler's (1949) objectives model with a focus on rational planning and evaluation, and Stenhouse's (1975) process model, which perceives curriculum as process, continuous and informed by research. In such a theoretical framing, curriculum planning cannot be ad hoc or intuitive but must be underpinned by a principled logic emanating from curriculum theory if internal coherence and contextual relevance are to be achieved. Considering the rapidly changing nature of society, where forms of knowledge may rapidly become obsolete and values change in response to socio-economic imperatives, curriculum planners need to engage in constant critical review. Very often, societal demands place educational institutions at the forefront of responses to emerging social problems; this in turn places schools, teachers, and policy makers under pressure to respond appropriately. Curriculum planning, therefore, needs to be deliberate, theoretically informed, and adaptive in nature; it needs to ensure that whatever is irrelevant or obsolete has been systematically removed and replaced with that which is valid, meaningful, and responsive to current social needs.

Four main elements of curriculum development can be identified: objectives, methods, content, and evaluation. The curriculum development process in the 1970s and beyond was considered to involve four stages in line with the decision-making on each of the four main curriculum elements. Despite the current emphasis on equipping school leavers with employability skills to enhance their prospects of gaining employment, the curriculum development process may be understood as comprising six stages: problem identification, needs assessment, setting objectives, strategy formulation, implementation, and feedback. Problem identification entails recognising societal gaps that the curriculum seeks to address. Needs assessment focuses on determining the deficiencies or skills required by the curriculum’s target audience, namely the students. The stage of setting objectives involves defining clear and measurable goals and milestones that guide the content and instructional methods, as well as clarifying the

intended outcomes and suggesting appropriate approaches. Subsequently, strategy formulation involves selecting methods believed to be effective in achieving the established goals. Implementation follows, ensuring that the planned activities are executed, involving the allocation and mobilisation of both human and physical resources necessary to carry out the curriculum plan. The final stage consists of evaluating the curriculum to assess the extent to which the predetermined goals have been met. This evaluation provides feedback on quality and highlights areas necessitating improvement. The insights gained from this process inform whether the students have demonstrated attainment of the intended learning outcomes.

Initiated by Porter (2004), the model of the intended, enacted, assessed and attained curricula (See figure 3.1) was first introduced to highlight the gaps that often arise between what policymakers intend students to learn, what teachers teach, what systems assess and what students finally attain. In distinguishing these four layers, Porter (2004) sought to provide a clearer framework for analysing curriculum alignment and identifying where inconsistencies occur across policy, classroom practice and learning outcomes. Green et al.'s (2006) work supports its use by offering methodological tools with which to explore how curriculum is interpreted and transformed at different stages. Hence, the three types of curricula implemented and the attained curriculum (See figure 3.1).

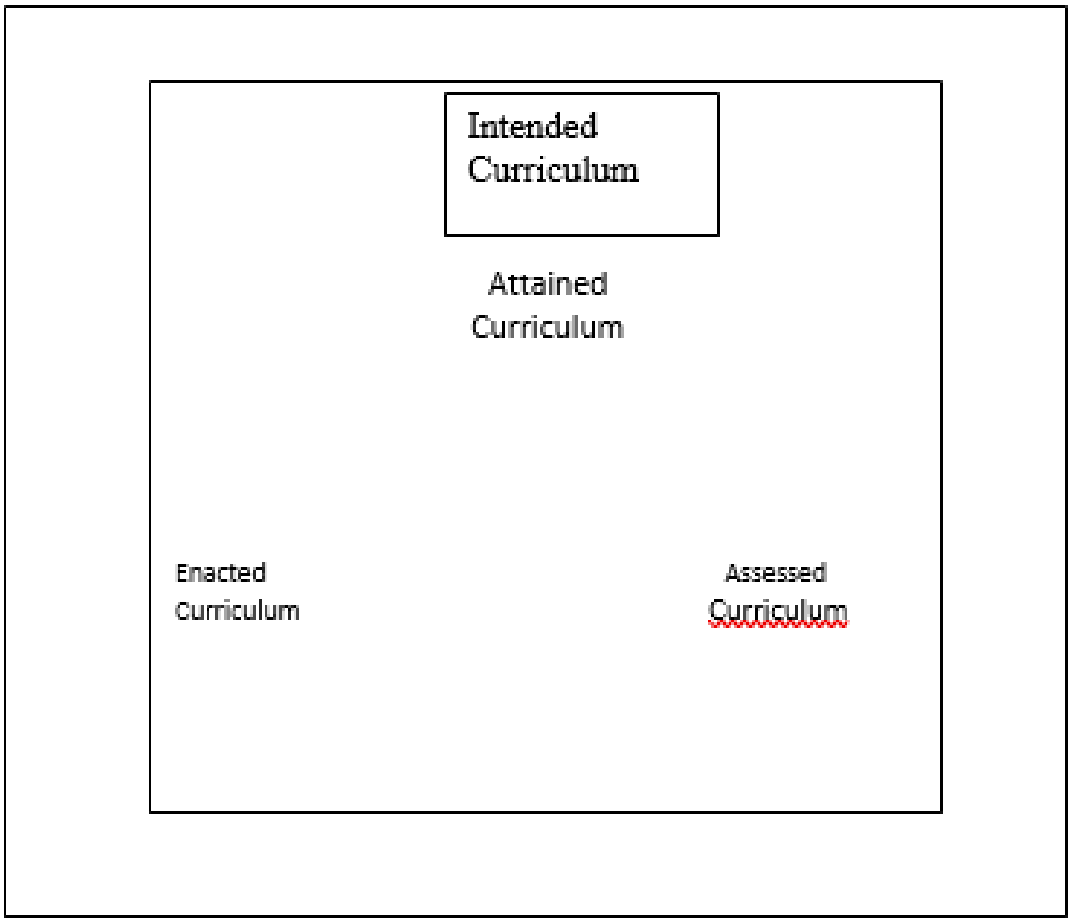


Figure 3.1: Intended, enacted, assessed and attained curricula. Source: Adapted from Green et al (2006) and Porter (2004)

The intended curriculum, often referred to as the official curriculum, outlines the objectives of the education system along with the frameworks intended to facilitate their realisation (Wiggins and McTighe, 2005; Kuiper, Folmer, and Ottevanger, 2013). It represents the content expected to be delivered to students, is prescriptive in nature, and is documented in syllabuses and other curriculum materials issued by educational authorities, which specify the knowledge and skills teachers are expected to transmit. In contrast, the enacted curriculum relates to what is delivered in classroom settings and constitutes a central aspect of teachers' routine responsibilities (Shulman, 1986). Teachers may face challenges in fulfilling these roles due to factors such as instructional constraints, insufficient resources, inadequate teacher quality, or ineffective school management. The attained curriculum refers to the skills, knowledge, and values that students ultimately acquire through their educational experiences. Additionally, Green et

al. (2009) and Porter (2004) introduced a fourth component, the assessed curriculum, which is defined by the content on which students are evaluated to determine their level of achievement.

3.9 The Need for Curriculum Reform

Gouëdard et al. (2020) assert that curriculum reform is perceived across many countries as a necessary step to innovate schools and respond to the demands posed by a rapidly changing world. They note that numerous OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries have recently undertaken such reforms with the goal of equipping children with the knowledge, skills, and competencies anticipated to be important in the future. Nonetheless, identifying the most suitable and effective approaches to implement these changes remains a complex issue. This difficulty is often framed in the literature as an implementation gap, highlighting the discrepancy between the intended goals of curriculum renewal and their actual realisation. Furthermore, in an era characterised by rapid global transformations where economic growth and the acquisition of skills to address 21st-century challenges are critical, the role of education has gained increased importance (Van Rooy, 2005). Educational reforms continue to be designed systematically to foster effective practices and improve the overall quality of schooling. Scholars such as Van Rooy (2005), White (2004), and Blake (2003) accentuate that curriculum evolution is not a novel phenomenon. This is reflected in initiatives like Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence and reforms in developing countries, including South Africa in 1997 and 2005, as well as Cameroon in 1995. Notably, Van Roy (2005) emphasises that substantive changes in the educational system depend on teachers' perspectives on the curriculum within classroom contexts, transcending the realms of governments, scholars, or curriculum designers. Recognising the dynamic nature of societies, it is acknowledged that any change necessitates corresponding adaptations in socio-economic structures. An inflexible curriculum within a shifting societal landscape becomes untenable, necessitating a dynamic curriculum designed through careful planning to achieve defined objectives and strategies. This highlights the imperative for continuous scrutiny and evaluation of school content, ensuring its relevance and enhancement within an evolving society.

Despite the consensus on the need for responsive curricular adjustments, Baker (2011) challenges the assumption that schools can effectively address societal issues, citing the English education system's limited impact on societal disparities. This paradox raises crucial questions, particularly in developing countries like Cameroon, regarding the efficacy of post-independence curriculum reforms considering financial investments and time allocations. Acknowledging that effective curriculum reform extends beyond content and methods, it is important to consider its alignment with shifting ideologies, socio-economic landscapes, and political contexts. Glatthorn and Jailall (2009) contend that reform should be an inclusive process involving teachers, school leaders, and those translating methods into practice. Moreover, community involvement, especially that of parents, plays a crucial role, given that they entrust their children to schools with the anticipation that the secondary education cycle will conclude successfully.

3.10 Concerns in Curriculum Development for Cameroon Schools

A school's curriculum, as articulated by Tambo (2000), encompasses the deliberate learning opportunities provided to students within and beyond the classroom. Curriculum development, therefore, entails the intricate process of designing these educational experiences and ensuring their effective implementation. Mekhanet (2025) notes that in the post-colonial context of Cameroon, marked by the legacy of colonial education systems, the challenge of realigning the school system with African realities necessitates a focus on education policy, particularly in the context of curriculum development. Despite numerous initiatives, including conferences, seminars, workshops, textbook authoring, and syllabus creation, Alemnge, (2021) maintains that the intended goals of curriculum development in Cameroon remain largely unmet, plagued by strategic challenges.

The first major concern relates to policy, encompassing issues such as harmonisation, bilingualism, integration of ethnic languages, ruralisation, and prioritisation of science and technology (Alemnge, 2021). The policy of harmonisation is often hindered by the historical legacy of two colonial education systems, French and British, necessitating structural and systematic alignment (Tambo, 2000). For example, despite initial progress in the harmonisation of academic calendars, significant disparities persist, particularly in the structure of examinations and sequencing of subjects (Alemnge, 2021). Also, the

bilingualism policy, aimed at promoting the constitutional option of bilingualism, faces challenges at the primary school level, while at the secondary level, the teaching and assessment of both official languages is a major challenge (Takam and Fassé, 2020). Furthermore, the integration of ethnic languages, (a multilingualism initiative) which seeks to incorporate Cameroonian languages into education, remains hindered by the absence of a well-defined implementation strategy (Takam and Fassé, 2020). Besides, the ruralisation policy, focusing on rural development needs in curriculum design, has persistently encountered challenges due to ambiguity in its definition, unrealistic school roles, disagreements among officials, failure to harmonise education systems, and underutilisation of research. Takam and Fassé (2020) further observe that the prioritisation of science and technology, advocated by the government, faces challenges such as misinterpretation, lack of originality, shortage of science teachers, and inadequate resources - notwithstanding some progress in utilising local materials and establishing technical schools at the secondary level. The overarching contention is that these policy concerns highlight the intricate nature of curriculum development in the complex educational landscape of post-colonial Cameroon.

3.11 The concept of the Curriculum in Cameroon

To Abangma (1999) the interpretation of the term curriculum in Cameroon is a subject of considerable debate, manifesting in two distinct senses: a narrow, restrictive sense and a broader, more encompassing sense. In its restrictive connotation, the curriculum is perceived as the description of syllabi and topics delivered within the educational setting. In the broader context, it comprises all activities occurring within the school environment. Abangma (1999) asserts that in Cameroon, the understanding of the curriculum is predominantly narrow, often equated with the term "syllabus," indicating content. Regardless of terminology, be it syllabus or curriculum, Abangma (1999) argues that it is imperative to underscore that a comprehensive school curriculum entails more than merely specifying new or enhanced content; it must also encompass critical elements such as objectives, teaching methodologies, and instructional resources. In the Cameroonian context, where the curriculum is viewed as the stipulated subjects for

student instruction, contained within syllabi and textbooks, the term "curriculum" is used be interchangeably with "syllabus" in the literature.

Abangma (1999) further states that while the terms "core curriculum" and "non-core curriculum" are not explicitly employed in Cameroon, certain subjects are considered more important than others. These courses are considered essential for imparting necessary skills or fostering a shared cultural knowledge base. For instance, as outlined by Nana (2013), Mathematics, English, and French are mandatory in the Anglophone system, requiring five years of study at secondary schools, with all students compelled to register for the GCE Ordinary Level examination in these subjects (See chapter 2, section 2.3). As noted by, Alemnge (2021), in the Francophone system, subjects of greater significance receive more teaching hours and carry higher coefficients in examinations. The coefficient system consists of grading subjects on a scale of 20, followed by multiplying the grade by an assigned coefficient. In the first cycle of secondary education within the Francophone system, Mathematics, English, and French carry a coefficient of 5, whereas subjects considered less prominent, such as natural science, history, and geography, have a coefficient of 2. This grouping of subjects by coefficient, where the subject with the highest coefficient is comparable to core curriculum subjects in the English system, introduces additional complexity to the differentiation of curricula in Cameroon (Alemnge, 2021).

3.12 Curriculum Traditions in Cameroon

The contemporary secondary school curriculum in Cameroon marks a departure from its colonial-era counterpart, which aimed to produce administrative and clerical assistants to serve the colonial rulers (See Chapter 2, section 2.1). Presently, the primary objective of the curriculum is to extend educational opportunities to a broader segment of the community, offering prospects for further and higher education (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). Abangma (1999) notes the similarity between the Cameroon curriculum, whether pre-colonial or post-colonial, and Western educational models. This resemblance, rooted in the legacies of both French and English influences, results in a curriculum tradition that can be classified into 'elitist' and 'utilitarian' categories.

Critics such as Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) argue that the educational system, particularly in secondary schools, perpetuates social stratification, creating divisions between the affluent and the impoverished, and the powerful and the vulnerable. The gap in earnings linked with education is accentuated, leading to a societal rift between elites and the masses. Thus, the elitist curriculum, often associated with grammar schools, emphasises examination preparation and is perceived to hold higher value. This elitism is evident not only in the subjects offered but also in the selection procedure for students (Ndille, 2020). In the anglophone sector, grammar school admission is determined by the government common entrance examination, favouring students with high grades (Ndille, 2020). However, the elite constitute a small portion of the overall population when compared to individuals living in rural areas and slums, among whom a larger proportion of children attend elite secondary schools (Ndille, 2020). This socioeconomic power dynamic influences the selection process, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds often attending low-status secondary schools and vocational schools. Conversely, Ndille (2020) remarks that the Francophone sector lacks a centralised entrance examination, with individual schools conducting examinations in their catchment areas. Despite variations, both systems contribute to the perpetuation of elitist practices, influencing social status including access to higher education and broader opportunities such as scholarships to study abroad. Furthermore, the utilitarian curriculum is embodied in technical schools and Rural Artisan Schools (SARs), designed to prepare students for the workforce upon completion of school (Ndille, 2020). Critics question the effectiveness of these schools in achieving their intended purpose, particularly in the Anglophone sector (Lavngwa, 2013). Ndille (2020) further notes that the utilitarian curriculum, with historical roots in French colonial rule, involves training schools for technicians, vocational schools affiliated with departments, and vocational schools referred to as rural artisans training centres. Essentially, the curriculum traditions in Cameroon reflect a dual nature, encompassing both elitist and utilitarian objectives. While the elitist curriculum emphasises academic excellence and perpetuates social stratification, the utilitarian curriculum prioritises practical skills for the workforce, albeit with challenges and perceptions of inferiority. These curriculum traditions underscore the complex historical legacies and socio-economic dynamics shaping education in Cameroon.

3.13 Style of Curriculum Development in Cameroon

It is recognised that the formulation of curricula is a process deeply intertwined with organisational and societal constraints (Jing, 2019). However, in Cameroon, a top-down curriculum development approach is employed; this means placing the Minister of Education at the helm of responsibilities, overseeing development, control, and administration of technical schools. This authoritarian approach, as asserted by Forzie (1990), confines the capacity for change or modification solely to the directives of the Minister of Education, reflecting a centralised and rigid system. Moreover, the integration of the educational system with the political structure in Cameroon underscores the likelihood of curricular changes becoming politically charged (Mbatna and Aquin, 2022). The top-down approach tends to render curriculum implementation somewhat one-sided, often neglecting valuable classroom feedback during the curriculum design phase, as highlighted by Abangma (1999). The Minister of Education, supported by a cadre of trained inspectors, assumes control of the curriculum, issuing directives to schools, teachers, and parents upon curriculum endorsement. This authoritative control extends to external examinations, which adhere to highly prescriptive curriculum criteria (Mbatna and Aquin, 2022). Such inflexibility in curriculum control limits teachers' autonomy in tailoring their teaching methods and assessments (Abangma, 1999). Nonetheless, in the terms of syllabus and textbooks, schools adhere to a structured syllabus designed by the Ministry of Education, accompanied by adopted textbooks. These documents, while straightforward in design, primarily list topics and sub-topics without consistently incorporating defined objectives, student activities, teaching resources, or assessment criteria. The prescribed textbooks, recommended by national pedagogic inspectors and higher education authorities, wield significant influence on the subjects taught across the country, leading to limited diversity in the products of curriculum development.

The mode of teaching in Cameroon's secondary schools is predominantly teacher-centred due to large class sizes, making individualised teaching challenging (Wiysahnyuy, 2019). The standard duration for each subject is 45 minutes, with limited double lessons. The evaluation system heavily relies on examinations, viewed as gateways to further education or employment. Examinations, graded based on the perceived importance of subjects in the curriculum, serve as indicators of achievement, selection criteria, and

motivators for students and teachers alike. Promotion within secondary schools in Cameroon is contingent on termly exams at the end of the academic year. The emphasis on educational progression may lead to the repetition of classes for academically weaker students, contributing to a system where academic liberty can inadvertently result in the elimination of less talented or socioeconomically deprived students. In summary, the curriculum development and implementation in Cameroon manifest a centralised, authoritarian structure with political and societal implications, reflecting both strengths and limitations in responding to the diverse needs of students and educators.

3.14 The development of the conceptual framework

Chapter 1, Section 1.8.1 presented Maxwell's (2013) definition of a conceptual framework. It further discussed the importance of such a framework in research, noting its function in assisting researchers with clarifying objectives, formulating research questions, selecting appropriate methods, identifying possible validity threats, and establishing the study's significance. Building on these points, the current section examines the development of the conceptual framework used in this study, underscoring the themes emerging from the literature review including youth unemployment and education-labour market mismatch; employability skills and vocational education; and curriculum development and skills mismatch; as well as its role and relevance in addressing the research problem identified.

3.14.1 Youth Unemployment and the Education-Labour Market Mismatch

The literature review (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6) indicated that unemployment in Cameroon has become a significant socio-economic issue. The scarcity of job opportunities for young people completing secondary education leaves many of them facing uncertain prospects, often pushing them towards informal income sources or irregular, low-wage employment (see Section 3.5). This situation underscores a notable disconnect between the outcomes of the education system and the demands of the labour market, pointing to the need for a structured approach to analyse and address this disparity.

Specifically, the ongoing unemployment experienced by school leavers in Cameroon appears to be linked to the curriculum's failure to adequately prepare students with skills aligned with current labour market demands (Penn, 2016). While students are anticipated to gain both practical and theoretical knowledge through the curriculum, these outcomes are often hindered by inadequate curriculum design and a lack of comprehensive reform.

3.14.2 Employability Skills and Vocational Education

In parallel, there is an urgent need for the educational system to equip students with relevant skills that enhance employability, particularly through vocational and technical education. However, fostering a competence-based or entrepreneurial culture requires a shift from the traditional academic approach towards a more vocational and skill-oriented curriculum. As Dike (2009) argues, incorporating employability skills or vocational training into the school curriculum is central to equipping students with the skills necessary for meaningful employment. The Cameroon government's limited initiatives in promoting vocational skill development may have contributed to the high unemployment rates among school leavers (see Chapter 3, Section 3.6.1).

While some prior research highlights vocational education's role in equipping young people for the job market (Quintini & Martin, 2006; OECD, 2012), other studies identify the ongoing problem of skills mismatch as a significant factor contributing to unemployment, especially within developing countries (Almeida et al., 2012). The literature review thus provides compelling evidence that vocational education has the potential to mitigate youth unemployment, yet the secondary education system in Cameroon currently falls short in equipping school leavers with skills relevant to the labour market.

3.14.3 Curriculum Development and Skills Mismatch

The conceptual framework outlined in this study (see Figure 3.2) illustrates the relationships between curriculum development, employability skills, and youth unemployment. It proposes that employability skills, understood as the abilities and competencies that enhance an individual's attractiveness to potential employers, function as crucial links connecting educational processes to employment outcomes.

Although previous research offers valuable perspectives, research undertaken in Cameroon has rarely explored the direct link between curriculum development and employability skills. While prior research highlights vocational education, employability skills, and skills mismatch, the direct relationship between curriculum development and employability skills remains insufficiently explored. This gap highlights the importance of the present conceptual framework, which posits a direct and meaningful association between the design of the curriculum and the acquisition of skills necessary for employment, subsequently influencing youth unemployment rates.

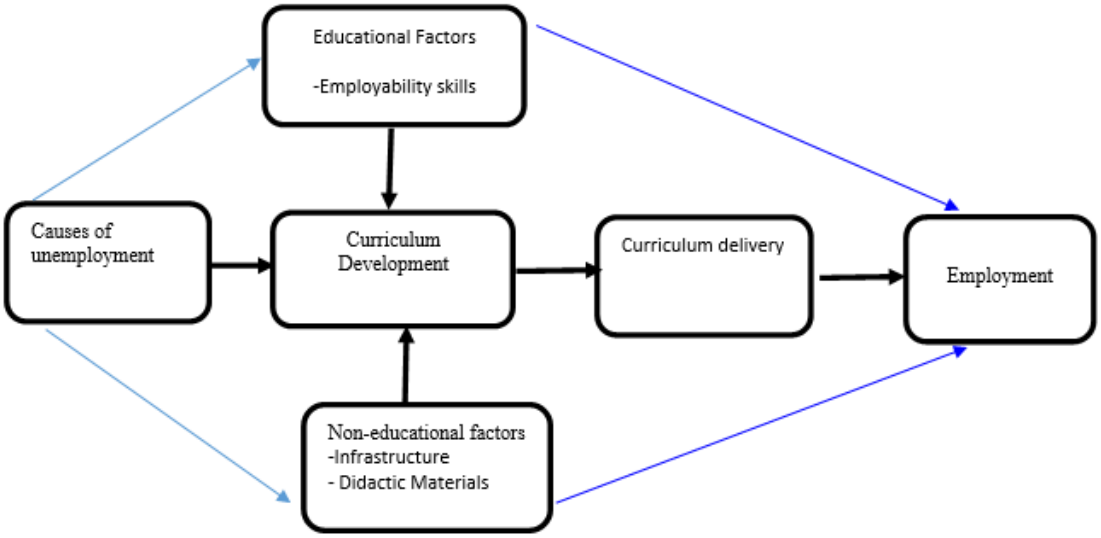


Figure 3.2: A conceptual framework for linking employability skills curriculum development.

3.15 Relevance of the Conceptual Framework to the Study

The conceptual framework is therefore essential as it offers a structured lens to explore these relationships. It directs the research to identify how curriculum development might be aligned with employability needs, guides the methodological decisions, and allows for interpreting the findings. Further, it allows for a structure for analysing stakeholder perceptions, including students, teachers, and pedagogic inspectors, on whether the curriculum at the secondary school level supports and prepares school leavers for the labour market. Indeed, the conceptual framework constitutes an important tool in

understanding, explaining, and addressing the ongoing problem of youth unemployment in Cameroon.

3.16 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to establish the key definitions relevant to the study and to review available literature to develop an understanding of existing research and discourse relevant to the study as well as to locate the research within an overall context. The literature has been used to illuminate discussions on employability skills and related concepts such as vocational/technical education, and competency. It has been demonstrated how employability has received significant scholarly recognition and debate in the literature although there still exist gaps around evidence related to effective attainment of skills to influence employability. There is the need to contemplate redesigning the curriculum with employability skills and VET central to the curriculum for students to both recognise and explicitly make connections between employability outcomes and their discipline. Improving learning provided to secondary school students is fundamental to productively developing them for gaining and sustaining employment in their chosen fields. It is however acknowledged that, despite the plethora of existing literature on employability skills, it will remain a central subject of scholarly discourse for some considerable amount of time.

This literature review draws on data from the World Bank (2019) and the International Labour Organisation (2013) to illustrate the impact of youth unemployment across both developed and developing nations. In response to this challenge, the government has implemented targeted interventions, such as the GESP 2010/2020 programme, aimed at improving youth employment outcomes. Although efforts have been made to restructure the education system and refocus its objectives toward addressing youth unemployment and promoting social development, available evidence indicates that these initiatives have yielded only modest results. A contributing factor to the increasing youth unemployment appears to be a lack of skills required to secure employment among young people. Incorporating competency-based skills through the vocationalisation of secondary education may offer a viable avenue for enhancing the employability of youth.

The field of curriculum studies has been identified as complex and contested, with diverse approaches emerging over recent decades, as noted by Pinar (2004) and Malewski (2010a). The curriculum encompasses fundamental questions regarding its epistemological nature, which are continuously examined in relation to the interplay between theoretical models and practical application. Discussions on this topic highlight the intricate nature of school curricula, reinforcing the need to consider how policy directives are translated into practice, as well as the considerable variation in this process across different schools. The design and implementation of curricula involve complexities and uncertainties. A well-constructed programme of study must attentively address the core educational objectives. It should facilitate the social integration of young people within society and enhance their capacity for active citizenship, while simultaneously fostering work-related skills without overly concentrating on narrowly defined vocational training. This presents a considerable challenge for policymakers and educators aiming to tackle the ongoing problem of unemployment among school leavers. The literature review has supported the creation of a conceptual framework intended to evaluate how well the secondary education system in Cameroon equips students for the workforce.

Chapter 4. Research Methodology and Methods

4.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to examine the philosophical assumptions underlying this study and to evaluate the employed methods and design. It occupies a central position in the thesis, as the outcomes of the thematic analysis, along with the subsequent discussions and conclusions, hinge on the chosen methodology and methods. Kincheloe and Berry (2004) argue that assumptions influence research outcomes, and methodological decisions significantly affect the findings. Although initial assumptions may guide the beginning of research on a particular topic, they often become more refined through continued reflection and analysis. This process narrows the research focus by defining its aims and objectives and by formulating precise research questions. Furthermore, Kincheloe and Berry (2004) posit that articulating the rationale for the selected methodological approach allows the researcher to justify procedural choices, support the validity of the results, and utilise various philosophical frameworks to clarify the research process and the foundational assumptions upon which it rests.

Moreover, Taber (2013) contends that implementing techniques are only considered research if they are implemented as a component of a cohesive research plan, or research design, which must be guided by a research strategy. Likewise, and as indicated by Taber (2013) an educational research methodology supports the choice and ordering of appropriate strategies in a study, which aligns with what is commonly understood as methodology. It can be stated therefore that, the study design, which in turn dictates what data is gathered and the way it is analysed, are influenced by the methodological choice. Alternatively stated, the researcher's methodology extends beyond their research strategies as well as their paradigmatic - fundamental or philosophical commitments (Taber, 2013). Nonetheless, the approach taken to address research questions is known as methodology. Therefore, a straightforward approach to conceptualise methodology and techniques - sometimes referred to as "methods" - is through the lens of strategy and tactics (Taber, 2013: 77–78). A comprehensive and well-organised plan that delineates

the entire approach to accomplish the study objectives is a hallmark of effective research methodology. Further, as indicated by Taber (2013), typical approaches often perceived as research methodologies comprise of experiments, surveys, ethnography, case studies, grounded theory, and action research. Taber (2013) however, remarks that an approach solely for collecting or analysing data does not constitute a methodology. Mills and Birks (2014) argue that methodology involves strategies for gathering and analysing data, which are directed by an underlying theoretical perspective, as exemplified by approaches grounded in personal construct theory or phenomenology.

It is worthy to mention that the implementation of a conceptual framework for this thesis, as well as being outlined previously in chapter 1 section 1.5.4 has also been explained in the Literature Review Chapter (Chapter 3, section 3.14). The conceptual framework illustrates the interdependence between curriculum development and the acquisition of employability skills. Given that this research is conducted during a period marked by elevated youth unemployment rates in Cameroon (2019 to present), the theoretical framework, which suggests that investment in secondary school students' employability skills may improve their career opportunities, offers a relevant lens for examining the extent to which the secondary school curriculum equips graduates for the job market. This framework serves as a foundation for interpreting the study's findings, enabling an exploration of the underlying mechanisms and contextual factors. It also facilitates an explanation of the perspectives held by various education stakeholders.

The Research Onion framework's structure (See Figure 1.0) has been employed to aid the structure of this chapter. Saunders et al., (2019;2023) developed this framework to offer a useful approach whereby a research methodology could be developed. The framework comprises six (6) layers of the onion, each of which represents a more in-depth step of the research process which must be followed by the researcher (Saunders et al., 2019; 2023). The link between Saunders' research onion and research methodology is reflected in the structure of this chapter, which systematically addresses each layer of the onion from the outermost to the innermost (Saunders et al., 2019;2023). According to Saunders et al. (2019;2023), the onion model delineates three main stages involved in methodological decision-making: the research philosophy and approach, represented by the two outermost layers; the research design, which includes methodology, strategy,

and time horizon; and the techniques and processes, involving data collection methods and analysis procedures at the core. These layers are interrelated and influence each other throughout the research design process.

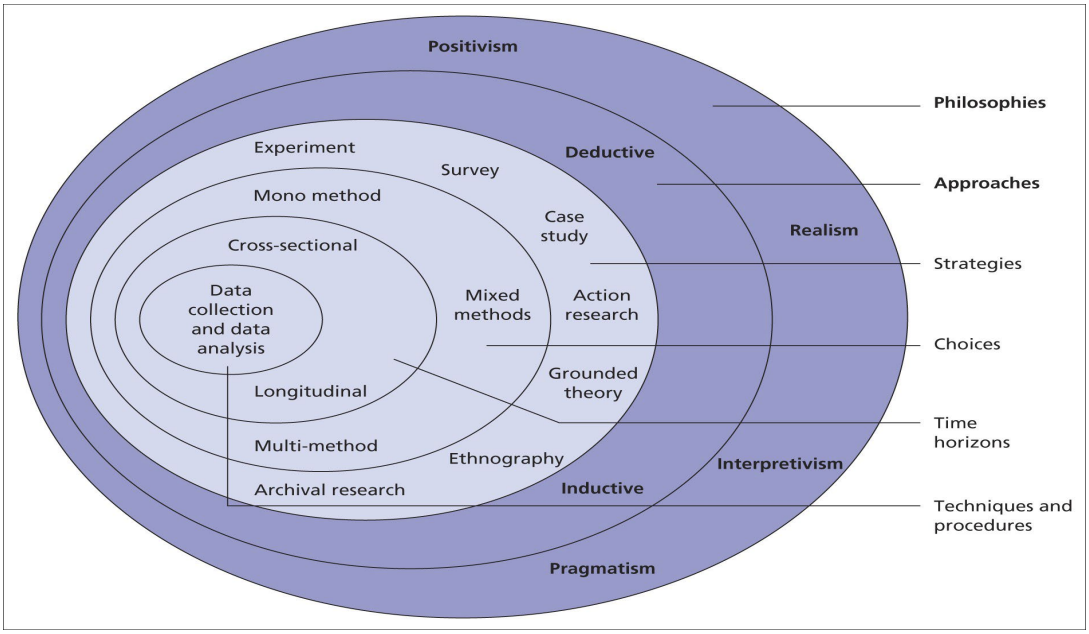


Figure 4.0: The Research Onion; Source: Saunders et al., (2016; 2023).

Therefore, the six phases aligned with the six levels of the Research Onion are used as the framework for discussing and justifying the methodological decisions.

Table 4.0: Saunders' (2016) Research Onion as implemented in this study

Layers	Applied in this Research
1. Research philosophy	Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions /Interpretivism
2. Research approach	Inductive/Qualitative
3. Research strategy	Qualitative Case Study
4. Choices	Multi-method qualitative
5. Time horizon	Cross-sectional
6. Techniques and procedures	Data Collection and Analysis

Initially it provides justification for the research philosophy and the chosen theory formulation strategy. To Saunders et al. (2016;2023), these two layers then have an

impact upon the choices made in the methodological choice, research strategy, and time horizon levels of the research onion. "*You can think of these three layers as concentrating on the research design process, which involves the process by which you transform your research question into a research project*" (Saunders et al., 2016, p. 173). The methods for gathering and analysing data are assessed in the last, inner layer of the onion, alongside the validity of the results and the presentation of research ethics (Saunders et al., 2016;2023). Ultimately, the study's limitations and drawbacks are highlighted, and then the selected research approach is briefly summarised. The following section reviews the research question for this study.

4.1 Research Questions

Prior to embarking on a piece of research, Cohen et al., (2011) suggest considering the role of research questions and the direction to the study that they may provide. Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that research approaches are not invariably guided by the research question, and certain qualitative studies may not always contain research questions (Bryman, 2007b). Additionally, research questions determine the basis for the kind of research that the researcher intends to undertake. Crucially, the wording of the research questions impacts on the type of approach as well as the overall research that will be developed. To Savin-Baden and Howell Major, (2013) research questions in a qualitative study are formulated from inference and observation and commonly begin with “how” and “why.” In contrast, in quantitative or experimental approaches, research questions rely on inductive logic and are not expressed in the research hypothesis. Once the main elements have been identified, the development of research questions can follow (Savin-Baden and Howell Major, 2013). Moreover, in most research, research questions figure significantly (Cohen et al., 2011; 2018). Research questions are used to identify aspects within a broad and complex field that researchers consider significant (Flick, 2009). They provide a framework that guides focus on relevant theoretical components and supports the development of the study design, as outlined in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Key Research Questions

Question	Method	Analysis
1. What is the perception of current students (Form 5, 15-16-year-olds), teachers and education administrators on the types of knowledge and skills they need from the curriculum to gain employment?	Questionnaires and interviews	Thematic analysis and adapted approach for questionnaires
2. What is the relationship between curriculum development and youth (15-24) unemployment from participants' (teachers, students, pedagogic inspectors) perspectives?	Literature	Conceptual Framework/ Thematic Analysis and adapted approach for questionnaires
3. How can employability skills be integrated in the curriculum of schools in Cameroon to improve employability skills for students (15-16) from participants' perspectives?	Questionnaires and interviews	Thematic analysis and adapted approach for questionnaires

The main research questions presented in the first chapter and emphasised in the literature review form the central focus of this study. They have been employed to define the phenomenon being examined, to inform the chosen methodological framework, and to represent the epistemological basis of the research process (Kivunja, 2016). These questions are revisited at various stages of the study, shaping the interpretation of data in the Findings chapter, supporting the analysis in the Analysis chapter, and underpinning the conclusions reached in the Conclusion chapter relational to the study's objectives.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Drawing from existing literature and educational background, the conceptual framework outlines the key concepts and research concepts relevant to the study's questions. Its purpose is to explore the connection between curriculum development and the acquisition of employability skills. With this framework defined (refer to Chapter 1, section 1.8, and Chapter 3, section 3.14), the next step in this research involves analysing the underlying philosophical approach, which is the focus of the present chapter. This examination is intended to reinforce the key concepts guiding the study, including the methodological choices related to data collection and analysis, thereby providing a coherent conceptual basis for interpreting the emerging findings and structuring the overall study framework.

Saunders et al. (2016;2023) state that a research methodology is fundamentally anchored in a particular philosophical framework, which subsequently shapes the choice of research strategies and methods. This suggests that the underlying research philosophy influences all aspects of the research process, including the selection of methods and the overall design. In this context, the research philosophy determines how data is collected before the findings are interpreted within the conceptual framework. This is significant because it reflects the expression of beliefs and values regarding the nature of the world, including its organisation and proposed structure (Newby, 2010;2014). To substantiate the chosen research approaches, it is therefore important to articulate an understanding of the associated philosophical foundations. Central to this is the examination of how the social world is studied, which raises ontological questions about the nature of social reality and what can be known about it. Additionally, epistemological questions address how knowledge about the social world can be acquired and justified (Ritchie et al., 2013, p.5). These issues are elaborated further in section 4.3 below. The subsequent sections outline the philosophical basis of this research prior to a discussion of the sampling methods, data collection instruments, and the study's design. The research philosophy thus constitutes the foundation upon which the research design and procedures are constructed. Indeed, researchers hold diverse perspectives on how to understand and engage with their environments (Silverman, 2014), resulting in considerable variation in research methodologies. Researchers seek findings that command respect and expect

their work to be regarded as rigorous, credible, reliable, valid, and contributing meaningfully to knowledge (Silverman, 2014). Moreover, the outcomes must be justifiable, with transparent processes that allow for critical examination by the scholarly community. The methodology employed in this study will facilitate a detailed analysis of stakeholders' perceptions in education concerning the specific knowledge and skills that students need to acquire from the curriculum to improve their chances of employment.

4.2.1 The Notion of Paradigm

Educational research paradigms, according to Bani (2021), such as ontology, epistemology, positivist, interpretivist, just to name a few, can be confusing and challenging to both experienced and novice researchers. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) remark that available literature often lacks precise definitions of these topics, leading to varying interpretations. This section aims to illustrate the influence of the researcher's paradigmatic stance, as well as their ontological and epistemological assumptions, on the choices made in the study's methodology, design, and related decisions.

Paradigms consist of a coherent collection of ideas and approaches that embody particular values and beliefs (Bartlett and Burton, 2012). According to Newby (2014), a paradigm represents a manner of conceptualising a subject and conducting research that is regarded as suitable by scholars within the relevant field. It provides researchers with a conceptual framework that underpins the justification of strategies and intentions associated with methodology, research design, and data collection techniques. In the context of educational research, Burgess et al. (2006) describe a paradigm as a collection of convictions and guidelines considered valid within the discipline. A paradigm from these perspectives, determine the basis of the research – empirical and objective or interpretive and subjective (see section 4.2.3). Operating within a certain paradigm determines the researcher's philosophical standpoint (Burgess et al., 2006). Consequently, the relationship between researchers with their data and study participants as well as how the findings and conclusions are drawn; are determined by a paradigm. Further, different paradigms underpin a range of data collection and analysis methods and in turn constitute a wide range of theoretical frameworks (Newby, 2010).

Well (2013) defines the first two elements of research as ontology and epistemology. This next section elaborates on each of these components.

4.2.2 Epistemological and Ontological Assumptions

There are theoretical perspectives that guide the beliefs and actions of researchers (Jackson, 2013). The epistemological and ontological stance of a researcher determines the methodological approach adopted (Jackson, 2013). Providing a rationale for the selected methodology in relation to the research questions enhances the study's credibility and rigor (Cresswell, 2007; Wilson and Stutchbury, 2009). Epistemology concerns the ways in which knowledge is understood and explained (Crotty, 2014), as well as how such knowledge can be effectively communicated to others (Cohen et al., 2011). In the view of Jackson (2013), epistemology addresses the criteria for what constitutes educational knowledge and how it is acquired (Sharp, 2009, p. 5). In this context, epistemology defines the philosophical foundation for determining the types of knowledge that can be considered valid and sufficient.

Jackson (2013) conceptualises ontology as the philosophical inquiry into the nature of reality. This study adopts an ontological position aligned with Crotty (2014), positing that knowledge or reality emerges from human consciousness and is not independent of it. Furthermore, the social world consists of significant attributes such as perspectives, beliefs, and assumptions that resist objective quantification (Crotty, 2014). Jackson (2013) additionally points out that ontology concerns the fundamental nature of reality. Within educational research, this translates to the philosophical examination of educational reality and acknowledges the possibility of diverse interpretations of established knowledge (Jackson, 2013).

From an ontological perspective, this research addresses questions concerning the existence of the world independent of an individual's perception (Greener, 2011:6). The researcher's methodological decisions are shaped by their ontological position, which depends on whether reality is perceived as external and independent, or as a construct shaped by social or individual conceptions (Jackson, 2013: p56). This ontological stance influences the selection of research approach, determining whether a qualitative strategy

suited for subjective and interpretive inquiry is appropriate, or whether a quantitative approach is more consistent with the research objectives, or if a mixed-method design is necessary. Thus, the researcher's view on ontology is closely linked to decisions regarding data collection, as it reflects the underlying assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge (Oliver, 2010: p34). To ensure methodological coherence and strengthen the credibility of the study, it is essential to explicitly define the ontological framework and align the chosen methodology accordingly. Furthermore, articulating the rationale behind these decisions contributes to enhancing the validity of the methodology, including both data collection techniques and subsequent analytical procedures.

Furthermore, in relation to ontology, objectivism and subjectivism are two perspectives that are correlated. Bryman (2008) maintains that objectivism represents an ontological stance that advocates that social phenomenon as well as their meanings are independent of social actors or those who are part or studying the phenomena. This implies that the real world is separate and independent of human experience and envisage the phenomenon being studied as tangible and quantifiable. Consequently, considering that the researcher is external to what is being researched, the objectivist's worldview commonly employs quantitative methodologies. Conversely, subjectivism ontology also referred to as interpretivism perceives the creation of social phenomena from perceptions and consequent actions to those of social phenomena. It posits that the researcher and the phenomenon under investigation are mutually related (Bryman, 2012). From the ontological standpoint adopted in this study, a more suitable approach is to describe social phenomena like employability skills and the learning process as ongoing accomplishments enacted by social actors. The subsequent section elaborates on the epistemological perspective underpinning this research.

4.2.3 Interpretivism and Positivism

In light of the nature of knowledge and its acquisition, this study adopts an interpretivist perspective that emphasises the interdependent relationship between the researcher and the social context; these two elements influence each other rather than existing independently. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) identify foundational philosophical assumptions, including ontology and epistemology, as integral components embedded

within the interpretive framework widely employed in qualitative research. The goal of interpretivist inquiry is to understand and analyse the meanings underlying human behaviour, with emphasis on understanding over the generalisation or prediction of causal relationships (Marshall and Rossman, 2010). Therefore, interpretivism was considered appropriate for analysing data to derive meaning from the responses provided by education stakeholders.

The interpretivist perspective posits that understanding and values are embodied within the individuals under study, suggesting that uncovering truth is feasible if an appropriate methodological approach is applied (Cohen et al., 2011). Proponents of interpretivism argue that the subject matter of the social sciences; namely human beings, differs fundamentally from that of the natural sciences. Consequently, these differences necessitate a distinct epistemological framework to adequately address and represent them (Bryman, 2016: 26). This philosophical position hinges on understanding and interpreting human activity and behaviour, hence, interpretivism is subjective. The researcher does not only observe from afar but is part of the action under investigation. For a researcher to understand an individual's interactions with the social world, they must be submerged in their reality (Cohen et al. 2011). Interpretivists are not concerned with the forces that make human behaviour possible but rather the meanings humans attach to the world that underpin their behaviour (Bryman, 2016), thus views human behaviour as meaningful (Newby, 2010, 2014). Interpretivism considers the desires and beliefs of humans and highlights that *"intentionality, rationality and reflexivity;"* as core aspects of human behaviour are central to their position (Flowerdew and Martin 2005: 18).

The interpretive paradigm is inherently subjective and grounded in real-world phenomena. Grix (2004) describes how that reality does not exist independently of our understanding of it. Similarly, Hammersley (2013) suggests that multiple interpretations of a phenomenon emerge through human interactions, although co-constructors of knowledge often reach a degree of consensus regarding what constitutes truth (Pring, 2000). Consequently, knowledge possesses characteristics that may be influenced by cultural or historical contexts. From this perspective, the interpretive paradigm tends to accept existing ideologies rather than critically challenge them. Gray (2014) contends that

interpretivism recognises the fundamental differences between natural reality (including scientific laws and social reality), thereby necessitating distinct data collection approaches. For instance, natural sciences typically seek patterns within data to establish general laws (nomothetic), whereas social sciences focus on understanding individual actions and meanings (ideographic) (Gray, 2014). The interpretive paradigm is therefore a type of study that considers human action as meaningful, while recognising the fact that although people generate knowledge subjectively, their objectives and actions can be perceived in an objective way (Schwandt, 2000). According to interpretivists, there is no one-to-one relationship between humans (subjects) and the world (objects); and that social reality requires a different epistemology which requires utilising different approaches (Gray 2009 and 2014). Knowledge and meaningful reality emerge through the interaction between individuals and their environments, occurring within a social context (Crotty, 1998). Understanding this social context requires adopting the perspective of humans as active participants (Cohen et al., 2007; 2018). Furthermore, the aim of interpretivism is to uncover underlying social forces and structures that are not immediately apparent. Crotty highlights this distinction by stating that our focus in the social world tends to be on aspects that are unique, individual, and qualitative, whereas in the natural world, consideration is given to more abstract phenomena distinguished by quantifiable regularities (1998:68).

Interpretivism asserts that the social world exists independently of the researcher and that its characteristics can be directly assessed through observation (Gray, 2014). The interpretivist view of human knowledge postulates that people interpret the meaning of objects and actions in the world and then act upon those interpretations. This implies that meaning is derived from the social interaction process; it is not fixed but may change based on experience (Gray, 2014).

Interpretivism aligns with qualitative research methods (Crotty, 2005) and, due to its emphasis on interpreting the social world, it is well-suited for the present study. Proponents of interpretivism argue that the social world is shaped through human relationships and interactions; although norms and values are acknowledged, they do not exist independently as separate entities (Bartlett and Burton, 2012). They are used and affected by people in their daily lives. Consequently, people are viewed as actors;

interpretivists interpret events and act in response (Bartlett and Burton, 2012). This study primarily aims to understand the lived experiences of individuals and how various education stakeholders interpret and construct meaning within their social environment. The research takes place within the contexts of schools and the Ministry of Secondary Education, settings where participants hold differing perspectives on events and respond based on their interpretations, as noted by Bartlett and Burton (2012). Given this consideration, positivism may not be suitable for the present study. Instead, adopting a subjective ontological stance appears more appropriate, as engaging with participants is essential to explore and understand their perspectives on the acquisition of employability skills and the development of curricula. This approach contrasts sharply from positivist epistemology, which argues that the social world exists independently of the researcher and that its characteristics can be directly measured through observation (Gray, 2014). Rather, the research aligns with an interpretivist understanding of knowledge, which posits that individuals assign meaning to objects and actions in their environment and respond in accordance with those interpretations. The implication is that meaning is derived from the social interaction process; it is not fixed but may change based on experience (Gray, 2014).

This study adopts a case study methodology, as outlined in section 4.5, using a qualitative approach to gather data. This method aims to provide sufficient depth to understand participants' perceptions of their experiences (Scott and Morrison 2007). After outlining the philosophical assumptions guiding the research (see chapter 4, section 4.3), it becomes important to consider the research paradigm applied (Bartlett and Burton, 2012). As noted in section 4.3, the research philosophy shapes the data collection process and informs how the findings are interpreted within the conceptual framework. This indicates that the selection of methodologies and methods is guided by the specific research questions and the nature of the problem under investigation. To support the validity of social research, Creswell (2007) emphasises the importance of clearly articulating the research approach.

Positivists on the other hand, arrive at the truth by developing hypothesis and testing them to offer explanations to phenomena. There are constant testing and verification of theories to produce facts that are used in the creation of laws (Williams, 2003, Bryman,

2016). When theories are justified; knowledge is valid, if unjustifiable they are meaningless (Cohen et al. 2011; 2018). Observations and experiments are critical to the testing of theories, and as a result, positivists are objective (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005, Bryman, 2016). Positivists provide explanations on the factors that influence human behaviour, this is achieved through observations of social reality that assumes human behaviour has a cause-and-effect relationship (Cohen et al., 2011; 2018, Bryman, 2016). Scientific approaches have limitations in capturing the complexity inherent in human behaviour, leading to the development of contrasting epistemological perspectives (Cohen et al., 2011; 2018). Consequently, it may be contended that the positivist approaches fall short in accounting for the distinctiveness of individual human experiences.

Additionally, positivists use facts to explain human behaviour while interpretivists understand human behaviour and make meaning of it (Bryman, 2016); this is a major distinction between the two epistemological positions. Cohen et al., (2018) further maintain that electing an objective or positivist approach necessitates the utilisation of research methodologies that will enable the world to be measured by using surveys and experimental designs. Researchers adopting the subjective or anti-positivist approach are more concerned about the fact that, facts are not evidence-based but socially constructed in their view of the social world (Cohen et al., 2018). They use methods such as personal accounts, interviews and observation of participants to collect data. The following section explains the importance of adhering to the interpretive paradigm when examining stakeholders' views on potential developments in the secondary school curriculum aimed at improving students' acquisition of employability skills.

Aligned with the research objectives, the researcher adopts an interpretivist stance, consciously recognising the perspectives that inevitably influence the way stakeholders' experiences are understood. The researcher seeks to characterise education stakeholders' actual activities, that were influenced by their knowledge and interpretations of employability skills. The study is defined by its naturalistic, compared to experimental, research design. Based on this standpoint, knowledge is not viewed as an objective fact that the researcher describes scientifically. Rather, Goodsell (2013) acknowledges that all knowledge is subjectively produced. Furthermore, in this study,

human activity is viewed as purposeful, deliberate, and goal-directed, as opposed to passive and only a visible reaction to a stimulus. The research also considers that, to understand stakeholders' experiences with employability skills and the subjective meanings they attach to them, the researcher should interact and engage in discourse with the participants (Wahyani, 2012). To develop this dialogical knowledge, the researcher immerses themselves in the research, engages in it, and develops a relationship with the participants, allowing them to reach into their hearts and minds and learn about their experiences and perceptions of employability (Goodsell, 2013). As a result of all these assumptions, from an exploratory-interpretive standpoint, research is regarded as an endeavour of interpreting human activity by understanding the personally defined purposes, intents, and objectives that influence it. Applicable to the inquiry of stakeholders' experiences with employability, this research permits the researcher to investigate how study participants experience employability in public schools in Cameroon and to understand their opinions on it.

4.3 Research Approach

The concepts of deductive and inductive reasoning constitute the second (2nd) layer of the Saunders et al., (2016) research onion. It is important to recognise how the previous layer impacts on the second layer, emphasising the need to clearly understand the study aims including their limitations. Deductive reasoning includes generating theories-based hypotheses and then designing a study plan to test these hypotheses empirically (Silverman, 2013). This type of approach is especially consistent with positivist approaches, which involve the development of hypotheses and statistical confirmation of predicted results to a certain level of probability (Snieder and Larner, 2009). Kothari (2004) describes this approach as progressing from a general framework toward specific instances: initially, a broad theoretical foundation is established, after which the findings emerging from the research are evaluated in the context of that framework. It is noteworthy that deductive approaches could also be implemented in qualitative research settings; nonetheless, in these cases, expectations from previous research are expressed differently than they are through traditional hypothesis testing (Saunders et al., 2019; 2023).

As opposed to using pre-existing theories, an inductive method allows for the generation of novel concepts, thereby distinguishing it apart from the deductive approach. A shift from the specific to the general defines it (Bryman and Bell, 2011). With this approach, the research's emphasis might develop after data collection without following a predetermined structure (Flick, 2011). Although this approach is often viewed as a means of producing fresh perspectives, it is also conceivable that the results of data analysis might support preexisting beliefs (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Often used in qualitative research, this method involves carrying out interviews on specific occurrences, then analysing the data in search for themes that emerge from the respondents (Flick, 2011). However, it may also be effectively incorporated into positivist approaches, in which initial data analysis identifies important patterns which then influence the development of outcomes.

This research adopts an inductive qualitative approach, defined by Fraenkel et al., (2015) as a method that enables the exploration of the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials. As Cleland (2017) state, qualitative research deal with questions such as ‘how' and 'why', allowing for a deeper understanding of contexts, phenomena, and experiences. It is often impractical to quantify responses to these questions; therefore, qualitative research is essential in enriching knowledge and literature (Cleland, 2017). The approach is particularly suitable for narrative expressions that require a flexible writing style, free from formal constraints (Creswell and Poth, 2018) and it is recommended when existing theories are inadequate or when one seeks to understand specific contexts or problems more thoroughly.

Cohen et al., (2018) remarks that given the variety of views and methods utilised in qualitative research, there is no definitive plan. Defined broadly, qualitative research comprises adaptable, data-driven techniques that often prioritise words over statistics (Hammersley, 2013). As reported by Preissle (2006), there is no agreement on the boundaries, aims, and terminology of qualitative research, which includes interpretative, ethnographic, and case study approaches. Qualitative research emphasises subjectivity and reflects a complex knowledge of human actions, attitudes, and social occurrences (Sandelowski, 2012). It is crucial to note that ethnographic research, a subcategory, generally requires long-term community immersion, although qualitative studies may

employ varying strategies to respond to research questions. Despite its inherent subjectivity, qualitative research is useful for systematic reviews because it helps frame research topics, complements quantitative data, and offers novel perspectives. While qualitative investigations lack the controls associated with quantitative research, its value exists in contextual insights and its potential to reveal deeper, sometimes unobservable social processes (Dixon-Woods, 2011). Nonetheless, qualitative research is judged on the quality of the evidence and the strength of the sample, but meticulous analysis helps preserve fundamental context - which is central to qualitative approaches (Cohen et al., 2018).

Consequently, to achieve a deep understanding and detailed description of participants' conceptualisation of employability skills and curriculum development, it will be crucial to interact with participants in schools and Ministry of Secondary Education in the Central and Southwest regions. Considering that the study adopts an interpretivist approach, focusing on participants' views and interpretations of their experiences. Participants will act as partners in generating meaning, and through these interactions, meaning will be constructed in multiple and varied ways. For example, it is anticipated that students and teachers will attribute different meanings and perspectives regarding the knowledge and skills that current students and school leavers require from the curriculum to improve their professional prospects. It is expected that in understanding knowledge, people may differ in the way they construct meaning of the same phenomena. Thus, engaging with participants facilitates the collection of data that may significantly influence both the conduct and presentation of research findings. Manning and Kunkel (2014) reiterate that interaction within the social environment allows individuals to interpret and assign meaning based on their perceptions. This process is reflexive, as meanings attributed to objects or ideas within a social context are continually negotiated. In essence, meaning is dynamic, evolving as individuals exchange perspectives and engage in dialogue (Manning and Kunkel, 2014). Interpretivists are thus concerned with how people interact to create this social scene. The implication of this is that the meanings created will be analysed as themes that impact on the findings of this research. Consequently, engaging with students, teachers, and pedagogic inspectors, enables the gathering of data, which will be

analysed to reveal the phenomena related to their experiences across various contexts, as conveyed through the data collection instruments.

Additionally, study participants will be contacted in their employment environments. Newby (2010) contends that a distinguishing feature of qualitative research lies in its naturalistic approach, wherein data collection occurs in settings that are as close to natural conditions as feasible. This approach enables the collection of descriptive data that contributes to understanding the experiences of the participants, constituting the basis of the data gathered for this study. An interpretive inquiry will be adopted to gain insight into participants' perspectives on employability skills and curriculum development in Cameroon. Administering questionnaires and conducting interviews entails interacting with people in their natural settings to minimise the effect of unrealistic research (Newby, 2010, p.117). This interaction will facilitate the creation of interpretations of the empirical data collected. Manning and Kunkel (2007) observe that qualitative research elicits dimensions of feeling, emotion, and lived experience, offering a breadth of perspective. The inclusion of participants' voices provides access to emotions and insights into experiences that are often inaccessible through other research methodologies, thereby contributing what Manning (2007, p. 430) terms *'the warmth of an interpretive lens'*. This approach centres on participants' behaviours and expressions as key sources of understanding.

The direct interaction between the researcher and participants involves an exploration of emotions, feelings, and subjective experiences, which allows the clarification of ideas or concepts that might otherwise remain unclear (Manning and Kunkel, 2014). Participants are provided with opportunities to articulate their perspectives on the social world through the use of questionnaires and interviews. This process involves entering their social context, thereby promotes familiarity and building trust. However, it is recognised that this approach raises several ethical issues, including concerns related to confidentiality and anonymity (Silverman, 2014). Section 4.10 discuss the measures implemented to minimise these ethical challenges. Understanding participants' perceptions of employability skills and curriculum development requires visiting multiple schools in the Southwest and Central Regions of Cameroon, engaging with them within their educational or professional settings. Data collection was conducted using a

structured interview schedule. Interviews were audio-recorded, and pseudonyms were assigned to participants after transcription to ensure the protection of their anonymity and confidentiality.

Moreover, Scott and Morrison (2007) assert that from a qualitative lens, the world is seen through the eyes of those being studied; this means an understanding of their perspectives is critical. This criticality is applicable to the entire community regardless of whether the subjects are children or adults. The focal point of this research is on participants' perceptions, meanings of events and processes in teaching and learning including curriculum development and the researcher's understanding of these. Owing to the typical teaching and learning and curriculum development process, a qualitative approach was found to better account for the complexity of participants' perception and reveal those skills which pupils and teachers believe are the most important in order to meet the needs of employers and the aspirations of learners; reveal whether students have experienced these skills in the curriculum, teachers' job skills initiatives as well as ascertain the link between curriculum development and employability skills.

Scott and Morrison (2007) contend that educational researchers insert themselves into the continual process of meaning construction to understand it. This implies that, to draw meaningful inferences and provide suggestions that may be valuable to educationalists, the perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators from both the French- and English-speaking regions of the country under study will be considered. In view of this, questionnaires served as the main tool for gathering data from students and teachers, whereas interviews were employed to collect information from administrators (refer to sections 4.7.2, 4.8, 4.8.1, and 4.9). Given that data collection instruments will be administered by the researcher, the intention is to observe both what the participants says and how it is said (non-verbal communication) as well as probing for additional information whenever necessary. Indeed, researchers such as Beattie and Shovelton (2011) have shown that nonverbal communication, including hand gestures, conveys essential semantic information beyond what is spoken and plays a crucial role in communicating meaning. This way of undertaking qualitative research is supported by Scott and Morrison (2007) who maintain that constructed knowledge is not truth that remains immovable and generalisable beyond all feasible contexts; it rather exists within

distinct contexts and perspectives – knowledge may be truth for one context and not for another context. The following section outlines the methodology employed in conducting this study.

4.4 Research Strategy - Case Study Approach

Qualitative research is linked to various methodologies, including case study research, action research, exploratory surveys, grounded theory, ethnography, and narrative inquiry (Saunders et al., 2016). This study specifically employs a case study design. The selection of an appropriate approach depends on the research objectives and underlying philosophical stance. Consistent with Creswell and Poth (2018) and Yin (2018), the case study method is a qualitative strategy in educational research that aims to achieve a detailed understanding of one or more bounded systems, or cases. In another sense, it is a qualitative design in which an initiative, occurrence, action, procedure, or one or more people are carefully studied by the researcher (Creswell, 2014, p. 241). The case(s) are subject to limitations related to time and activity, prompting researchers to gather extensive data over a prolonged duration using various methods of data collection. It is thus an approach for researching social phenomena that involves analysing a particular reality's environment. Yin (2018) adds that through an in-depth examination of the context, a case study provides responses to the research questions *why* and *how* which helps in gaining an awareness of social phenomena. Consequently, it investigates social phenomena within the framework of a time and geographically constrained system, utilising verbal and visual communication to explore how people behave in real situations to respond to questions relational to the research (Stake, 1995; Creswell and Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Pearson et al., (2015) remark that a case study provides the researcher with an opportunity to explore a phenomenon through a variety of lenses. This multi-perspective approach was essential for gaining a profound and thorough understanding of a variety of real-life circumstances of the participants (Miles, 2015; Pearson et al., 2015). Although the qualitative case study is relatively common in various research fields, there is ongoing debate over whether it is indeed a method of research or more accurately a methodological approach (Pearson et al., 2015). Hamilton (2011) contends that case

studies are by their very nature are idiographic studies that are typically interpretative. Indeed, studies adopting this approach rely on the investigation of locations or events. Unlike survey analysis, they evaluate each case as empirically unique as opposed to immediately assuming that many instances can be combined to create a homogenous aggregate (Hamilton, 2011). This is supported by Taber (2014) stating that a case study represents a methodological approach used to explore a specific event in depth. Thus, the occurrence must be recognisably distinct from other instances and may take the form of a lesson or the delivery of a curriculum in a school and so on. Regardless of whether a case study examines a particular scenario, it also is typically naturalistic, exploring the case through its usual context instead of trying to establish a clinical setting, which is often not feasible even if it were thought to be beneficial because the case is more often incorporated in its natural setting in ways that affect its characteristic features (Taber, 2014).

Researchers typically utilise the case study approach for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, case studies are recognised for their methodological adaptability. While qualitative information could be gathered from approaches such as observation or interviewing, accordingly, research using case studies can also integrate quantitative data, such as results from surveys (Yin, 2018). Additionally, as suggested by Merriam (1998); Stake (1995) and Yin (2018), researchers may elect to focus on several examples. An additional benefit in employing a case study methodology is that it is possible to focus on both the phenomena under investigation and how it operates within the case's unique environment. This method successfully blurs the differences between phenomenon and environment, allowing for insights into how these factors could interact (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018). Finally, the case study strategy provides several options for describing cases within research. Cases can be identified using geographical criteria; however, they may similarly be conceptualised more abstractly (Ragin, 1992; Yin, 2018). For example, a case may represent a specific entity such as a student or a school, or it may represent a more abstract idea, like an event or a group of schools perceived as identical in a theoretical context (Yin, 2018).

Notwithstanding its obvious benefits, Miles, (2015) and Thomas (2011) contend that applying case study approach has some significant drawbacks that should be considered.

For example, generalisability, or more precisely, the absence of meaningful generalisation, is widely acknowledged as a limitation of study findings from case studies (Miles, 2015; Thomas, 2011). Given the likelihood that every case is distinct, it is important to consider the lack of a standard research topic. Additionally, there is the possibility that researchers will draw conclusions that go outside the scope of collected data. Thomas (2011) however remarks that case study research does not constitute the only area of education and social science where generalisability is lacking. As such, it is important to take these issues into account in all qualitative research procedures. Irrespective, the use of case studies as an approach offers researchers the flexibility, depth, and multi-perspective research strategy (Thomas, 2011).

As stated by Harland (2014), one must either go through the situation themselves or obtain knowledge from the experiences of others to understand intricate social situations. This study adopted the case study approach to learn more about a particular case – *how* well the secondary school system in Cameroon equips or prepares students for employment - by seeking and gaining the perspectives of important stakeholders, including students, pedagogic inspectors within the Ministry of secondary education, schoolteachers, head teachers and school councillors. It is however acknowledged that although there was a plethora of literature in relation to employability skill acquisition and its impact on employment, there was a lack of depth in what was known about how these skills may be integrated into school curricula in Cameroon across stakeholders including *what* and *how* (Yin, 2018) students learnt through their experience in schools.

Data collection adhered to the case study approach (Yin,2018). A questionnaire was administered to secondary school students and teachers to obtain their perspectives on the skills required in the context of the world of work. Given that several questions were open-ended, respondents were invited to share their personal viewpoints. Analysis of the questionnaire responses revealed areas requiring deeper investigation. To address these, semi-structured interviews were conducted with pedagogic inspectors, teachers, and counsellors.

Utilising a case study approach enabled the gathering of deep, context-rich insights into how participants view and interpret employability skills. This method encouraged an in-

depth exploration of individual stories, presenting a range of perspectives that often differed from one another. Adhering to the interpretivist roots of qualitative research, the study focused on highlighting the variety of interpretations related to employability (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). This approach provided a more detailed understanding of the issues at hand, as participants shared and expanded on their personal experiences. As Halbesleben (2011) points out, qualitative case studies are especially effective at revealing the intricate nature of social processes that might get lost in more simplified, quantitative methods.

Despite the challenges that are inherent in case study research including issues of generalisability, subjectivity, and researcher bias (Gerring, 2007; Simons, 2009), these limitations did not undermine the aim of this research. This research aimed to explore how employability is understood in a particular secondary school setting, rather than trying to make generalisations. Notably, the data (see chapter 5, section 5.9) highlighted that secondary education is increasingly seen as a place not just for academic success, but also for developing employability skills that are crucial for future job markets. This insight aligns with broader policy discussions that link skill development in schools to better socio-economic outcomes (Taylor, 2017; Prince's Trust, 2016). It shows that case study research can go beyond just describing situations and engage thoughtfully with larger structural and policy issues.

4.5 Methodological Choice

Saunders' research onion outlines six methodological approaches: mono-method quantitative, mono-method qualitative, multi-method quantitative, multi-method qualitative, simple mixed methods, and complex mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2016). The initial methodological decision for a study ought to determine whether to opt for a mixed-method, quantitative, or qualitative approach (Saunders, et al., 2016). The research question, objectives, and chosen research philosophy serve as the basis for all elements of the research design (Saunders et al., 2016; 2023). To Saunders et al. (2023), one way to differentiate quantitative research from qualitative research involves distinguishing numeric data, such as numbers, from non-numeric data, which includes words, photographs, audio recordings, video clips, and similar materials. This study

involves an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon (employability skills), which seeks the perspectives of education stakeholders based on their own experiences with the phenomena under study. Thus, the study is classified as qualitative in terms of methodological choice. To Saunders et al., (2019; 2023), a mono-method qualitative study constitutes a specific approach within qualitative research design that employs only one method of gathering data, whereas a multi-method qualitative study employs many methods of gathering data. This research will employ many qualitative data gathering methods and associated analytical processes. Case studies employing a qualitative approach, and stakeholder interviews are among the chosen data gathering methods in this study (see chapter 4 section 4.3). As a result, multi-method qualitative research was chosen as the methodology. The justification for the choice of a qualitative approach has already been discussed in chapter 4, section 4.4 above.

4.6 Time Horizon

Prior to the collecting data, Saunders et al., (2023) advises considering if the research purpose is to investigate a single event (cross-sectional) or a continuous phenomenon (longitudinal). The focus of this research is on a specific phenomenon occurring at a certain period. Therefore, the research time horizon is designated as a cross-sectional approach. As described by Setia (2023), cross-sectional studies are a form of observational study in which the researcher evaluates exposure, outcome, and other factors (including confounding variables) simultaneously. These investigations are sometimes referred to as prevalence studies and can be applicable to a wide number of fields in the social and behavioural sciences (Setia, 2023). According to Cohen et al., (2018), cross-sectional research captures a snapshot of a population at a single point in time, usually by means of representative sampling, such as a nationwide survey of people of various ages, professions, and origins. They add that in education, such research might indicate developmental variations among age groups. These studies could be undertaken withing a short amount of time, at a considerable low cost, and utilised to develop new hypotheses (Setia, 2023). However, the primary limitations of this research are sample bias, length-time bias, same source bias, and the inability to establish a strong temporal relationship between exposure and result in many cases. The implication is that the

researcher should use caution when assessing the measure of association from these studies, since it may not be suitable to draw causal conclusions from them.

Longitudinal studies, which include surveys alongside various methodologies, for example, case studies, often use trend, cohort, or panel methods (Creswell, 2012). They may utilise repeated cross-sectional samples, often with different participants for each or maintain the same sample across time phase (Ruspini, 2002). In doing so, the approach allows researchers to study changes, highlight similarities and contrasts throughout time, and determine implications over time (Cohen et al., 2018). They can therefore investigate either constant characteristics, such as gender, or variable factors, such as income and it is adept at simulating complicated behaviour because it facilitates causality evaluation while integrating quantitative and qualitative data (Cohen et al, 2018).

Though retrospective analysis is often linked with longitudinal research, it is not limited to them. Cross-sectional research, for example, may incorporate retrospective factual enquiries into former occupations, birth dates, or marital status changes (Rose and Sullivan, 1993; Ruane, 2005). However, Rose and Sullivan (1993) caution against gathering additional retrospective data in cross-sectional studies, highlighting the risk that respondents' recollections may compromise data quality. When planning longitudinal research, the frequency and length of data collection should be established with consideration for both the study's goals and practical constraints. To account for participant dropout, researchers ought to start with a suitably high sample size (Wilson et al., 2006).

4.7 Techniques and Procedures

The next layer of Saunder's (2016) research onion which is the deepest layer of the research onion focusses on 'tactics', which includes the finer elements of data collecting and analysis. This section therefore elaborates on numerous important points in the research. First, it discusses the pilot study undertaken to test the research instrument (Newby, 2010) prior to discussing the data gathering tools and techniques, such and administering questionnaires, and interviews. Second, it describes the study population

and sampling processes, including sample size and sampling techniques as well as how the data analytical procedure.

4.7.1 Pilot Study

To assess how effectively the secondary school curriculum in Cameroon equips students for employment, an initial study was conducted using questionnaires. This preliminary investigation sought to achieve two key objectives: to identify possible flaws in the data collection tools (Newby, 2010) and to clarify the research objectives. Data collection for the pilot study took place in the spring of 2017, involving 20 secondary students and 15 teachers from a secondary school in Cameroon's Southwest region. Notably, both the school and its participants were excluded from the final sample for the main study (Newby, 2010). Analysis of student responses indicated that, at the secondary level, learners receive insufficient exposure to practical work experiences and limited opportunities to develop employment-related skills. Contrastingly, teachers reported active job skills instruction and positive engagement in this area. According to the teacher questionnaires, teaching adhered closely to the prescribed syllabi, emphasising subject applicability; teachers also provided guidance related to employment issues and generally demonstrated effective teaching practices. Despite this, most students showed limited awareness of the specific skills the curriculum aims to impart for employment readiness. Moreover, a majority of students lacked any form of work experience, whether voluntary or paid. These findings suggest that the secondary education system may not be adequately preparing students for entry into the workforce, as might be anticipated. This discrepancy or mismatch informed the research question and indicated the need for further investigation into the credibility of teachers' claims, as well as consideration of curricular reforms to better embed work-related skills for school leavers.

The data obtained from the questionnaires administered during the pilot study played a crucial role in shaping the research instruments, methodology, question sequencing, data organisation, and analytical approaches used in this study. However, these data will not contribute to the content of the final thesis. Clarity and more explanations were identified for some sections of the questionnaire. For example: section three was modified to clearly define what constitutes work in the context of Cameroon. Being

mostly rural, the main occupation of the people is farming. Young people help their parents during school holidays on the farms, and it can be argued that this may count as work. Some typing errors were identified in section one of the student questionnaire. These were carefully considered, and the necessary amendments were made. Besides, the researcher subsequently returned to the participants to probe into their experiences of completing the questionnaires. This was intended to ascertain whether the questionnaires were straightforward or complicated; if they captured the topics, they considered important as well as issues such as the layout, sequencing of questions and their general feelings about the instrument (Newby 2014).

4.7.2 Sampling Process

Robinson (2014) defines sampling as the complete set of individuals from which cases can be legitimately drawn for an interview study, emphasising its fundamental role within qualitative methodologies. To address the objectives of the present research, purposive sampling was employed, following the rationale outlined by Cohen et al. (2018). This approach rests on the assumption that specific individuals; namely, Pedagogic Inspectors within the Ministry of Secondary Education possess relevant expertise on curriculum development within the country. Silverman (2014) highlights one advantage of purposive sampling: it allows the selection of cases exhibiting characteristics relevant to the research interests. For this research, the Pedagogic Inspectors, secondary school students and secondary school students were identified as being able to provide considered responses to the issues being explored. Purposive sampling does not however, provide a straightforward approval to any chosen case. Rather, it requires that the researcher engage in critical reflection on the criteria of the identified population and meticulously choose the sample on that basis (Silverman, 2014). The study concentrated on two particular areas: the Southwest and Central regions of Cameroon, as depicted in Figure 4.0 below. These locations were selected for their richness in information, offering significant understanding into issues related to skills acquisition and curriculum development. This context enabled an in-depth examination of the relationship between the narratives presented in government reports and academic research, and the perspectives held by education stakeholders in Cameroon.



Figure 4.1. Map of Cameroon showing the 10 administrative regions

Selecting a sample that facilitates an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, as well as the meanings constructed by participants from both regions, supports the generation of insights that may be indicative of the broader population (Thompson, 2012). The samples chosen (see section 4.12, Gaining Access) enabled the integration of data relating to the phenomenon across distinct contexts namely, French- and English-speaking regions, thereby minimising reliance on pre-existing information. This approach is expected to generate rich data on how participants interpret skills acquisition and curriculum development based on their personal experiences. By combining perspectives from diverse research sites, the study can capture the complex interactions inherent to each context (Patton, 2002), resulting in rich data that underpin an in-depth understanding of the meanings participants attribute to curriculum development and employability skills acquisition within Cameroon. Consequently, purposive sampling is justified by the assumption that selected participants demonstrate *"typicality or possession of characteristics being sought"* (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 156).

Given that secondary schools nationwide adhere to a uniform curriculum and that students undertake national examinations, attention was paid to ensuring a balance between one Anglophone region, where English predominates, and one Francophone region, where French is the main language. The choice of research sites proved challenging because Cameroon comprises ten geographical regions, eight predominantly French-speaking and two English-speaking as illustrated on the accompanying map. Indeed, and as discussed below, savings in time and costs was also considered in the choice of the research sites (Denscombe 2017).

Samples were drawn from two of the ten regions in Cameroon. The selected schools in these regions were generally accessible, as they were located near main towns and reachable from Buea (the administrative centre of the Southwest Region) and Yaoundé (the centre of the Centre Region), where the researcher was based during fieldwork. Purposive sampling was employed to select 202 participants (see Table 4.1 below for response rates), comprising form five students, typically aged 15 to 16, and 26 teachers who were administered questionnaires. Form five students were chosen because, at this stage, they are expected to have sufficient familiarity with the curriculum. Teachers were included with the assumption that they possess an understanding of the curriculum they deliver. Cohen et al. (2011) indicate that considerations of cost, time, and accessibility should be addressed early in the research planning process. In light of financial limitations, time restrictions, inadequate infrastructure, and the logistical challenges of traveling across regions, it was considered impractical to cover all ten regions depicted in Figure 4.1.

Participants were recruited from schools where individuals voluntarily agreed to share their perspectives with the researcher. As a result, the number of schools, teachers, and pedagogic inspectors sampled was low in comparison to the national total. This limitation implies that the findings do not provide a sufficient basis for broad generalisations. Nonetheless, participants were selected based on their willingness and interest in contributing to the study. The questionnaires focused on participants' views regarding the essential knowledge and skills that current students and school leavers require from the curriculum to improve their prospects in the workforce. Selecting appropriate cases is critical to ensuring the validity of qualitative research and must be approached with care

(Miles and Huberman, 1994). In choosing study regions, priority was given to locations where it was feasible to collect evidence offering a broader perspective and rich information relevant to the phenomena under investigation (Miles and Huberman, 1994). According to Curtis et al. (2011, p. 1003), *"Intensive research depends on the collation of thick description, of the phenomena which are conceptually important."* Similarly, this study sought to capture the views of education stakeholders to understand their perspectives within their professional contexts. Consequently, the research involved four schools and the Ministry of Secondary Education. Further details on these regions are provided in the context chapter (see Table 4.2 below).

4.7.2.1 Sample Size and Response Rate

To balance the need for a sample size that was sufficient to provide adequate data for analysis without resulting in an unmanageable volume, an initial decision was made to distribute 50 questionnaires per school. However, this decision was not fully realised, as the actual number of questionnaires collected from each school depended on the number of teachers and students willing to participate, as well as the availability of pedagogic inspectors (within the Ministry of Secondary Education), head teachers, and school counsellors who completed interviews schedules. An appropriate sample size is generally one that is adequate to address the research questions while remaining manageable to allow for detailed analysis (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Cohen et al. (2007) note that determining the ideal sample size lacks a definitive rule, as it varies according to the specific objectives of the research and the characteristics of the population under investigation. In this light, two hundred and twenty-eight questionnaires were distributed to 202 students and 26 teachers completed and returned them. Table 4.2 below is a summary of completed questionnaires and interviews:

Table 4.2: Response Rate

Areas	Number of Schools Visited	Number of Questionnaires	Face-to-Face Interviews
Central Region (Students)	2	51x2	6
Southwest Region (Students)	2	50x2	0
Central and Southwest (Teachers)	4	26	0
Total Number of Schools	4	228	6
Response Rate		100%	100%
Total analysed		228	6

4.8 Participant Interviews

In addition to distributing 228 questionnaires among students and teachers, six interviews were carried out with personnel from the Ministry of Secondary Education, including pedagogic inspectors, as well as with school staff such as a teacher and a school counsellor. The professional positions of these participants allowed them to share informed perspectives and provide specific instances of relevant policies and practices observed at national and regional levels. Prior to the fieldwork, an interview schedule (refer to appendix 6) outlining the research objectives was distributed to all interviewees to ensure they had the opportunity to prepare for the topics under discussion. This approach aligns with the recommendation by Haukås and Tishakov (2024), who emphasise that providing interview questions in advance can improve the rigor and depth of qualitative research. It allows participants time for reflection, leading to deeply considered responses, and addresses ethical concerns by ensuring informed consent and minimising harm. Participants were therefore encouraged to review and contemplate the questions prior to the interview, with an emphasis that there were no incorrect or right responses, nor an assessment of their knowledge. The main aim was to understand the

participants' perspectives and experiences, valuing their insights and opinions (Haukås and Tishakov, 2024).

Before conducting the interviews, permission was obtained from each participant, and informed consent was secured to uphold ethical standards. The semi-structured interview format employed in this study aimed to establish a framework that covered all key topics of interest, while permitting participants to expand on issues or explore themes beyond those anticipated by the interviewer (Newby, 2010). Interviews were conducted individually in the participants' offices, with durations between 35 and 50 minutes. This approach facilitated the comparison of responses to shared questions (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012). Each interview was audio-recorded using a tape recorder (Kvale, 2007) to maintain a natural conversational flow and ensure accurate data collection.

4.9 Preparation of instruments for Data Collection

This study sought to investigate a phenomenon that presents challenges for quantification since the personal perspectives and experiences of participants was essential for detailed understanding. The primary focus was to examine how participants perceive skills acquisition and curriculum development within the national context. Given the emphasis on participants' subjective views, it was necessary to employ methods that allowed for diverse modes of expression and promoting valid and reliable responses (Adams and Cox, 2008). Accordingly, questionnaires were used to examine the process of skills acquisition in schools, while interviews provided a platform for pedagogic inspectors, teachers, head teachers, and school councillors to articulate their perspectives. During the development of the questionnaire, emphasis was placed on the conceptual framework, ensuring that the selected content directly corresponded to the research questions. It is noteworthy that existing literature and conceptualisations regarding stakeholders' perceptions of skills acquisition and curriculum development predominantly derive from Western contexts. Therefore, the formulation of questionnaire items considered the specific cultural, educational, and systemic characteristics of Cameroon.

4.9.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Survey Questionnaires

Having decided that qualitative research would be central to the investigation, the two instruments used to gather data were questionnaires and recorded interviews. In this study, a field survey utilising questionnaires was conducted in Cameroon to gather data and examine the situation on the ground, with the aim of understanding stakeholders' perspectives on skills acquisition and curriculum development. The use of questionnaires was appropriate within the qualitative study because they enabled the collection of detailed accounts of participants' perceptions and experiences. Bartram (2019) asserts that the use of questionnaires in a qualitative study is plausible since they can elicit detailed accounts of participants' perceptions and experiences. Bartram (2019) further highlights the fact that questionnaires are a flexible method of data collection that can generate rich qualitative data whilst allowing researchers to assess a broader range of participants than might be feasible through interviews alone. Newby (2014) maintains that questionnaires represent one of the most frequently used data collection methods in educational and social science research, owing to their capacity to generate detailed information while remaining relatively straightforward to administer and analyse. Robinson (2002) further adds that questionnaires offer a simple and direct means of capturing attitudes, values, beliefs, and motivations through standardised questions.

The questionnaires also provided a quantitative element within the predominantly qualitative methodology. Numerical data in the form of tabulations were used and represented by tables to support the evidence. As reported by Marshall and Rossman (2011), questionnaires are a suitable method for drawing inferences about large populations from data obtained from relatively small samples. Therefore, this method was employed to characterise and elucidate variations in specific attributes across diverse school contexts. The questionnaires also enabled statistical analysis and were straightforward to administer and manage. The empirical data obtained contributed to an understanding of the effectiveness of the secondary school system in preparing young people for employment, as reflected in the accounts of pedagogic inspectors, teachers, students, and head teachers based on their experiences.

A paper-based questionnaire was thus used for interpretive purposes, enabling the collection of data from educational stakeholders and facilitating the explanation of observed phenomena and result patterns. This approach allowed the questionnaire data to contribute to both the interpretation of stakeholders' perspectives and the presentation of numerical evidence through tabulations and tables.

However, Newby (2014) stresses that questionnaires are far more than just writing a range of questions related to the research issues under investigation. Consideration should be given to the appropriateness of the words used and ensuring that the layout is meaningful and attractive to the research participants (Newby, 2014). If not carefully designed, the instruments may generate subjective data influenced by incorrect assumptions regarding individual experiences and characteristics. However, based on participant feedback collected after the pilot study and subsequent amendments, the questions were considered clear and unambiguous. The researcher used concise and straightforward language (Newby, 2014) to ensure that both students and teachers could respond to the literal meaning of the questions, thereby facilitating accurate interpretation of their answers. The questions were carefully evaluated to identify potential bias, assess sequencing, ensure clarity, and establish face validity. It was feasible to pilot test the instrument on small groups to assess its utility and reliability by comparing responses from two distinct regions.

Once the students and teachers were conversant with the questionnaire, participants were then asked to complete the questionnaires on their own without any assistance. The students' questionnaire contained five sections. Section one contained demographic information such as sex, age, class, subject combination, and career path. Section two constituted the core of the research. The purpose was to identify the skills perceived as most critical for addressing employer requirements and aligning with learners' goals. It also aimed to reveal whether students have experienced these skills in the curriculum. In this section, like the approach used in the teachers' questionnaire, a rank-ordering method (Cohen et al., 2007) was employed. Participants were asked to assess the provided statements by assigning a score of 1, 2, 3, or 4 in the corresponding box, reflecting the perceived importance of each skill or characteristic. A score of 1 indicated the highest importance, whereas 4 indicated the least important/not important.

Section three of the student questionnaire aimed to determine whether the participants had any experience with employment, including paid, unpaid, or voluntary roles. A contingency question format was employed, wherein subsequent questions depended on responses to prior items, as described by Cohen et al. (2007:332). For instance, if a participant indicated employment by answering "yes," this response served as a filter directing them to follow-up questions. These subsequent questions were contingent upon the initial answer and functioned as branches extending from the original inquiry, thereby eliciting more detailed information regarding their employment status. Mindful of the main disadvantage of the contingency questions, filters and branches format, in that respondents may ignore, misread, or do not follow instructions correctly (Redline et al., 2002), this was used judiciously and limitedly and was kept within each section (Cohen et al., 2007). Section four of the questionnaire sought the perspective of participants about how useful their subject combinations (specialisation) at school is/will help them to find work. Section five dealt with finding out family employment, including any paid, unpaid, or voluntary work that participants might have done.

Given that this study assumes employability skills and vocational education can be incorporated into the secondary school curriculum primarily to the extent that teachers are capable of delivering it, the teacher questionnaire was designed with the following objectives:

(i) To gather data on teachers' understanding of the concept of 'employability skills'.

(ii) To identify which skills teachers, regard as most critical for addressing employer requirements and learner ambitions.

(iii) To explore the extent of teachers' efforts to embed employability skills within their teaching practices.

Section one of the teachers' questionnaire elicited demographic information such as sex, age, name of school, teaching subject, and other responsibilities. Section two aimed to explore teachers' understanding of the concept of 'employability skills' and to identify which skills they regard as most critical for addressing employer demands and learner aspirations. Within this section, a rank-ordering method adapted from Cohen et al. (2007)

was employed. Participants considered a set of statements and assigned scores from 1 to 4, indicating the relative importance of each skill or characteristic, with 1 representing the highest importance and 4 denoting the least or lack of importance.

Section three sought to examine teachers' initiative regarding their job skills. It posited that without a clear understanding of their actions and the underlying reasons, teachers might struggle to determine the appropriate methods and timing for implementation (i.e., understanding of what and why informs how). Open questions were used because 'possible answers are unknown' and, because one of the objectives of the questionnaire was to explore teachers' perspective about attempts at incorporation of job skills in their teaching (Bailey, 1997, p. 120). Reliance was placed on the integrity and precision of teachers' reports regarding their efforts to integrate employability skills into their instruction.

4.10 Process of the Main Study

Prior to traveling to Cameroon for data collection, follow-up telephone calls were conducted with pedagogic inspectors, head teachers, and teachers who had previously received invitation letters. These calls confirmed their willingness to participate in the study. Alongside providing participants with an information sheet, formal approval to conduct the research was acquired from the Ministry of Secondary Education in Cameroon. Upon receiving this authorisation, appointments were arranged with various head teachers, initially through informal contacts and visits to the schools.

Before distributing the questionnaires, preliminary meetings were held with each head teacher in Cameroon to explain and clarify the study's objectives, procedures, scope, and anticipated duration, as well as to address any questions. Ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, and anonymity were reiterated. Subsequently, further appointments were scheduled with each head teacher to facilitate meetings with teachers and students. During these sessions, the same ethical principles were restated, and participants were given opportunities to seek clarification if needed. The questionnaires were distributed first to students and then to teachers whilst clarifications were made and responded to

questions from both students and teachers. Interviews with the head teacher, teachers, and school counsellor were conducted on the dates specified by the participants, while the questionnaires were collected on the same day after participants had completed them.

4.10.1 Power Relations in research

It was considered important to establish a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewee's personal experiences and attitudes as they occurred (Warren and Karner, 2005). This meant sharing own experiences of the culture, system and history of Cameroon (as Cameroonian) to foster a sense of intimacy rather than just visiting research sites to administer questionnaires and to conduct interviews. The visits to the schools and the Ministry of Secondary Education were conducted informally, with participants' consent obtained for each activity in accordance with the ethical guidelines stipulated by the institutional authorities. Attention was given to participants' preferences regarding the time required to complete the questionnaires, which ranged from 35 to 50 minutes. Participants were also reminded of ethical considerations, including their right to withdraw from the study at any point. This approach aligned with principles of methodological rigor and transparency, thereby enhancing the credibility of the research process (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009).

4.10.2 Conducting the interviews.

Prior to conducting the interviews, it was crucial to find out if the pedagogic inspectors, teacher, school counsellor and head teacher were still willing to be interviewed and to ask them if it was permissible for the session to be audio taped. Although interviewees received a participant information sheet outlining ethical guidelines, withdrawal procedures, confidentiality, and anonymity in advance, these points were reiterated at the beginning of each interview. This was done to check whether participants understood why they were taking part in the study and the rights to confidentiality, anonymity, and withdrawal. Each interview began with a preliminary phase aimed at building rapport, which involved greetings and posing general questions about the participants' institutions

(King and Horrock, 2010). All the participants agreed to be voice recorded. After the informal sessions, the interviews commenced.

Interviews represent one of the most frequently used data collection methods in qualitative research (King and Horrock, 2010), with their effectiveness largely contingent upon the interviewer's communication skills (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007). Throughout the interview sessions, it was essential to formulate questions with clarity (Cohen et al., 2007), engage in attentive listening (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007), and employ appropriate pauses, probes, or prompts as necessary (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003:141). Encouraging participants to speak openly and candidly was prioritised, as was facilitating an environment where responses could be offered without the sense of interrogation (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007:134; Finlay, 2008). Moreover, verbal ability, nonverbal cues, and the use of empathetic signals emerged as important techniques during these interactions. The use of an interview schedule enabled the capture interviewees' perspectives on their work and school experiences in their own language, thereby maintaining focus and allowing insight into the participants' viewpoints. Interviewees were encouraged to ask questions if they needed clarity, and secondary questions were used to illuminate what they had said when necessary.

Interviews were conducted individually in the participants' offices, with each session lasting approximately 35 to 50 minutes. This format ensured that all participants responded to the same set of questions, facilitating comparison across responses (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012). Audio recording was employed using a tape recorder (Kvale, 2007) to capture the conversation smoothly, minimising interruptions during the exchange. Recognising a situation where the participants may not favour being recorded; it was planned to inform them that notes would be taken and would only continue if there was no objection. However, this situation did not arise as all participants consented to being recorded. Participants were reminded that they could discontinue the interview at any time should they decide to withdraw.

Six interviews were conducted, each structured around eight questions aligned with the research objectives. After participants were informed of the confidentiality measures applied to their responses, both the interview and audio recording commenced.

Following each response, participants were invited to confirm whether they wished to proceed to the next question or provide additional comments. The interview advanced according to their preferences. Upon completion of each session, participants received acknowledgment and thanks for their time and contribution.

The interview is a social encounter (Kvale, 2007), involving interactions between the interviewer and the participants. The relationship formed during the interview generates a specific *"field of communicability"* (Briggs, 2007, p. 556), which reflects a social construction of the communicative process (Briggs, 2007). In this context, the interviewer poses questions and elicits responses from the interviewee. Brinkmann (2013) notes that this field of communicability is often overlooked by researchers when considering how knowledge is produced. The interviewee may share personal information that would typically not be disclosed to a stranger, thus facilitating knowledge construction (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). Through dialogue, interaction, questioning, and attentive listening, the researcher gains an understanding of the participants' experiences, emotions, and perspectives. This approach requires careful questioning and listening skills. The interview topic was introduced and followed up attentively based on participants' responses. Repetition of key words from the participants' answers demonstrated politeness, ensure clarity, maintain a non-threatening stance, and avoid assertiveness (Cohen et al., 2011). This approach helped prevent dominance by the interviewer and allowed for reflection on the provided answers. Clarification and elaboration were encouraged by requesting further explanation, which helped to capture the participants' arguments more accurately (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). As stated by Cohen et al. (2011), the interview is a flexible data collection tool capable of engaging multiple sensory channels; *verbal, non-verbal, spoken, and heard* (p. 409). This flexibility allows for immediate verification and clarification of misunderstandings, which is not possible with questionnaires (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008). Pauses or breaks in the conversation provided participants opportunities for reflection before resuming, often generating significant information that proved crucial in the analysis and findings. While most interview settings in the schools were generally conducive, one school posed challenges due to noise from students during break time, which affected the quality of one recorded interview. Nevertheless, the recording remained sufficiently audible.

Considering the interpersonal aspect of interviews, addressing ethical concerns is crucial (Cohen et al., 2011). Researchers must engage with participants openly and ensure clarity about ethical issues such as informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and possible effects on the interview dynamics (Kvale, 2007). In line with Silverman's (2014) perspective, viewing ethical matters as mere procedural requirements may jeopardise the research's integrity, reducing the focus to merely *"doing a good job"* (p. 140).

4.11 Research Ethics

Bryman and Bell (2007) and Cohen et al., (2011) maintain that ethical considerations arise with all research and involve issues relating to how the study participants are treated, how the research is undertaken and how gathered data is utilised. Prior to commencing data collection, ethical approval for this study was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. This procedure involved submitting a detailed description of the proposed research, which was subsequently reviewed and approved by an ethics panel on 27 April 2020. The following sections outline the way the research adhered to established ethical guidelines.

Newby (2010) suggests that obtaining participants' consent is essential in research. In line with this, informed consent was secured from all participants involved in the study. Specifically, participants were provided with information about the research objectives and the rationale for their selection before their involvement, thereby enabling them to make informed decisions regarding participation (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Cohen et al., 2011). In the case of interviewees, the informed consent document was sent in advance and read aloud prior to the interview, ensuring that participants understood the purpose of the research and the confidentiality of their responses (see appendix 6 for interview schedules and appendices 2, 3, 4, and 5 - the consent forms). It was explicitly communicated that participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any point. Only after confirming their consent did the interview proceed. For questionnaire respondents, an introductory page provided a clear explanation of the study's aims, the handling of their data, and their rights, including the ability to ask questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Participants indicated their consent by voluntarily submitting the completed questionnaire after reviewing this information.

Additionally, anonymity was assured to all participants. However, as my study involves interviewing education stakeholders, complete anonymity is impossible. Punch (2014) points out that is not always straightforward as members of the community may always employ a range of clues to infer the identities of those quoted in a research study. Notwithstanding, anonymity was achieved by removing any identifiable traits before dissemination of information (Punch, 2014). During the data analysis phase, the identities of pedagogic inspectors, schoolteachers, school counsellors, and head teachers were removed to ensure anonymity in their responses. Thus, all responses remained confidential. Participants were explicitly instructed not to include their names on questionnaires or any related documents, and it was assured that no information compromising their identity would be disclosed.

Furthermore, strict measures were implemented to ensure data protection throughout the study. Data protection refers to the secure storage of information to maintain its confidentiality (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Hammersley and Traianou (2012) further note that confidentiality is grounded in respect for privacy rights and functions as a '*precautionary principle'* (2012:121). In keeping with this, all questionnaire responses and interview transcripts were stored on a secure computer system with access restricted solely to the researcher. Consequently, no unauthorised individuals could access the data, which was exclusively utilised by the researcher. in sum, this study was conducted in compliance with the university's ethical code of conduct as well as the BERA (2018) guidelines to uphold ethical standards. It is also relevant to highlight that the procedures implemented align with the more recent BERA (2024) guidelines. The subsequent section will outline the procedures employed for analysing the data collected from interviews and questionnaires.

4.12 Data Analysis process

This study applied a qualitative thematic analysis to examine the interview data. Thematic analysis is commonly employed in qualitative research for analysing interview content. The analytical framework applied in this study is based on the conceptualisation proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), who describe thematic analysis as a structured method for *'identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data'* (p. 79). The selection of this

approach was influenced by its potential to generate insightful interpretations that address specific research questions through a rigorous process (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 97). Also, thematic analysis was considered appropriate due to its flexibility and accessibility when working with qualitative data, as well as its adaptability to diverse epistemological perspectives and varying research inquiries (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Although its primary objective involves identifying themes and patterns relevant to the research questions, Clarke and Braun (2013) contend that thematic analysis surpasses simple data summarisation by providing a means to interpret and elucidate the underlying meanings within the data.

Themes were produced from the outcomes of the interviews and questionnaires, together with a conceptual framework, as principal organising framework developed for this study. Prior to fieldwork, attending a 3-day training workshop on the use of NVivo to aided understanding qualitative data analysis. NVivo minimises the need for numerous manual procedures, thereby allowing researchers to allocate more time to identify patterns, discern themes, and draw conclusions (Bazeley, 2007). Nonetheless, in the context of this study, manual thematic analysis was adopted to enable immersion and familiarity with participants' narratives, enabling connection with the data to identify relevant issues and interrelationships. Corbin and Strauss (2008) stress that such immersion with the data enhances the analytical process. The analysis process comprised of the following stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006):

Stage 1 involved listening to and transcribing recorded conversations. Verbatim transcription is an interpretive approach whereby spoken language is converted into written form (Kvale, 2007). Nonetheless, given the exploratory nature of the study, pauses, repetitions, and isolated utterances were excluded from consideration.

Stage 2 entailed identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within the transcribed data. This step required a thorough examination of participants' responses to develop a detailed understanding and to inform subsequent analytical decisions (Green et al., 2007). Multiple readings of the transcripts enabled the emergence of diverse ideas and meanings, which served as the basis for generating initial codes.

Stage 3 consisted of collating coded responses. This phase involved categorising the data to determine the range of issues conveyed by participants and assessing their relevance to the research objectives (Green et al., 2007). Transcripts were revisited several times to highlight sections relevant to the study's objectives, and these selections were compared across participants to discern patterns and variations. This iterative process enhanced the clarity of the researcher's position and the participants' roles within the study. The ongoing comparison between coded segments, participant differences, and relevant textual material allowed for evaluation of whether the codes aligned with the study's central concepts and contributed to a cohesive understanding of the data (Finlay, 2008).

Table 4.3: An example of coding data in the interview analysis

No	Relevant Text (Data immersion)	Coding
1	'….So, I think if there is unemployment, there are, as I say, many reasons: first, they need competence, and the second, is skills…'. '…there is a high rate of unemployment in Cameroon is because the curriculum or call it syllabuses (syllabus make up the curriculum) the syllabuses which have been there for more than thirty years are already obsolete…'.	Youth unemployment is caused by lack of skills and outdated curriculum
2	For now, those who design the curriculum are the pedagogic inspectors. '…we've sat in some pedagogic meetings even at the level of the pedagogic inspectorate and we were given the opportunity to make proposals after their presentations and I don't know but it seems as though the come to those meetings to tell us what to do and not to listen to us…'.	Curriculum Development Process in Cameroon

Stage 4 of the analytical process involved categorising the data. After the initial coding, the data were organised to identify possible connections. This was done by analysing the participants' diverse perspectives and assessing whether the codes corresponded with the primary issues under investigation. Such links revealed the range of experiences reported by the interviewees. These experiences were assigned descriptive labels, which were treated as subthemes. In the effort to explain the various labels, it became apparent

that some could be more appropriately grouped under a single label. Certain subthemes were broad and thus consolidated for better coherence, while others were combined with different categories. Some subthemes retained their initial associations, as they were coherent in that form. Green et al. (2007) highlight that the deliberate process of linking and examining participant data relative to the central research question allows researchers to interpret the shared experiences pertaining to a common theme.

Stage 5 entailed defining and naming themes by selecting relevant extracts for presentation and analysis, followed by constructing a coherent narrative around each theme. This process required examining the connections among participants' perspectives across all categories to verify consistency with the assigned labels and their integration within the overall dataset. This followed an explanation of the different views under themes.

Table 4.4: An Example of generating themes from interviews

No.	Creating categories	Sub-themes	Theme
1	1. Lack of cohesion (skills) or match between education and labour market demands.	Educational Factors • Employability Skills and youth unemployment • Curriculum development and youth unemployment	The Causes of the high level of youth unemployment
2	1.Outdated Curriculum 2.Inappropriate link between curriculum and employment		
3	1.Lack of or insufficient level of infrastructure	Non-educational Factors	

Stage 6 involved producing a detailed analytic narrative that integrated all themes and subthemes, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. During this phase, themes were further refined and supported by participant excerpts to authentically represent

their perspectives. The analysis moved beyond simple description toward interpretation, aiming to clarify the relationship between the themes, the research objectives, and relevant literature. Attention was given to coherence and consistency to ensure the findings provided meaningful insights into participant experiences. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the reporting and analysis, acknowledging the researcher's interpretative influence. This stage concluded with a well-structured narrative that offered an understanding of how participants interpreted the phenomenon under study.

Although critics of this approach may criticise the researcher's role as not being neutral, Denscombe (2007) argues that the researcher plays a major role in the analysis of data. The interview approach is not only seen as an interpersonal encounter, but also as a social one and simply not a data collection activity (Cohen and Manion, 2007). Denscombe, (2003) advises keeping an open mind when interpreting data. In the analysis process, which involved data familiarisation, text selection, coding, category creation, and theme identification, there was a strong alignment between participants' opinions and experiences and the researcher's interpretations. This alignment ensured that the themes reflected the participants' perspectives accurately, thus contributing to the reliability and validity of the results. Consequently, the identified themes authentically conveyed the participants' perspectives, as underlined by Flick (2009). The next section details how data obtained from questionnaires was processed and analysed.

4.12.1 Questionnaire Data Analysis Process

The data collected from questionnaires were systematically reviewed upon submission by both students and teachers to identify errors, including unanswered items or instances of not following directions (Cohen et al., 2011). In instances where participants submitted incomplete questionnaires or did not follow instructions, the next step involved contacting them to discuss the omissions to ascertain any misunderstandings. This approach, involved clarification rather than correction, ensuring that participants' genuine viewpoints were captured (Creswell and Poth, 2018). By fostering a sense of collaboration and maintaining a neutral stance, errors were minimised without influencing participants' responses, thereby preserving the integrity of the data (Maxwell, 2013). This method ensured the authenticity and validity of the research findings while

respecting participants' autonomy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of checking the questionnaires was to identify and correct errors made by the participants. (Cohen et al., 2011).

The questionnaire data were manually entered into Microsoft Word and spreadsheet files to facilitate the synthesis of participant responses and to allow straightforward data retrieval for addressing the research questions (Sapsford and Jupp, 2008). Each row corresponded to an individual school's responses, while columns represented distinct topics, thereby supporting operations such as sorting, copying, pasting, and categorisation.

Table 4.5: Example of tabulated student responses showing section 3 of the students' questionnaire relating to current involvement in any work.

School A		School B		School C		School D	
Response	No. of Respondents	Response	No. of Respondents	Response	No. of Respondents	Response	No. of Respondents
Yes	0	Yes	0	Yes	0	Yes	0
No	48	No	46	No	43	No	48
None	3	None	4	None	6	None	3
Total	51	Total	50	Total	49	Total	51

Closed questions were organised into tables to present descriptive data, whereas open-ended responses required condensation into an appropriate format to allow analysis (Sapsford and Jupp, 2008).

Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that qualitative investigations can make extensive use of tables considering that social phenomena can be located not solely in the mind but also in the real world. They further contend that while they play a crucial role in conveying details about research locations, methodologies, observational summaries, and data representation, their utility expands further as analytical instruments. Furthermore, tables effectively structure data, promoting accessible comparisons that enable researchers to identify parallels and distinctions, as well as recognise patterns such as co-occurrences, thematic elements, and emerging trends (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 93). Consequently, these analytical capabilities are essential for the interpretation of qualitative data. However, Pratt et al., (2020a) indicate that there are dissenting voices that express caution regarding the potential overabundance of tables and the unintended absurd outcomes that their utilisation could generate. These outcomes involve imposing artificial categories on the evidence, which may minimise the intrinsic complexity that distinguishes qualitative research from other methodologies (Pratt et al., 2020a). The variety of ways in which these categories are applied within qualitative studies often receives little attention, as many researchers tend to regard them primarily, and sometimes exclusively, as communicative tools employed strategically to increase the chances of publication (Jonsen et al., 2018: 48). In this study, keyed-in responses were used illustratively and supplemented as needed by incorporating answers from a broader sample of questionnaires (Jonsen et al., 2018). Careful consideration was given during theme identification to ensure their use as evidence supporting the research questions.

The questionnaire analysis involved identifying frequently occurring concepts by initially ranking them according to how often they appeared in the responses. The preliminary stage of data analysis is characterised by data reduction. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe data reduction as the processes of selecting, focusing, simplifying, organising, and transforming data. At this point, emergent ideas guide decisions about what should be included in the data display phase. To maintain the authenticity of the original data, verbatim participant statements were retained for illustrative purposes when appropriate.

4.12.2 Managing and Analysing Questionnaire Data

Kreuger and Neuman (2006) distinguish qualitative data analysis from its quantitative counterpart by emphasising its lack of standardisation and the diversity of approaches it encompasses. While quantitative researchers typically select from a defined set of analytical techniques, qualitative research allows for multiple strategies, including traditional methods such as physically cutting and pasting paper excerpts or employing computer-assisted tools (Mertens, 2010). Flick (2013) further notes that qualitative analysis may focus on subjective experiences of individuals or on particular cases, whether individual or collective, examining their unique characteristics and interrelations.

In presenting the findings, tables were used to summarise results, enabling a quick overview of responses to specific questions (Gillham, 2008). The data were thoroughly examined; concepts were compared, merged, or categorised to emphasise key themes relevant to the research questions, and to assess how participant responses related to the broader study. Responses from all participants were transcribed, then organised and re-sorted to identify similar answers, which were subsequently grouped and highlighted. Coding was applied selectively, based on the criterion that responses sufficiently addressed the questions and exhibited diversity or interest to warrant coding (Sapsford and Jupp, 2008, p.166). Cohen et al., describe data reduction as the assignment of code numbers to individual survey responses. In this study, participants interpreted questions and formulated answers based on their understanding, experiences, or opinions; thus, each question within the five sections of the student questionnaire received a code. Nonetheless, not every answer was coded in this manner (Cohen et al., 2011).

Open-ended questions in the teachers' questionnaires elicited a range of responses (Payne, 2004), providing valuable context for interpreting responses to related items. The objective was to gather information on teachers' roles in equipping students with workplace skills. However, these responses required extensive time for interpretation and analysis. Payne (2004) argues that data analysis depends heavily on the study design and the nature of the collected data, implying that while researchers can often assess data relevance, coding and interpretation, particularly for open-ended responses can be challenging. Consequently, rigor is necessary during the interpretation of such data (Dey,

2005). Notably, the response rate for both teachers' and students' questionnaires reached 100%, attributable to self-administration and support of informal contacts.

As previously indicated, manual analysis was adopted to enable immersion and familiarity with participants' narratives, enabling the identification of interconnected issues across the dataset. Corbin and Strauss (2008) contend that such immersion is integral to the analytical process. Given the qualitative approach, understanding the lived experiences of education stakeholders was considered essential. Manual analysis enabled in-depth engagement and understanding of the data especially for the open-ended sections of the teachers' questionnaires. Like the interviews, the iterative process ensured total engagement with the data.

4.13 Gaining Access

Before commencing fieldwork in Cameroon, authorisation was requested and subsequently granted by the GLOBE Programme Cameroon, the body responsible for overseeing global learning initiatives within the Ministry of Secondary Education and Basic Education. The process of securing permission to begin field activities required approximately six weeks. However, challenges related to accessing research sites were relatively limited, largely due to support from informal contacts. In the absence of publicly available information and contact details on the Ministry of Secondary Education's website, these informal networks played a pivotal role in facilitating entry to the locations involved in the study. As a Cameroonian with prior experience working domestically, I have sustained ongoing relationships (Walford, 2001) with three key informal contacts in the target regions. These individuals were instrumental during the pilot phase and were essential in obtaining approval to conduct research within both schools and the ministry. The primary roles of these contacts are summarised as follows: Contact 1, an administrator within the Ministry of Secondary Education, was vital in identifying appropriate administrators for interviews and in distributing the authorisation letter, participant information sheets, and interview schedules. Contact 2, the Head of the English Department at a secondary school in Buea (Southwest Region), enabled access to distribute questionnaires in two schools. Contact 3 arranged and secured approval to administer questionnaires in two schools located in the Centre Region.

4.14 Validity

Silverman (2011, p. 289) defines validity as how well an account reflects the social phenomena it aims to describe. Similarly, Newby (2010) underscores that validity involves ensuring the data collection process accurately captures the intended aspects. In its broadest sense, validity relates to how well-grounded an argument, finding, deduction, or justification is (Maul, 2018). Despite strong consensus on its significance, there is no single definition of validity that is universally acknowledged across professional and academic groups, as is the case with many other theoretical constructs and terminologies (Maul, 2018).

The terminology is widely, although not always, used in the social sciences to relate to educational and psychological measurement, where it is commonly described as perhaps the most critical factor in generating and assessing tests. According to Cohen and Manion (2017), validity and reliability constitute essential components in quantitative and qualitative research and have several dimensions. They add that the degree to which the rules of the research methods were adhered to while generating study results could be used to justify the validity of a study. Oliver (2010) also maintains that all categories of research must demonstrate validity (Cohen and Manion, 2017). This implies that the credibility of any inquiry is reliant upon illustrating validity, as claims cannot occur in isolation in research contexts without substantive evidence. By evidencing validity, one can demonstrate that adequate robust evidence has indeed been offered for the research to be recognised as trustable.

Despite being a term that is recurrently used in educational research, validity has multiple interpretations. A research study demonstrating what it purports to reveal can be broadly interpreted as valid (Goodman, 2008a). Goodman (2008a) further suggests that validity is determined by whether the data analysed and reported mirrors reality and covers the significant subjects it intended to investigate. However, dependent on respective philosophical stances, various qualitative researchers disagree with the validity model that is typically used in more quantitative social science research. They disapprove of the fundamental realist tenet that reality exists independently of our perception of it.

Therefore, it makes no logical sense to concentrate on truth or falsity in relation to an external reality, which is the primary focus of validity.

Whiston (2012) indicates that the concept of validity first emerged within quantitative research. Educational research, like most research, can generally be categorised into two types: quantitative and qualitative (Cohen et al., 2008). Whereas qualitative research emphasises understanding phenomena from the standpoint of human participants, quantitative research employs objective assessment and statistical analysis of numerical data to understand and explicate phenomena (Cohen et al., 2008). Nevertheless, the necessity to establish standards for the appraisal of such instruments is essential given the variety of measuring tools available to researchers undertaking either approach. Crucially, two key measuring tools in research exist: validity and reliability (Cohen et al., 2008). While these measures might be appropriate within the context of scientific research, their applicability to educational and social research is not consistently assured (Cohen et al., 2017). It is therefore crucial to overcome the temptation to assume that all measurements are suitable for all types of study.

In contrast to quantitative methods, which prioritise measurement, control, and predictability, naturalistic studies are grounded in socially situated investigations that rely predominantly on data drawn from the natural environment (Cohen et al., 2017). By aiming to understand individuals and their behaviour through the insider's viewpoint, social science research tends to move away from striving for traditional notions of objectivity (Punch, 2013). This study sought to provide an in-depth understanding of how the secondary school system prepares students for employment by examining the perspectives of educational stakeholders. The study corresponds to the principles required of naturalistic inquiry, focusing on how individuals act in the context of everyday life and rooted in the interpretive paradigm as opposed to the positivist paradigm (McKechnie, 2008).

In qualitative research, the concept of validity is often defined differently from its counterpart in quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the notion of trustworthiness to correspond with the naturalistic variants of internal and external validation, objectivity, and reliability. They argued that credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability collectively underpin trustworthiness in qualitative studies. These criteria were proposed as alternatives to the conventional standards typically employed for assessing validity in quantitative research. While these terms do not represent direct equivalents of established scientific terminology, they reflect the inherent complexity of qualitative inquiry and underline the importance for researchers to acknowledge the subjective and fluid nature of their investigations, all while striving to maintain methodological rigor (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Thick description is also required to validate that the findings are transferable between the researcher and the study subjects (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This is supported by Creswell and Poth (2013), who state that validation in qualitative studies is the process of determining the accuracy of findings based on how well the researcher and participants have expressed them.

Regardless, Cohen et al. (2017) underscore that the criteria used to assess validity must be suited to the epistemological setting of the inquiry since validity in distinct research traditions must remain consistent with those traditions. As a result, due to the intrinsic disparities between quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the criteria useful for evaluating qualitative research may differ from those suitable for quantitative investigations.

One approach to establishing validity involves ensuring that the data accurately represent the phenomenon under study. This entails detailed consideration to both the sampling procedures and the selection of cases (Newby, 2010). In this research, participants were deliberately chosen based on the assumption that certain individuals within the country possess expertise in curriculum development. Moreover, efforts were made to achieve a balance between participants from an Anglophone region and those from a Francophone region, as detailed in Section 4.6.

To further reduce threats to validity, the researcher personally collected qualitative data through interviews and questionnaires. The presentation of this data aims to offer sufficient detail regarding the findings, allowing readers to assess their trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007). According to Newby (2010, p. 17), validity can be enhanced when *"the argument and the evidence that supports it is as complete as we specify it needs to be."* During the data analysis phase, the transcripts were carefully reviewed several times to

ensure that the recorded material was accurately represented in the documented evidence. Additionally, two friends were invited to review and proofread the interview transcripts to verify their accuracy to the original recordings (Kvale and Brinkman, 2008). The analysis primarily drew upon participants' perceptions, from which interpretations and thematic categories were developed.

The study period allowed the researcher to fully immerse in the topic under investigation and in the settings of the target participants, which facilitated appreciation of their objectives, attitudes, difficulties, and motives. The themes that emerged allowed for saturation of the data collection process, preventing the emergence of any new major topics (O'Leary, 2004). Saturation is used as a foundational concept in qualitative research to determine the point at which data collection adequately supports a thorough understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. This study employed a purposive, non-probability sampling approach, which is typically guided by considerations of saturation. Although the sample was limited to four schools and the Ministry of Secondary Education, possibly limiting the diversity of perspectives, the study did not intend to produce generalisable findings.

Guest et al. (2006) argue that saturation has multiple interpretations and lacks transparency even though it is commonly used as a benchmark to assess the adequacy of sampling diversity. The justifiability of qualitative research is closely linked to the appropriateness of sampling, which should aim to provide depth and enhance the potential for findings to be transferable (Spencer et al., 2003). In this research, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were employed as data collection methods to capture in-situ information, thereby gaining firsthand insights into the experiences of school participants and administrators. Despite these precautions, Cohen et al. (2011, p. 179) argue that factors that could affect validity cannot be eliminated; instead, their impact can be mitigated through ongoing attention to validity throughout the research process.

4.15 Reflexivity

Basit (2013) highlights the considerable responsibility placed on educational researchers, particularly those operating within the interpretive paradigm and utilising qualitative methodologies. Interpretivism, as a qualitative approach, centres on understanding individual human experiences. Consequently, social reality is viewed through the lens of individuals' subjective experiences, emphasising how they perceive and interpret their social environment. For qualitative researchers, this perspective implies that qualitative data best captures the complexity and intricacies of human interactions, as well as the ongoing rapport established with study participants (Basit, 2013). Engaging with participants thus involves making informed decisions aimed at uncovering truths, underscoring the importance of reflecting on research choices and learning from those experiences.

Luttrell (2010, p. 3) defines reflexivity as the recognition that the researcher is inherently part of the context and social phenomena under investigation. It serves as a tool for critically examining the research process in its entirety. In this research, the components of the research procedure are interconnected, contributing collectively to a coherent whole. Interaction occurred during the distribution and collection of questionnaires, while interviews were conducted solely with volunteers who provided informed consent. The recorded interviews were reviewed multiple times and transcribed, with emergent themes employed to enrich the study's findings.

The transcription of interviews involved an iterative process, requiring repeated review to derive meaning from the interpretations and to assess the accuracy of both the transcripts and the recorded conversations. To achieve this, the recorded conversations were listened to a few times, hence making changes appropriately and where necessary. Moreover, selecting one anglophone and one francophone region helped reduce potential bias and supported the integrity of the collected data (Creswell, 2009). To build rapport with participants, the initial minutes of each interview were dedicated to greeting them, engaging in brief conversation, and reiterating the voluntary nature of participation, the option to withdraw, and the requirement of informed consent. Recognising the inherent power dynamics within the research context (Karnieli-Miller,

Strier, and Pessach, 2009), the study prioritised including only those individuals who willingly volunteered and remained committed to participating. Throughout all stages of the research, participants received thorough explanations to ensure their understanding.

Considering that the researcher's perspectives and inherent values influence the study, steps were taken to inform participants about the research objectives. This included clarifying the reasons for their selection, explaining how their information would be used, and outlining the potential for their data to be identifiable and traceable. Such measures aimed to enable participants to make informed decisions about their involvement, based on a thorough understanding of the study's purpose and conditions, consistent with Newby's (2010) recommendations. Based on the above, it can be concluded that the researcher plays the role of the primary instrument for data collection. Preissle (2006, p. 691) asserts that qualitative research is not a neutral endeavour; researchers bring their own values, biases, and worldviews, which shape the way they interpret the participants already interpreted experiences. Therefore, it is essential for researchers to engage in reflexivity by identifying and acknowledging their influential role throughout the research process, which helps reduce bias and improve the study's credibility. This reflection must be ongoing, ranging from the initial formulation of the research question to the eventual reporting of results.

4.16 Summary and Conclusion

The literature review illustrates that employability skills is a concept that could enhance school leavers' employment chances. Considering this context, it is remarkable that relatively little thought is given to integrating employability into the curriculum of schools, even though doing so could significantly enhance outcomes for school leavers. To better understand the deeper implications of the major notions of employability, the present research investigates strategies of incorporating employability into the curriculum. An attempt has been made to review the existing literature on research methods in this chapter. Using an appropriate research framework that follows a methodical process from the research philosophies to the Research Approach, Research Methodological Choice, Research Strategy, Research Time Horizon, as well as research

techniques and procedures, a suitable methodological framework has been adopted for this study.

This chapter has addressed the theoretical foundations of this study, as well as the methodological approach and research design employed. It explored the nature of research paradigms in relation to how knowledge is constructed and understood, providing justification for the chosen theoretical stance. Qualitative methods were selected to adequately address the research questions and meet the study's objectives. In this research, skills integration into the curriculum is viewed as a human construct, aligning with an interpretivist theoretical perspective. A case study approach was employed due to its capacity to integrate multiple data collection methods, including interviews, surveys, and document analysis. Specifically, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were administered for data gathering. To obtain a sample that is representative, purposive sampling was utilised to select two regions from ten, followed by random sampling of students and teachers for questionnaire distribution.

The pilot study conducted proved valuable in refining the questionnaire, as well as in shaping and confirming the research questions. Thematic analysis supported the interpretation and reporting of participants' perspectives within the study. To ensure validity and reliability, the research employed strategies recommended by Creswell (2007) and Davies (2007). In line with the advice of Miles and Huberman (1994), ethical considerations were addressed throughout all phases of the study. Consequently, measures were implemented to safeguard participants' privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, dignity, and rights. Ethical guidelines outlined by Newby (2010), Cohen et al. (2007), Hammersley and Traianou (2012), and Punch (2014) were also considered to uphold the study's ethical standards.

Chapter 5. Findings of Thematic Analysis of the Interview and Questionnaire Data

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion and analysis of the findings derived from the qualitative study described in Chapter 4, Section 4.10, which aimed to address the research questions listed in Table 5.0. It provides an overview of the study's rationale and contextual background through a review of its aims, objectives, and research questions. It reviews the analytical approaches applied to the data in relation to both the specific research questions and the overall objectives of the study. The analysis integrates data obtained through interviews and questionnaires. Details regarding the data collection procedures are provided in Chapter 4, Research Methodology.

The thematic analysis draws on information gathered from three national pedagogic inspectors at the Ministry of Secondary Education in Cameroon (MINSEC), one secondary school headteacher, one school counsellor, and one secondary school teacher who participated in interviews, in addition to responses from 202 secondary school students and 26 secondary school teachers who completed questionnaires. The selection of a thematic approach for data analysis was motivated by its capacity to offer flexibility and theoretical openness, enabling an elaborate and intricate account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, thematic analysis is suitable to research aimed at capturing participants' viewpoints, detecting patterns and differences, and revealing unforeseen insights, which aligns with the objectives of this study (Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, critics of the approach often allude that its flexibility can result in lack of consistency and coherence when identifying themes from the gathered data. Nonetheless, King (2004) asserts that due to its usefulness in summarising salient features in data, thematic analysis allows for a systematic approach to data handling and the development of a clear and organised final report.

This chapter also explores the study's findings with a focus on the interpretations derived from responses to the research questions and their implications for subsequent investigations. It synthesises various elements of the current research by engaging with the outcomes of the data analysis. Subsequently, the chapter discusses each research question in relation to the identified themes, while also reflecting on emerging conclusions intended to shed light on the issues highlighted during the investigation.

As described in chapter 3, sections 3.7.1 through 3.7.4, it is essential to note that curriculum models provide varied approaches to conceptualising and structuring educational practice. For example, the body of knowledge model focuses on set content and the delivery of subject matter through syllabi (Kelly, 2009; Blenkin et al., 1992). The product model, based on Tyler's work, highlights objectives, measurable outcomes, and connections to professional standards. This model is closely linked to employability discussions, but it often faces criticism for its rigidity and overemphasis on final assessments (Tyler, 1949/2013; Fotheringham et al., 2012; Eisner, 2001). In contrast, the process model views learning as inquiry and interaction. It values critical thinking, feedback, and student involvement (Stenhouse, 1975; Knight, 2001). The praxis model goes further by including action, reflection, and social purpose in the curriculum. It emphasises real-world problem-solving, collaboration across disciplines, and empowering learners (Grundy, 1985; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Crucially, each model has its strengths and weaknesses, from coherence and comparability to adaptability and social relevance. These factors influence how curriculum development addresses current challenges like employability (Arnold and Mundy, 2020).

In addressing the research questions, the study revealed that participants' perspectives on the knowledge and skills required for employment underscored a tension between the product model's emphasis on clearly defined outcomes and the praxis model's endorsement of flexibility. Students, teachers, and administrators acknowledged the significance of measurable skills, including communication, ICT, and entrepreneurial abilities, which correspond with the product model's focus. At the same time, they highlighted the need for transferable skills such as adaptability, collaboration, and critical thinking, which are more effectively fostered through process-oriented and praxis frameworks (Stenhouse, 1975; Grundy, 1985). In exploring the connection between

curriculum and youth unemployment, participants argued that rigid, exam-driven curricula lead to skill mismatches by focusing on knowledge reproduction instead of application. In contrast, process and praxis models prioritise inquiry, context, and problem-solving, making them more responsive to labour market needs and better at preparing young people for work. When considering how to incorporate employability skills into the curriculum in Cameroon, participants suggested a blend: clear learning outcomes for accountability alongside student-centred teaching and real-world projects that connect school and workplace expectations (Fotheringham et al., 2012; Hussey and Smith, 2003).

Analysing the study's data shows that no single model fully meets the challenges of employability for young Cameroonians. However, the praxis model emerges as the preferred alternative. It integrates knowledge, skills, and values within relevant social contexts while recognising students and teachers as shared creators of learning (Grundy, 1985; Carr & Kemmis, 1986). Praxis emphasises hands-on problem-solving, interdisciplinary work, and reflection. This approach ensures education goes beyond just acquiring knowledge; it prepares learners for real-world challenges. This model aligns most closely with participants' views in this study, as it positions curriculum development as both a teaching method and a social process. This approach provides an opportunity for Cameroonian schools to enhance the preparation of young individuals by equipping them with the skills, attitudes, and adaptability that contribute to meaningful employment. The chapter commences with a review of the research questions guiding this study.

Table 5.0 Research Questions

Research Questions			
1. What is the perception of current school pupils (Form 5, 15-16-year-olds) and teachers on the types of knowledge and skills they need from the curriculum to gain employment? 2. What is the relationship between employability skills/vocational education and curriculum development from participants' perspectives? 3. How can employability skills be integrated in the curriculum of schools in Cameroon to improve employability skills for students?			
Interview Questions **(Stakeholder interview schedule and guidelines)**	**Research Objectives**	**Questionnaire Questions**	**Research Objectives**
Q1. What in your view is the cause of the high youth unemployment rate in the country?	1, 4, 5	Q1. Employability Skills: A person is more suitable for employment/promotion if they:	2,4, 5
Q2. How can arrangements be improved between the Ministry of Secondary Education to create effective mechanisms for employers to connect with schools?	3, 4, 5	Q2. Current Employment: Are you currently involved in any work? Paid, unpaid, voluntary?	1, 4
Q3. What support do employers want from the Ministry of Secondary Education and what do you think your Ministry can offer employers?	3, 4, 5	Q3. Job Skills: How useful is/will your subject combinations (specialisation) at school help you to find work?	2, 4, 5
Q4. Who is responsible for curriculum development in your Ministry?	3, 4, 5	Q4. Describe what you are doing to help your students gain and sustain employment?	2, 3, 4, 5
Q5. Please explain how the curriculum is disseminated, implemented and evaluated?	3, 4, 5		
Q6. Do curriculum developers get some input from: Students; Teachers; Careers advisers; School Governors/Parents'-Teachers' Association; Head teachers/Principals?	3, 4, 5		
Q8. What skills do you think school leavers need from the curriculum to help them find and stay employment?	1, 4, 5		

Research adopting an interpretative approach within a qualitative research design commonly begins with the formulation of a research question. In contrast to quantitative research, where the research question is usually established at the outset, qualitative inquiries tend to be more fluid and adaptive; the focus may evolve, expand, narrow, or shift considerably throughout the study (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Nonetheless, the research questions reflect the course and epistemological orientation underlying the investigation (Newman and Covrig, 2013). It is essential to acknowledge that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies offer distinct advantages, and the choice between them should be guided by the nature of the research problem being addressed (Newman and Covrig, 2013).

In this study, the research questions concerning the influence of the secondary school system on participants' lived experiences shaped the analytical approach. Demuth and Terkildsen (2015) argue that research questions help direct the research toward specific knowledge, and that carefully formulated questions match the study's objectives while reflecting underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions. Within qualitative research, questions can be categorised into different types (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and thematic analysis encompasses a wide range of such question categories. It could provide analyses of the experiences of individuals with respect to a problem, or the aspects and practises that underpin and impact specific phenomenon. The initial research questions developed for this study (see Chapter 3 section 3.2, Research Questions) were realistic ones and sought to find out participants' accounts of their lived experiences and perspectives. This guided the questionnaire and interview questions and subsequent analytical procedures.

To analyse the data, consideration was given to the nature of the information gathered (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (see Chapter 4 section 4.11 Data Analysis process and Chapter 5 section 5.2 Coding of Obtained Data). The nature of the study is qualitative, and interviews and questionnaires were the basis of data collection process. Through the data collection process, detailed and elaborated information were gathered. For the same purpose, thematic analysis was relied upon as an analytical framework. It was found to be highly suitable with a view of analysing the subjective data. The themes emerged from the responses provided by the participants to the questions asked.

The semi-structured interview schedule (located in appendix 4) focussed on identifying key issues in the education system that has contributed to youth unemployment in Cameroon. The semi-structured interview method enabled a subjective examination of perspectives, allowing the collection of in-depth and holistic accounts of participants' experiences (Flick, 2009). Attention was given to the participants' experiences, the meanings they ascribed, and the realities they encountered, allowing for examination of how these elements influenced prevailing discourses, assumptions, or ideas within broader contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interview schedule employed enabled defined topics to be addressed whilst allowing participants to respond and discuss pertinent issues on their own terms (Choak, 2012). It provided a guide to the interview, allowing other relevant themes to develop during the interview rendering a process resembling a flowing conversation (Choak, 2012). Data gathered through questionnaires provided a framework for the in-depth interviews; enabling central themes, ideas, and meanings to be uncovered and developed (Mee, 2007).

As outlined in Chapter 4, only participants who volunteered were interviewed. Consent was obtained prior to recording the interviews, which were subsequently transcribed manually by the researcher. The rationale for choosing manual transcription and coding is detailed in Section 4.10 of the same chapter. Importantly, the process of transcribing facilitated a deeper engagement with the data, enabling greater understanding, reflection, and insight both during and after transcription (Ritchie et al., 2003). The audio-recorded interviews were fully transcribed, and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to preserve confidentiality (P representing pedagogic inspectors at the Ministry of Secondary Education; H for head teachers; C for secondary school counsellors; and T for secondary school teachers). The criteria for selecting individual participants are discussed in Section 4.7 of Chapter 4. Selected excerpts from the transcribed interviews are presented in italics.

5.2 Coding of Obtained Data

The approach to thematic analysis applied to the data collected from interviews and questionnaires was outlined in Chapter 4, Section 4.10. Thematic analysis is widely recognised as a prevalent method for analysing qualitative data and is notable for its

flexibility, dynamism, and nuanced application (Holloway and Todres, 2003). Unlike methodologies such as grounded theory, thematic analysis does not possess a clearly defined historical lineage or a prescribed set of analytical techniques. Bryman (2008), in earlier work, even questioned the significance of thematic analysis as a topic of discussion. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis should be regarded as a foundational method for qualitative research and recommends it as an initial analytic skill for those new to qualitative interpretive approaches. They further propose that thematic analysis needs recognition as a distinct methodological approach in its own right (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, the thematic analysis in this study follows the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) (refer to Section 4.2.1) to delineate and elucidate the analytical process within the domains of skills acquisition and curriculum development.

Moreover, in qualitative data analysis, coding is comparatively a universal method; it is a crucial part of the analysis procedure and the manner wherein researchers break down their data to create something new (Bree and Gallagher, 2016). It is the method of processing qualitative textual information by disassembling it to see what it comprises before reassembling it in a meaningful fashion (Creswell, 2015). An illustration of the process using extracts from the transcribed interviews and summaries of questionnaires conducted with study participants follows below.

Table 5.1: Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis

Approach to thematic analysis
Step 1 involves gaining an in-depth understanding of the data. Step 2 consists of producing preliminary codes based on this comprehension. In Step 3, potential themes are identified through analysis of the coded data. Step 4 entails evaluating and refining these themes to ensure their coherence and consistency. Step 5 focuses on clearly articulating and defining each theme. Finally, Step 6 comprises the process of compiling the findings into a detailed written report.

5.2.1 Familiarity with the data

To gain an initial understanding of the collected data, audio recordings of the interviews were first listened to and then transcribed. The initial phase of the analysis involved multiple readings of the transcripts, following the approach outlined by Clarke and Braun (2013). Selected excerpts from the interviews used in this study are presented in Appendix 1. During this stage, brief notes capturing preliminary observations and impressions were recorded to facilitate deeper engagement with the data. Below are some primordial, notes made on the data:

> *The National Education Pedagogic Inspectors attribute youth unemployment primarily to deficits in young people's skills, limited job experience, inadequate job search abilities, and insufficient financial means to secure employment. There is an emphasis on leadership-related competencies, including adaptability to the work environment, personal attributes, and communication skills, which are perceived as particularly valued by employers. Educators consistently stress the essential role they play in transmitting knowledge and skills to students. Both teachers and guidance counsellors offer various forms of support to learners during their schooling. In Cameroon, a statutory National Curriculum established by the Ministry of Secondary Education provides the educational framework. However, teachers identify the lack of adequate infrastructure as the main obstacle to the effective delivery of this curriculum.*

This step concentrated on examining how the data might address the research questions and identifying patterns within it, while also considering the underlying ideas conveyed by the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Although making notes about the data is beneficial, notes were considered crucial to ensure that any early analytical ideas were not overlooked (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thus, the approach of jotting down notes was not systematic or exhaustive at this step (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

5.2.2 Generating initial codes.

The second stage of the analytical process was intended to generate initial codes from the data which meant organising the data into a meaningful and systematic manner

(Braun & Clarke 2006). The analytical process focused on addressing the research questions. Data segments that reflected relevant aspects of these questions were coded, and the coding was subsequently refined through iterative analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Table 5.2 Example of descriptive categorisation and coding process

Category: Youth unemployment	**Category:** Curriculum Development and Pedagogy	**Category:** Support Mechanisms	**Category:** Implications/curriculum review
Code: Shortfall of skills, Competence	**Code:** Pedagogic inspectors, Top-down, Outdated/obsolete curriculum, infrastructural problems, Personnel issue	**Code:** Counsellor Support, Teacher role	**Code:** Competence-based

For example, the issue of *'lack of job skills'* and *'obsolete or outdated curriculum'* was an issue that was common in all the transcribed interviews and was linked to the first research questions for this study. These were used as preliminary codes and the process continued; working through the transcripts and coding segments that were relevant and specifically addressed the research questions.

Table 5.3: An example of coding data in the interview analysis

Code	Meaning – words found in text
Shortfall of skills, Competence,	Lack of skill/ability, capability/ability, old-fashioned/outmoded
Pedagogic inspectors, Outdated/obsolete curriculum, top-down, infrastructural problems, Personnel issue	Education inspectors/curriculum designers/ supervisory responsibilities, instituted from the top level, equipment/facilities, staffing problems
Counsellor Support, Teacher role	Help to overcome problems, facilitate learning
Competence-based	knowledge, skills, and attitudes

The data was read repeatedly, and once finished, generated codes were compared to identify similarities between the teachers' and inspectors' accounts; this meant generating new codes and sometimes modifying existing ones (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017).

5.2.3 Search for themes

According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), a theme constitutes a pattern that encapsulates relevant elements within the data. Hence, the subsequent stage of the analytical process involved identifying themes from the collected data. This required a thorough examination of the codes derived in the prior phase, some of which naturally clustered together to form coherent themes. For instance, multiple codes pertained to the perception that a range of skills is necessary to improve students' employability. These codes were grouped into a theme labelled 'Relevant Employment Skills.' By the conclusion of this step, the codes were organised into broader themes that aligned with the research questions. The resulting themes were primarily descriptive, capturing patterns within the data related to the study's objectives. Table 5.4 below provides an illustration of the identified themes, along with their associated categories and sub-themes.

Table 5.4 Description of themes that emerged from the data.

Four main themes that emerged from the data			
Youth unemployment & relevant employment skills	**Curriculum and Pedagogy**	**Support Mechanisms**	**Implications**
Key indicator of the current trend of youth unemployment; the mismatch between demand and youth employability; youth skill tends not to be readily absorbable by the labour market; and teachers' Job Skills Initiatives	Curriculum development; Teachers' voice and challenges in delivering the curriculum	Guidance and counselling to students to develop emotionally, mentally, physically, morally, and educationally to cope with classroom learning both in and out of school setting.	The implications for revising the curriculum.

5.2.4 Reviewing themes

The themes identified in the preceding data analysis stage were subsequently reviewed to verify their coherence and validity. This meant looking into all the gathered data that was relevant to each theme and involved utilising the 'cut and paste' tool in Microsoft office word processing (Bree and Gallagher, 2016). Data connected to each theme was read and consideration was accorded to whether the data supported the themes.

5.2.5 Refining and Writing up

The final phase of the analytical process focused on refining the themes to capture their essential meanings, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Each theme was examined to clarify its core message, identify potential sub-themes, and assess their interconnections,

as illustrated in Table 5.4 above. The primary theme that emerged, underpinning the others, was 'the causes of youth unemployment' within the country. Most participants were consistent and clear about the causes of youth unemployment. They made comments such as:

> *P3 Lines 7-10*
>
> *You know, to be employed, you need to first of all have skills. You need to have some competence to be able to be employed. So, not only in Cameroon but all over the world, you need to realise that there are many unemployed young people. Why? Because they are not really competent in what they are supposed to do.*
>
> *T1 Lines 17-18*
>
> *… the curriculum of the schools are not adapted in a way to give the children enough skills that will permit them to adapt to any kind of situation that will permit them to have jobs.*
>
> *C1 Lines 17-19*
>
> *We contribute so much in under employment because there is first of all lack of jobs and their training doesn't warrant them to create jobs for themselves.*
>
> *P1 Lines 41-50*
>
> *We have to change our curriculum and rewrite our syllabuses. We have to change to the competence-based approach. In the competence-based approach the question the learner asked is what can the learner give, what is the learner able to do? That is the CBA that is real life situation. Every learner should be able to do something.*

Some participants attributed youth unemployment to insufficient job skills among young individuals. They conceptualised youth unemployment as being inextricably linked to the outdated or obsolete curriculum applied in the country. They however identified the competence-based approach to curriculum to resolve the problem. Eventually four broad themes, discussed in detail from section 5.6 emerged: Youth unemployment and relevant employment skills; Curriculum and Pedagogy; Support Mechanisms and Implications.

5.3 Interview Data Analysis Method

The thematic analysis approach applied to the interview data is detailed in chapter 4, section 4.10 (Data Analysis process). This method was employed to identify themes that

informed the findings of the study. The qualitative interviews focused on the participants' perceptions and interpretations of their everyday experiences. The aim was to interpret the meanings behind key themes emerging from participants' lived experiences (Choak, 2012) and to examine in depth issues specific to their perspectives, thus enabling an understanding of how various phenomena of interest are encountered and evaluated. Schreier (2012) points out that access to reliable and credible accounts of participants' narratives underpins the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Consistent with this view, selected excerpts from the participants are presented.

Table 5.5. Mapping How Students' Questionnaire Data was Analysed

Question Number	Contents/Themes	Main Outcomes
2	**EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS** • Suitability for Employment/Promotion • Most Important Skills/Characteristics	The most relevant skills were: learn from mistakes; positive attitude to work; cooperation with others; read and understand information; appropriate presentation; understand and use numbers; customer relation; aware of own strengths and weaknesses, relevant vocational skills and knowledge, punctuality, take initiative; planning and organising; reliability; enthusiastic; eager to improve and can influence others.
3	**CURRENT EMPLOYMENT** • Current involvement in any work • Basis of employment • Location of Work Role • Number of Hours Spent in Work: First Job? • Fulltime jobs, duration, and reason for leaving • Job seekers: Any employment in the past? • Length of time looking for work	Most of the students were not involved in any work Most of the students preferred public sectors

Question Number	Contents/Themes	Main Outcomes
	• Reason for choice of sector	
4	**JOB SKILLS** • Usefulness of subject combination to future work • Usefulness of general skills to future job • Specific Difficulties in search for employment • What methods did/do you use to search for a job? • If you are employed, which method did you use to get the job? If yes, what kind? • How useful do you think this guidance was/is? • When did you start looking for work?	Most of the students found the subjects useful for the future work The general skills are useful for the future jobs There was no specific difficulty in search for employment Most of the students did not prefer these methods to search for a job
5	**FAMILY EMPLOYMENT - PAID, UNPAID, VOLUNTARY** • What is your parent's highest qualification? • Is your father currently employed? • If yes, what is his occupation? • What sector does your father work in? • Is your mother currently employed? • If yes, what is her occupation? • What sector does your mother work in?	Most of the fathers are currently employed Most of the fathers work in private sectors Most of the mothers are currently employed Most of the mothers work in private sectors

Table 5.6 Mapping How Teachers' Questionnaire Data was Analysed

Question Number	Contents/Themes	Main Outcomes
2	**Employability Skills** • A person is more suitable for employment/promotion if they: • Skills/characteristics considered most important	Leadership skills; competence, adaptation to work environment; personal qualities; and communication skills are the most relevant skills demanded by employers.
3	• Job Skills Initiatives • Describe what you are doing to help your students gain and sustain employment? • How/Why did you decide to do this? (e.g. was it your idea or school/market/employer driven or led) • Who did you consult? • How did you design your programme/activity? • What did you hope to achieve? • What results have you had in the past 2 years? • What amendments have you made in helping your students gain and sustain employment? (if any)/ • What feedback have you had from students in helping them gain and sustain employment? • Have you evaluated the impact? • Which of the 'skills of employability' did this initiative/activity address?	The teachers followed various sources to improve job skills initiatives. The national syllabus that helped teachers to design the programme. Teachers referred to the school curriculum and schemes of work to improve the quality and results of initiatives. Some teachers consulted from national employment fund and learned it from the hierarchies. Some of the teachers indicated towards the practical approach like organising seminars and debate and conferences. The motive for the initiative was to increase the capacity of students with respect to employment. Some teachers claimed that the initiatives have achieved excellent results in terms of increasing the skill set of students.

Question Number	Contents/Themes	Main Outcomes
		Regular changes are the most essential part of such job skill initiative in order to meet the needs of students. Teacher claimed that students appreciate these initiatives which encourage teachers and students to continue with the initiatives. Teachers addressed skills such as communication, ICT, Problem-solving approach, teamwork, self-presentation and time-management

Themes from the interviews and questionnaires that seemed to have some congruence and compatibility were merged and examined under a single heading (see section 5.3, Table 5.5). In terms of analysing the data obtained from the teachers' and students' questionnaires, consideration was given to the idea that in qualitative data analysis, there is no single approach; rather, a range of approaches and procedures could be applied depending on the purposes and preferences of the researcher (Dey, 2005). As participants handed the completed questionnaires, they were checked for errors and for omissions of any responses (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Whilst questions one to five for the students' questionnaires were closed questions, this was slightly different for the teachers' questionnaire where questions one and two were closed questions while question 3 contained open-ended questions. The questionnaire responses were manually entered into Microsoft Word and spreadsheet files to allow summarisation of participants' answers, enable easy data retrieval, and address the research questions (Sapsford and Jupp, 2008). Each row corresponded to a specific school, while columns were designated for distinct topics, allowing for operations like sorting, copying, pasting, and categorisation. Closed-ended questions were organised into tables to generate

descriptive statistics, whereas open-ended responses were condensed into a format suitable for analysis (Sapsford and Jupp, 2008). The recorded answers served illustrative purposes and were supplemented, when necessary, by incorporating data from a broader set of questionnaires (Sapsford and Jupp, 2008). Particular attention was paid during theme extraction to ensure their appropriate use as evidence supporting the research questions. It is important to point out that a full description of the analytical procedures for questionnaires is in chapter 4, section 4.11.1 - Questionnaire data analysis process.

It is equally essential to note that this study adopted the interpretivist approach to explore the perspectives of various stakeholders in education regarding the effectiveness of the secondary school system in equipping students for the workforce. Interpretivists advocate a relativist ontology asserting the potential for multiple interpretations of a single phenomenon instead of determining a truth through the process of measurement (Creswell, 2013). This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of a phenomenon and its distinctive complexities, rather than seeking to generalise the underlying principles of understanding (Cohen, Manion & Morison, 2011). This means that unintentional limitations could have left out a disparaging gap in corroborating the validity and usefulness of research results that utilise scientific approaches. Moreover, interpretivism tends to adopt a subjective rather than empirical stance in its ontological perspective (Mack 2010). Consequently, research findings may be affected by the researcher's personal perceptions, values, cognitive frameworks, or cultural background, which can introduce bias. Notably, these limitations were addressed by providing rich, detailed descriptions that aim to accurately convey participants' perspectives, thereby enabling readers to form a more authentic understanding of the data (Creswell 2009). Nonetheless, because the interpretivist approach could not provide the means to explore all the intended facets of the research questions, it seemed plausible to employ another methodological approach utilising quantifiable numerical data. The use of numerical data in this study was mainly limited to providing demographic information that describes the participants. This quantitative aspect helped supplement the qualitative data obtained from interviews. As a result, this approach served a supportive function, aiding in the detailed documentation of the lived experiences of individuals engaged in education.

5.4 Amalgamating themes from the questionnaires and interviews data analysis

The themes identified from the analyses of both the questionnaire and interview data were consolidated into a single chapter. Table 5.7 below shows how themes emerging from the questionnaire and interviews data analysis were combined.

Table 5.7. Themes

Questionnaires	Interviews	Combined Themes
Current Employment opportunities for students	Unemployment in Cameron is caused by various reasons.	Theme 1: Reasons for the high level of youth unemployment - The types of knowledge and skills that students need from the curriculum - Teachers' Job Skills Initiatives
There are various skills that students need to develop/suitability for employment / Suitability for employment/promotion	There are various skills that students need to develop.	
The teachers follow various sources to improve job skills initiatives.	------	
Schools have various programmes to help students gain sustainable employment.	A school counsellor can help students immensely	Theme 2: Support Mechanisms Provided to Students at School
-----	-	Theme 3: The Secondary School Curriculum - Exclusion of the teachers' voice and Other Stakeholders - Challenges in delivering the curriculum
-----	Lack of collaboration between teachers and ministry.	
-------	There are various challenges which a schoolteacher can face.	
	The collaboration between employer and ministry is essential.	Theme 4: The perception of educational administrators and curriculum planners on the responses received and the implications for revising the curriculum.

The analytical procedures employed in this study were influenced by several factors, including the nature of the research, the specific research questions, and the contextual setting. As Punch (2014) highlights, analytical decisions depend on the characteristics of the research, the questions posed, the research context, and the profiles of both researchers and participants. This viewpoint informed the chosen approach, ensuring that the analysis was consistent with the study's objectives and reflective of the involved individuals' attributes.

The primary methodological tool applied was qualitative semi-structured interviews. This method enabled the collection of diverse perspectives related to skills acquisition within the secondary school curriculum in the Cameroonian context. Its utility lies in its capacity to explore complex social phenomena by enabling participants to articulate their experiences and viewpoints in depth, thereby generating complex and contextually relevant insights (Folkestad, 2008). Engaging with teachers and educational administrators proved particularly valuable for obtaining informed perspectives on the processes and strategies supporting curricular skills development.

Key informant sampling, which is widely recognised as critical for the validity of case study research, was adopted in this investigation. Key informants not only offer detailed, context-specific information essential to the study but also serve as sources for corroborating or contrasting evidence, thereby enhancing the interpretive richness and credibility of the findings (Yin, 2009). Given that interviews constituted a primary data collection method, careful consideration was given to the data analysis approach. A manual thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted, which identified significant concepts embedded in the data and aligned with the study's aims and conceptual framework. These themes played a central role in elucidating participants' perceptions.

The initial analysis was structured by interviewee and by school; however, the findings were ultimately consolidated into a single chapter because of the strong interconnections between the emergent categories. Presenting the data in separate sections would have risked imposing artificial boundaries on themes that are, by nature, constructed and interrelated. An integrated approach therefore reduces fragmentation and allows readers to recognise the relationships across the core themes. Data from interviews and

questionnaires were synthesised to provide a holistic account of participants' perspectives on employability skills, youth unemployment, and curriculum development. The overlaps observed between categories should not be regarded as a limitation but as indicative of the inherently relational character of understanding, which develops through connections rather than in isolation. Although this chapter does not reproduce the literature review (Chapter 3), the analysis is cross-referenced with existing scholarship to situate the findings within the wider research context and to highlight the study's contribution to ongoing debates.

5.5 Organisation of the Data

The themes and their accompanying quotations were used to substantiate and further elucidate the findings obtained from the questionnaire. These themes reveal a wide range of challenges related to skills acquisition within Cameroonian schools. To gather sufficient data for a project of this scope, two instruments were employed: semi-structured interviews and questionnaires (see chapter 4, sections 4.11, 4.11.1, and 4.11.2). Initially, there were personal concerns regarding the possible insufficiency of the data gathered. Such uncertainty is not unusual in qualitative designs, where determining what is considered "enough" data is fluid and context-dependent (Mason, 2010; Braun and Clarke, 2021). Nevertheless, upon reflection, it became apparent that the structure and content of the data collection tools particularly, the questionnaire comprising four thematic sections and the interview protocols developed around similar thematic categories were methodologically coherent with the overarching aims of the study. This alignment contributed to obtaining data with greater depth and increased relevance. By conducting a systematic thematic analysis, four primary themes emerged from the textual data collected through interviews and questionnaires. All qualitative data were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participants' voices, enabling a more nuanced interpretation of meaning. The findings suggest that, while initial concerns regarding data sufficiency were justifiable, the thematic saturation achieved across data sources indicates that the dataset was robust for the analytic purposes of the study. The interview transcripts were carefully transcribed and reviewed multiple times to achieve familiarity, allowing initial patterns to become apparent. Themes were then identified by

relating these patterns to the study's research objectives and conceptual framework. This study's thematic analysis was based on both the semi-structured interview transcripts and questionnaire responses (gathered using a Likert scale). The primary themes and sub-themes that emerged from analysing these data sources are presented and discussed starting from section 5.6.

5.5.1 *Demographics - Summary of Questionnaire Responses*

Demography is a research area where investigators analyse the measurable statistics of a given population (Vogt and Johnson, 2011). These facts are used to identify a subset of the population to characterise them at a point in time. Widely known demographic information includes age, sex, ethnicity, educational level, disability, employment, and socio-economic status, as well as subject-specific characteristics. Often, a sample is drawn from individuals who volunteer to participate in a study. Justification for the sampling procedure has been discussed in chapter 3 section 3.6. The following sections provide a description of the sample along with relevant demographic characteristics.

5.5.2 *Student Questionnaires*

There were four different schools named A, B, C, and D to ensure that the data cannot lead to anyone identifying individual institutions in the study. The students from these four schools were asked questions by using the medium of a questionnaire. There was a total of 202 students from all the schools out of which 50 students were from school A, 50 students were from school B, 51 students were from school C, and the remaining 51 students were from school D.

Table 5.8. Demographic

Age Group	Number of Respondents per School			
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**
<14 years	0	0	0	1
14-21 years	49	49	51	50
> 21 years	0	1	0	0
Disqualified	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	**50**	**50**	**51**	**51**

Table 5.9. Demographic

Age Group	Number of Respondents per School			
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**
Males	26	14	24	12
Females	23	36	27	39
Disqualified	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	**50**	**50**	**51**	**51**

Table 5.10. Demographic

Age Group	Number of Respondents per School			
	A	B	C	D
Form 4	1	0	0	0
Form 5	48	50	51	51
Disqualified	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	**50**	**50**	**51**	**51**

Table 5.11. Demographic

Age Group	Number of Respondents per School			
	A	B	C	D
Arts	10	46	15	41
Science	39	3	36	9
Commercial	0	0	0	0
Mixed	0	0	0	1
Disqualified	1	0	0	0
None response	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	**50**	**50**	**51**	**51**

The numeric data display indicates that a total of 202 students in total from all the four schools. The demographic profile of the students indicates a predominance of females, with most individuals falling within the age range of 14 to 21 years. Additionally, there were two different classes in the school which were Form 4 and Form 5. Most of the students from all the schools were in the 5th Form. It has been found that the Arts subject was the first choice for most of the students, whereas science was secondly preferred by them.

The table below presents the demographic characteristics of the teachers included in this study.

Table 5.12 (Demographic – Teachers)

Age Group

Age Group	Number of Respondents per School			
	A	B	C	D
Less than 25	1	0	0	0
Above 25	8	7	6	4
TOTAL per sch.	**9**	**7**	**6**	**4**
Grand total	**26**			

Table 5.13. Sex (Demographic – Teachers)

Age Group	Number of Respondents per School			
	A	B	C	D
Males	3	3	6	2
Females	6	4	0	2
TOTAL per sch.	**9**	**7**	**6**	**4**
Grand total	**26**			

Table 514. Other Responsibilities (Demographic – Teachers)

Other Responsibilities	Number of Respondents per School			
	A	B	C	D
Vice Principal	0	0	1	0
Head of Dept	0	0	1	2
Class Master/ Mistress/Advisor	2	0	1	3
Club Coordinator	0	0	0	1
Discipline Master	0	1	0	2
Library Attendant	1	0	0	0
Guidance Counsellor	1	1	0	0
TOTAL	**4**	**2**	**3**	**8**

Table 5.15. Subjects Taught

Subject Taught	Number of Respondents per School			
	A	B	C	D
French	0	1	0	0
Chemistry	1	1	1	0
Computer Science	2	0	0	0
Biology	0	0	1	0
Geography	0	1	2	0
Home Economics	0	0	0	1
Mathematics	0	0	1	1
History	1	1	0	1
Food/Nutrition	1	0	0	1
Citizenship	1	1	0	1
Physics	1	0	0	2
Philosophy	1	0	0	2
Eng. Lang/Lit.	2	2	1	0
Religious Studies	0	0	0	1
Latin	0	0	0	1

According to survey data, there were a total of 26 respondents out of which there was only 1 respondent who was less than 25 and the remaining 25 respondents were more than 25 years of age (the selective admission test for Government Teacher Training Colleges (GTTC) is opened to Cameroonian between the ages of 17 to 32 (Wohlfahrt, 2018). Out of these, 8 respondents belonged to school A, 7 from school B, 6 from school C and 4 respondents, above 25 years of age from school D. There were 14 male respondents, and 12 respondents were females. A maximum number of female respondents was in school A and in school C there was no female respondent.

Collected data showed that some teachers held different positions of responsibility alongside their teaching roles. From school A there were 2 class masters, 1 library attendant and 1 guidance counsellor. In school B, there was 1 discipline master and 1 guidance counsellor. School C consisted of 1 vice principal, head of department and 1

class master whilst school D had 2 heads of the department, 3 class masters, 1 club coordinator and 2 discipline masters.

Various pathways to teacher training exist in Cameroon (see chapter 1 section 1.10). These can be both through government and private institutions delivering teacher training (Djeumeni 2015). Through the government pathway, individuals can receive secondary school teacher training through École Normale Supérieure (ENS) or the Government Teacher Training College (G.T.T.C.)/Higher Teacher Training College (H.T.T.C.) where they specialise in the chosen subject reflecting their bachelor's degree. Critics of the training system allude to inadequate curricula and training programmes and insufficient quality and availability of textbooks, teaching, and learning resources (The World Bank 2017). Since the 1990s, the government has embarked on reforming the curriculum of the teacher training colleges in Cameroon aimed at addressing these deficiencies through its 2035 vision of development. Nevertheless, teacher training often focuses on theoretical knowledge while providing limited opportunities for experiential learning. This issue is further compounded by the insufficient availability of essential teaching and learning materials within schools (Djeumeni 2015). Consequently, the country's 2035 development vision necessitates a significant redefinition of the roles assigned to students and teachers, as well as the introduction of fundamental governance principles (See Chapter 2, section 2.5 Overview of the Curricula for Secondary Schools). Crucially, schools remain accountable for developing citizens, encouraging individuality, economic knowledge, shared action, moral standards, intellectual capacity, civic and political understanding (Djeumeni 2015).

5.6 Theme 1: Youth unemployment and Skills Development

The first theme that emerged was the issue of youth unemployment and skills formation and development. Participants suggested that young people are experiencing high rates of unemployment and under-employment. While many still hope to find a job in the public sector or civil service, public sector institutions cannot hire or create positions at a rate that meets the need. One of the consistent issues raised was that the skills young people gained in education did not always match the skills needed by the labour market.

As a result, young people who had gone through education could not readily transition into employment.

5.6.1 Shortfall of skills

Youth unemployment is pervasive, yet more acute in developing nations because of the faster growth of labour force than in developed countries (ILO, 2013). In Cameroon, the pressure is visible in terms of a mismatch between young people's skills and the demand for work in the labour force. Participants (National Pedagogic Inspectors, Head Teacher, School Counsellor and Teacher) said that many young people lack competence to get employment. They reflected that the lack of employability skills is a factor in their continued unemployment. Participants used the word competence repeatedly, which meant employability skills, showing the extent to which the meaning of competence informed their beliefs. The head teacher, for example, made statements such as:

> ***HT 1:*** *… The first reason is that youths lack training skills. They have not been properly trained to get paid for the job market. When one is in secondary school, the tendency is to pass exams and when they do so with certificates, such certificates do not give them adequate skills to face the job market.*
>
> HT1 Lines 14-17
>
> *P3: … You know, to be employed, you need to first of all have skills. You need to have some competence to be able to be employed. So, not only in Cameroon, but all over the world, you need to realise that there are many unemployed young people. Why? Because they are not really competent in what they are supposed to do.*
>
> P3 Lines 6-9

Research affirms that possessing knowledge in only academic fields is insufficient to ensure young peoples' career and job prospects (Trilling and Fadel 2012; Wager 2010; Zhao 2009).

One of the participants however, identified three factors responsible for the youth unemployment: Social and cultural, lack of skills in the current curriculum and the lack of connections between schools and employers. This perception is forcefully expressed by the following comments:

T1:…there three factors that are responsible for that: 1) …… is the social and cultural factor; in the sense that the educational system has been adapted to make the children look at white collar jobs and as such they find it difficult to adapt to other types of jobs that are not white collar. 2), the curriculum of the schools is not adapted in a way to give the children enough skills that will permit them to adapt to any kind of situation that will permit them to have jobs. 3) …… the lack of relationship between schools and companies or enterprises or industries where these children during holidays or other times can go and have internships to be able to develop such skills that will be needed or warranted from them when they would have left school.

T1 Lines 14-23

The perception that youth unemployment is not only the result of lack of skills; reveals that other factors can be attributed to the high level of youth unemployment. The remarks implicate structural features of the education sector in restricting the ability of youth to find employment. The societal and cultural focus around white-collar jobs results in students selecting from a limited range of jobs, making it hard for them to transition to alternate or vocational roles. Next, the curriculum does not provide flexible or practical skills, which leaves students unprepared for the wide-ranging opportunities available for work. This is particularly problematic given the tenuous relationship between schools and industries that limits students' exposure to internships and work-based learning experiences to develop the skills needed by employers. These factors, in combination, contribute to structural impediments to youth employment.

5.6.2 The types of knowledge and skills that students need from the curriculum

The sub-theme emerging from the interview and questionnaire data is associated with the second objective of this study, which aims to explore participants' perspectives on the essential knowledge and skills that students should acquire through the curriculum to better prepare for their professional lives. This question matches the respondents' expectations and understandings of employability. Addressing the second research question required gathering participants' views and subsequently situating these findings within the existing literature, particularly the diverse interpretations of employability discussed by Shacklock and Marchant (2018).

The majority of pedagogic inspectors consider leadership abilities, professional competence, adaptability to the work environment, personal attributes, and communication skills to be among the most important skills desired by employers. Rehman (2014) asserts that, these skills usually get displayed during a job interview as well as the workplace which makes it necessary to give adequate importance to them. These perceptions concur with existing literature that identify these skills as suitable for gainful employment. Baldacchino (2014) and Quay (2013) mentioned that progressive educators like John Dewey (1938) emphasised learning through active engagement, integration, entrepreneurship, critical thinking, problem solving, collaborative activities, and the cultivation of social skills. They argued that learning should aim for clear understanding and practical application rather than relying on rote memorisation, testing, and examinations. The common participants' perception viewed schools as the place where these skills should be taught to students and as such leading to the view that:

> P2: Inspector: ……. *I talked about leadership skills; there are many things we see out here. If we don't have a leader who can stand up and say how things should be or not be…….*
>
> P2 Lines 218-219
>
> *P2… I am just from Rwanda where I attended an international conference organised by Bill Gates in America and when they were talking about leadership skills and entrepreneurial skills, I saw children from poor families who use bamboos to weave bags, to make certain things and sell so as to get money to pay their school fees and these are the things which Cameroon needs. They do not need people who will get a first degree and wait that the government should employ them.*
>
> P2 Lines 226-235
>
> P3: Interviewee: …*But first of all I think a young person should be able to adapt to the work environment…*
>
> P3 Lines 18-19
>
> P3: *There are also personal skills. How do you cope in the working environment? So, there are all those types of skills that apart from the academic, they also need those personal skills to be able to adapt themselves to the working environment. Because at times, companies can recruit somebody who has the qualification but does not have the knowhow to transmit the knowledge.*

P3 Lines 21-22

C1: *In my opinion, I think the schools should look at some competences. They should look at both natural competences that are in students and then try to develop those competences*

C1 Lines 22-24

H1*: They need professional training skills. It should be included in their curriculum, and we equally need some NGOs, organisations that are professionals.*

H1 Lines 20-21

T1: ND: Communication in the sense that in class for example, many-a-time, it is the teacher who speaks, and the students listen.

T1 Lines 43-44

It is unsurprising that there are proponents of the idea that the current emphasis of the school system does not fit with current and future market demands (Bregman, 2007). Bregman, (2007) contends that most school systems in Sub-Saharan African nations are unable to offer a significantly substantial proportion of their young people with schooling that adequately equips them for employment, particularly at a time when labour markets are constantly striving for work performance abilities and experiences. At the heart of this argument is an underlying disagreement about the categories of knowledge and skill sets necessary within the curriculum and instructional methods. Questions have been raised on whether education should be about enabling students to learn facts or motivating them to adopt a practical approach - knowledge or skills. For example, Mohd et al. *(*2010) maintain that employees with a broad skill set, and expertise will gain from integration into the twenty-first century workforce, whereas those who do not possess these attributes will lag. Most pedagogic inspectors, and teachers seem to favour a curriculum that develops students' abilities to solve problems to compete in the job market rather than aspire for white collar jobs as indicated above (Esongo, 2017) (see chapter 3 section, 3.6). Their expectation is that schools should deliver content that facilitates the acquisition of skills, dispositions and capabilities needed to make students indispensable in an uncertain future. However, restricting the curriculum to focus solely on practical skills would be inadequate. It can be asserted that the best approach may lie in ensuring that the schools teach students knowledge and skills so that they leave school with a

fistful of qualifications along with being predisposed for a brave new world in which competition for getting employment is a challenge. Potential employees, therefore, may require both types of skills to compete for, gain and stay in employment (Omar, et al., 2012)

Nonetheless, these skills have additionally been identified as essential for employment by Nayan (2010), who observes that employers seek individuals possessing personal qualities such as responsibility, self-confidence, social competence, honesty, flexibility, teamwork, punctuality, efficiency, a positive work attitude, intelligence, collaboration, self-motivation, and self-management. Participants in the present study appeared to agree that focusing on these attributes represents a pragmatic strategy for enhancing skill sets and fostering student development. Therefore, it is necessary to reform the educational system to ensure that students acquire both academic knowledge and the skills required for employment. Thus, there is need of modification in curricula accordingly. There is need of identifying students' capacity and preparing them for the future by focused observation and training. This requires school systems to continuously improve the educational and skill levels of their students so they can compete in the world of work (OECD. 2011) (see chapter 3, section 3.4). Some of the participants maintained that the best way is to collaborate with all education stakeholders.

It is however plausible to note that, securing a job upon completion of school or finding an opportunity to start a career is the prime focus of every student in Cameroon (Ndille, 2017). To achieve this, students need to develop the ability to effectively engage and persuade potential employers. This suggests that the motivation to succeed in the job market becomes a matter closely tied to their ability to navigate competitive challenges. In such circumstances, knowing and embracing the fact that the qualification alone is not enough to survive the job market is much more important (Rehman 2014) although it is conceded that it certainly makes the student eligible to apply for that job. There is, nonetheless, a good likelihood of abundance of similarly eligible and capable applicants in the present competitive scenario. Consequently, prospective employees need a range of skills to gain employment as well as to be proficient in their job (Rehman, 2014). Against this complex and complicated context, Mohd et al., (2010) remark that with globalisation, personal knowledge and skills are constantly developing. The evolving landscape places

growing demands on educational institutions, especially at the secondary level, to prepare students with both academic knowledge and practical, transferable skills that are increasingly valued by employers. An interesting point of consideration is the mention of the fact that possessing communication skills is important for the students; implying that the curriculum should focus on improving this skill set. In today's corporate environment, Rehman (2014) maintains that survival demands habitual interaction with clients and administrative staff. He further adds that communication skills relate to the ability to: listen and communicate both verbally and nonverbally (formally and informally) to obtain understanding. Without appropriate communication skills, it may not be possible for students to present themselves in front of the employers (Mohd et al., 2010). There is thus, the need to give preference to the development of communication skills. For example, to increase the level of communication, it is vital to include group activities in lessons, the participants noted. It seemed apparent that communication strategies need to be contemplated when developing a curriculum and associated teaching strategies and learning methods.

Further, in this study, the guidance counsellor asserted that schools have the potential to contribute meaningfully to improving students' competencies and skills, as a result, enhancing their employment opportunities. The schools need to understand the requirement of employers in order provide education accordingly. The school counsellor made comments such as:

> C1 Lines 22-28
>
> *In my opinion, I think the schools should look at some competences. They should look at both natural competences that are in students and then try to develop those competences e.g., if you have a child who knows how to sing well, singing can help the student to earn a living if that child is trained in that particular skill. But now in Cameroon, we have a particular field where we are turning our attention to; not looking at the natural competence of that child. I think that if natural competency was more developed, it could be better-off than the present curriculum that we have, where we concentrate just on a particular subject where everybody has to do the same subjects. Whether you are gifted in it or not.*

Research has demonstrated that a school's role in developing these skills could potentially have positive economic and work outcomes for students (Taylor, 2017;

Prince's Trust, 2016). The Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2012) suggested that schools should extend their educational offerings beyond purely academic content. Although these suggestions are uncommon amongst debates around the need for employability skills, there is an underlying perception for a change in policy ideas and schools' systems. The participants' remarks suggest that the secondary school system is not adequately equipping students with the skills sought by employers. In response, some proposed fostering closer collaboration between schools and other governmental bodies, such as the Ministry of Youth Affairs, as a potential approach to enhancing the educational system.

In the Likert-scale questionnaire (see appendix 2), two main areas emerged from the teachers' and students' responses. Participants were asked to suggest what makes an employee suitable for employment and to identify the six most important skills for employment. The responses from the students from the four schools sampled (studying at secondary school for four years and were in their fifth year) suggested that they were knowledgeable regarding the types of skills, characteristics and attributes required for employment. The students were provided with different statement options that explained an individual's suitability for employment or promotion, choosing the most relevant to the least relevant. The most relevant skills were learning from mistakes; positive attitude to work; cooperation with others; read and understand information; appropriate presentation; understand and use numbers; customer relation; aware of own strengths and weaknesses, relevant vocational skills and knowledge, punctuality, take initiative; planning and organising; reliability; enthusiastic; eager to improve and can influence others. In its review published in 2012, the Confederation for British Industry (CBI 2012) admitted that these skills are essential for both the employers and school leavers on the threshold of beginning their careers and entering the job market. They make the case for education systems to develop students' skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values to help them to take on the challenges of the future. The strong focus on these skills was identified by all participants as significant indicators to the suitability for employment of school leavers. Fettes et al. (2018) contend that the qualities and attitudes required to gain employment are distinct from, however interconnected to the basic and personal skills essential for a smooth integration to the labour market.

Accordingly, to optimise students' ability to enter employment and respond to its demands, they need personal and practical skills (Fettes et al. 2018). It thus appears that in the eyes of employers, academic qualifications seem to be decreasing in value with employers placing increased attention on the competencies and skills possessed by prospective employees.

Participants were additionally requested to select from a list comprising 19 statements. (as presented in table 11) which ones they considered to constitute a group of the six most relevant statements for employability skills.

Table 5.16. Statement set to select the six most relevant employability skills

• Show a willingness to learn
• Have relevant vocational skills and knowledge
• Are punctual
• Can work on their own initiative
• Show that they are hard-working
• Can learn from their mistakes
• Show a positive attitude to the work
• Can work co-operatively with others
• Can read and understand information
• Are able to follow instructions
• Present themselves appropriately (dress, language etc|)
• Are able to understand and use numbers
• Relate to customers
• Are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses

• Want to improve
• Can plan and organise
• Can influence others
• Are reliable
• Show enthusiasm
• Other (please specify)

The students considered the following skills as the six most relevant for employability:

- 'have relevant vocational skills and knowledge',
- 'are reliable',
- 'can work co-operatively with others',
- 'are punctual',
- 'can plan and organise'
- are able to follow instructions.'

Responding to the same questions, teachers in the four schools sampled identified the following statements as the six skills/characteristics they consider most important to secure employment: cooperation with others, relevant vocational skills and knowledge, punctuality, read and understand information, willingness to learn and cooperation with others. These skills have been highlighted by the CBI (2016) and Fettes et al. (2018) as key behaviours required for gainful work. It was thus apparent that research participants made sense of the employability skills as well knowledge regarding the curriculum and the need to incorporate employability skills in the curriculum. Discussing about these key skills offered participants opportunities to clearly articulate their personal and philosophical beliefs on the expectations of schooling with some critiquing government policies and their approach to solving the youth unemployment problem. Therefore, it is imperative to encourage government authorities and relevant stakeholders to undertake the necessary amendments to the curriculum.

5.6.3: Teachers' Job Skills Initiatives

Teachers play a critical role in delivering the curriculum by promoting the acquisition of knowledge and skills among young learners. They are tasked with supporting students' development of the skills necessary for their academic progression within the classroom setting (Fischman et al., 2006). This suggests that, for teachers to effectively convey knowledge and skills to students, it is necessary to demonstrate creativity, possess a good understanding of subject content, dedicate time to refining their teaching methods, and relate lesson content to wider real-life situations (Fischman et al., 2006). Hence, to elicit information on the teachers' role in ensuring that students were equipped with work sills, a set of nine open questions and one closed question were asked to teachers in the four secondary schools sampled in Cameroon.

The first question aimed to explore the strategies and actions teachers employ to assist their students in obtaining and maintaining employment. A common teachers' perception was that schools have various programmes to help students gain sustainable employment (see appendix 8)**.** After the analysis of data, it was noted that schools focused on counselling the students to select subjects that matched their abilities and interests. This element was common in all the schools. Additionally, school B supported their students by informing them about the opportunities available in the external world. School D had research-oriented teaching methodology that enhanced the learning capacity of students.

The second question aimed to explore the rationale behind the teachers' decision to engage in the activities described earlier, specifically investigating whether the initiative originated from the teachers themselves or was influenced by the school, market forces, or employers. Most respondents indicated that it is both employer-driven and directives from the minister of secondary education as well as their personal initiative. They also stated that it enhances the chance of gaining employment after completing school. They achieved this through group work, use of practical examples during lessons (including practical sessions). A majority held the view that employment is a rewarding outcome of education; hence, employability skills should be imparted to students.

The third question sought to find out who the teachers consulted before carrying out such activities. The teachers claimed that they followed various sources to improve students' job skills**.** Most teachers consulted the school curriculum and work schemes to enhance both the quality of teaching and student outcomes. Some teachers reported referring to the national employment fund and seeking guidance from school administrators in addition to officials within the ministry of secondary education. Others noted consulting students' parents and accessing relevant literature through websites to inform their understanding of these subjects.

The fourth question (see appendix 8) aimed to investigate the approaches teachers used in designing their programmes or activities. The responses indicated that teachers considered multiple factors, such as aligning with the national syllabus, when developing learning activities. Additionally, some teachers incorporated group work with students to foster communication skills, which in turn could contribute to the improvement of their job skills. Some of the teachers indicated that the practical approach like organising seminars and debates and conferences were also used. It gave the learners the opportunity to make improvements to their work and filled them with some excellent ideas. However, the teachers from School B stated that they followed prescribed ministerial syllabuses/schemes of work, adopt a learner-centred approach to activities, draw up adaptive timetables of lessons, as well as added their own ideas/innovations.

The fifth questions concerned the intended achievement of the activities of job skill initiatives. Most participants wanted to ensure high performance among students, produce competent students with practical skills, and above all to ensure success. Teachers believed that this initiative would have long-term sustainable results**.** The teachers from School B mentioned that such programmes could enable students to indulge in productive and practical learning sessions where students could become more responsive towards the global environment as their knowledge and practical skills increased. All the teachers from School A were clear that their only motive was to raise the capacity of students with respect to future employment. All the teachers at School D stated that they hoped to achieve better results in exams.

The sixth question investigated what results have been achieved in the past two years. The responses were affirmative of the fact that they have had very good and rewarding results as even dropouts have been performing well out of school and those who are continuing education are also doing great in their subject areas. All the teachers at School D claimed that they have received excellent results in terms of increasing the skill set of students. Some teachers boasted stated that they have received 100 percent GCE results. Further, some of the students have found employment in the microfinance sector after finishing school. Notably, the teachers reported that they have yet to observe positive outcomes and remain in anticipation of satisfactory results. The teachers at school B mentioned that the biggest achievement is that students have become aware of the need of employment and group work.

The seventh question focused on what amendments have been made by teachers in helping their students gain and sustain employment (if any) regarding their job skills initiatives. Some respondents did not give any responses to this question, but those who did so indicated that the most common amendments they will implement is to change and modify lesson notes to suit students' needs on an annual basis. They also encouraged students' active participation during lessons and practical sessions. They advised students to follow in the footsteps of former students who were successful in the job market as well as students continuing education after secondary level.

The eighth question was intended to assess the level of appreciation or satisfaction based on feedback received from former students from whom their activities helped them to gain employment. Again, the general response was in the affirmative of good (Appendix 3).

The ninth question related to whether teachers have evaluated such activities. To the teachers, the initiative improved various skills of students. The main skill developed was the students' communication skills. The students became aware of the fact that through effective communication, they could have a positive impact on employers (see appendix 3).

The tenth question presented the use of ICT as the area that the job skill initiative addressed. The students became comfortable with using technology, which they considered as main advantage of such initiatives. Problem-solving approach and teamwork were other skills that their initiative addressed (appendix 3).

5.6.4 Most of the students were not involved in any work or had work experience

According to Okobia et al. (2013), education is the mechanism by which society's valuable knowledge and skills are passed down from one generation to another to its members. It is in this light that curriculum reform, in terms of content, is needed through which educational shortcomings could be addressed to provide quality education. Among these limitations is the insufficient provision of opportunities for young individuals to enter the workforce upon completing their education. The ILO (2013) predicted that by 2050, the African continent will be host to 29 percent of the world's youth population. This demographic status undoubtedly possesses youth unemployment challenges as has been demonstrated in the Literature review chapter.

Table 5.17. CURRENT EMPLOYMENT - Current involvement in any work

School A		School B		School C		School D	
Response	**No. of Respondents**	**Response**	**No. of Respondents**	**Response**	**No. of Respondents**	**Response**	**No. of Respondents**
Yes	0	Yes	0	Yes	0	Yes	0
No	48	No	46	No	43	No	48
No response	3	No response	4	No response	6	No response	3
Total	**51**	Total	**50**	Total	**49**	Total	**51**

The analysis of data collected from all four schools indicates that the majority of participants (students) lack work experience, whether voluntary or paid. Notably, a significant proportion of students did not respond to this section (see Table 5.18). One plausible explanation for this omission is that secondary school students are generally not exposed to work environments or afforded opportunities to develop job-related skills. Although youth unemployment is widespread across the continent of Africa, it affects

young people disproportionately. In its 2015 report, Solutions for Youth Employment revealed that young people are at least twice as likely to be unemployed than the adult population and the situation is more pronounced in developing world countries like Africa (SYE, 2015). This disparity places youths at a disadvantaged position in terms of labour market participation. Although available literature by scholars such as Uddin and Osemengbe (2013) and Muiya (2014) attribute this disadvantaged position of youths to the shortfall of skills required by employers, it is surprising that schools are not responding to this demand by effectively exposing students to opportunities to gain these work skills.

The ideas offered by Saunders and Zuzel (2010) are relevant to the topic of this study, which explores how effectively secondary schools prepare students for work. Their emphasis on matching employability skills with curriculum development offers an important lens with which to analyse how well present educational methods fulfil the needs of the contemporary job market. The evident gap they identify between curricular content and students' work preparedness correlates with the challenges that this thesis seeks to address in the secondary school setting. Similarly, Altman and Rama's (2013) statement that secondary schools are well-positioned to integrate cognitive, non-cognitive, and technical skills into the curriculum supports the study's goal of assessing how well such integration currently takes place. These viewpoints not only provide context for the study, but they also influence its analytical approach and point out areas in which the educational system could be failing to adequately prepare school dropouts for the workforce.

A marked contrast between the perspectives of students and teachers lies in the teachers' assertion that their teaching aligns with the prescribed syllabuses, that stress the practical aspects of the subjects. Teachers also reported providing students with guidance on employment-related matters and generally delivering effective teaching. However, the students participating in this study appeared to lack any work experience. This discrepancy highlights a mismatch between the teachers' initiatives to develop job skills and their positive evaluations on one side, and the students' lack of work experience on the other. The findings suggest an evident gap between the educational process and its relevance to the labour market. Additionally, a key responsibility of the school

counsellor, as described in the preceding theme, is to provide students with relevant information about educational, social and vocational opportunities. However, there seem to be a disconnect between students' lack of work experience and her responsibility to direct students towards this goal. According to Shobhana and Majgaard (2016), schools' plans for developing skills have not been synchronised with labour market. It seems conceivable to argue that the school system should focus on exposing the youth to opportunities to gain valuable work experience.

5.7 Theme 2: Curriculum Development and Pedagogy

5.7.1: The Secondary School Curriculum

Cameroon has a statutory National Curriculum developed by the Ministry of Secondary Education. For this analysis, the term 'syllabus' is employed interchangeably with 'curriculum' to align with its usage within the Cameroonian context, as discussed in chapter 3, section 3.11 of the literature review. According to some research participants at the Ministry of Secondary Education, the ministry's responsibilities include designing and approving curricula or syllabi, following consultation and formal endorsement by the Minister. Importantly, during interviews, national pedagogic inspectors often equated syllabus with curriculum. Abangma (1999) argues that the concept of curriculum in Cameroon is narrowly defined and is often referred to simply as the syllabus. Nevertheless, regardless of terminology, it should be emphasised that a school curriculum encompasses more than the introduction or revision of content; it also involves elements such as educational objectives, teaching methodologies, and teaching resources. Since in Cameroon the curriculum is generally understood as the set of prescribed subjects outlined in syllabi and textbooks, the terms 'curriculum' and 'syllabus' tend to be used interchangeably in relevant literature.

Participants were asked to elaborate on the curriculum procedures in the country. This was intended to elicit information on some curricular development issues such as: who is responsible for curriculum development? How the curriculum is passed on to schools and how quality assurance is ensured as well as challenges encountered in delivering the prescribed curriculum (matching the third research objective - to investigate how

educational administrators and curriculum planners perceive the feedback obtained and its potential impact on curriculum revision).

Curricula are often not developed entirely anew and typically operate within established organisational and societal constraints. In Cameroon, curriculum development follows a top-down model. The Minister of Secondary Education holds responsibility for developing the curriculum, overseeing its implementation, as well as managing technical schools nationwide. Within the ministry, a group of trained inspectors undertakes curriculum-related tasks under the minister's direction. The Minister of Education is accountable not only to the ministry and the public but also, crucially, to political authorities (Forzie, 1990). This arrangement suggests an authoritarian structure in which any curriculum changes or modifications must be authorised through directives issued by the Minister of Secondary Education.

Consistent with common practice in many African nations, the education system in Cameroon is closely intertwined with the political system, rendering curricular modifications susceptible to political influences (Abangma, 1999). Furthermore, due to the predominance of a top-down approach in curriculum development (where local needs receive limited consideration), the implementation of the curriculum often follows a unilateral pattern, with minimal integration of classroom feedback into the design process (Abangma, 1999).

As anticipated, participants affirmed that the responsibility for curriculum design lies with the National Pedagogic Inspectors at the Ministry of Secondary Education:

> *P2:…we have national pedagogic inspectors (NPI). These are the people who actually design our syllabuses…*
>
> P2 Lines 137-138
>
> ***T1:*** *To the best of my knowledge, I think that is left in the hands of the National Pedagogic Inspectors.*
>
> T1 Lines 69-70
>
> ***P1:*** *The Inspectorate General of Education and it is composed of nine Inspectorates of Pedagogy covering all the sectors consisting of General education, Commercial education, Technical education, Professional training, Teacher training, and Career*

Orientation and School Life. The final product is entrusted to the Minister of Secondary Education for endorsement.

P1 Lines 28-32

As mentioned earlier, the Minister of Education is responsible for overseeing the curriculum, working with a team of pedagogical inspectors. After the curriculum is developed and officially approved, schools, teachers, and parents are required to follow it. The curriculum provides clear instructions on what content should be taught, suggested teaching methods, weekly workload, and time allocation. This creates a certain rigidity in how the curriculum is managed. In some situations, this control also applies to external exams, which are created and graded based on detailed curriculum standards. Such stringent oversight imposes limitations on teachers, affording them minimal flexibility in adapting the curriculum for teaching and assessment.

A pedagogical inspector (P2, as referenced below) vividly described the initiation of the process involved in developing or revising a curriculum. Although this quote is unusually long, it was intended to clarify the various steps in involved in designing the curriculum in Cameroon. It was also intended to ascertain the style of curriculum adopted by the country.

Interviewer: Who is responsible for curriculum development in the ministry of secondary education?

P2: *According to the organisational chart laid down by the government of Cameroon for the ministry of secondary education, there is an inspector general of education in the ministry of secondary education followed by the inspector coordinator general. The inspector general is like the permanent secretary at the ministry. Then the inspector coordinator general is like the director. After the inspector coordinator general, we have national pedagogic inspectors (NPI). These are the people who actually design our syllabuses, who rewrite our curriculum and to be the national pedagogic inspector, you must be a seasoned teacher, and you must have taught for at least 10 to 15 to 20 years.*

Interviewer, P2 Lines 131-140

Interviewer: *Could you explain - when the curriculum is designed, how is it passed over to schools and what is done at the ministry level to ensure that it is implemented and is it evaluated?*

P2: When the curriculum is designed it is not sent directly to the school. It has to be validated. We have to hold a meeting with all the curriculum designers or the developers. If it is ok, then minister will now come and sign to give value to it - that is to validate it. After validation, the national inspectors go now to the regions to train the regional inspectors who in turn will train the subject coordinators or head of departments. These head of departments come together sometimes with their teachers, and they are trained on how to use the new curriculum. After this, it is sent to the schools. The inspectors now go around to check their records or workbooks to see that the teachers are teaching using the new pedagogic approach, using the new curriculum that was developed. That is how it's done in Cameroon.

Evaluation comes later because once the things have been sent to the fields. When they are tested, we get feedback from the field. If the feedback is positive, it is implemented but if it is not good, we must touch those areas that are not good for teaching. That is how I look at it. The regional delegates, the inspector delegates all these chains of pedagogues oversee the work in the classroom. They make sure that everything is done as required by the minister of secondary education. The evaluation will come later; we are still at level 5....the former curriculum that was there at the time that one was written I was not born. It has been there for more than 30 years. I was not even born....it was handed over around 1950 that is when I was born. After teaching the new curriculum for some time that is when we will see; we will hold a forum to see if it was it successful.

Interviewer, P2 Lines 141-160

The pedagogic inspector elucidated on the fact that in Cameroon, the national pedagogic inspectors are responsible for designing curricula and they do so with the help of regional pedagogic inspectors. Further, the inspector claimed that they involve students, teachers in curricula designing process. To the inspector, they do not do it directly but send whatever they designed to the schools and seek suggestions. In this way, the top-down approach appears to be predominant although it can be argued that there is a hint of bottom-up approach as teachers, head teachers and students are solicited for feedback which might be considered. Despite their comments insinuating teachers' and students' involvement in the process, there appears to be some disparity in relation to the teachers' view on the subject in the ensuing theme as evident in section 5.7.4 highlight the feeling of discontent by teacher for being overlooked in the curriculum development process. Wong (2009) argues that curriculum changes or modifications should be designed to address the specific needs of local classrooms. This involves a mediating process whereby active participation from teachers and students at the grassroots level

plays a crucial role. Implicit in this view is the notion that, despite the presence of broad guidelines established from higher authorities in curriculum development, the implementation within classrooms ought to be managed by teachers, effectively adapting instruction to the local context (McKernan, 2008).

5.7.2 Outdated/obsolete curriculum

In addition to the perceived education system orientation, participants also reported the outdated pedagogic models employed in schools. Data collected through interview from one of the pedagogic inspectors helped to elaborate other crucial reasons for youth unemployment. Firstly, one of the pedagogic inspectors - P2 mentioned that the secondary education syllabus (curriculum) in Cameroon is thirty years old and as such has become 'obsolete' and is not enough to compete at international levels. As a result, certain participants perceived that the secondary school curriculum did not sufficiently equip students with necessary skills, reflecting shortcomings both in the curriculum content and the scarcity of teaching materials. The following comments summarise these views:

> *P2: …. the high rate of unemployment in Cameroon is because the curriculum or call it syllabuses (syllabus make up the curriculum) the syllabuses which have been there for more than thirty years are already obsolete.*
>
> P2 Lines 12-14

A possible further clarification of this view is that the content of what is taught in schools is outdated and irrelevant. In this context, the term 'obsolete' carries a negative connotation as described by Schleicher (2015), indicating that Cameroon, similar to many developing nations, continues to implement educational standards in the 21st century that were characteristic of Western countries during the early 20th century. Lawyer (2019) adds that most of these nations struggle to change their pedagogical approaches primarily due to political and social beliefs and lack of resources. The curricula and syllabuses implemented in their schools often focus on skills that no longer align with the demands of the contemporary era. In this example, the notion of an outdated system helps to reinforce the reason why many students complete secondary education with a minimum set of cognitive and non-cognitive abilities (Lawyer 2019). It is plausible to put

forward cogent arguments that to address this issue, consideration must be given to tailoring the curriculum content to address the requirements of the labour market by teaching skills that are relevant for this 21st century.

In addition to the outmoded curriculum, P2 further observed that after the introduction of ICT, the country could not incline towards the objective-based curriculum. According to the inspector, to generate jobs, there is a huge requirement of bringing the change in syllabus and adopting the competence-based curriculum approach. P2's view is captured in the following comments:

> *P2:….again with the coming of ICT, Cameroon could not continue using the objective based approach curriculum and again all those who were trained following the objective based approach following the old curriculum left by the colonial master.*
>
> P2 Lines 19 – 21

There is the recognition that with the rapid transformation in technology and radical changes in the way people gain knowledge, there is a need for new pedagogical paradigms that align educational systems with modern times and ensure quality training for all students (Mbangwana 2008). Reiteratively, this emphasises that technology and skills are becoming the principal factors for development that could address youth unemployment. In this context, Lawyer (2019) underlines the relevance of reforming students' learning experiences in educational contexts to facilitate their development of skills and knowledge relevant to the demands of the twenty-first century. Whilst it is perhaps undeniable that the curriculum will change over time, it is reasonable to assert that it needs to be responsive and flexible to the situations where the educational experience is being delivered or provided.

The country's continuous use of the objective-based curriculum approach is especially important for this study. This curricular approach (see Chapter 2 Section 2.5), which defines education in terms of measurable learning objectives, offers useful framework for assessing how employability is conceptualised and implemented in schools. Priestley and Minty (2013) criticise this approach, linking it to bureaucratic processes, excessive testing, and reducing the development of curriculum to a box-ticking activity. These issues

present key considerations for the present investigation, specifically whether such a rigid framework allows for the development of wider employability skills that go beyond academic achievement.

In Cameroon, like in most developing countries, education infrastructure is a primary education-quality damaging factor (Tatangang 2011). In several schools in the country, there is a dearth of basic classroom infrastructures such as benches and cupboards as well as didactic materials. The focus is on the curriculum and on what is taught, rather than on individual students' needs and educational infrastructures. The Head teacher (H1 - see below) in this study seem to believe that the lack in infrastructure unquestionably, impacts on the educational quality for the students as also asserts Tanyi (2016). Some of the comment regarding the lack of infrastructure include the following:

> H1*: It's a general problem in Cameroon, that of infrastructure, that of inadequate space and infrastructural problems. Some schools in Cameroon don't even have adequate spaces for the learners to occupy all what's being taught to them. And lack of didactic materials - materials for learning. It's a general problem even in government schools. The government may not even build classrooms and in other places some schools are created but there are no teachers, and the children are abandoned on their own. So, there are a lot of challenges.*
>
> H1: Lines 83-88

This may suggest that the learning environment must be accommodated in a comfortable and conducive manner for the pupils to ensure that the learning goes well and to achieve the maximum impact and effect (Preeti and Kiran 2012). Alternatively, if schools are equipped with the relevant educational infrastructure, it is probable that some of the negative effects it has on students' learning could be minimised. It would be inaccurate to assume that all students' needs primarily depend on educational facilities. Nevertheless, some participants indicated that insufficient infrastructure could pose challenges to learning. Additionally, it should be acknowledged that some students might be more vulnerable to adverse effects when specific infrastructural elements are absent.

Moreover, the response from H1 appears to characterise this as an obstacle to student learning. School infrastructure, by definition, consists of the facilities that support and complement teaching and learning processes, thereby contributing to multiple

dimensions of student personality development (Tambo 2012). While it is acknowledged that schools differ in the types of infrastructure they provide to promote effective teaching and learning, it remains evident that such infrastructure significantly affects students' well-being. Even though the type of infrastructure has been generalised to facilities that enable teaching and learning, study participants maintained that education administrators are required to provide the needed facilities to improve students' experience in school.

However, the above assertions are in stark contrast with one of the national pedagogic inspectors who showed a lack of awareness of the unemployment situation in the country despite stating that employers and job seekers are complaining of the current situation.

> *P1: I do not know if the rate of youth unemployment is high. However, both employers and job seekers are complaining. The Ministry of Secondary Education prepares students in general education as well as in commercial, technical and professional training.*
>
> P1 Lines 4-11

According to P1, the Ministry of Secondary Education educates students not only through general education, but also through commercial, technical, and professional training (lines 4-11). This suggests that the system aims to equip students with a range of skills relevant to both employment and further academic pursuits. However, this claim appears to contradict P1's admission that he does not know whether young unemployment is high, despite noting broad unhappiness among companies and those seeking employment. This conflict shows that, while P1 has a positive assessment of the educational system's goal and structure, they may be unaware of how these initiatives transfer into actual employment outcomes.

5.7.3: Challenges in delivering the curriculum

To solve a problem, the problem needs to be identified in the first instance. To achieve this, it is vital to identify potential challenges in delivering the current curriculum. As indicated above, participants highlighted the lack of adequate infrastructure as the most basic problem impacting on the effective application of the curriculum. It creates

problems in providing the practical learning experience to the students due to the lack of space. In government schools, there is a lack of didactic materials. In some communities, the lack of qualified teachers to teach students affects the establishment of an effective education system within the country. Data collected through interviews helped to explain and elaborate some of the main problems faced by deliverers of the curriculum. This is briefly captured in the following comments:

> Interviewer: *What are some of the problems your teachers have told you they encounter in implementing or delivering the curriculum?*
>
> **H1:** *With the different pedagogic approaches that we had - we started-off with the content- based approach and we moved to objective based approach but now we are doing the competent based approach and with this approach learners have to be on the field so that they get the necessary work experience. There are certain abilities that are expected of them but when you have a school that may not have adequate space, maybe taking kids for cultivation, seeing how crops grow it becomes a problem. It's a general problem in Cameroon, that of infrastructure, that of inadequate space and infrastructural problems. Some schools in Cameroon don't even have adequate spaces for the learners to occupy all what's being taught to them. And lack of didactic materials - materials for learning. It's a general problem even in government schools. The government may not even build classrooms and in other places some schools are created but there are no teachers, and the children are abandoned on their own. So there are a lot of challenges.*
>
> Interviewer, H1 75-88.

The head teacher's remarks above highlight various institutional barriers to the effective implementation of Cameroon's competency-based curriculum. While the participant relates to their local school setting, they openly highlight nationwide challenges that include a lack of adequate infrastructure for practical learning activities, insufficient didactic resources, and shortages of teachers. Phrases like *"it's a general problem in Cameroon"* and mentions of both government and community schools indicate that the participant sees these issues as systemic rather than restricted to a specific school. However, caution must be exercised when considering the generalisability of this viewpoint. Although the participant claims that the difficulties are nationwide in nature, this idea is grounded on personal experience and knowledge as opposed to empirical facts gathered from various schools. As a result, this viewpoint should be regarded as helpful subjective insight rather than a definite generalisation. Nonetheless, it gains

strength when considered in the context of other participants who expressed similar concerns throughout the study, implying some degree of convergence in stakeholder perspectives.

In keeping with the body of existing literature, research has documented the infrastructural problems in Cameroonian schools, especially in rural or underfunded regions (e.g., Poutong, et al. 2025; Njoh et al., 2022). These studies indicate that a lack of instructional resources and inadequate infrastructure continue to be an ongoing challenge to the successful implementation of curricula. As a result, the participant's remarks corroborate previous studies and the concerns' ongoing relevance. However, this study adds value by linking these structural barriers directly to the competency-based curriculum paradigm, which requires actual, field-based learning experiences. This relationship is less often studied in the literature, suggesting that the data from this study makes an important addition. It demonstrates how infrastructure problems not only undermine overall educational quality, but also fundamentally inhibit the delivery of curricular methods designed to develop employability and practical skills. Considering that this research aims to explore ways in which the curriculum can more effectively prepare students for employment, it is essential to examine the challenges associated with its implementation. Addressing infrastructure inadequacies may, therefore, also be a prerequisite for any effective curricular change in this context.

The absence of teachers from meaningful curriculum development was a persistent issue. One teacher said that, while they are periodically asked to curriculum planning sessions, their contributions have little effect on final decisions. Instead, educational orders are often issued by inspectors or principals, resulting in a top-down style that marginalises classroom teachers. The teacher further criticised the divide between politicians and on-the-ground reality, claiming that individuals in top positions, notably pedagogical inspectors, often lack an intimate understanding of the issues teachers experience. These challenges are expressed in the following quotations:

> Interviewer*: what are some of the challenges you face as a teacher in teaching the contents of the prescribed curriculum?*

T1: We follow two curricula, 1 - the ministry of secondary education forward its own and 2 the GCE board forwards its own and then we are supposed to teach following both because at the end the children have to sit the GCE board exam and not the ministry exam but after that they have to sit other exams for professional schools. So that's the first challenge. The content of the curriculum is broad and at times it is difficult for teachers to meet up with all what has to be done and it's time consuming. The curriculum is also not adapted to the realities of the country. They want us to teach and adapt something that is taught in another country which doesn't tie with local realities. Also, the level of understanding – some of the contents in the curriculum are challenging for the students. They are not up to the level cognitively. Another challenge is that even those who are supposed to elucidate or enlighten us on what is in the curriculum so that we are able to follow the right track, even they themselves are kind of lost in it so much so that when we sit in seminars with them at times we feel like we are supposed to teach them what they are supposed to come and enlighten us on. So, it's really a problem.

Interviewer: Who are these people you are referring to?

T1: The National Pedagogic Inspectors, the regional inspectors – when they come for seminars, what they have for us is not what we see because some of us also are enlightened on these things and what they bring, at times, they don't really master it.

Interviewer, T1 Lines 124-143

This gap was apparent in multiple aspects. To begin with, the dual-curriculum system comprising guidelines issued by both the Ministry of Secondary Education and the GCE Board imposes conflicting requirements on teachers. Second, the curriculum was regarded as very extensive and time-consuming, with certain information that was out of sync with the local context and students' cognitive abilities. The teacher noted out that even those tasked with delivering the subject during seminars frequently looked confused with its material. Consequently, the system tends to position teachers primarily as implementers of educational policy rather than as active participants in its formulation.

These issues raise important questions regarding the design of teacher training programmes and ongoing professional development. Even well-intentioned and hard-working teachers may struggle due to insufficient assistance and guidance. Existing research emphasises the importance of teacher agency and professional experience in curriculum interpretation and adaptation (Fullan, 2007; Priestley et al., 2012). When

teachers lack the necessary skills to critically interact with curricular information or when their experience is ignored in the process of making choices, it becomes challenging to address students' different learning requirements. Furthermore, the teacher's comments indicate that the system prioritises exam success above meaningful learning, restricting the opportunity for innovative or contextually appropriate instruction. Teachers might find it challenging to make the curriculum accessible to all students when there is limited possibility for innovation. The interviewee's dissatisfaction reflects a larger problem of institutional mismatch between policy aims and classroom reality. These disparities are likely to remain in the absence of structural changes and increased teacher involvement in curriculum development.

Besides, the above comment, T1: '*They want us to teach and adapt something that is taught in another country which doesn't tie with local realities'* (H1: Lines 133-134), highlight one of the major problems in the educational system of the country – Harmonisation as stated in the following quote:

> *T1:….. And then, the harmonisation of the school programme from the university, right down to the nursery such that there is a follow-up because at the moment there is some dichotomy between the secondary and university – each moving in its own direction. This to me is problematic.*
>
> T1 Lines 172-175

According to teacher T1, the absence of harmonisation among the educational sub-systems contributes to challenges related to equity and the quality of education (Ngalim 2014). Scholars have attributed the lack of harmonisation of the educational systems to obstacles such as the bicultural outlook of the country (Tchombe 1999), misconceptions of the term, pedagogical or instructional considerations and weak political will hindering policies being translated into action (Fonkeng 2007). Having inherited two systems of education, the French and the British, harmonisation became the main priority of curriculum policy particularly after the first decade of independence. Two systems of education co-exist in the country. This presents two main challenges: structural and programme (Tambo, 2000). Structural harmonisation primarily concerns the duration of courses, the scheduling of the academic year, including start and end dates, holiday

periods, and the fundamental objectives of education. In contrast, programme harmonisation involves ensuring that the educational content delivered is consistent across all regions, regardless of a student's geographical location within the country. This means that there exist differences at the level of sequencing of subjects for instructions in the number of years in each cycle of schooling and inherent attitudes towards education as a process in human development. It should be mentioned that these two systems have continued to co-exist but in an atmosphere of suspicion and not harmony. Despite government's attempts to bring the two systems together, the problem has persisted (Ngalim 2014).

5.7.4: Exclusion of the teachers' voice and other stakeholders

The interviews with the teacher revealed a prevailing sense of disenchantment due to their marginalisation in the curriculum development process. The teacher expressed the view that curriculum designers ought to regard teachers as stakeholders whose input is essential in determining the content of the school curriculum. If Eisner's (2000) perception that curriculum design is a practical activity that can be used to resolve issues of student performance both within the classroom context and in the workplace worth consideration, it becomes apparent that curriculum planners ought to get input from educational stakeholders. Eisner argues that curriculum development and teaching are essentially practical activities. Their primary objective is not the generation of knowledge but the accomplishment of specific tasks. Successfully achieving these tasks involves an understanding of context, relying on the individual's ability to evaluate different possible actions, manage unavoidable trade-offs, and recognise that each situation is likely to possess distinct characteristics (2000, p. 354).

Besides, Van Roy (2005) highlighted that substantive changes within the educational system depend primarily on teachers' perspectives regarding the curriculum and their practical engagement in classroom settings, rather than on interventions by governments, academics, or curriculum developers. Teacher T1 emphasised the significance of this point, noting that teachers are the individuals most directly impacted by school curricula. The teacher's discontentment suggests that curriculum is administrative led, it is set by politicians without teacher consultation. Consequently, given the latter, teachers can find

themselves lacking a great sense of ownership over the material they are expected to teach, especially if it is handed down from above without their participation (Su 2012). The lack of control might lead to a sense of obligation to teach content as opposed to true interest in it. Not seeking their views in its design implied that curriculum developers overlooked the input of those who were supposed to implement it.

Comments availed through interviewing the secondary school teacher further explained that government authorities (National Pedagogic Inspectors at the Ministry of National Education); before inviting school representatives for seminars to provide input for the curriculum, already had preconceived ideas about what they intended. Hence, these meetings or seminars were simply procedural. National pedagogic inspectors operate as semi-autonomous officials within the Ministry of Secondary Education. Their duties include overseeing the development and reform of the school curriculum, distributing curriculum materials, and conducting monitoring and evaluation activities (Forzie, 1990). However, due to their exclusion from the curriculum planning and design stages, one teacher remarked as follows:

> *Interviewer: As a teacher, are you consulted for some input in the development of the curriculum?*
>
> *T1: That I will clearly say it is a no. Errr… Most often even when proposals are made and forwarded – I've had the opportunity to sit where we make certain proposal and forward it – I want to say that these proposals were hardly taken into account – since the teacher, the administrator, the parent or even the university – we have forwarded certain proposals, but these were never taken into account. I think they have a theme – how they work is a mystery to us because what we see is not what we propose – it's all what they want us to do. So, I wouldn't say they consulted us towards the development of the curriculum.*
>
> Interviewer, T1 Lines 108-117

The teacher advocated for a curriculum that is more grounded in the local context, emphasising the significance of aligning educational content with the "realities of the country" rather than adopting international models that may not be appropriate for Cameroon's unique socio-cultural and economic conditions. McKernan (2008) agrees with this viewpoint and supports for contextually relevant courses. However, while the teacher's viewpoint is fair and shows a desire for locally relevant learning. it may be

perceived as relatively restricted. A wider view can evaluate how global competences, and international standards might help students become more employable and prepared for the global workforce. Furthermore, the instructor criticised the existing curriculum designers, claiming that national pedagogic inspectors lack the expertise needed to create successful curricula. This demonstrates a recognised need for reform not only in curricular content, but also in the selection and training of individuals in charge of developing it.

However, this view contradicted those of two other interview participants who disclosed that curricula development underwent various stages - firstly, there is first the selection of themes and then assessing them based on possible learning experience. However, the selection of themes also involves various people. The chain includes departmental delegates, regional delegates, national inspectors and regional pedagogic inspectors. They work collectively at different stages to select themes. The following statements confirm these developmental stages:

> Interviewer: *Ok, thank you very much. My next question is to do with the curriculum. Do you know who is responsible for curriculum development at the level of the ministry of secondary education?*
>
> Interviewer*: Now do you mean before the curriculum is actually designed, they get input from head teachers?*
>
> H1: *Yes, from all these levels because inspectors when they come down, the regional pedagogic inspector, they get input from the children because they go to class and watch the teachers teach and they have a few questions they ask and when we go to seminars organised at the level of national inspectors, there are input that are taken from teachers and at the level of the regional delegate for other seminars that we have with them. So, it's at different levels. At all these levels they gather information and come out with the curriculum.*
>
> Interviewer, H1 Lines 60-67

Clearly, the head teacher confirmed that their input is sought when designing the curriculum. The school counsellor further reiterated this although doubtfully when she said:

> ***C1:*** *I am not very, very sure but I believe it is the inspector in charge of pedagogy, so they are the ones. But they don't do it alone; they do it with either direct or indirect contribution from the stakeholders.*

Interviewer: When you talk of stakeholders, are these stakeholders - schools, or employers, or head teachers, teachers and parents? Who are these stakeholders?

C1: *Yes, the stakeholders are teachers, but when it comes to teachers, some teachers are invited when they are developing the curriculum but not all of them. But when it comes to curriculum, the students do not participate directly but indirectly through reports like when I write my report the students' needs can come in. That is indirectly and not directly.*

Interviewer, C1 Lines 67-77

Despite these two accounts, it was still unclear from the data gathered whether the national inspectors solicit input from teachers, students, or head teachers. It can however be argued that, although there are opportunities to have a say in relation to curriculum design, the decision lies in the hands of the pedagogic inspectors while the minister makes the final decision.

5.8 Theme 3: Support Mechanisms

Although most students receive support and advice from their parents especially in choosing subject combinations, they also benefit from support mechanisms available to them at school. Students are offered a variety of support such as information and services on educational orientation and training at school from the school guidance counsellor and teachers. Most of the students confirmed that the advice from the parents was the major reason for choosing the subject combination. As discussed in chapter 2 section sections 2.3 and 2.5 in relation to 'subject combinations' it is worth noting that secondary education consists of Form One (1) to Form Five (5) 11-16 and the students must sit end of year exams for the five (5) years progressing to the next class. The curriculum of study comprises all subjects from Home Economics to Physics and everything in between. By the completion of Form Three, students are generally expected to choose between pursuing an Arts or a Science pathway. The curriculum in Forms Four and Five then becomes more focused, with an orientation towards preparation for the final examinations.

During the interview session with the school counsellor, there was a general perception that the role of the counsellor is immense. In consonance with Odu (2004), guidance and

counselling can enable students to develop emotionally, mentally, physically, morally, and educationally to cope with classroom learning both in and out of school setting. The counsellor's role in schools is to assist students to study, understand themselves and their environment as well as supporting them to make the right behaviour choices to develop and make progress educationally and personally (Egbo, 2008). Accordingly, the primary form of support offered to students involved the counsellor's role in informing them about available opportunities and helping them gain access to various career or employment prospects. The school counsellor described the support provided to students in the following comments:

> Interviewer*: ……. How do you support students in your role as the guidance counselor?*
>
> C1: *Ok, I do many things, but I want you to be specific. Are you talking about orientation? Are you talking about problem solving?*
>
> Interviewer: *Yes, I would like to know in a broader sense how you support students. ……. what does your job description require you to do at the school and how do you use that to support students?*
>
> C1: *Ok, I do many things but what I have to do is that, I need to keep the students informed of every aspects - be it school, be it job opportunities that ties with a particular field or domain of studies they have chosen and then I will equally need to help them when they have psychological problems that can prevent them from learning, then equally have topics that develop and do some sort of good counselling in class that is a means of preventing students from some particular behavior.*
>
> Interviewer, C1 Lines 37-49

The counsellor support explained above could be perceived as a positive endeavour towards student development and to improve school effectiveness among many challenges arising faced by schools. The counsellor had strong feelings that that counselling played a significant role in the students' school experience. C1 believed that counselling was a positive mechanism that helps students understand what they need to know in and out of school as well as proving them with information about educational, social, and vocational opportunities. It appeared that counselling encouraged positive attitudes and behaviours to learning and the counsellor's role was generally supportive

towards students. Undoubtedly, counselling is significant in effective teaching learning in schools. Whilst the counsellor's comments are not surprising, Akinade (2012) highlights the lack of trained counsellors most schools due to inadequate funding to run various services. However, in all sampled schools, there were provisions for student support such as the availability of a guidance counsellor. The guidance counsellor (C1) affirmed that help regarding psychological barriers is also provided to the students to support students in identifying their strengths and weakness. It is the counsellor's role to liaise with other agencies or administrators to solve problems. Sometimes, it can be a teacher or school staff, principal or parents, it depends on the problem. Despite this support, the role of parents is always immense in shaping the career of a child as mentioned by the school counsellor.

Beyond the assistance offered by the school counsellor, it was found that teachers play a significant role in student support. The quote below is a summary of the kind of support mechanism available to students with regards to the teacher:

> *Interviewer: How do you support and ensure that students choose the right subject combinations in form 4?*
>
> **T1:** *Well… it all begins from forms 1 to 3. In that sense we don't just allow students to select subject for selecting sake. There is a follow up, the results that they've been having from the day that they entered the school from form 1 to form 3. After form 3, we help them – we tell them that this is the choice, this is what you're what you're good in. Because you see the subjects that you've been successful in. You need the orientation as arts subjects or science subjects. We now give the orientation and then we advise them to do the science or arts subject because your aptitude is towards the arts subjects or science subjects. But that notwithstanding we find some students sticking with their parents. And insisting on the fact that though you send my child today to do arts, I want my child to do sciences because I want my child to become a medical doctor, because I want my child to become an engineer whereas the child has not got the aptitude for those subjects. We've had cases where at the end of the day when the child has got to form 4, struggled, repeat form 4, go to form 5 and failed the GCE then the parents say I now see what you were saying – and send the child now to re-do arts because their orientation is towards the arts. Basically, that's how we follow them up.*
>
> Interviewer, H1 Lines 74-90

The teacher's response emphasises the proactive role teachers play in enabling students' academic and vocational choices, particularly as they enter form 4. T1 emphasises a

continuous support process that begins in form 1 and extends throughout the students' educational journey, using phrases like *"follow-up," "orientation,"* and *"advise."* This technique includes monitoring students' academic performance to assist them recognise their strengths and make informed subject choices that are in line with their abilities. While the teacher recognises the occasional conflict between professional advice and parental preferences, when parents encourage pupils into disciplines such as medicine or engineering despite their lack of aptitude, there is a strong commitment to student-focused advising. This reflects a broader concept of the teacher's responsibility, which includes not only delivering curriculum knowledge but also serving as a mentor to students in making decisions that will improve their long-term employment prospects. This viewpoint is consistent with the broader concepts mentioned in Hayes and Marshall's (2016) work, which emphasises the significance of providing students with applicable skills and encouraging self-awareness in terms of career development. nonetheless is crucial to note that, whilst T1's account reflects similar values, it does not stem from or form part of Hayes and Marshall's study; rather, their study supports the idea that career guidance in schools should be integrated into ongoing educational support, as echoed by T1.

5.9 Theme 4: Implications for Curriculum Review

The third objective of this study focuses on analysing the perceptions of educational administrators and curriculum planners regarding the responses obtained and their implications for curriculum revision. This suggests that the perspectives of key stakeholders in education play a significant role in shaping future curriculum design. There is substantial support for incorporating vocational skills into the curriculum. Unwin and Wellington (2001) have argued that students may achieve a deeper understanding of concepts or theories when instruction occurs within a practical context, thereby facilitating cognitive processes. Further, they argue that students may be motivated to learn a theory or a formal technique when teaching takes place in a practical setting (motivational). Winch (2000) argues that providing young people with adequate incentives to enhance their skills would likely result in their qualification for specialised jobs. Consequently, the labour supply could align more closely with entrepreneurs'

demand, facilitating the creation of high-skill jobs. Nevertheless, he contends that such alignment between supply and demand is not guaranteed, particularly over the short term. Employers may require additional motivation to offer compensation for skilled labour, and in the case of low-skilled work, the demand for newly skilled workers may remain insufficient. This means that the knowledge required in a workplace is largely practical. If the skill is low, this will have negative implications for the firm, the individual and the public.

However, curriculum reforms imply curriculum change. To address the demands of employers, revisions to curricula are necessary. Various countries, communities, and schools undertake curriculum renewal either because the current curricula do not meet desired standards or due to the assumption that modifying the curriculum will lead to anticipated improvements in classroom outcomes. Participants in this study have identified the secondary school curriculum as requiring improvement. Sahlberg (2009) observes that regardless of the motivations behind curriculum changes, those responsible for implementing such changes invariably confront the challenge of determining how these changes will be realised in practice. The following subsection explores stakeholders' perspectives on potential improvements to future curricula aimed at enhancing students' employability skills.

5.9.1 The collaboration between employer and ministry is essential.

Similar claims relating to curricula, skill building and employment were commonly expressed by research participants in the current study. While clearly outlining the government's initiatives to create collaboration between employers and schools, as well as the shift from an objective-driven curriculum to one centred on competencies, they recognised that this transition could require a considerable amount of time. One of the national pedagogic inspectors commented that:

> P3: *What the ministry is doing now is signing partnership with various sectors. You know, partnership is both ways. As the ministry of secondary education, we try to help our learners to be well equipped for the job market. And also, at the level of these partners, they also bring their technology to us. It's a partnership – they have something to give, so do we. We are still at our beginning, but I think if we develop*

that partnership, maybe in the long run – in ten years' or fifteen years' time there will be a change in our system

P3 Lines 71-76

This observation from a national pedagogic inspector expresses optimism about the Ministry of Secondary Education's efforts to form partnerships with other sectors, notably those which can provide technology knowledge and facilities. In contrast to earlier comments by the teacher (T1) that criticised inspectors for being unaware of or disconnected from real challenge, P3 takes a more optimistic and engaged perspective, implying that some inspectors are aware of existing gaps and are advocating for progressive systemic change. This disparity in viewpoint emphasises the complexity and diversity of viewpoints within the educational system. P3's statement recognises the government's desire to match education with market demands by supporting competency-based learning and encouraging technological collaboration. Nevertheless, although these initiatives are valuable, the efforts are still in the early phases. The inspector acknowledges that significant change could take *"ten or fifteen years,"* confirming the notion that transformation is an ongoing endeavour rather than a quick solution. Furthermore, while these collaborations attempt to improve educational quality through improved technological access, persistent infrastructural shortages particularly in ICT remain a significant challenge. This concern is supported by the findings of Wallet and Beatriz (2015) and Fouda et al., (2013). Fouda et al., (2013) for instance, found that just 100 of over 1,000 Cameroonian secondary schools had suitable facilities to teach computer science. This implies that, although infrastructure and partnerships can improve educational delivery, they are not a solution to all structural issues. Thus, whilst the Ministry's current initiatives may contribute to future improvements in curriculum delivery and employability, they must be situated within the broader context of structural limitations, resource constraints, and the need for sustained, inclusive implementation strategies.

Moreover, the secondary school teacher (T1) was clear about what the future curriculum should look like. The teacher mentioned that with respect to improving the curricula, there is the need for understanding the requirements of the country rather than adopting a foreign curriculum. The future curriculum should consider local realities as this would be

beneficial for the entire education system in Cameroon. When asked about the changes he would like to see incorporated in the curriculum, the teacher pointed out that:

> *Interviewer: If you were in a position of developing the curriculum, what would you like to see in it?*
>
> *T1: …. I would like to see the relationship between school and enterprises included in the curriculum such that the children start school with internships and other programmes.*
>
> *Interviewer, T1 Lines165-170*

The secondary school teacher went on to suggest that future curriculum development should consider the realities of the country.

> *T1: Secondly, it should be adapted to local realities not brought from any other country. Even if it is brought from another country, it should be adapted to the local realities.*
>
> *Lines 170-172*

The teacher recommended that curricula developers need to understand the external environment. The people who design the curriculum need to understand the viewpoint of students, parents and schools. It is one significant element that can be beneficial for all the participants. Education reform is necessary, and it can be introduced by soliciting contributions and suggestions from students, schools and parents.

In reflecting on curriculum development, the head teacher expressed a perceived shift in government policy toward creating a curriculum that is relevant and closely connected to the lived experiences of the population. He further noted that the Competency-based Curriculum Approach, which they indicated has been initiated, aims not only to equip learners with the ability to produce tangible outcomes but also to support the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

> H1: *we started-off with the content- based approach and we moved to objective based approach but now we are doing the competence-based approach and with this approach learner have to be on the field so that they get the necessary work experience.*
>
> H1 Lines 78-81

Kafyuililo et al. (2012) describe the competence-based educational approach as valuable in underscoring the practical abilities that prospective employees demonstrate, rather than solely their academic qualifications. Essentially, it focusses on learners' capabilities rather than on what they are supposed to learn. This perspective is supported by Deiβinger and Hellwig (2011), maintaining that the aim of a competence-based approach is to prepare learners for employment, that is, skills acquisition required for the workplace. Interestingly, the head teacher acknowledged the shortcomings of the content approach being implemented. The head teacher appeared to favour a system that aligns educational goals to skills that learners must possess at the end of their schooling although it is still in its infancy.

Additionally, the school counsellor suggested that the standards of teachers should be improved through further training to accommodate students' needs.

> *Interviewer: ok thank you very much for your time is there any additional information you may want to add.*
>
> *C1: Not really but the only thing I will say is that the training of teacher should be improved as teachers are not skilled enough to really prepare the students for the job market. Because, if they have to do something, they need to start with training of teachers.*
>
> *C1 Lines 113-116*

The counsellor's comment above suggests that teachers should be provided training to empower them to better impart job skills to students. The participant highlighted that enhancing teacher training is a critical need, given that current teachers often lack the necessary skills to adequately prepare students for the labour market. This indicates that improving student employability requires a systemic response that starts with the educator's professional development. The remarks reveal that insufficient teacher training may be considered a fundamental contributor to the lack of skills among students. It is notable that the relationship between teacher competence and youth readiness for the labour indicates the distinct link between the educator's competence within the classroom and the educational progress of youth. To address the shortcomings in teacher education and professional development, it is necessary for education

authorities to allocate resources toward training programmes that allow teachers to effectively incorporate workplace skills into the school curricula.

5.10 Interpretation of Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

5.10.1 Research Aims and Objectives

The interpretative approach adopted in this study (see Chapter 4, Section 4.3) sought to assess the degree to which the secondary education system in Cameroon supports the development of skills among youth that correspond with job market demands. A qualitative thematic analysis (Chapter 4, Section 4.11) was applied to data collected from various sources, including interviews with three national pedagogic inspectors from the Ministry of Secondary Education in Cameroon (MINSEC), a secondary school head teacher, a school counsellor, and a secondary school teacher. Complementary data were obtained using questionnaires distributed to 202 secondary school students and 26 secondary school teachers (see Chapter 4, Section 4.7.1). The analysis uncovered diverse perspectives on both the education system and the challenges related to youth unemployment. The central aim of the study was nonetheless to explore the views of education stakeholders regarding the design of a curriculum that incorporates employability skills at the secondary school level.

As outlined in Chapter 1, Section 1.3.1, this study investigates the problem of youth unemployment in Cameroon by analysing its causes and examining the role of education in preparing students for the labour market. The primary objective was to identify factors contributing to high youth unemployment and to determine the specific knowledge and skills that the curriculum should provide to enhance students' employability prospects. Additionally, the research explored the perspectives of educational administrators and curriculum planners regarding these needs and their potential influence on curriculum reform. A further aim was to develop a conceptual framework delineating the relationship between curriculum development and employability skills, which may guide the design of future curricula. Lastly, the study sought to offer practical recommendations to support curriculum review and enhancement within the Cameroonian context.

To address these aims, the study was structured around three research questions. The first considered how current Form 5 students, aged 15 to 16, perceive the knowledge and skills necessary from their curriculum to attain employment. The second examined stakeholders' views on the connection between curriculum development and vocational education. The third investigated strategies for effectively integrating employability skills into the school curriculum to improve students' readiness for the labour market.

This study explored the concepts of employability and curriculum from the perspective of the participants. They highlighted the need for students to develop employability skills and advocated incorporating these skills into school curricula to respond to the changing demands of today's job market. In order to meet the research objectives and explore the outlined questions (Kivunja, 2016), eight related questions were presented to participants during interviews, supplemented by data gathered from questionnaires consisting of four main questions (Chapter 5, section 5.1, Table 5.0). The analysis revealed important patterns relating to the underlying factors contributing to youth unemployment and identified the specific skills students require from the curriculum to obtain and maintain employment (see Chapter 5, Sections 5.6–5.9). The data analysis offers valuable points of reference on the youth unemployment problem and poor curriculum structures and reforms.

5.10.2 Research Questions

The data collected from interviews and questionnaires were analysed to assess how effectively the curriculum prepares school leavers for employment. The findings reveal several notable reasons why the current educational system in Cameroon appears insufficient in equipping young people with the skills necessary for employment both locally and internationally. To support this assessment, a thematic analysis was conducted following the method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analysis identified three primary factors contributing to the high rates of youth unemployment in the country. These factors comprise educational elements such as the development of employability skills and their relation to youth unemployment; the content and structure of the curriculum; as well as non-educational factors including inadequate infrastructure. The qualitative results and their interpretation are organised around three key research

questions and four main themes that emerged during the study (see Chapter 5, Section 5.11). These themes are Theme 1; Youth Unemployment and Skills Development; Theme 2; Curriculum Development and Pedagogy; Theme 3; Support Mechanisms; and Theme 4; Implications for Curriculum Review.

5.10.3 Research Question 1: What is the perception of current school pupils (Form 5, 15-16-year-olds) on the types of knowledge and skills they need from the curriculum to gain employment?

The findings of this study expand on the research of some of the academics mentioned in the literature Chapter 3 in respect of the first research question, which considered the topic of the essential knowledge and competencies that students require from the curriculum to secure employment. For example, as already indicated in the Literature Review, chapter 3, Section 3.4, the relevance of secondary schools in professional education is becoming more apparent as an increasing number of young adults are unable to join the workforce after completing secondary school (Jayaram and Engmann, 2014). The evidence provided by the students, teachers and the pedagogic inspectors relate to the fact that employers increasingly seek for non-cognitive or soft skills like communication, leadership, adaptability and problem-solving, which are often missing from the curriculum (Sermsuk et al. 2014). Statements from participants seemed to confirm this assertion. To most study participants, a student's success in obtaining and retaining employment is influenced more by their schooling attitude than the depth of the curriculum, although the curriculum's nature may present challenges. They placed emphasis on the importance of leadership skills, noting the need for effective leaders in addressing various issues. Entrepreneurial skills were considered crucial, and they felt that these could be acquired through the established CBA and the professionalisation of education. The ability to adapt to the workplace was also highlighted, stressing that, besides knowledge and qualifications, personal skills play a vital role in successful adaptation to the professional setting. Communication skills were identified as a key competency (see chapter 5 section 5.6.2 – and T1 Lines 43-44)

Employability skills (competence – see section 5.6.1 P3 Lines 6-9) were described by participants as a hybrid of hard and soft skills, mirroring the perspectives of several

employers and researchers (Wolf, 2002). Although the literature review reveals a divergence in definitions of employability skills (Youth Employment UK, 2017), the participants clearly demonstrated an understanding of the attributes preferred by hiring managers and the factors that contribute to a school leaver's readiness for employment. The evidence suggests that this issue may stem from an absence of well-established and mutually agreed-upon terminology among all involved parties (Kashefpakdel et al. 2018). It is important to note that references to competence, often framed as employability skills, might be better understood in terms of what learners are expected to achieve (capability) rather than what they are anticipated to study. The focus is primarily on acquiring practical workplace skills or competences (Deiβinger and Hellwig 2011). A clear concern across all participants was the need to narrow the divide between educational experiences and real-life demands. Although the severity and scope of youth unemployment in Cameroon have been acknowledged, these issues are still inadequately addressed. Hence, it appears that for young individuals or potential employees to align with current labour market demands, adaptability to evolving social and economic environments is essential (Wright and Lee, 2014). This perspective seems prevalent partly because the educational system falls short in preparing youth with the skills necessary for employment.

Crucially, the literature conveys the idea that the development of vocational initiatives that can benefit students in the acquisition of essential employability skills could be a plausible intervention in this issue. For instance, Choi et al., (2015) demonstrated that students who received career education over a two-year period significantly increased their development skills compared to those who participated only once or not at all during that period. The participants thus, highlighted the employability skills considered crucial in the workplace and the contribution that schooling could serve in promoting employability skills instruction. (Chapter 3, section 3.4). This served as the driving force behind the discussion on employability skills education. As a result, it was suggested (Pedagogic Inspectors) that training providers form alliances with business to encourage the development of skills for employment. It was revealed that employability skills were used to designate a broad set of competences which are generally ignored by the educational systems in the country. Due to its significance in the workplace, it can no

longer be ignored as the concept has recently acquired favour among academics and governments in developed and developing countries. Participants in this study indicated that acquiring employability skills may support the transition from education to employment, expand job opportunities for school leavers, and improve an individual's capacity to adapt to workplace changes. The employability competencies identified align closely with those discussed in the literature review, notably those presented by Martin, Smith, Marshall, and McKenzie (2008) in Chapter 3, sections 3.0 and 3.3. Thus, it is expected that many of the key employability skills recognised in this research are linked to work-related processes.

5.10.4 What is the relationship between curriculum development and vocational education from participants' perspectives?

Knight and Yorke, (2003) posit that although education and employability seem to be closely related and complementary study notions, there does not exist much research on these two concepts or their relationship, which makes it difficult to understand how they relate. The literature review clearly indicates that employability has received substantial scholarly attention, especially concerning the development of pedagogical tools such as business simulations (Avramenko, 2011). Additionally, research has focused on the viewpoints of both students and employers regarding employability (Tymon, 2013). An in-depth understanding of the factors influencing school leavers' successful transition into the workforce is essential, given that the knowledge-based economy requires prospective employees to be suitably aligned with available job opportunities (Finch et al., 2013). Undoubtedly, it may be a challenge analysing students' education and subsequent employment discretely (Knight and Yorke, 2002). Nonetheless, the respondents generally agreed that schools are important in helping students enhance their employable abilities. These findings were consistent with the gathered data from the questionnaires, the interviews, as well as the literature review (see Chapter 4, Section 4.7).

To the teachers and pedagogic inspectors, the curriculum should really focus on promoting teaching, knowledge, and learning in a way that integrates these elements into each student's identity. It is also important to nurture skills that help students transition smoothly from school to the workplace. Based on what the participants shared, it seems

that curriculum designers should intentionally keep the content focused and limited. This way, students are encouraged to undertake their own research and exploration. Nevertheless, it also appears crucial that the curriculum maintain interconnections with the real world while simultaneously remaining flexible enough to allow for the expansion and academic exploration of ideas. As a result, new approaches to educational processes are required to match the emerging economic and social order, particularly the world of work (Mouzakitis, 2010).

As commented by the schoolteacher (see section 5.6.1, T1 Line 14-23), three crucial factors play a key role in school leavers' failure to gain employment including social and cultural emphasis on white-collar jobs; the curriculum does not develop students' adaptable skills; and schools have limited connections to industry for internships and opportunities for hands-on experiences. These comments indicate that the education system is designed to enabling young people aspire for 'white-collar' or public service jobs. These comments are not surprising as Mobit and Mbella, (2016) found that amid limited job opportunities provided by the public service, more educated individuals tend to remain unemployed. Some scholars have argued that the primary objective of schooling is to offer the opportunity of culturally valued knowledge and behaviour to its recipients. Schooling and education in general provide opportunities that are relevant, efficient, and socially alluring for students (Slaughter, 2009). For instance, Moss (2013) posits that students who experience this transformative process develop competencies in conceptual understanding, performing tasks, and attitudinal shifts. Among the research participants, there is an expectation that schools should provide students with both the knowledge and skills necessary for a purposeful entry into adult life. Although Robinson (2011) reiterates the view that the secondary school curriculum falls short in equipping students with employable skills, there is also an indication of a lack of effective mechanisms linking educational institutions with employers. This observation highlights a significant challenge: secondary education may not sufficiently equip students for the workforce. This issue is compounded by a lack of effective mechanisms to connect schools with industry. Robinson's (2011) assertion emphasises how unprepared students are for employment. Improved opportunities for practical experience and an enhanced

understanding of industry demands are made possible by the necessity for greater connections between businesses and secondary schools.

5.10.5 How can employability skills be integrated in the curriculum of schools in Cameroon to improve employability skills for students from participants' perspectives?

Some participants, comprising both teachers and head teachers, observed that although national curricula explicitly define the objectives of secondary education, educators continue to encounter difficulties in designing learning environments that effectively promote the acquisition of work-related skills. This discrepancy between policy prescriptions and classroom realities highlights a notable challenge in the implementation of current educational system. As Carelse et al. (2014) suggest, integrating curriculum content across different subjects can enhance students' learning experiences and help them achieve broader educational goals. An integrative approach to the curriculum seems especially vital for enhancing students' acquisition of skills relevant to the workplace, ultimately better preparing them for life after school.

This viewpoint is shared by educational inspectors who observed that the Ministry of Education is actively building partnerships with various stakeholders (Chapter 5, Section 5.3). These partnerships suggest an increasing effort to harmonise student learning outcomes with the increasing expectations of the labour market. If this effort is maintained and implemented effectively, the Ministry's commitment to enhancing the national skill set and technological know-how in secondary education could serve as a catalyst for change. Such reforms could improve teaching methods and better prepare students with the skills they need for todays and tomorrow's workplaces. However, as participant P3 pointed out (Chapter 5, Section 5.3), the realisation of these reforms might take some time, especially considering the necessary structural and institutional changes. This highlights the need for a phased approach and ongoing assessment to ensure that the intended policy goals lead to real educational and socioeconomic benefits.

Some study participants recognised that producing school leavers with skills that appeal to employers is not a straightforward one, it requires stronger links between employers

and schools, and collaboration between government, education and business sectors to place more emphasis on work experience and soft skills in the school curriculum (Chapter 5, Section 5.3). This aligns with other literature that identifies the continuing skill mismatch and advocates the need for closer school and industry partnerships to prepare young people for labour markets (OECD, 2019; Mann et al., 2018). Regardless, what curriculum developers must take into consideration, are the voices of parents, students, and educators. Research suggests that co-designing learning programmes with key stakeholders makes them more relevant and delivers better learner outcomes (Scott, 2015). Education reform is needed, and it can be achieved by listening to students, schools, and parents' proposals. As previous studies have indicated, these types of collaborative associations can enhance students' employability as well as assist in bridging the skills gap (World Bank, 2019).

While the suggestion to improve students' workplace abilities in Cameroonian schools is advocated, there are indeed practical tensions to consider. One challenge is contextual limitations with funding. It is worth noting that Cameroon is facing other national priorities and may not have the resources to properly train teachers and develop its curriculum or programmes to improve employability outcomes (World Bank Group, 2025). Moreover, its political context also means that policy attention may not prioritise reforms to improve employability outcomes with evidence that such proposals are often given inadequate attention (Datnow, 2020; Lau et al., 2020). The school councillor suggested that teachers lack the skills to create employability-oriented education for students and that education authorities do not support this activity after teachers finish their studies (C1 Line 113–116). This aligns with research indicating that teachers are central to successful educational reforms, particularly when changes are implemented without consultation, and that continuous professional development positively affects learner outcomes (Desimone et al., 2006).

From the above discussion, it is plausible to assert that bridging these gaps requires a multifaceted approach. Allocating resources toward teacher training and ongoing professional development should empower teachers with both content knowledge and appropriate workplace-relevant skills, which should be delivered in a practical and experiential way. Educational reforms should align with wider policy priorities, and

stakeholders should mobilise political and financial support by emphasising the importance of employability skills to national development. Further, private sector and NGO partnerships can extend government initiatives by offering expertise, funding, and real-world learning opportunities. This collaborative, and holistic approach could be the intervention required to break through existing limitations and to ensure students are acquiring the skills to succeed in the job market (Datnow, 2020; Desimone et al., 2006; Lau et al., 2020).

5.11 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presents a discussion and analysis of the findings derived from the qualitative study described in Chapter 4, Section 4.10, aimed at addressing the principal research questions. It details the analysis results and the supporting evidence obtained from the fieldwork, while identifying recurring themes across participants' responses, discussing individual experiences, and providing a platform for diverse voices. This was achieved through engagement with data gathered through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The analysis reveals that participants' understanding of employability skills was influenced by multiple factors, including their personal experiences, knowledge, and roles within the educational sector. The notion of employability prompted respondents to reflect on broader philosophical issues such as the purpose of education, its function within society, and the socio-economic and political dynamics influencing labour market transformations (Tomlinson, 2017). Increasingly, researchers acknowledge the significance of employees' capacity to apply the knowledge and skills gained through education to new circumstances (Kashefpakdel et al., 2018). Accordingly, it becomes necessary for educational institutions to reconsider how student learning is developed, acknowledging that the attributes expected of school leavers have evolved (Su Ya-hui and Li-yia, 2008).

Although participants mainly attributed youth unemployment to a disconnect between education and labour market requirements, additional factors such as inadequate infrastructure were also identified as contributors to the high levels of youth unemployment. A primary concern centred on the curriculum, which has remained unchanged for approximately thirty years, indicating its lack of responsiveness to

students' needs. Van Rooy (2005) underscores that curriculum development must address twenty-first-century challenges by continuously seeking to understand effective educational practices and adapting schooling accordingly in a rapidly changing environment. However, a significant barrier is rooted in the curriculum's failure to evolve, leading to inadequate preparation of students for contemporary workplace demands. The scarcity or poor quality of infrastructure further exacerbates youth unemployment by limiting access to essential instructional materials, suitable classroom space, and ICT resources, all of which are crucial for enabling relevant skill acquisition. To meet students' needs effectively, appropriate infrastructure is indispensable. The lack of infrastructure and teaching resources restricts opportunities for young people to develop marketable skills. Understanding the origins of youth unemployment is vital, as these factors directly influence curriculum development and implementation, which in turn affect youth employment outcomes. Consistent with these observations, Youth and Peacebuilding (2013) highlights that a key failing of Cameroon's education system is the neglect of employment-oriented education, contributing to high unemployment rates among school leavers.

Furthermore, the analysis of student responses indicated that secondary school learners generally lack sufficient exposure to the workplace and opportunities to develop job-related skills necessary for employment. Interestingly, a mismatch emerged between students' perceptions and teachers' reports regarding skills development initiatives. Teachers' questionnaires suggested adherence to prescribed syllabi prioritising practical subject matter and indicated that they provide career guidance. Despite this, most students displayed limited awareness of the specific skills required for employment as conveyed through the curriculum. Additionally, the majority of students had no work experience, whether paid or voluntary. This suggests that the secondary school curriculum does not adequately prepare students for workforce entry, contrary to expectations. These findings have shaped and validated the research questions, indicating a need for further exploration into the reliability of teachers' claims and potential enhancements to the curriculum that would better equip school leavers for employment.

The broader aim of this research is to understand and articulate diverse realities, bringing to light varying perspectives among secondary school education stakeholders. A

conceptual framework, as outlined in the literature review, has been developed which illustrates the reciprocal relationship between curriculum development and employability skills. Prior studies have focused on skill mismatches and the acquisition of employability skills as isolated concerns, rather than integrating them into the curriculum development process itself (Penn, 2016; Essongo, 2017). Existing literature corroborates the increasing demand for young people to possess a wide range of attributes in navigating the job market. This study presents an alternative viewpoint, advocating for schools to actively engage in equipping students with necessary employability skills. Consequently, the conceptual framework explores why Cameroon's secondary school curriculum fails in preparing students for employment and how employability skills might be embedded within it. Applying the framework involves identifying the root causes of youth unemployment and examining their links to curriculum development. The focus on Cameroon, as a specific African context, contributes to the broader understanding of how national circumstances shape the mismatch between curriculum content and skill acquisition.

This chapter also goes beyond summarising the findings and critically engages with them in the context of the broader scholarly discussions and policy landscape outlined in the literature review (Chapter 3). By connecting the findings to existing research, the chapter places the study within ongoing debates and underscores its significance in addressing current educational challenges. A major goal of the chapter was to uncover the underlying tensions and systemic complexities that influence the issues highlighted by the findings. For instance, while the curriculum clearly laid out the goals of developing work-related skills, there was a noticeable gap between what policymakers intended and what happened in the classroom. This tension was evident in the challenges teachers and educators faced when trying to implement engaging teaching methods that fostered these skills, a finding that resonates with Carelse et al. (2014), who advocated for curriculum integration to connect theory with practice. Additionally, these tensions were rooted in broader structural and institutional challenges, such as limited resources, echoing concerns raised by Smith and Lovat (2003) and reflected in national educational regulations and policy frameworks.

The Ministry of Education is making efforts to create partnerships across different sectors and enhance technology in secondary education (Chapter 5, Section 5.3). This endeavour underscores the significance of synchronising educational outcomes with the demands of the workplace. However, as participants pointed out, putting these reforms into action requires careful long-term planning and a phased approach, which adds layers of complexity and uncertainty to the reform journey. This underscores the fact that effectively turning policy into practice demands not just clear guidelines but also ongoing capacity building and systemic support to manage these challenges. By reflecting on these dynamics, this chapter sheds light on how policy goals interact with real-world challenges, ultimately influencing educational outcomes. It shows that reform processes are complex, where competing priorities and limited resources exist alongside real chances for meaningful change.

The study's findings provide a basis for interpreting the research questions and their implications for subsequent investigations. The chapter synthesises various elements of the current research by engaging with the outcomes of the data analysis and discussing each research question in relation to the identified themes, while also reflecting on emerging conclusions intended to shed light on the issues highlighted during the investigation.

The final chapter will extend these insights by presenting a summary of the study's key conclusions, highlighting its contributions to our understanding of the issues raised, and providing recommendations relevant to policy and practice. Additionally, it will address the study's limitations and propose areas for future research aimed at deepening the understanding of the complexities and interactions discussed herein.

Chapter 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.0 Introduction

This concluding chapter brings together the research's major insights, offering a review or reflection that incorporates the central research topic, the main research question, and the results obtained. The purpose here is not to rehash the findings, but rather to articulate the study's broad conclusions and demonstrate how they contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the research issue. In doing so, the chapter explores the findings' broader significance, discussing possible implications for policy and professional practice as relevant to the secondary school setting in Cameroon. These reflections are presented with full consideration for the stud y's methodological and practical limitations, which shape the breadth and application of the findings. The chapter ends with a concise conclusion that summarises the primary contribution of the thesis and reinforces its significance within the wider academic discourse.

The sample size outlined in the methodology chapter, along with the limited geographic distribution of the schools involved in the study, constitute important limitations on the broader applicability of the data. However, within the national context, considering the characteristics of schools in the French (Centre) and English (Southwest) regions, the patterns that emerge offer useful perspectives for informing curriculum development efforts (refer to Chapter 5, Section 5.9). Importantly, the subsequent discussion situates the conclusions within the context of issues identified in the literature review, thereby addressing the research questions. The final section of this chapter thus proposes practical recommendations that could guide improvements in future curriculum development initiatives.

Although this is the final chapter of the thesis, the question of youth unemployment and underemployment in Cameroon is still being debated. Other academics are encouraged to read this study, question, and broaden the points made about the best strategy to help secondary school students develop employability, particularly considering the lack of congruence between learning and skills. This is an unsolved problem that continues to occupy the minds of education stakeholders. Furthermore, it is plausible to believe that

by probing an under-researched area, this study has raised a multitude of challenges, contributing to the narrative of available research, and achieving one of the primary research goals of contributing fresh perspectives to the discourse and challenging prevailing traditional concepts in secondary school education

6.1 Reflection on Methodology and Methods Adopted

As previously stated, (Chapter 4, section 4.2) ontological and epistemological viewpoints underbrace methodology and indeed, have implications for how the research will be conducted. The term methodology involves a range of interpretations; however, it is commonly understood as a broad theoretical framework that directs the research process. This framework includes the underlying assumptions, principles, norms, and the specific methods employed within the research strategy (Schensul, 2008). Based on this description, it may be plausible to claim that it unifies and encapsulates most of the theoretical underpinnings or philosophies and the procedures. Payne and Payne (2004), like other researchers, make the distinction between methods and methodology, with the former referring to the pragmatic research instruments employed, for example, open-ended interviews or questionnaires/surveys, whilst methodology refers to the presumptions or philosophies that offer ascent to the research instruments. Alternatively, Mills and Birks (2014) argue that philosophy is the distinguishing factor between a series of methods and a methodology. Therefore, it is useful to consider methods and methodology as distinct concepts, since a single method may be applied within multiple methodologies. For example, open-ended interviews can be employed across various methodological frameworks, as noted by Wellington et al., (2005). Methods refer to the techniques for data collection that form the empirical foundation for knowledge generation (Wellington et al., 2005). In contrast, methodology addresses the theoretical underpinnings and the overall strategic approach to a research study, rather than focusing on the specific characteristics or applicability of individual methods (Wellington et al., 2005).

A crucial distinction that helps to bisect research is the dichotomy among both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, which are rooted in modernist/positivistic and post-modern/interpretative ideologies (Todd et al., 2004). Alternative methodologies

such as mixed methods and action research also coexist within the research landscape. The mixed methods approach, as implied by its name, involves integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques guided by a coherent and systematic rationale (Todd et al., 2004). Research employing mixed methods may draw on philosophical foundations such as pragmatism or apply qualitative strategies to deepen the understanding of quantitative findings. Similarly, action research comprises a range of approaches (Chandler and Torbet, 2003) and utilises quantitative and/or qualitative methods. This methodology focuses on the application of knowledge to effect immediate practical change and promote human well-being (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014). It often adopts participative, emancipatory, or transformative stances and involves direct engagement with research participants to examine and address specific problems (Reason and Bradbury, 2013).

To Penny (2021) some research techniques conform more tightly to one philosophy with a well-established collection of methods, while some have expanded and evolved into several philosophical and methodological orientations such as the branches from a tree stump. Regardless, one of a researcher's responsibilities when presenting a thesis is to reveal the research's epistemological foundation. It is not the intention of this section however, to restate the philosophical assumptions of this study, but to reflect on how issues of epistemology and ontology have impacted on the research procedure. Clough and Nutbrown, (2012) attest that if every research thesis had to articulate its ontological and epistemological grounding, the wheel could genuinely be continuously recreated because the justifications utilised are inclined to considerable overlap with the possibility of substantial duplication. However, failing to offer this evidence may inhibit the interpretation of the thesis by introducing several unsubstantiated assertions, making any subsequent knowledge claims questionable.

This research has offered significant answers to the research questions that were posed (See Chapter 6, sections 6.1.2.1 to 6.1.2.3). The implication is that the methodologies employed were appropriate for the study's objectives. The analysis and interpretation of collected data, on the other hand, must be methodologically appropriate for the context in question, and the data gathering method(s) should be confirmable, trustworthy, dependable, and transferrable (Elo et al., 2014). The source of the data obtained has a significant impact on the reliability of any value judgments made and the dependability of

any solutions given because of research (Elo et al., 2014). The choice of approach was facilitated using interpretative strategy (See Chapter 4, section 4.1). This method enabled the analysis of data gathered from a case study of teachers, students, as well as pedagogic inspectors. This data, combined with the use of the conceptual framework and the examination of assumptions and bias, minimised the possibility of making incorrect interpretations and enhanced the study's validity (Leedy et al., 2005) discussed in section 6.3.1 of this chapter. Interpretivism, which refers to epistemologies, or theories regarding how we can gain knowledge about the world, that is loosely reliant on construing or the interpretation of meaning that individuals attach to their actions, also helped to contest conceptions of knowledge and the scientific community's views, by inviting us to question what counts as knowledge and truth (Pring, 2004) and to produce new constructions of knowledge. Unlike science investigation, this research does not purport to provide absolute truth; instead, it provides a temporary point of view on a specific part of the educational academic arena (Kincheloe, 2004) that aids in broadening the readers' awareness and recognition of the study participants' life experience.

The study employed thematic analysis to create themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006) about the determinants of the issue of youth unemployment in Cameroon, the types of skills students need to be able to find work after finishing school, the country's curriculum development system, and suggestions on how students' skills acquisition could be improved. During the study, it became clear that the participants had a certain way of speaking about these themes. There appeared to be specific narratives underneath the data, which related to youth unemployment and curriculum development, both of which were associated to skills acquisition. For example, from participants responses about youth unemployment, there existed an implicit sense that this is caused by the secondary school system or curriculum development process. There were also underlying discourses about the skills that students need for employment, as well as an implied knowledge of the difficulties teachers faced in curriculum delivery. Consequently, thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was selected as the analytical method. Discourse analysis reveals meanings that are rooted in social practices (Braun, Gavey, and McPhillips, 2003). As previously noted, this study adopted an interpretative approach aimed at assessing the extent to which the secondary school system prepares students for the workforce and

exploring potential improvements in curriculum development. As a result, it was decided not to adopt a fully quantitative approach, which typically generates numerical data analysed through mathematical and statistical techniques to test hypotheses, identify correlations, and investigate possible causal relationships (Ritchie, 2013). Although a questionnaire was employed in this research, it was designed to gather descriptive, open-ended responses that would provide contextual insight into participants' experiences rather than to produce numerical data for statistical analysis. Adopting a purely quantitative design would therefore have required a shift away from the original research aims and questions. Moreover, an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon in its natural educational setting would likely have been challenging without meaningful interaction between the researcher and the study participants. Without this connection, the researcher may not have fully understood the perspectives and experiences of the individuals involved (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). Additionally, when exploring educational issues in secondary schools, the researcher does not necessarily need to remain detached or act solely as an observer, as doing so may limit the depth of insight into participants' thoughts and perspectives (Berg and Howard, 2012). These factors informed the choice to employ thematic analysis as the most suitable approach for examining the data collected in this study.

Additionally, Chapter 4, Section 4.11.1 (Questionnaire data analysis process) and section 4.11.2 (Managing and Analysing Questionnaire Data) consider the analytical process of data from questionnaires and clarification of the use of tabulation. The section draws on Miles and Huberman (1994) who suggested that qualitative investigations can make extensive use of tables considering that social phenomena can be located not solely in the mind but also in the real world. They further contend that while they play a crucial role in conveying details about research locations, methodologies, observational summaries, and data representation, their utility expands further as analytical instruments. Furthermore, tables effectively structure data, promoting accessible comparisons that enable researchers to identify parallels and distinctions, as well as recognise patterns such as co-occurrences, thematic elements, and emerging trends (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 93).

Nonetheless, in processing the data, precautions were taken to accurately record and represent the voices of participants. Since qualitative inquiry initiatives are not self-

contained, the inextricable interdependency between interpreter and interpretation (Thomas & James, 2006) necessitates that the researcher recognise that their text is a depiction, as well as a version of the facts that is the result of researcher decisions, and that it is explanatory (O'Sullivan, 2015). The primary goal of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies inherent in personal experiences from the perspectives of the participants including teachers, students, and pedagogic inspectors. This objective necessitated adherence to the epistemological principles of the interpretivist paradigm (Mertens, 2010) and a preference for subjective, insider viewpoints (Borko et al., 2007). The question regarding the researcher's voice inevitably arises in discussions concerning how a researcher engages with the interviewee's voice; both during the data collection process and throughout interpretation. Chase (2005) argues that researchers construct their own voices by interpreting, shaping, and conveying the realities expressed by others. As previously noted, qualitative research diverges from quantitative methods that rely on tests or experiments for data collection; instead, the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering data (Borman et al., 2006), underscoring the importance of research integrity. Throughout the research process, there remained a consistent recognition of the need to systematically identify and address underlying assumptions and biases. This recognition was intended to identify how they affected the findings and interpretations of the study. Significantly, the awareness extended to recognising the potential sway of personal attributes, encompassing factors such as gender, age, and professional status, in shaping the construction of knowledge (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). The overarching aim revolved around enabling an environment where research participants could be assured that their genuine viewpoints could be accurately conveyed.

6.2 Achieving Validity

As outlined in Chapter 4, Section 4.14, validity refers to the degree to which an account faithfully represents the social phenomena under investigation (Silverman, 2011) and the extent to which the data collection process accurately captures the intended aspects of measurement (Newby, 2010). In its broadest sense, validity relates to how well-grounded an argument, finding, deduction, or justification is (Maul, 2018). Although widely used in

the social sciences, there is no single definition of validity that is universally acknowledged across professional and academic groups (Maul, 2018). Validity and reliability are essential concepts in studies employing quantitative and qualitative methods, and the degree to which research methods are strictly adhered to in generating results can be used to justify the validity of a study (Cohen and Manion, 2017).

In qualitative research, validity is often understood differently from the traditional quantitative model. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed the concept of trustworthiness to capture the naturalistic equivalents of internal and external validation, objectivity, and reliability. They identified four criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as alternative measures for evaluating the rigour of qualitative research. These concepts emphasise ensuring that findings accurately reflect participants' perspectives and experiences and that sufficient evidence is provided to support the research claims (Creswell and Poth, 2013).

Ensuring validity also entails that the data collected adequately represents the issue under investigation, which requires meticulous attention to the sampling process and the selection of appropriate examples (Newby, 2010). In this study, participants were chosen with the assumption that individuals familiar with curriculum development issues were available, and efforts were made to achieve a balance between participants from Anglophone and Francophone regions. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and questionnaires, with findings presented in sufficient detail to enable readers to assess their credibility (Creswell, 2007). To verify that the recorded evidence was accurately documented, transcripts underwent multiple reviews (Kvale and Brinkman, 2008). While such procedures enhance validity, it is acknowledged that potential threats cannot be entirely eliminated; however, their impact can be minimised by maintaining rigorous attention to validity across all stages of the research process (Cohen et al., 2011).

6.3 Limitations

According to Greener (2018), acknowledging the limitations of a research project does not only demonstrate rigour but also gives researchers the chance to propose readily apparent objectives for future exploration. Limitations primarily relate to the restrictions

placed on the research methodology (Miles, 2017). The study obtained data from questionnaires and interviews with head teachers, teachers, school counsellors, secondary school students, and pedagogic inspectors. Its goal was to get insight into the nature of skill acquisition in secondary education by utilising their accounts. The participants in this study possess a unique perspective on the support mechanisms available to students aimed at improving their acquisition of employability skills. Even though the data obtained and analysed provided insightful information about the role of employability skills in schools and to address the study questions, limitations (see below) ought to be acknowledged and taken into consideration when assessing the findings presented and conclusions drawn.

Firstly, it was challenging to interview participants from the Ministry of Secondary Education because the subject was perceived sensitive by some. Even though the sample interviewed was a good representation of the population, some people declined to take part in the study. Despite assurances of confidentiality, they remained apprehensive that they may be identified. However, other methodological approaches might be used in future studies to resolve this. To address this challenge in future research, Tourangeau and Yan, (2007) suggest utilising anonymous surveys or indirect questioning methods, which might minimise perceived risks of being identified (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007). Nonetheless, anonymous tools may fail in providing the depth and context that semi-structured interviews can offer (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Since the study aimed to explore in detail, the focus was on in-depth interviews to capture varied perspectives (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). For future research, a mixed-methods approach could be employed to balance the safeguarding of participants as well as achieving analytical depth.

Additionally, the main research interviews were undertaken within a relatively limited period, with transcription taking place between interviews due to the constraints associated with undertaking a part-time PhD alongside full-time employment. There could have been more time between interviews for further reflection and reading. However, the process of transcribing the interviews provided some opportunity for reflection, while ongoing reflection continued throughout the writing-up of the data and the thesis.

Given that the study comprised of six interviews with the pedagogic inspectors, teacher(s) and school counsellor, there was a potential for researcher bias. Nevertheless, every effort has been made to be open about the research process, and there was the belief that their views were honest.

6.4 Contribution to Knowledge

The current research makes significant contributions by attempting to fill several gaps as well as contributing to knowledge that already exists. In addition to providing several recommendations for future research, this study contributes to four key ways to the limited body of literature addressing the effectiveness of the secondary school system in preparing students for the world of work. These contributions to knowledge are:

1) Development of a Conceptual Framework
2) Broadening the scope of scant research on Skills Acquisition in Cameroon
3) Contribution to Literature in Skills Mismatch
4) Implications for policy and practice

Each of these is discussed below.

6.4.1 Development of a Conceptual Framework

The principal theoretical contribution of this Ph.D. thesis lies in the formulation of a conceptual framework (Chapter 3, Section 3.14). This framework has been utilised to explore the reasons behind the secondary school curriculum in Cameroon failing to adequately prepare school leavers for the labour market, as well as to explore potential means of integrating employability skills into the curriculum (see Figure 6.0 and Table 7.0). The initial framework incorporated key factors identified as crucial to the interdependent dynamics among curriculum development, employability skills, and youth unemployment, as evidenced by the data presented in Chapter 5, Sections 5.6 to 5.9. According to Knight and Yorke (2004), the concepts of education and employability are closely related and complement one another. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates unequivocally that employability is a heavily researched subject, with particular attention paid to suggestions for curriculum improvements (Holmes, 2001), the views of students

on employability (Tymon, 2013), teacher opinions regarding employability (Morrison, 2013), students' orientation to careers and work (Tomlins Tomlinson, 2017). Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the fundamental link between education and employability is essential, as employability is often regarded as an outcome and practical value of schooling in relation to career development and job opportunities (Storen and Aamodt, 2010).

Nonetheless, an approach to applying the framework involved initially identifying the factors contributing to youth unemployment and subsequently examining their association to curriculum development. Crucially, the initial conceptual framework was not static, nor prescriptive and extended organically as new links were incorporated and adopted, although retaining some of its core values, relational to the findings and outcomes of this study (see Figure 6.0).

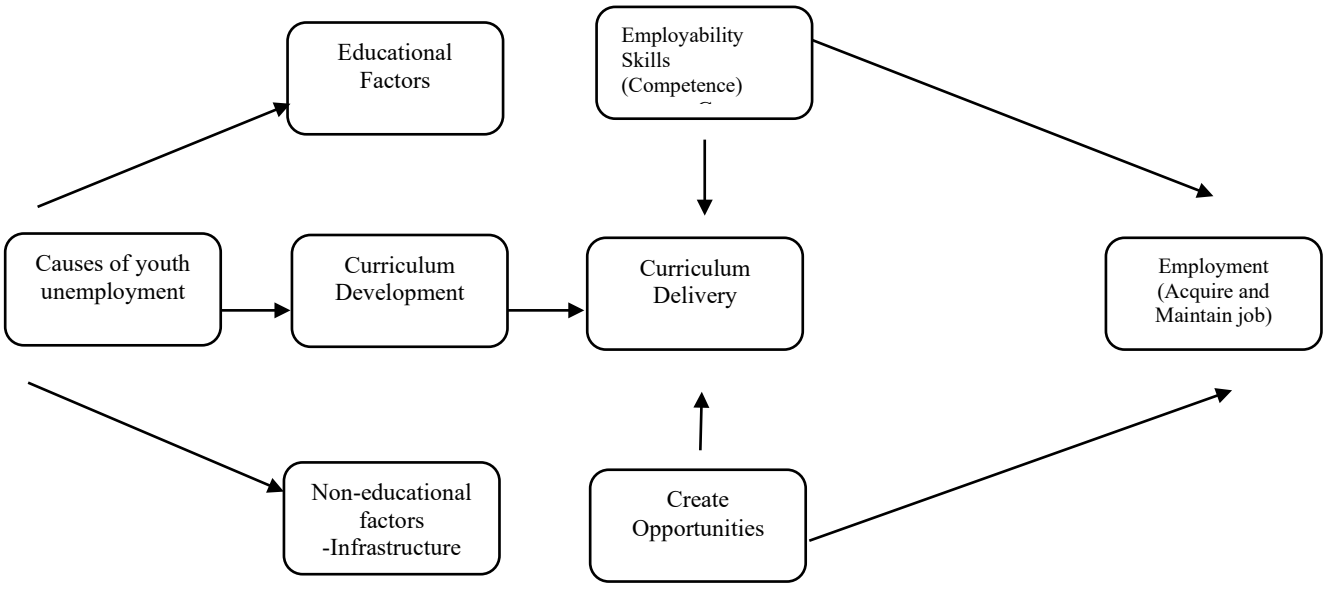


Figure 6.0 - A Conceptual Framework for Incorporating Skills in the Schools' Curriculum.

Table 6.0: Formulation and implementation of the conceptual framework

1. Delineating the research problem	• the setting that the study problem was derived from
2. Establishment of theoretical coherence (through the literature review	• Different theoretical frameworks and their link to the research problem
3. Organising/structuring the design and implemetation	• research questions • methodology • data gathering • analysis of data
4. Framing the conceptual conclusions	• explicit congruence between the theory and reality of the investigation and the conceptual conclusions of the thesis format • Identification of the study's limitations alongside potential directions for future research.

The formulation of a conceptual framework influenced not only the organisation and presentation of the research but also its methodological approach. The study's evolving conceptual framework was beneficial in the four significant aspects as categorised in Table 7.1 above. By depicting the conceptual framework within a visual diagram, the complexity inherent in the study's realities was succinctly captured, concurrently establishing a fundamental basis for the methodology as advocated by Wisker (2005). The first three iterations of the conceptual framework within which the study was developed provide clarity about how the essential concepts, academic viewpoints, as well as practical setting were developed. The conceptual framework diagram (Figure 6.1) elaborates the research's findings about the creation and delivery of a curriculum-base that provides opportunities that enable students to gain access to a broad range of skills in the contexts of school learning. Hence, participants stressed the necessity of possessing skills and competencies for employment, citing these as fundamental prerequisites. They pointed to the multifaceted reasons behind unemployment, highlighting the critical need for competence and skills. Criticisms focused on the existing school curriculum, with

issues highlighted about its inadequacy in providing students with the fundamental skills necessary for job adaptability. Proposals were made for a curriculum review, advocating for the adoption of a competence-based approach (CBA) that emphasises real-life situations and focuses on what learners can contribute and achieve. Additionally, suggestions were made to integrate internships and other practical programmes into the curriculum to allow for a closer relationship between schools and enterprises, thus, promoting experiential learning. Based on the findings, and in congruence with the participants' viewpoints, recommendations are made for skills to be incorporated and developed in Cameroon and ensure that students acquire employment skills (fourth iteration); therefore, a transition from a curriculum focused primarily on content to one oriented toward developing competencies. (see chapter 5, section 5.9).

With new links incorporated and with regards to interpretation, the conceptual framework demonstrates that if students are given sufficient opportunities to develop their employment skills, it will allow them to become self-sufficient and job creators in the future. This study's focus on Cameroon, as a representative African context, aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how country-specific factors influence the disparity observed between curriculum development and youth unemployment.

6.4.2 Broadening the Scope of Scant Research on Skills Acquisition in Cameroon

One important insight is that the findings will create fresh and original data, helping curriculum planners and teachers in Cameroon gain a clearer perspective on curriculum development. This deeper understanding will empower them to develop curricula that chances of success in both academic and job markets for students. Many secondary school students in Cameroon see their educational journey as an exciting and hopeful adventure, believing that finishing their studies and earning certifications will open doors to rewarding job opportunities in both the public and private sectors. However, while earning certifications is seen as crucial, York (2006) warns that just having a certificate does not guarantee a job. Sanders and Zuzel (2010) also point out that employers are increasingly looking for students who have the employability skills necessary to make a meaningful contribution right from the start. It is no surprise then that employers in Cameroon have voiced concerns about the low productivity of their employees, a concern

that is made even more pressing by the high unemployment rate among secondary school leavers (World Bank, 2012). Given these challenges, it is essential for curriculum planners to seriously address the gap between academic success and readiness for the workforce, ensuring that students are better equipped for the realities of the job market.

This study has the potential to inform the restructuring of policies related to curriculum development and may serve as an initial step toward integrating job skills into school curricula. Research on the specifics of skills acquisition in Cameroon remains sparse (Abangma, 1992; Mbangwana, 1996), and the type of inquiry undertaken in this study represents a novel approach within the Cameroonian context. The research sample includes combined authorities from the Ministry of Secondary Education, school administrators, and secondary school students, all of whom contribute significantly to ensuring that the study's findings generate new insights regarding curriculum enhancement aimed at addressing unemployment trends in Cameroon (see Section 6.8 – Reporting and Dissemination).

6.4.3 Contribution to Literature in Skills Mismatch

This study makes contribution to the existing body of literature, specifically in the context of developing countries facing widespread youth unemployment rates. The results offer insights that may inform future curriculum development, stressing the need to incorporate practical skills in the curriculum of schools (refer to section 6.4.4). The central aim was to revisit the concepts of employability and skill acquisition. While prior research, such as that by Ali et al. (2017), predominantly examines significant transformations affecting education and job markets, this study adopts a different perspective. Rather than focusing on employers' perceptions of new employees' skills, it underlines the necessity of effectively embedding practical skills within educational curricula.

This research sheds light on the reasons behind youth unemployment, especially focusing on the skills mismatch and the gaps in the skilled labour force. By doing so, it aims to guide educational policies, practices, and industry strategies. For example, the ILO (2013) points out that several key factors contribute to youth unemployment, including the lack of essential skills, job experience, job search techniques, and sufficient resources. This

perspective is echoed by various study participants, including National Pedagogic Inspectors, Head Teachers, School Counsellors, and Teachers. Their insights, along with the real-world challenges faced by school leavers, suggest that revamping the curriculum could effectively tackle these issues. This recommendation reflects the diverse viewpoints gathered from the participants in the study.

6.4.4 Implications for policy and practice

This study adds to existing knowledge by offering recommendations aimed at the Cameroonian government, particularly curriculum designers such as Pedagogic Inspectors within the Ministry of Secondary Education. These suggestions focus on improving the acquisition of work-related skills, suggesting curriculum development endeavours, and addressing other relevant factors that could contribute to making secondary education more effective. The framework (see figure 6.4.1 above) could be used by policymakers in Cameroon to strengthen secondary education in the country. As a result, teachers, curriculum developers, and other education stakeholders can use the research outcome to support the design of their appropriate curriculum.

Since education is the foundation of society, it is therefore unsurprising that teaching and learning are interconnected parts of a complex ecosystem (Robson, 2017). The divergent political and ideological perspectives on education's purpose, the results it attempts to produce, and the most effective ways to accomplish these aims are one aspect of this heterogeneity. Indeed, this ecosystem has a diverse range of stakeholders, comprising of professionals, researchers, politicians, parents, employers, and the institutions that bring them together with, usually, and conflicting agendas (Robson, 2017).

This research has identified several implications relevant to curriculum development aimed at improving the acquisition of work-related skills among school leavers (see Chapter 5, Section 5.9). The issue of the skills gap, particularly within the context of a developing country such as Cameroon, remains underexplored and continues to exert significant effects on the labour market (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1; Section 2.3). Factors contributing to youth unemployment include the growing need for multi-skill approaches, the evolving demand for contemporary competencies, and inadequacies in educational

infrastructure, among others, as discussed in the analysis of findings (Chapter 5, Section 5.6). In Cameroon, efforts to address or even discuss the workforce skills gap through curriculum development have been limited (Fornyuy, 2024). Nevertheless, the conclusions drawn here may hold considerable relevance for Cameroon (see Chapter 4, Section 4.14), especially regarding potential curriculum modifications to address unemployment among school leavers. This study sought to examine the extent to which the secondary school system in Cameroon equips students for employment. While existing literature addresses aspects of skills mismatch, there is a remarkable scarcity of research focusing on this issue from the perspectives of secondary school students and other educational stakeholders within Cameroon (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1). To effectively address the skills mismatch, it was essential to capture and analyse the diverse viewpoints of the participants involved.

6.5 Generalisability of Findings

The potential to make generalisations from research findings according to Ercikan and Roth (2014) is a crucial factor in evaluating the value and importance of research. However, Ercikan, and Roth (2014) observe that restricted perceptions on generalisation in educational research, typically associated with the representativeness and scale of samples involving students, schools, and other settings, may result in misunderstandings. These misunderstandings could be interpreted or imply that studies with larger samples (quantitative studies) are intrinsically more generalisable in comparison with those utilising smaller samples, such as qualitative studies (Ercikan, and Roth, 2014). Such viewpoints often fail to recognise the underlying drawbacks of these generalisations in informing policy and practice effectively.

As defined by Vogt (2005), generalisability is the degree to which conclusions about a particular entity – usually a population can be inferred from information gathered about another entity - usually a sample (p. 131). This definition, according to Guenther and Falk (2021), highlights a controversial topic in research procedures, that frequently highlights distinctions between quantitative and qualitative methods. Consequently, the generalisability of findings from qualitative research in education is a subject of significant debate within the academic community. It is noteworthy to mention that qualitative

research fundamentally aims to explore, describe, and understand complex phenomena within specific contexts, rather than producing universally applicable results (Hays and McKibben, 2021; Sullivan and Sargeant, 2011). This methodological approach leverages in-depth case studies, interviews, focus groups, and observations to provide rich, contextualised insights into educational settings and experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Qualitative studies prioritise understanding depth and complexity above breadth, in contrast to quantitative research, that employs statistical inference to attempt and generalise results from a sample to a wider demographic (Patton, 2015). The implication is that the main objective of qualitative studies is to capture the intricacy and uniqueness of the human experience in a particular setting. This thus raises pertinent questions as regards the generalisability of qualitative research results outside of the immediate study setting.

For this reason, "transferability" rather than "generalisability" is suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a suitable benchmark for qualitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is the extent to which study findings within a specific setting may be applicable to another context, given the extent of similarity between the two. Accordingly, by presenting thorough, in-depth explanations of the study's background and participants, researchers enhance transferability and allow readers to assess how applicable the results are regarding their respective contexts. This approach thus recognises that knowledge is contingent and situational, and that educational events are intrinsically linked to the broader institutional, social, and cultural settings within which they occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Critics such as Agius (2013) nonetheless argue that the lack of generalisability in qualitative research limits its utility for informing broader educational policy and practice. This perspective overlooks the unique contributions of qualitative research. By illuminating the complexities of cases and unearthing the meanings and perceptions of participants, qualitative designs can generate meaningful insights that inform and enrich theoretical frameworks, directing future research and practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moreover, qualitative studies can identify patterns and themes that, while not statistically generalisable, offer critical perspectives on educational issues that quantitative approaches may disregard (Maxwell, 2013). It is relevant that qualitative findings often

support the development of new theories and the refinement of existing ones, providing a deeper understanding of educational phenomena (Maxwell, 2013). This theoretical contribution is crucial in education, where varying contexts and individual differences considerably influence outcomes (Yin, 2018). For instance, qualitative studies on classroom dynamics or teacher-student interactions can reveal underlying processes and mechanisms that quantitative studies might miss, thereby offering comprehensive insights that can inform practice and policy.

A key goal of this research was to capture the views and experiences of study participants in a particular setting rather than making generalisations. The findings and contributions of this research provide sufficient background information, allowing those interested in transferability to make informed judgments. As stated above, Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that transferability is equally a reader-driven process, where readers determine if the research results are applicable to their own situations. The detailed and context-specific insights generated by this research are essential for addressing the complexities inherent in educational settings. Thus, the significance of this qualitative study resides in its ability to gather and convey the experiences of those involved in education, rather than in its restricted applicability to broader populations (Stake, 2010).

The next section is an exploration of reflective practice prior to a discussion of recommendations that may impact on policy and practice, particularly, curriculum developments.

6.6 Reflective Practice

Reflective practice, from a general standpoint constitutes the thought process associated with the completion of a project or during an activity. To Mortari (2015) researchers must be able to look back deeply to be more than technicians but good researchers. In other words, they should consider not just the actual aspects of research, but rather the mental experience that shapes the significance of practice. In both private and professional life, reflection is a critical mental activity (Mortari, 2015). This means learning the art of introspection is crucial because it allows individuals to build a meaningful connection to the world and therefore obtain a more conscious perspective on their lives.

In research, reflection is a critical cognitive activity (Dahlberg, Drew, and Nyström, 2002). Reflexivity is most employed in qualitative research to justify and support research processes (Mortari, 2015). Reflexivity is a strategy that a researcher needs to engage in to make the politics of study clear, as it is mentioned in practically every qualitative research paper (Mortari, 2015). Thus, the reflective researcher, according to Hertz (1997), does not simply report the results of the study, but also examines and discusses how those outcomes are created. Typically, the intent is to ameliorate and enhance what you have done as well as to develop and to discover a whole new outlook of thinking and doing.

The motivation behind conducting this interpretative case study (as elaborated in Chapter 1 Section 1.3 and Chapter 3 Section 3.4) arises from extensive experience working as a teacher across various secondary schools and Further Education sectors within the United Kingdom. The selection of Cameroon as the case study of this investigation is rooted in personal background, having been born and educated in Cameroon and the UK. Over the course of my involvement in education, a strong curiosity has developed regarding how schools facilitate the development of students' skill sets to enhance their employability. Simultaneously, a growing awareness has emerged concerning contemporary discussions from political figures, as well as advocacy groups and employers. These discussions underscore the perceived inadequacy of young individuals in terms of their preparedness for the professional realm. This has led to a call for an increased emphasis on imparting employability skills within educational settings. Eager to explore this matter, the aim was to assess whether the secondary education system adequately supports students in acquiring these crucial employability skills or if there exists a deficiency. By gathering and analysing data from educators, students, school counsellors, and pedagogic inspectors, valuable insights have been gleaned regarding the influence of the secondary education system on equipping graduating students equipped with the skills necessary to transition effectively into the workforce.

As mentioned earlier, the integration of employability aspects into school curricula appears to have received limited attention within the context of Cameroon. Existing research has primarily concentrated on matters such as skills disparity and the necessity for vocational training (Esongo, 2017), often overlooking the incorporation of employability within the curriculum development process. This research has brought to

light significant issues pertinent to this subject. It contributes to the existing body of literature, addressing gaps, and is consistent with the original aims of the study, thereby enhancing the potential career enhancement of students.

The completion of this research project stands as a distinctive educational venture, yielding insights into the essence of research and its inherently iterative, occasionally intricate character (Newby, 2014). It becomes evident, for instance, that not all phenomena lend themselves to straightforward categorisation, and research can alternate between moments of profound gratification and excitement. This research undertaking has generated substantial insights into how secondary educational institutions support the acquisition and development of students' skills, while also providing indications of potential areas for future curriculum development. The findings have prompted further consideration of the role that schools and other educational stakeholders play in facilitating this process, particularly in relation to the potential implications for students as they transition beyond the school system. Furthermore, the methodological approach adopted in this study has stimulated critical reflection on my own teaching practice within the broader educational context. This reflective process has generated useful insights that may contribute to the refinement of existing benchmarks for skills acquisition and development and inform future approaches to curriculum design and pedagogical practice.

Prior to examining the implications arising from this study, it is important to consider the role of reflective practice within the research process. Reflection is an integral component of both educational practice and research, enabling educators and researchers to critically examine their experiences, assumptions, decisions, and practices. It can therefore be argued that educators and researchers engage to varying degrees, in reflective processes as they navigate their professional practice and undertake research. Reflection, as conceptualised by Cole and Masny (2012), embodies the reciprocal interaction between an individual's influence and being influenced. This ongoing process revolves around self and encompasses a diverse spectrum of human interactions (Mann, 2016). Importantly, reflexivity extends beyond this notion by examining how researchers impact their own investigations. Consequently, a lack of reflective consideration may

undermine the development of initial research questions, the integration of newly obtained data, and the assessment of complex arguments (Mann, 2016).

Participation in this study has offered the researcher an important opportunity for learning. It has contributed to in-depth appreciation of the research landscape and the iterative, sometimes complex characteristics of the research process (Whitehead, 2016). By acknowledging and embracing the inherent messiness of the research process (Newby, 2014), I have come to recognise the value of sharing written drafts with supervisors. This collaborative approach has allowed for external involvement, allowing for the refinement and progression of research narratives. Such collaborative engagement has not only enriched the educational learning paradigm but has also disseminated the influence of principles that have favourable prospects for societal development.

This research has also generated valuable insights that have been instrumental in critically evaluating my existing professional principles and establishing benchmarks for potential future developments in practice, particularly in relation to supporting students in acquiring skills that enhance their employability. Beyond the specific research questions addressed in this study, I intend to explore employers' perspectives on the competencies of newly recruited employees in future research. This intention has arisen from a growing awareness of the potential influence of employers' perspectives on curriculum development and the extent to which educational provision can respond effectively to the skills and competencies required within the workplace.

Simultaneously, the research has encouraged a deeper exploration of how school systems and educators facilitate the development and acquisition of skills within the classroom. Examining stakeholders' attitudes and perceptions of their roles and contributions has highlighted the potential significance of professional recognition in shaping engagement, job satisfaction, and opportunities for professional development. These insights have prompted further consideration of how educational environments might be structured to promote greater recognition, support, and empowerment among those involved in the learning process. Moreover, the research approach has enabled me to critically examine my own teaching context in relation to the broader educational landscape. This reflexive process has broadened my understanding of the contextual factors that shape skills

development and has provided a foundation for considering how the quality and effectiveness of skills development might be enhanced within my own professional practice.

Indeed, Rabey (2008) argues that secondary schools could play a crucial role in preparing students for the world of work by placing greater emphasis on areas such as organisational dynamics, interpersonal communication, teamwork, and goal setting. This perspective suggests that educational settings can provide students with opportunities to explore their interpersonal needs, interests, and capabilities in ways that align with their future career aspirations. Such an approach may facilitate an earlier and more meaningful engagement with the expectations and complexities of the workplace. Furthermore, the provision of effective careers guidance can encourage students to consider pathways into further education while simultaneously supporting the development of skills and competencies valued by prospective employers (Rabey, 2008).

6.7 Recommendations

This study identified a central theme concerning the skills mismatch, as detailed in Chapter 4, Section 4.7. The primary objective was to examine the extent to which the secondary education system equipped students with the skills necessary for employment. Previous research had demonstrated that school leavers lacked the skills necessary for employment (Perry and Wallace, 2012), prompting the researcher to investigate the issue and offer suggestions. The continued professional development of school leavers after they have been hired, to keep their skills updated and relevant with changes in workplaces and the advent of newer technologies, is a demand side issue of the skills gap (See Chapter 3 section 3.4). More research is required to mirror its focus on exploring more of the supply side element of the skills gap.

The findings in this study (Chapter 5, Section 5.9) indicated that the secondary school curriculum and its content should be aligned with contemporary industrial needs and challenges, reflecting the demands of the modern economy and labour market. Consequently, students require a curriculum that challenges them not only in terms of subject matter but also in the development of skills relevant to the workplace, as

suggested by the data (see Chapter 5, Section 5.9). While this study did not examine the skill requirements of other organisations and employers across the public and private sectors, existing literature and the collected data (see Chapter 3, Sections 3.4, 3.5, 3.5.1) indicate that the current secondary education system is unlikely to prepare school leavers adequately for employment demands. Therefore, in addition to curriculum revision, it is necessary to establish mechanisms that actively support students in acquiring these skills, as evidenced by the findings presented in this study (Chapter 5, Section 5.9).

The findings in this study (Chapter 5, Section 5.9) indicated that more flexible and dynamic skills and education strategies are required to allow for the modification of skills provision to constantly shifting demands and to ensuring that students are fully prepared; being more robust and can learn to acquire and deploy their adaptive capabilities more efficiently. Participants proposed strategies such as revising the curriculum to more effectively match the specific needs of the country, rather than adopting curricula designed abroad (T1). Furthermore, although participants recognised the government's efforts to promote partnerships between employers and schools, as well as the shift from an objective-focused curriculum to one centred on competencies, they also noted that this transition might be gradual and extended (P3). Another strategy relates to enhancing teachers' standards through additional training to better meet students' needs (C1) as well as improving the level of technology in the education sector to enable schools to improve teaching methods to enable students to learn quickly (P3).

The findings in this study (Chapter 5, Section 5.9) suggested that students should explore government-provided opportunities in technical education, effectively utilising the available programmes, materials, and resources. This approach aims to foster their interest in practical hands-on practice and develop technical skills in their specific specialisations, ultimately enabling them to become self-sufficient and innovative in the job market. Findings in this research (Chapter 5, Section 5.9) aligned with those of other researchers, for example Horn (2006), that employers who are the final recipients of employees should be encouraged by the government to provide the industrial setting and resources for students on internships to enable knowledge and skill transfer in real-world settings. Employers might consider allocating resources to bursaries and research

initiatives aimed at encouraging young Cameroonians to engage more actively in the nation's economic and technological development. According to the literature and indicated in the findings in this study (Chapter 5, Section 5.9), doing this would have the benefit of improving the performance of learners in relation to skills acquisition. Additionally, teachers need to understand the industry's specialised capabilities to impart this knowledge to students in this process (Chapter 5, Section 5.9). To do this, teachers could be offered opportunities during a teaching term to visit and/or spend time in industry; thus, enabling them to develop teaching, learning and that reflected current trends in industry (Desimone et al. 2006; Steyn 2011). Corporations in both the private and governmental sectors, on the other hand, could support the creation of vocational education curricula and texts in schools. This may help to alleviate the country's youth unemployment problem.

6.8 Opportunities for Future Research

The persistent gap between secondary education and the labour market has raised significant concerns among policymakers, educators, and employers, primarily because of its implications for productivity, employability, and overall economic development. Moreover, skills mismatch exists where the skills offered by the education system fail to match the skills demanded by employers, resulting in skills underutilisation and barriers to labour market entry (Brunello et al., 2021). Research continues to show that secondary leavers leave the Cameroonian secondary education system with limited skills that can be utilised for employability (Ndille, 2016; Essongo, 2017). This supply-side deficit reflects the mismatch between the secondary school curricula and the competences required by the labour market, like problem-solving, communication, and flexibility.

While inadequate educational preparation contributes to the issue, it is also crucial to recognise that demand-side factors play a significant role in the continued existence of skills gaps. Indeed, modern workplaces are shaped by an increase in digitalisation, automation, and utilisation of emerging technologies, which require employees to continuously refresh their skills through formal and informal professional development training (Morandini et al., 2023). Employers increasingly expect new employees to accept evolving job requirements, but on occasion, organisations also contribute to the

mismatch through too rigid recruitment criteria or neglecting to invest in well-designed continuous professional development (CPD) (Marginson et al., 2023).

A significant gap in the existing literature concerns the limited attention given to the demand side of skills development. Much of the research, including the present study, has focused predominantly on the supply side by examining the extent to which secondary schools prepare students for the world of work. While this perspective provides valuable insights into the provision and development of employability skills, comparatively limited attention has been given to the perspectives of employers. There remains a need for systematic engagement with employers across both the public and private sectors to identify the skills and competencies they require and to assess the extent to which school leavers meet these expectations (McGuinness et al., 2018). Without incorporating both supply- and demand-side perspectives, understanding of the nature and extent of potential skills mismatches remains incomplete.

Prioritising placing the skills mismatch on the research agenda is justified on several grounds. Firstly, it is addressing an economically and socially significant issue by directly engaging with marrying educational outcomes and labour market demand. Secondly, it is highlighting the need to reconcile supply-side knowledge of students' readiness with demand-side information from employers to inform evidence-based policy and curriculum reform. Ultimately, these studies provide understandings that can guide the development of interventions, including work-based learning opportunities, apprenticeships, and continuing professional development programs. Such initiatives aim to improve the employability of school leavers while simultaneously contributing to more efficient labour markets and increased organisational productivity (Quintini, 2011; McGuinness et al., 2018). By positioning studies at the interface between education and work, future research can provide practical recommendations that facilitate workforce preparedness, reduced unemployment, and sustained economic growth.

6.9 Reporting and Dissemination

In addition to the technical requirements of methodology and design, Taylor (2020) contends that there is a third part of research work - distribution or dissemination.

Writing a dissertation, writing for publication, or giving presentations at professional workshops or conferences are some of the most common ways to disseminate new knowledge gained through research and thought (Taylor, 2020). This section makes the case that research dissemination, as opposed to concluding or shutting up the research procedure, could open fresh avenues for discourse, inspire broader participation, and bring about change (Carruthers, 2020). Research dissemination simply entails delivering your research's outcomes to the individuals who can use them in maximising the research's potential benefits as quickly as practical. Without reaching the persons who want to use it, research is useless (Carruthers, 2020).

Ensuring that research penetrates the profession, and that the profession can inform the research agenda is one of the constraints of dissemination of research, particularly research relating to new technologies in education (Multisilta, 2014). Simultaneously, there is a rising belief that the education profession ought to be more evidence-based and draw from verifiable good practice and educational research and teachers at all levels of education, should be aware of this. Yet, Multisilta (2014) adds that research needs to be carefully interpreted and implemented since teaching and learning occur in contexts that are increasingly becoming more complex across numerous systems. As a result, the process of disseminating information might be seen as an open educational setting where both researchers and recipients of educational research could understand more about everyone else's goals and the shortcomings and depths of their own study (Multisilta, 2014). Biesta (2007) asserts that educational research is not solely an investigation of education; it often intersects with educational practice to some extent. He acknowledges, however, that various approaches exist to bridge the gap between research and practice. Scholars engaging with this issue, such as Burkhardt and Schoenfeld (2003) and McIntyre (2005), generally advocate for a more transparent relationship and enhanced communication between these domains. While recent studies indicate a trend toward greater integration, historical evidence suggests that educators have rarely used research findings directly (Penuel et al., 2017). As an illustration, educational researchers have promoted inquiry methods emphasising collaborative creation and the gradual dissemination of knowledge to address challenges in information exchange (Zeichner et al., 2015). Additionally, design-based research and design-based implementation research

are further examples of this evolving practice (McKenney and Reeves, 2019). During the continuous formulation and construction of long-lasting responses to real-world challenges, these strategies generate new knowledge and allow cooperative partnerships between researchers and education professionals (Stosich et al., 2017).

Scholars and researchers are expressly and implicitly urged to convey their findings in methods that are distinctive to their fields. Author (2019a) posits that the foundation of our academic legitimacy is that we predict and repeat traditional formats; they maintain the academic wheels spinning. The proactive task of application of knowledge to practice, policy, or humans, is sometimes considered as residing outside the process of research because conventional methods of distribution are oriented at an academic audience (Keen and Todres, 2007). Evans (2016) notes the relative scarcity of critical literature on dissemination, despite its growing integration into contemporary discussions of research impact. Traditional dissemination methods tend to rely on technical-rational frameworks grounded in positivist conceptions of social reality (Barnes et al., 2003). Such approaches appear misaligned with the complexities and contradictions highlighted within qualitative methodologies.

From a personal standpoint, bringing together the various skills and passions in the broader educational field and other sectors could impact policies and practices. This study stresses the importance of in-depth qualitative data reflecting the perspectives of teachers, students, and administrators. Existing literature has extensively documented the reasons why the secondary education system inadequately prepares students for effective employment. While a wealth of research addresses skill mismatches and youth unemployment, there remains a significant void regarding the examination of policy implementation, practical approaches, and curriculum development (Cedefop, 2015). This implies that it is challenging to evaluate what works well and what does not in efforts to bridge the skills mismatch policy. By undertaking this research, the primary objective was to seek to close this knowledge gap. This has thus, increased knowledge of the issues surrounding educational stakeholders' experiences, as well as enhance my knowledge of research methodologies and the application of research methods.

This research has provided an opportunity to engage with administrators at the Ministry of Secondary Education and principals of secondary schools regarding the ongoing issue of youth unemployment in the country, and such dialogue is expected to continue. It is also planned to disseminate the research findings to a broader audience. In collaboration with my supervisor, I have been exploring the potential for publishing portions of this work in appropriate educational journals. The findings of this research give comparable investigations such as Esongo (2017); Mobit and Mbella, (2016) and McGrath (2020) fresh understanding and perspective; through their interpretation, the emerging themes and outcomes shed light on the problems with the secondary school system and contribute to our understanding of what changes are urgently needed. It reflects the government of Cameroon's 2010 vision through the Strategy for Growth and Employment (DSCE) which identified youth unemployment and low productivity among other factors as the main obstacles to the country's development. The country can provide better employment possibilities for its youth, while also contributing to closing the income disparity by equipping young Cameroonians with high-quality skills that address the requirements of today's workforce.

6.10 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the primary themes identified through the research that are related to the research questions. Additionally, the background and rationale, along with the goals, objectives, and research questions, were addressed in Chapter 1. The chapter has also discussed how established themes from the study add to the body of information currently in existence, as well as the limitations of interpretations and implications for future investigation (section). It has provided some thought on how this study could impact future secondary school curriculum development, as well as the wider research community. The chapter has also discussed the research results in relation to the research questions and provided suggestions for how the secondary school system might better serve the educational needs of students (Chapter 6 section 6.1.2). Despite the conviction regarding the importance of this study and its potential to affect both external parties and the researcher, it is acknowledged that the final judgment regarding its value will ultimately be made by others.

As anticipated, the secondary school sector continues to be a dynamic field that seeks to accommodate a diverse student population. Government policies, including Vision 2035, outline the Cameroonian government's strategic objectives for national growth and development, highlighting the transformation of the country into an emerging economy by 2035. It is also the long-term mainstay for the government's poverty reduction strategy, which prioritises employment. The vision labelled the Strategy for Growth and Employment (DSCE), which was completed in 2010, identifies joblessness and low growth as critical problems for the nation's progress, among other things. Although the DSCE specified an aspirational goal to invest in skills development and reduce underemployment from 76 percent of the workforce to 50 percent by 2020 by creating tens of thousands of formal jobs, evidence after two years of its implementation suggested that the DSCE was far from meeting this objective (Sosale and Majgaard, 2016). For example, approximately 90% of Cameroonian employees are underemployed or working in informal employment while only about 5% or 6% work in the formal sector, and the business environment disincentivises self-employment (Sosale and Majgaard, 2016).

The complex and situation-specific factors underlying curriculum development, skill acquisition, and youth unemployment in Cameroon have been clarified by this thesis. The research emphasises the structural, institutional, and sociocultural factors that mediate this link rather than demonstrating a direct causal relationship between reforming the curriculum and employment. It shows that although curriculum changes towards competence-based approaches may have promise, their effectiveness is contingent upon significant stakeholder involvement, adequate resources, and alignment with the needs of the domestic and international employment markets. The results imply that a redesign of the education-to-employment pathway is necessary for long-term solutions to young unemployment, one that transcends technological changes to address more fundamental systemic problems of equity, governance, and economic opportunity. By providing concrete understanding into the challenges of turning policy into practice in environments with limited resources, this study adds to the broader conversation on education reform in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval



Life Sciences and Education

ETHICAL APPROVAL FEEDBACK

Researcher name:	Ernest Nkmata
Title of Study:	Skills Acquisition in Cameroon: How well does the Secondary School Curriculum Equip School Leavers for Employment?
Status of approval:	Approved

Thank you for addressing the committee's comments. Your research proposal has now been approved by the Ethics Panel and you may commence the implementation phase of your study. You should note that any divergence from the approved procedures and research method will invalidate any insurance and liability cover from the University. You should, therefore, notify the Panel of any significant divergence from this approved proposal.

You should arrange to meet with your supervisor for support during the process of completing your study and writing your dissertation.

When your study is complete, please send the ethics committee an end of study report. A template can be found on the ethics BlackBoard site.



Signed: Prof. Roozbeh Naemi **Date:** **27.04.2020**

Ethics Coordinator
School of Life Sciences and Education

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet – Questionnaire

SKILLS ACQUISITION IN CAMEROON: HOW WELL DOES THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM EQUIP SCHOOL LEAVERS FOR EMPLOYMENT?

INVESTIGATOR:

Ernest Nkamta, PhD Student, School of Life Sciences and Education, Staffordshire University, College Road, University Quarter, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 2DE, UK, Email: n025896i@student.staffs.ac.uk.

BACKGROUND

You are being invited to take part in a research study. This sheet gives you information about the study to help you decide if you would like to take part. Please take the time to read the information carefully, talk about it with others if you would like to, and decide if you would like to take part.

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

What is the study about?

I am exploring the perspectives of stakeholders in education for developing a broad-based curriculum which incorporates vocational studies at the secondary school level. The aims of my study are: to find out the ways in which vocational training can be integrated in the curriculum of secondary schools to improve the acquisition of employability skills by students; and the relationship between curriculum development and vocational education. Although youth unemployment is an issue of international concern in most developing countries, this research study, will not aim to generalise its findings but will rather focus in meeting the objectives of the study in the context of Cameroon. As such, it is hoped that the recommendations arrived at will act as a valuable source of new knowledge that will go a long way to enable curriculum developers to construct a clear philosophy for education. Additionally, it is expected that other countries will be able to relate the findings to suit their own context where unemployment is of critical concern to governments. Further, it is anticipated that the research findings will not only enhance the diversification of the curriculum but will contribute towards the process of educational renewal which is governed by determinants within the society as a means of addressing technical or philosophical flaws in the educational system of Cameroon.

For this, I would like to conduct interviews with selected administrators at the Ministry of Secondary Education, Regional Education Delegates and administer questionnaires to secondary school students and teachers in Cameroon.

Why have I been chosen?

I have studied published documents and have informal discussions with people in Cameroon and you are among those identified to be in a better position to participate.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is optional. If you choose to take part, you will sign a consent form and keep a copy of this information sheet for your record.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I will book an appointment with the head teacher of your school and your teacher who will inform you about the date to complete a questionnaire. It will last for about an hour. Apart from signing the consent form, you will not be asked to do anything different from normal.

What are the advantages of taking part?

In my study, I find out your opinions and views on some important issues concerning the types of knowledge and skills current secondary students in Cameroon students and school leavers need from the curriculum to enhance their working life. Even if you do not get any direct personal benefits, your involvement may help curriculum developers in Cameroon on how future curriculum can be improved.

Are there disadvantages to taking part?

I do not know of any disadvantages.

How else will you guarantee confidentiality?

I will take care to respect your confidentiality throughout the project. I shall use code numbers for the participants and none of the participants will be quoted by name in all future documents. All the information I collect – consent forms, recordings, and so on – will be stored carefully.

What if I have a complaint about the study?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, I will do my best to answer your questions. If you are not satisfied, I will refer you to my relevant university contacts.

What will happen after I have completed the questionnaire?

I will analyse the data and present the findings in my thesis.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

I will report the results in my thesis.

Who is organising and paying for the study?

I am the only investigator of the project, self-funded and will not pay those who accept to participate in this study.

How long will the data be stored?

All the information I collect – consent forms, recordings, and so on – will be stored securely electronically. Research Data will be preserved and accessible for ten years in line with the University's policy regarding how long data are stored.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

If you have questions about the study, e-mail me at n025896i@student.staffs.ac.uk. If you have any questions about your participation in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact my supervisor at l.b.machin@staffs.ac.uk or 0044 17822 94166.

The research has been approved by the appropriate Ethics Committee at Staffordshire University and strictly adheres to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines.

At Staffordshire University, we are committed to protecting personal data. We have taken steps to comply with The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) - a new EU legal framework for data protection which applies to all member states from 25 May 2018.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet. With your acceptance I will contact you later to decide a suitable date and time to complete questionnaires.

Nottingham, 3rd March 2020

Appendix 3: Assent Form

SKILLS ACQUISITION IN CAMEROON: HOW WELL DOES THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM EQUIP SCHOOL LEAVERS FOR EMPLOYMENT?

Assent Form

My name is Ernest Nkamta. I am a PhD Student at the School of Education, Staffordshire University, College Road, University Quarter, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 2DE, UK. I am inviting you to participate in a research study about Skills Acquisition. Your parent(s) know we are talking with you about the study. This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether you want to take part in it.

What is the key information about this research study?

The purpose of this study is to find out the ways in which employability skills can be integrated in the curriculum of secondary schools to improve the acquisition of employability skills by students. You will be asked to complete a questionnaire. I expect that you will be in this research study for one hour. The main benefit of participation in my study is that, I will find out your opinions and views on some important issues concerning the types of knowledge and skills current secondary students need from the curriculum to enable them to gain employment.

Why is this study being done?
You are being asked to take part in the study because you are in your final year of school and would have familiarity with the curriculum delivered.

What do I need to do?
If you decide to be in the study, I will book an appointment with the head teacher of your school and your teacher who will inform you about the date to complete a questionnaire. Apart from signing the consent form, you will not be asked to do anything different from normal.

What are the benefits to me?
Taking part in this study may not have direct benefits to you, but it will help me learn about how well the secondary school curriculum equips students for employment upon completion of school.

Are there any risks to me if I decide to be involved in this study?
There are no foreseeable risks.

How will my information be protected?
Your responses will be anonymous. You will be assigned ID numbers during the study and pseudonyms during reporting of the data, and your personal information will only be

accessed by myself. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be used.

Do I have to be in the study?

No, you don't. The choice is yours. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. No one will get angry or upset if you don't want to do this. And you can change your mind anytime if you decide you don't want to be in the study anymore.

Do I get anything in return for participating in this study?

I am the only investigator of the project, self-funded and will not pay those who accept to participate in this study.

What if I have questions?

If you have questions about the study, you can ask me now or anytime during the study. You can also
e-mail me at n025896i@student.staffs.ac.uk. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact my university's graduate school at graduateschool@staffs.ac.uk. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

I give my consent for my data to be processed in accordance with the GDPR. **Yes** ☐ **No** ☐

Signing below means that you have read this form and that you are willing to be in this study.

Name of the Participant _____

Signature of the Participant _____

Date:_____

Appendix 4: Parental Consent

SKILLS ACQUISITION IN CAMEROON: HOW WELL DOES THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM EQUIP SCHOOL LEAVERS FOR EMPLOYMENT?

Parental Consent

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE:

Dear Parent

My name is Ernest Nkamta. I am a PhD Student at the School of Education, Staffordshire University, College Road, University Quarter, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 2DE, UK. I am conducting a research study on skills acquisition in Cameroon. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information that will help you decide if you will give consent for your child to participate in this research.

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH STUDY:
The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether you want your child to be a part of this study. Information that is more detailed is listed later on in this form.

STUDY PURPOSE:
The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of stakeholders in education for developing a broad-based curriculum which incorporates vocational studies at the secondary school level. The aims of my study are: to find out the ways in which vocational training can be integrated in the curriculum of secondary schools to improve the acquisition of employability skills by students; and the relationship between curriculum development and vocational education. Although youth unemployment is an issue of international concern in most developing countries, this research study, will not aim to generalise its findings but will rather focus in meeting the objectives of the study in the context of Cameroon. As such, it is hoped that the recommendations arrived at will act as a valuable source of new knowledge that will go a long way to enable curriculum developers to construct a clear philosophy for education. Additionally, it is expected that other countries will be able to relate the findings to suit their own context where unemployment is of critical concern to governments. Further, it is anticipated that the research findings will not only enhance the diversification of the curriculum but will contribute towards the process of educational renewal which is governed by determinants within the society as a means of addressing technical or philosophical flaws in the educational system of Cameroon.

For this, I would like to conduct interviews with selected administrators at the Ministry of Secondary Education, Regional Education Delegates and administer questionnaires to secondary school students and teachers in Cameroon.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS:
If you agree to participate, your child will be one of 200 participants who will be participating in this research.

PROCEDURES FOR THE STUDY:
If you agree for your child to participate in the study, she or he will complete a questionnaire.

RISKS AND INCONVENIENCES:
There are no foreseeable risks and inconveniences to participating in this study.

SAFEGUARDS:
The child can skip any questions that he or she feels uncomfortable answering while taking the survey.

CONFIDENTIALITY:
Your child's responses will be anonymous. Participants will be assigned ID numbers during the study and/or there is no master list with participants' personal information.

The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your child's name will not be used. Data will be stored locked cabinets, password protected computer. The researcher will have access to the data the data will be retained up to 10 years after the project is completed. The data will be disposed (e.g. the paper records will be shredded, the digital files will be erased).

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:
Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline participation at any time. You may also withdraw your child from the study at any time; there will be no penalty. It will not affect your child's grade.

BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THE STUDY:
Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation may help curriculum developers in Cameroon on how future curriculum can be improved and the study will contribute to educational research.

PAYMENT OR INCENTIVE:
I am the only investigator of the project, self-funded and will not pay those who accept to participate in this study.

CONTACT INFORMATION:
If you have questions about the study, e-mail me at n025896i@student.staffs.ac.uk. If you have any questions about your child's rights as a participant in this research or if you feel your child has been placed at risk, you can contact my supervisor at l.b.machin@staffs.ac.uk or 0044 17822 94166.

PARENT'S CONSENT:
By signing below, you are giving consent for your child to participate in the above study.

☐ I give permission for my child to complete the questionnaire.
☐ I do not give permission for my child to complete the questionnaire.
☐ I give consent for my child's data to be processed in accordance with the GDPR

Your child's name: _____

Parent's name: _____

Parent's Signature: _____

Date:_____

Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form



SKILLS ACQUISITION IN CAMEROON: HOW WELL DOES THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM EQUIP SCHOOL LEAVERS FOR EMPLOYMENT?

INVESTIGATOR:
Ernest Nkamta, PhD Student, School of Education, Staffordshire University, College Road, University Quarter, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 2DE, UK,
Email: n025896i@student.staffs.ac.uk.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Organisation/Department: ……

Respondent No. ……..

- ☐ I have read the Information Sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and I understand the nature and purpose of the research.
- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
- ☐ I understand that the interview will be audio taped
- ☐ I understand that information gained during the study will be presented in an academic thesis, journal article and conference presentations and will include the use of anonymous direct quotations. I understand I will not be identified, and my personal details will remain confidential
- ☐ I understand that Ernest Nkamta, supervisors and PhD examiners at the School of Life Sciences and Education at Staffordshire University, UK will have access to the recordings and transcripts without their being edited. I understand that in all circumstances administrative and research staff seeing the data will do so under strict confidentiality conditions
- ☐ I agree to take part in the above study

Name of Participant: …….

Signature …….. Date ……

Name of Principal Investigator: ……

Signature …….. Date ……

Appendix 6: Stakeholder interview schedule and guidelines

Stakeholder interview schedule and guidelines
SKILLS ACQUISITION IN CAMEROON: HOW WELL DOES THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM EQUIP SCHOOL LEAVERS FOR EMPLOYMENT?

A series of face-to-face interviews will be held between …….. and ……. Each interview will last approximately between 30 - 45 minutes. Care will be taken to ensure a balance of views and experiences by involving a selection of administrators at the Ministry of Secondary Education. I am greatly indebted to all participants who will share their views and experiences.
An interview schedule of semi-structured/open questions will be used for all interviews: a copy is provided below. Interviewees will have the opportunity to reflect on the set questions - sent in advance. These will be approved by my supervisors.
It is expected that participants will give detailed and considered responses, as well as provide some examples of emerging good or interesting policies and practices at a national and regional levels. All quotes that will be outlined in the final thesis will be anonymised, though an indication of the organisation may be made explicit.

Background

I am currently studying for a PhD in Education at the Staffordshire University; UK and I am passionate and committed in identifying key issues in the curriculum that has resulted to youth unemployment in Cameroon.
The key questions of my research are:
1. What is the perception of current school pupils (Form 5, 15-16-year olds) on the types of knowledge and skills they need from the curriculum to gain employment?
2. What is the relationship between curriculum development and vocational education from participants‟ perspectives?
3. How can employability skills be integrated in the curriculum of schools in Cameroon to improve employability skills for students?
The research study is based on analysis of published documents and interviews with representative stakeholders in education on how to improve on the future curriculum that will make secondary education not only a solid foundation for tertiary education but also serve as a credible foundation with which students can face the challenges of today's job market.
You are formally invited to contribute to the research study by participating in a key stakeholder interview with myself.

Thematic areas for exploration include: -

Q1. What in your view is the cause for the high youth unemployment rate in the country?
Q2. How can arrangements be improved between the Ministry of Secondary Education to create effective mechanisms for employers to connect with schools?
Q3. What support do employers want from the Ministry of Secondary Education and what do you think your Ministry can offer employers?
Q4. Who is responsible for curriculum development in your Ministry?
Q5. Please explain how the curriculum is disseminated, implemented and evaluated?

Q6. Do curriculum developers get some input from?
• Students;
• Teachers;
• Careers advisers;
• School Governors/Parents'-Teachers' Association;
• Head teachers/Principals?
Q7. What is the potential, if any, of the Ministry's sphere of influence with employers and schools?
• In the curriculum
• In the use of labour market information
• In developing ICT and innovative policies and practices
• In supporting destinations of young people
• Other, please specify and elaborate.
Q8. What skills do you think school leavers need from the curriculum to help them find and stay employment?

Other additional comments or observations.....

Appendix 7: Questionnaire on Skills Acquisition

Purpose of questionnaire:

The aim of this questionnaire is to find out your opinions and views on some important issues concerning the types of knowledge and skills current students and school leavers need from the curriculum to enhance their working life.

Your responses will be very useful to my PhD project which seeks to explore the perspectives of stakeholders in education and school-leavers for developing a broad-based curriculum which incorporates vocational studies at the secondary school level.

How anonymity is protected:

This is an anonymous questionnaire. **Please do not include your name anywhere on the questionnaire.**

This questionnaire has been broadly distributed to various secondary schools in Cameroon. Should you choose to respond, your questionnaire will be one of many received. To help maintain your anonymity, **please return the questionnaire to the researcher.**

Informed consent:

Participation in this project is voluntary. Completion of the questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in this research. This project conforms to British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines and has been sanctioned by the UK University's Ethics Committee.

Staffordshire University are committed to protecting personal data. Steps have been taken to comply with The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) - a new EU legal framework for data protection which applies to all member states from 25 May 2018.

Thank you in anticipation for your help.

A Questionnaire on Skills Acquisition

This survey not take long to complete

Section 1: Demographics

Please circle the appropriate response

1. Age Group: 14 - 21 Above 21

2. Sex: M / F Other:

3. What form are you in school?

……
……

4. What subject combinations are you studying at the moment?

4. What were the main reasons for choosing the above subject combinations?

Please number the most important answer: Number 1 being the most important, number 2 being the second most important and so on.

My parents advised me	☐
Teacher's recommendation	☐
I enjoy the subjects at school	☐
For university	☐
Skills and knowledge are useful for employment	☐
My friend(s) recommended	☐
Advice from student careers	☐
Pass rate is always high	☐

5. Do you have a career path you intend to follow when you complete secondary/high school?

☐

Yes

No ☐

If yes, please give details:

……

……

……

……

Section 2: Employability Skills

The purpose of this section is to help develop a clearer understanding of what is meant by 'employability skills' and to ascertain those which I believe are the most important in order to meet the needs of employers and the aspirations of learners.

Instructions
Please consider the following statements and score each 1,2,3,or 4 by writing in the box the number according to the level of importance you attribute to this skill/characteristic, with 1=most important and 4= least important/not important.

6. _____

A person is more suitable for employment/promotion if they:	
• Show a willingness to learn	
• Have relevant vocational skills and knowledge	
• Are punctual	
• Can work on their own initiative	
• Can learn from their mistakes	
• Show a positive attitude to the work	
• Can work co-operatively with others	
• Can read and understand information	
• Are able to follow instructions	

• Present themselves appropriately (dress, language etc)	
• Are able to understand and use numbers	
• Relate to customers	
• Are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses	
• Want to improve	
• Can plan and organise	
• Can influence others	
• Are reliable	
• Show enthusiasm	
• Others – Please specify	
•	
•	

7. Please consider the following statements and score by ticking the 6 skills/characteristics you consider most important

• Show a willingness to learn	
• Have relevant vocational skills and knowledge	
• Are punctual	
• Can work on their own initiative	
• Show that they are hard-working	
• Can learn from their mistakes	
• Show a positive attitude to the work	
• Can work co-operatively with others	
• Can read and understand information	
• Are able to follow instructions	
• Present themselves appropriately (dress, language etc|)	
• Are able to understand and use numbers	
• Relate to customers	
• Are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses	
• Want to improve	
• Can plan and organise	

• Can influence others	
• Are reliable	
• Show enthusiasm	

Section 3: Current Employment

1. Are you currently involved in any work? Paid, unpaid, voluntary (please tick)

   Yes ☐

   No ☐

2. Please indicate on what basis you are **employed** in your current role(s) by ticking the appropriate box:

☐ Full time

☐ Part time → Please indicate hours *per week* _____

☐ Casual → Please indicate hours *per week* _____

3. Where are you based in your work role(s)?

   ……
   ……

4. **Please give the number of hours spent in work**

Shop _____

Government employer (please specify) _____

Your current school/place of study _____

Non-profit organisation e.g. NGO (please specify) _____

Bank _____

Family company/business _____

Hospital: Private/Public _____

Other (please specify) _____

For the Employed

Is this your first job since finishing school?

Yes ☐

No ☐

What full time jobs have you had, what duration were you employed for, and what was the reason for leaving the job?

Job Description:

……

……

……

……

Duration of employment:

……
……

Reason for leaving:
……

……

……

……....

Those seeking employment

Have you had any employment in the past?

Yes ☐

No ☐

How long have you been looking for work?

……..

Which sector do you want to work in?

Public ☐ Private ☐ Other ☐

(Specify)……

Any sector, I just want a job ☐

Why do you want to work in this sector?

……

……

……

……

Section 4: Job Skills

How useful is/will your subject combinations (specialisation) at school help you to find work? Please tick in order of importance. Please tick.

	Not at all	**Not useful**	**Useful**	**Very useful**	**Don't know**
Subject Combination					

How useful do you think these general skills are/were for helping you to get a good job? Please tick.

	Not at all	**Not useful**	**Useful**	**Very useful**	**Don't know**
Skills					
Communication Skills					
Leadership Skills					
Job Specific Skills					
Analytical					

Skills					
Foreign Language Skills					
Team Work Skills					
Negotiation Skills					
Information and Technology (ICT) Skills					
Other Skills (please specify)					

What specific difficulties did/do you have in your search for employment? **Please tick**

Statements	***Problem***	***Not a Problem***
I don't have enough experience		
There aren't any jobs where I live		
There aren't enough jobs for people with my specialisation		
I couldn't get a public sector job and my family did/do not want me to work for the private sector		
My family didn't /do not want me to accept the job I was/have been offered		
Religious factors prohibit me from taking the job I have been/was in my specialisation		
My family does not/did not help me to find a job because they are not educated		
I am restricted by cultural and social perception about my tribe		

My family does not/did not want me to work abroad		
There are too many school leavers with my specialisation		

What methods did/do you use to search a job? Please tick Yes/No

Method	**Yes**	**No**
Attended job fair		
Help from family		
Visit employment agencies		
Volunteer		
Applied for jobs abroad		
Assistance from company I did part-time work while studying		
Responded to advert		
Help from friends		
Visited private employment agencies		
Help from the Ministry of Youths and Employment		
Other (please specify)		

If you are employed, which of the above methods did you use to secure the job?

……..... Not Applicable ☐

Did/do you receive any formal or informal career guidance at school?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, what kind of career guidance did/do you receive?

……

……

……

……

How useful do you think this career guidance is/was that you receive(d) in your school?

Not at all Know ☐ Not Useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very useful ☐ Don't ☐

When did you start looking for work?

Haven't yet started ☐

Before finishing school ☐

After finishing school ☐

Section 5: Family Employment – paid, unpaid, voluntary

What is your parents' highest qualification?

Father…….

Mother……

Is your father currently employed?

Yes, employed ☐ No, unemployed ☐

If yes, what is his occupation?

……..

What sector does your father work in?

Public ☐ **Private** ☐ **other (please specify)……**

Is your mother currently employed?

Yes, employed ☐ No, unemployed ☐

If yes, what is her occupation?
……..

What sector does your mother work in?

Public ☐ **Private** ☐ **Other (please specify)……**

THANK YOU **for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.**

Please now return the completed questionnaire to the researcher.

Appendix 8: Teachers Questionnaire

A Questionnaire on Skills Acquisition

Purpose of questionnaire:

The aim of this questionnaire is to find out your opinions and views on some important issues concerning the types of knowledge and skills current students and school leavers need from the curriculum to enhance their working life.

Your responses will be very useful to my PhD project which seeks to explore the perspectives of stakeholders in education and school-leavers for developing a broad based curriculum which incorporates vocational studies at the secondary school level.

How anonymity is protected:

This is an anonymous questionnaire. **Please do not include your name anywhere on the questionnaire.**

This questionnaire has been broadly distributed to various secondary schools in Cameroon. Should you choose to respond, your questionnaire will be one of many received. To help maintain your anonymity, **please return the questionnaire in the unmarked envelope provided**. Once questionnaires have been received, they will be passed onto the Investigator for data entry and later analysis. Only group data will be presented and / or published.

Informed consent:

Participation in this project is voluntary. Completion of the questionnaire indicates your consent to participate in this research. This project conforms to BERA guidelines and has been sanctioned by a UK University Ethics Committee.

Please return this questionnaire in the unmarked envelope provided:

Thank you in anticipation for your help.

A Questionnaire on Skills Acquisition

This survey should take only 20-30 minutes to complete

Section 1: Demographics

Please circle the appropriate response

1. Age Group: Less than 25 Above 25

2. Sex: M / F

3. School name: .....

4. Other Responsibilities:.....

5. What subject(s) are you teaching at the moment?

.....

Section 2: Employability Skills

The purpose of this section is to help develop a clearer understanding of what is meant by 'employability skills' and to determine those which are considered most important in order to meet the needs of employers and the aspirations of learners.

Instructions
Please consider the following statements and score each 1,2,3,or 4 by writing in the box the number according to the level of importance you attribute to this skill/characteristic, with 1=most important and 4= least important/not important.

1

A person is more suitable for employment/promotion if they: **(Please tick)**	**Most Relevant**	**Least Relevant**
• Show a willingness to learn		
• Have relevant vocational skills and knowledge		
• Are punctual		
• Can work on their own initiative		
• Can learn from their mistakes		
• Show a positive attitude to the work		
• Can work co-operatively with others		
• Can read and understand information		
• Are able to follow instructions		
• Present themselves appropriately (dress, language etc)		
• Are able to understand and use numbers		
• Relate to customers		
• Are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses		
• Want to improve		
• Can plan and organise		
• Can influence others		
• Are reliable		
• Show enthusiasm		
• Other (please specify)		

2. Please consider the following statements and score by ticking the 6 skills/characteristics you consider most important

• Show a willingness to learn	
• Have relevant vocational skills and knowledge	
• Are punctual	
• Can work on their own initiative	
• Show that they are hard-working	
• Can learn from their mistakes	
• Show a positive attitude to the work	
• Can work co-operatively with others	
• Can read and understand information	
• Are able to follow instructions	
• Present themselves appropriately (dress, language etc|)	
• Are able to understand and use numbers	

• Relate to customers	
• Are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses	
• Want to improve	
• Can plan and organise	
• Can influence others	
• Are reliable	
• Show enthusiasm	
• Other (please specify)	

Section 3: Job Skills Initiatives

	Question	
1.	Describe what you are doing to help your students gain and sustain employment?	
2.	How/Why did you decide to do this? (e.g .was it your idea or school/market/employer driven or led)	
3.	Who did you consult?	
4.	How did you design your programme/activity?	
5.	What did you hope to achieve?	
6.	What results have you had in the past 2 years?	
7.	What amendments have you made in helping your students gain and sustain employment? (if any)/	

8.	What feedback have you had from students in helping them gain and sustain employment?	
9.	Have you evaluated the impact?	
10,	Which of the 'skills of employability' did this initiative/activity address?	e.g. **Core Skills** • communication • numeracy • ICT • working with others • problem solving • literacy **Soft Skills** • customer care • oral presentation • planning and organising **Personal Qualities** • punctuality • self-presentation • reliability • enthusiasm • willingness to learn **Other** (please specify)

THANK YOU **for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.**

Please now return the completed questionnaire in the unmarked provided.

Appendix 9: Transcripts

Pedagogic Inspector

Interviewer: **The first question I've got is what in your view is the cause of the high unemployment rate in Cameroon?**

Inspector: I think I should begin by introducing myself to you. My name is ……., I am the national pedagogic inspector for bilingualism - English and French in the ministry of secondary education in Cameroon. And you wanted to know about the high rate of unemployment in Cameroon?

Interviewer: **Yeah … that is because part of study is investigating how the curriculum can be developed to incorporate skills in the curriculum; there is an argument that the fact that students are unemployed some of it is to blame on the lack of skills that is why I wanted to start with..... in your view is the cause of the high unemployment rate in Cameroon?**

Inspector: Let me just go ahead; you will understand. Yes, I wanted to begin by saying that there is a high rate of unemployment in Cameroon is because the curriculum or call it syllabuses (syllabus make up the curriculum) the syllabuses which have been there for more than thirty years are already obsolete. These syllabuses were made to suit the plan of the colonial masters. After independence they had to leave Cameroon and when they wanted to leave Cameroon, they had to train leaders to take over power from them and rule the country according to the way they designed it before leaving. And when they designed these programmes, we blindly followed their program or curriculum. After we gained independence in 1960; these syllabuses were already too old. And again with the coming of ICT, Cameroon could not continue using the objective based approach curriculum and again all those who were trained following the objective based approach following the old curriculum left by the colonial master. At the beginning there were jobs. After some time the population increased exponentially. There was a high rate of population. So when the population doubled or tripled, the little offices were saturated and there weren't space to recruit more people. There is also a mismatch between the graduates trained in our country. They trained people who have degrees in literature language whereas in the field we need builders, we need people in petrography, we need people to work in mineral extraction companies... but the people who have been trained, they have degrees in geography, history literature or letters and mathematics. They cannot fit in the job in the country. We have that mismatch between the training that we receive in our general secondary education and the job opportunities that are found in the country. We don't have the possibility for creating enough jobs for everybody because normally if you are recruiting people for technical domains, you must also recruit for general education training too. But we don't have the means to recruit everybody. If we had the means, the country is not good enough to create more offices, more military more job places for everybody including the graduates from any university. The enterprises which are in place, do not have the means to create more job opportunities - that's one of the reasons too. Then we have poor training, poor training goes with the mismatch between training received at school and the opportunities that they give in the country. Also, the former curriculum was not leading

towards professionalisation; we just had to go and learn how to read and write. You read a document, you write a letter to people and that was just all. There was no professionalism, no professionalisation of education in Cameroon and there was nothing to help the graduates to be ready for the job market and that is why Cameroon noticed that because there was a high rate of unemployment in the society due to the fact that our trainees, our graduates don't have any professional training when they get to the job market, they are all lost. They have jobs they give people but the training that they give people does not match. We have to change our curriculum

We don't have the opportunities to create jobs for more people. We have to change our curriculum and rewrite our syllabuses. We have to change to the competence based approach. In the competence based approach the question the learner asked is what can the learner give, what is the learner able to do? That is the CBA that is real life situation. Every learner should be able to do something. I can do this, I can do that, I can build a house, I can construct a bridge, and I can translate documents, books from English to French, which is already something.

Interviewer: **That is very interesting. It was really exhaustive. I will move to the next question. How can arrangements be improved between the ministry of secondary education which you work for to create effective mechanisms for employers to connect with schools? What I mean here is that what connections can the ministry do to connect schools with employers so that young people can benefit from learning work skills from employers?**

Inspector: that question is a difficult to answer at the moment because we have secondary technical and secondary general. Generally in Cameroon what we do is, at the level of technical education we have those who go in for building and construction, those who go in for electricity etc. After their trainings they have to be sent to enterprises to go and do field work, they go there as trainees for two or three months after which they come and graduate and are given a certificate. I don't see any GCE holder who will be sent to any company except you are doing specialisation at higher education like journalism in the school of journalism or you are at the higher teachers training college in Yaoundé, Bambili or Garoua and even Douala; then you can be sent to a school to go and do training.

Interviewer: **My next question**

Inspector: Take over that question again? We've not finish with that question.

Interviewer: **What links or what effective mechanism can be put in place so that children at secondary school level can go and learn work skills from employers?**

Counsellor: This used to be done in the past, far back in the past. There were so many jobs in Cameroon and companies like Brasseries du Cameroon used to come to schools to get graduates to go and do holiday jobs in their enterprises or factories. But these days the people have skilled workers. They put trainees at the disposal of enterprises. It is after the training that they come back to their schools to get their diplomas or certificates. Now, during these internships, the directors or managers of these enterprises take note of the work that is being done or the output. When they discover that this children are well trained, and when they are about to leave school, the companies are already hanging around; we need that person, we need that....it is through internships that these

arrangements are made. We have a big problem of the absence of a platform. I don't know if platform is English. I will like us to agree on the term before I continue.

Interviewer: **Some framework where they could start something on.**

Inspector: There is the absence of a platform or connection between minesec - which is the ministry of secondary education in French it is (ministere des enseignements secondaire) and the enterprises. That is why we have some problems today. Even though the ministry still places trainees to go and do internship, there is that absence of that platform and that is what minesec is trying to put in place today because our minister has been invited to GICAM. I don't know if you have heard about Gicam?

Interviewer: **I haven't heard about it.**

Inspector: It is a French acronym in Cameroon which is (groupement inter patronal du cameroun), which in English it is CIG (common initiative group). It is a national core maybe, I should call it 'come together' of bosses of enterprises, or companies. They come together and create their group - so whenever there is anything...It's like a syndicate, it's like something they create to protect their enterprises and their companies. They just go to their meeting and as I said, they want to meet the government to talk about that. They have invited the minister of secondary education to attend their congresses or one of their meetings in Douala on behalf of the government. So I was saying that there is this lack of platform .Thank God this project would be put in place very soon because they have already invited the minister to come and give a talk. With this platform the employer will define the profile, they will define the type of employee that they will need tomorrow. I think from there your question about the arrangements have been answered.

Interviewer: **It sounds promising**

Inspector: That platform is going to be put in place very soon because the minister has been invited.

Interviewer: **My next question has to do with employers. I would like to find out if you do have employers who have spoken to you, the ministry of what they need from employees?**

Inspector: That is what I was talking to you about the profile, the profile of the person you want to recruit, the job description and the type of person that fits into that job description... I must assure you it is a bit ambiguous because the first questions are simple and straight forward.

Interviewer: **Yeah, what do employers want from the ministry of secondary education?**

Inspector: They want people who are skilful, who have entrepreneurship skills. For example if I need a communicator in my company, I will need someone who is very versed with both the English and the French languages. So if you are versed with the English language, I will recruit you. You must have communicative skills, entrepreneurship skills and leadership skills. Today we call them competencies but I think skills are embedded in competences. So we need people possess these skills. As a national inspector, I cannot

decide all of that because it's the employer who comes and tell you the type of people they want. We are still waiting for the platform to hold so that they can give a clear cut definition of the type of people they want. They want people who are professionals, people who can do things. They want people who are already trained, people who will start doing the work immediately. I think they will need communicative skills as well. For example, a journalist who will come and advertise things for them, and maybe electricians, people who are versed in electronics or physicists people who will come and do things for them. The employers are going to define the profile of the employees that they need.

Interviewer: **What do you think the ministry can offer to employers, because they have spoken to you, that this is what they need, what can you offer to employers?**

Inspector: As I just told you, we are undergoing curriculum reform. We are already at the fifth level of secondary school curriculum development. Now the inspectors are still writing. The curriculum designers or developers are still developing the curriculum. They have not yet gone through, so what we are trying to do is to professionalise our education as I said before, to professionalise our educational system such that when you graduate from this system, you should be ready for the job market. We train people in all the domains that we can while waiting for the employers to tell us. We are trying to see all the domains in which we think the employers want to employ people. We have many domains in which we train people. Maybe when you go through our curriculum you will see the new domains that are created.

Interviewer: **That leads me nicely into my next question which is: Who is responsible for curriculum development in the ministry of secondary education?**

Inspector: Your question has been clearly understood. According to the organisational chart laid down by the government of Cameroon for the ministry of secondary education, there is an inspector general of education in the ministry of secondary education followed by the inspector coordinator general. The inspector general is like the permanent secretary at the ministry. Then the inspector coordinator general is like the director. After the inspector coordinator general, we have national pedagogic inspectors (NPI). These are the people who actually design our syllabuses, who rewrite our curriculum and to be the national pedagogic inspector, you must be a seasoned teacher and you must have taught for at least 10 to 15 to 20 years.

Interviewer: Could you explain - when the curriculum is designed, how is it passed over to schools and what is done at the ministry level to ensure that it is implemented and is it evaluated?

Inspector: Your question is well understood. When the curriculum is designed it is not sent directly to the school. It has to be validated. We have to hold a meeting with all the curriculum designers or the developers. If it is ok, then minister will now come and sign to give value to it - that is to validate it. After validation, the national inspectors go now to the regions to train the regional inspectors who in turn will train the subject coordinators or head of departments. These head of departments come together sometimes with their teachers and they are trained on how to use the new curriculum. After this, it is sent to the schools. The inspectors now go round to check their records or workbooks to see that the teachers are actually teaching using the new pedagogic approach, using the new curriculum that was developed. That is how it's done in Cameroon.

Evaluation comes later because once the things have been sent to the fields. When they are tested, we get feedback from the field. If the feedback is positive, it is implemented but if it is not good we have to touch those areas that are not good for teaching. That is how I look at it. The regional delegates, the inspector delegates all these chain of pedagogues oversee the work in the classroom. They make sure that everything is done as required by the minister of secondary education. The evaluation will come later on, we are still at level 5....the former curriculum that was there at the time that one was written I was not born. It has been there for more than 30 years. I was not even born....it was handed over around 1950 that is when I was born. After teaching the new curriculum for some time that is when we will see; we will hold a forum to see if it was it successful.

Interviewer: **Thank you very much. You`ve talked about how it is disseminated, implemented, and how it is evaluated. Now my next question is: before actually designing the curriculum, do the curriculum developers get some input from students, class teachers, career advisers, school governors or parents, or teachers association, or even head teachers? Do these people actually play a part in developing the curriculum, do you ask them on their own view is on what should be included in the curriculum?**

Inspector: I suppose that this is what I have understood from your question. You are trying to ask us whether we use the bottom – top approach or the top bottom approach.

Interviewer: **Yes, that's right.**

Inspector: From your question you say do we get input from the children, the teachers so you are moving from the classroom right up to the ministry that is what call the bottom – top approach. In the language of curriculum developers, we call that bottom-top approach. I want to tell you that, to be honest with you, in Cameroon it is both the bottom-top approach and the top- bottom approach. Now let me tell you how we do it. We start with the top-bottom approach. According to the law, the national inspectors are responsible for the designing or for the development of the curriculum. You cannot go to the field and start getting information from the classroom, no. So what we do, we start by writing something, we create something and send to the fields for testing. So the curriculum goes right down to the classrooms and people criticise. From the feedback t we get, we improve on the draft. So we start from the top, it is a top- bottom approach, sent down to the fields, then criticism come up to help us to ameliorate or improve the curriculum.

Interviewer: **Thank you very much. Now my next question is: what is the potential if at all there is any of the ministry's sphere of influence with employers and schools? By this it I mean how much influence do they have in the curriculum, in the use of the labour market information, in developing ICT and innovative policies and practises and in supporting destinations for young people? Is there any potential or do you see any potential from your ministry with employers affecting these domains I just mention?**

Inspector: Of course yes, the potential is enormous. Because we are the ones who go to the companies, we are the ones who go to the enterprises so we have to be advised by what they want. Because if we don't do that there's going to be a great mismatch between our training and the people whom they need in the job market. The ministry solicits for the drafting of the curriculum the professional milieu we have in Cameroon to define the type

of employees that they will need. There is also what we call the observatoire national et de l 'emploi. This has to do with the ministry of vocational education. That doesn't concern our ministry... I will tell David so you can contact one of our Anglophone sister who works there if you can have time to contact her, she will give us some information in that domain. It is some corporation between Mtn and lycee polyvalent de Bonaberi. Mtn is a mobile telephone company in Cameroon. They went to a school called lycee polyvalent de Bonaberi in Douala and they equipped two specialised room for ICT . One has the capacity of 50 students and the other has the capacity of 100 students. They equipped it and they put some high internet connections there. So that when you go there and you want to do something, you go and do it very fast. That is one of the examples I am giving you since you are talking about ICT.

Interviewer: **Yeah if I may just interrupt you there, you've mentioned that they went to this lycee polyvalent and equipped it. Don't you think other schools are left behind, what is being done to make sure that things like that benefit many schools rather than just identified schools?**

Inspector: That is a good question. You see, you cannot just bring something that is new and just litter the whole place with those things. We call them pilot projects. Chantal Biya created some centres too. We have lycee Leclerc in Yaoundé which has what we call 'centre multi media'. There are a few schools like that all over the country in all the ten regions. That's a pilot project – the example that I gave you in Bonaberi Douala. You have some other schools in the Littoral that have started teaching and there are many other people who come in. It is not only Mtn, there is Mtn, there is the Chantal Biya foundation and there are many other NGO's that help in that domain. There are many pilot schools like that in the country. I cannot just give you the exact number because I am not a science inspector. If I were in the inspectorate of sciences, I will be able to give you the exact number, but I know that in all the ten regions of Cameroon, there are pilot schools that are carrying out the pilot project.

Interviewer: **Finally, if I may just add - this is a bit related to the first question I asked you. What in your view do you think are the skills school leavers need from the curriculum to help them find and stay in employment?**

Inspector: Good, I talked about leadership skills, there are many things we see out here. If we don't have a leader who can stand up and say how things should be or not be, - for example - there is pollution in this town. All the water around the villages, people stool in the village stream, people wash clothes in the village stream, and there is pollution in the village. If there is no one who can come around and sensitise our parents, to tell our parents that no, if we're drinking this water we should not throw dirt into it, then we'll continue living in poverty. So they need leaderships skills, they need entrepreneurship skills so that they can be capable of creating jobs. They should be job creators, they should not only be job seekers. If you get out of school and there are no jobs, what do you do? You can make your own soap and sell. I am just from Rwanda where I attended an international conference organised by Bill Gate in America and when they were talking about leadership skills and entrepreneurial skills, I saw children from poor families who use bamboos to weave bags, to make certain things and sell so as to get money to pay their school fees and these are the things which Cameroon needs. They don't need people who will get a first degree and wait that the government should employ them. They should learn how to make their own puff-puff, they should learn how to make their own gardens, and

they should learn how to rear fowls and sell and make a lot of money to feed their families. So they need entrepreneurial skills and this entrepreneurial skills can only be gotten through the CDA which we put in place and the professionalisation of education...through our

Interviewer: **Ok thank you very much for your time. It's been an enormous pleasure talking to you. I think I have learned quite a lot from our conversation today.**

Inspector: You are welcome. If you have more questions or if there are some things that were not very clear, you can still email me and I will know what to do.

Interviewer: Thank you very much sir.

Appendix 10: Coding

No	Relevant Text (Data immersion)	Coding
1	*'.... So, I think if there is unemployment, there are, as I say, many reasons: first, they need competence, and the second, is skills…'.* *'…there is a high rate of unemployment in Cameroon is because the curriculum or call it syllabuses (syllabus make up the curriculum) the syllabuses which have been there for more than thirty years are already obsolete…'.*	- Lack of skills - Competence - Outdated/obsolete curriculum
2	*'…But first of all, I think a young person should be able to adapt to the work environment because at times…'* *'… There are also personal skills. How do you cope in the working environment? So, there are all those types of skills that apart from the academic, they also need those personal skills to be able to adapt themselves to the working environment. Because at times, companies can recruit somebody who has the qualification but does not have the knowhow to transmit the knowledge.'* *'In my opinion, I think the schools should look at some competences. They should look at both natural competences that are in students and then try to develop those competences…'* *'They need professional training skills. It should be included in their curriculum and we equally need some NGOs, organisations that are professionals.'* *'Communication in the sense that in class for example, many-a-time, it is the teacher who speaks, and the students listen. '*	- Adaptation - Personal skills - Competencies - Communication skills
3	*'For now, those who design the curriculum are the pedagogic inspectors.'* *'…we've sat in some pedagogic meetings even at the level of the pedagogic inspectorate and we were given the opportunity to make proposals after their presentations and I don't know but it seems as though they come to those meetings to tell us what to do and not to listen to us…'.*	- Pedagogic inspectors
4	*'… we started-off with the content- based approach and we moved to objective based*	- Content-based

No	Relevant Text (Data immersion)	Coding
	approach but now we are doing the competence-based approach and with this approach learner have to be on the field so that they get the necessary work experience.'	- Objective-based

No.	Creating categories	Sub-themes	Theme
1	1. Lack of cohesion (skills) or match between education and labour market demands.	Educational Factors • Employability Skills and youth unemployment • Curriculum development and youth unemployment	**The Causes of the high level of youth unemployment**
	1.Outdated Curriculum 2.Inappropriate link between curriculum and employment		
	1.Lack or insufficient level of infrastructure	Non-educational Factors	
2	1. Relevant skills demanded by employers • Leadership skills • Competence, • Adaptation to work environment • Personal qualities • Communication skills. 2.Characteristics and attributes required for employment. • Have relevant vocational skills and	Conceptions around the term -Employability Skills	**The types of knowledge and skills that students need from the curriculum**

No.	Creating categories	Sub-themes	Theme
	knowledge • Are reliable • Can work co-operatively with others • Are punctual • Can plan and organise		
3	Counselling students to select subjects that matched their abilities and interests. Support students by informing them about the opportunities available in the external world Research-oriented teaching methodology that enhance the learning capacity of students.	School have various programmes to help students for sustainable employment.	**Teachers' Job Skills Initiatives**
4	Encouraged positive attitudes and behaviours Liaise with other agencies or administrators to solve problems	Counsellor Support Counsellor plays a significant role in the students' school experience	**Support Mechanisms Provided to Students at School**
5	National Pedagogic Inspectors at the Ministry of Secondary Education are responsible for designing the curriculum	Designing and approving curricula or syllabi	**Development of the Secondary School Curriculum**
6	Teachers side-lined in the curriculum development process	Teachers' discontent	**Exclusion of the teachers' voice and Other Stakeholders**
7	Inadequate infrastructure Lack of didactic materials Absence of teachers to teach Bureaucracy in the curriculum development process	Infrastructural problems Personnel issues	**Challenges in delivering the curriculum**

No.	Creating categories	Sub-themes	Theme
	Complexity in interpreting curriculum contents. Lack of harmonisation of the educational sub-systems,		
8	Inclusion of vocational skills in the school curriculum Improving the level of technology and technological facilities in the education sector Future curriculum should consider local realities Competency-based Curriculum Approach	The collaboration between employers and ministry is essential.	**Implications for revising the curriculum.**