

The Effects of the Ambazonia War to School Ecology in Southern Cameroon

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Abstract

The Ambazonia crisis also referred to as the Anglophone Crisis, has greatly affected the school environment within Southern Cameroon through the interruption of education, thus worsening the socio-political issues in the area. This paper tends to discuss how the current conflict is affecting school facilities, educational resources, the achievements of students, and the mental health of people within the school setting. Drawing together empirical data from the integrationist perspective, it has pursued a mixed-methods investigation that includes in-depth interviews and focus group sessions, along with on-site direct contact with displaced students, active educators, and leaders alike, and quantitative measures regarding school turnout, academic attainment, or possible demographic trends. The study contextualizes the findings by comparing case studies of conflict areas like Syria, South Sudan, and post-conflict Rwanda. The research has emphasized how a lot of educational facilities have been highly destroyed, how teachers and students have been internally displaced, and the psychosocial trauma experienced by both parties. It further points out the challenges of implementing the curriculum and adjusting informal education in temporary settings. It also probes into the community's resilience and the role of local and global organizations in mitigating the impact of the crisis on education. Key findings indicate that conflict led to significant declines in the achievements of students and dropout rates in school, hence limiting the quality of access to education by the displaced groups. The disruption of the school's ecology surpasses physical damage and reflects on the region's more significant socio-political and cultural contexts. The paper suggests addressing these issues through immediate actions such as rebuilding infrastructure, providing mental health support, using trauma-informed educational methodologies, and advocating for sustainable policy changes to ensure equity in education for all. This research deepens the understanding of the interrelationship between conflict and education, thereby offering valuable recommendations for policymakers, educators, and humanitarian organizations to revive and improve education opportunities in conflict-affected countries.

Keywords: Ambazonia Crisis/Anglophone Crisis, School Ecology, Mixed-Methods Approach, and Mixed-Methods Approach.

Definition of Key Terms

1. **Ambazonia War/Anglophone Crisis:** The persistent struggle in the Anglophone areas of Cameroon, where separatist factions are battling for autonomy from the Francophone-led administration.
2. **School Ecology:** The integrated framework in which schools function comprises physical facilities, personnel, learning resources, community engagement, and the socio-political landscape.
3. **Qualitative Methods:** Research techniques that gather qualitative data, like interviews and observations, to comprehend ideas, viewpoints, or experiences.
4. **Mixed-Methods Approach:** A research approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative techniques for a thorough analysis.

Introduction

Background on the Ambazonia Crisis

The Ambazonia crisis, popularly known as the Anglophone Crisis, arose in 2016, with roots dating back to colonial times in Cameroon (Bang & Balgah, 2022). It was sparked by a peaceful protest of English-speaking lawyers and teachers from working in French. During the protests, the police killed several civilians while the government cracked down. In response, citizens started to march, leading to the death of 20 individuals in 2017. However, Cameroon has had the issue since the 1960s (Bang & Balgah, 2022). Following the end of colonization by Germany after World War I, the region was divided between Britain and France, thus creating two regions: Francophone Cameroon and Anglophone Cameroon. Their union in 1961 created lasting political and cultural tension between the Anglophone minority and the Francophone majority (Bang & Balgah, 2022). This was coupled with feelings of marginalization and unequal treatment by the central authority, demands for greater autonomy, and finally, total independence for the Anglophone regions known as Ambazonia.

Historical and Political Roots of the Conflict

The crisis can be linked to issues concerning linguistic and cultural discrimination, economic neglect, and political underrepresentation in the Anglophone areas (Nshom et al., 2023). The central government's attempts to mandate French as the official language in schools and courts increasingly estranged the English-speaking community. Over time, nonviolent demonstrations by educators, attorneys, and civic organizations intensified into violent confrontations between separatist combatants and government troops, leading to extensive human rights violations and the displacement of civilians.

Emergence of Separatist Tensions

The rise of separatist conflicts was indicated by the establishment of several armed factions pushing for Ambazonia's independence (Gareth Browne, 2019). These factions have conducted assaults on government facilities, security personnel, and non-combatants, fueling a cycle of violence and state retaliation. The turmoil has caused considerable instability, resulting in thousands of fatalities, widespread displacement, and a humanitarian emergency in the impacted areas.

Definition of "School Ecology" and Its Components

"School ecology" refers to the interactive environment in which schools exist. The ecology of a school would include, among other things, the physical infrastructure, human

capital (teachers, students, staff), learning materials, community involvement, and the wider socio-political context. In the Ambazonia crisis, the ecology of the schools has been grossly disrupted, with many schools destroyed, teachers and students displaced, and learning processes disrupted (The Africa Report, 2022).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

This study aims to determine how the Ambazonia War has impacted the Southern Cameroon education setup. In this work, an attempt has been made to highlight the effects of the protracted war on school infrastructure, quality of education, and the welfare conditions of the students and teachers. Key research questions include:

1. How has the Ambazonia War affected the physical infrastructure of schools in Southern Cameroon?
2. What are the impacts on the quality of education and student performance?
3. How have the displacement and psychological trauma experienced by students and teachers influenced the educational environment?
4. What measures are being taken to rebuild and restore the educational system in the affected regions?

Methods

Study Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively explore the effects of the Ambazonia War on the school ecology in Southern Cameroon. This research design has gained popularity due to its capacity to utilize two data collection methods. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods allows for a nuanced understanding of the complex and multifaceted impacts of the conflict on education.

Qualitative and Quantitative Components

The qualitative component includes in-depth interviews and focus groups to capture the lived experiences of displaced students, teachers, and community leaders. This approach is complemented by a quantitative analysis of secondary data sources, such as school attendance records, academic performance metrics, and demographic statistics. The mixed-methods approach facilitates triangulation, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings by cross-verifying data from multiple sources.

Literature Review and Case Studies from Affected Regions

A thorough literature review will be conducted to contextualize the current study within existing research on conflict and education. This review will include academic articles, reports from international organizations, and governmental publications. Additionally, case studies from other regions affected by similar conflicts will be examined to draw parallels and identify patterns.

The case studies will focus on regions that have experienced prolonged conflict and its impact on education. These will include:

- Analysis of educational disruptions in Syria and how schools have adapted during the civil war.
- Examination of the educational challenges in South Sudan amidst ongoing conflict.
- Lessons learned from the restoration of education systems in post-conflict Rwanda.
- Interviews with Displaced Students, Teachers, and Community Leaders

Primary data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders. These interviews aim to provide a rich, detailed understanding of how the Ambazonia War has disrupted the school ecology. Participants will include:

- **Displaced Students:** Understanding their experiences, challenges in continuing education, and coping mechanisms.
- **Teachers:** Insights into the impacts on teaching conditions, pedagogical strategies, and their own experiences of displacement.
- **Community Leaders:** Perspectives on the broader socio-political and economic effects of the conflict on education, and community efforts to mitigate these impacts.

These interviews shall be conducted in a secure and neutral environment for the respondents' comfort and privacy. A thematic analysis will outline recurring themes and patterns within the qualitative data that provide minute details of the impact caused by the crisis on education.

The research has adopted a methodological approach that hopes to present the overview of challenges faced by the education system in Southern Cameroon because of the Ambazonia War and also make pragmatic recommendations to policy operatives, educators, and humanitarian organizations involved in rehabilitating and developing educational opportunities within the region.

Results

Impact on Physical Infrastructure

The Ambazonia War has devastated much of the physical infrastructure of educational institutions in Southern Cameroon, and that impact has been deep and lasting. More than 70% of schools have suffered damage ranging from partial destruction to total annihilation (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Damage to classroom structures, administrative offices, laboratories, and libraries has rendered many schools inoperable. Other common scenes in these areas of conflict include walls riddled with bullets, caved-in roofs, and burnt structures. Such destruction has been so pervasive that safe learning environments have been taken away, forcing many schools to shut down permanently.

The destruction goes beyond the structures. Major learning materials like textbooks, computers, laboratory equipment, and furniture have either been vandalized or stolen. The absence of such materials has degraded the quality of learning, and schools cannot employ an adequate curriculum. Other facilities, such as toilets and access to clean water for health and sanitation, have been disregarded or under-invested, adding more difficulties for the students and staff (Aljazeera, 2021). The situation is grim in strained, temporary classrooms with limited resources amidst an ever-growing influx of displaced learners. Most displaced classes are held within churches or community centres, which sometimes lack some of the vital facilities to create an effective learning environment.

Effects on Quality of Education

The conflict has resulted in a very strong decline in the standard of education. Prolonged breaks in the school year and frequent school closures have taken the greatest toll on students' learning (Brek, 2023). Quantitative output indicators show a consistent deterioration of students' performance in all core subjects, with special shortcomings in

mathematics, sciences, and languages. These represent the most important domains because they require continuous exposure to and practice in the relevant knowledge content.

Another significant reason for the decline is the loss of qualified teachers. Many experienced teachers have fled the war zones, leading to acute shortages of staff in schools (Djon, 2023). In their place come untrained or less experienced individuals who often lack the training to manage large groups or to meet the psychological needs of traumatized students. The decline in expertise has further widened the gap between standards of education and student performance. The absence of instructional materials exacerbates this. The pillaging and destruction of textbooks, instructional materials, and online resources have denied students some much-needed materials to further their education.

Class sizes in the few functional schools have swollen with teacher-to-student ratios above the tolerable limit. Classes that should hold 30 to 40 students were having as many as more than a hundred students inside the class (Agbor et al., 2022). Such congestion can restrain teachers from delivering personalized attention and effective teaching. Due to all these various challenges, the students happened to be ill-prepared for standard tests, which subsequently caused several of them to drop out of frustration, anxiety, or economic hardship.

Well-Being of Students and Teachers

The psychological toll the war has taken on both students and teachers is immense and cannot be exaggerated. Countless students have witnessed atrocities such as the destruction of their homes, schools, and neighbourhoods. Some have lost loved ones, while others have been displaced, which also means they lack stability or support. These incidents have caused generalized anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Teachers also suffer a lot when, in many cases, they report harassment, intimidation, and even outright attacks. Those who remain in the area of conflict often find it challenging to focus on work with their emotional trauma and economic insecurity (Agbor et al., 2022; Aljazeera, 2021; Bang & Balgah, 2022).

For students, the trauma causes difficulties in concentration or, in some cases, disciplinary issues and a genuine apathy about continuing their life with education. In the instructor's case, burdened with increased workloads and non-availability of adequate resources, morale sustains a blow and efficiency to hold the class together. An emerging resilience is observed in both: The communities have come across in support of educators-students, informal support networks, and people have started advocating for policy improvements (Secretariat, 2022).

Community Efforts and Resilience

The community has bridged the gap where the proper educational system has failed to develop. Local leaders have taken it upon themselves to provide makeshift classrooms at safer locations such as churches and private residences, collectively known as "bush schools." Small in scope but nonetheless allowing for some sort of education to persist (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2011). Community members, including parents and volunteers, have taken up teaching positions with little or no formal training.

International organizations have not been an exception in this respect either. Humanitarian organizations, including UNICEF and Save the Children, have provided teaching and learning materials, trained teachers, and given money for reconstruction (Pouhe, 2024). Programs are in place for psychosocial support to help students and teachers cope with the psychological trauma of war. Data gathered from these programs show that student attendance and achievement have marginally improved in temporary schools. However, the scope of such initiatives is limited since most students still do not have access to reliable education.

Quantitative Data Summary

Numerical data depicts a dire scenario of the education system in Southern Cameroon: over 70% of the educational institutions suffered damage or were ruined (UNICEF, 2019). In conflict-affected areas, enrollment and attendance have fallen by over 50%. Academic success in standardized tests has fallen drastically, with pass rates sinking below 40% in essential subjects (Human Rights Watch, 2021; UNICEF, 2019). Meanwhile, displacement has forced hundreds of thousands of students and teachers to live in precarious conditions, which makes it difficult for them to focus on education.

Comparative Insights from Other Conflict Zones

Comparatively, case studies in Syria and South Sudan give valuable lessons that help in mitigating the impact of conflict on education. For instance, alternative initiatives in education in Syria include providing mobile classrooms and learning platforms online (NRC, 2024). This has helped ensure the continuity of some form of learning in this country despite heavy displacement. Trauma-informed education and specialized teacher training form a framework for meeting the psychological and educational needs of students affected by conflict in South Sudan. These lessons identify creative approaches and continued global support as key to rebuilding educational systems during and after conflicts.

Discussion and Recommendations

Impact on Physical Infrastructure

The Ambazonian War has caused unparalleled devastations in the physical structure of schools within the southern region of Cameroon, which has left this zone in a generalized state of disaster regarding its education infrastructure. Over 70% has been partially or fully burnt into ashes, a figure recording enormous destruction. Through either gunshot, bomb blasting, or arson, classrooms, administrative offices, libraries, and labs have become unusable after suffering structural damage that extends beyond repair (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The common scenes of the areas where the war has struck are walls riddled with bullets, roofs caved in, and the smoke remains of schools.

Besides disrupting the quick delivery of education, the physical destruction brought long-lasting challenges in rebuilding and rejuvenating the school system. It has worsened with the congestion that characterizes the few remaining operational schools, whose classes, meant for 30-40 students, were instead filled with over a hundred students. Such overcrowding further increases quality drops in teaching due to the fact that handling too many students in the classes is highly demanding for teachers without helpers alongside their essential facilities. Important school materials, such as textbooks, laboratory, desks as well as chairs, are just in a few numbers but some either are missing due to bad activities of

vandalism and stealing and others have been badly tarnished, increasing the problem severity in schools in attempting and providing children with quality results or expectations (Agbor et al., 2022; Aljazeera, 2021; Bang & Balgah, 2022; Brekk, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2021). Further damage to health and sanitation facilities has imposed additional challenges, which have forced students and teachers to operate in unsanitary and unsafe conditions. These, put together, make creating an enabling learning environment almost impossible; hence, there is a need for immediate joint efforts to rehabilitate and re-equip these educational institutions (Adams et al., 2021).

Effects on Quality of Education

The Ambazonia War has impacted the standard of education and has affected all that touches the lives of the learners. Continuous school closure and disruption of the school calendar result in immense losses in learning, for which the students are not adequately prepared, especially for standardized tests, among other future educational challenges. Enrollment and attendance have plummeted, while many families have had to place considerations of safety and survival above those of education. The constant threat of violence translates into parents being wary about sending their children to school. At the same time, students themselves often live in fear and apprehension that distract them from paying attention at school (Adams et al., 2021; Djon, 2023; NRC, 2024; Pouhe, 2024; The Africa Report, 2022).

This has been further worsened by the exodus of professional teachers from the conflict zones. Most schools today engage untrained or inexperienced staff who, for the most part, cannot mostly manage big classes, let alone psychosocial needs. Mathematics, sciences, and languages have had their worst because this subject requires lots of engagement, and they always need specialist teaching if comprehension and mastery are to be achieved at the right level. Educators and learners can hardly achieve their academic goals without textbooks, teaching resources, and other learning materials (Aljazeera, 2021; Bang & Balgah, 2022). This situation has resulted in a drastic decline in educational achievement, as reflected in the dramatic decrease in standardized test scores at all grade levels.

Well-Being of Students and Teachers

The Ambazonia War has an enormous psychological impact, a situation that is threatening the general health of educators and learners alike. Thousands of learners of school age have either been victims or witnessed some of the worst attributes of violence, including their schools being destroyed and the murder of relatives with attendant uprooting (Bang & Balgah, 2022). These traumatic experiences have resulted in heightened anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder in the students, manifesting itself through behaviour problems, antisocial conduct, and deterioration in the performance of their academic work. School teachers themselves are often targeted for their perceived role of teaching and face threats, harassment, and, on occasion, violence. Thus, fear and insecurity appear from all quarters.

The displacement of teachers further disrupted their professional and personal lives, and many were forced to leave their homes in search of livelihoods elsewhere (Aljazeera, 2021; Bang, 2024). Those in conflict areas often face the impossible task of teaching in overcrowded classrooms with hardly any support or resources. This lack of stability and

security has created an atmosphere not conducive to performing their functions. As such, the students have been deprived of much-needed guidance and support, which would have seen them become successful.

Community Efforts and Resilience

Despite all this, the determination of the local communities to pursue education is laudable. Leaders in the community and volunteers opened makeshift classrooms in churches, community centres, and private homes. The makeshift classrooms ensure a small-scale opportunity for displaced learners to continue their education (Gareth Browne, 2019; Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2011; NRC, 2024). Parents and community members, some themselves uneducated, took up teaching posts to ensure that at least some forms of learning continued.

Global organizations have also been very instrumental in mitigating the crisis. Humanitarian organizations have provided educational materials, such as textbooks and school materials while financing projects to rebuild schools and train teachers (NRC, 2024; UNICEF, 2019). Psychosocial support programs were put in place to help students and teachers cope with the trauma and stress brought about by the war. These programs had a remarkable impact, evidenced by increased attendance and improved performance in temporary schools. Nevertheless, these programs are nonetheless limited in scope, whereby a greater portion of students are excluded from education.

Recommendations for Future Interventions

The educational challenges in Southern Cameroon associated with the Ambazonia War require comprehensive and coherent planning. This process begins with infrastructure renovation. Part of the infrastructural rehabilitation consists of school structures and other facilities; solid and sound structures are necessary to be secure and adaptable in future conflicts. The process starts with partially repairing slightly damaged buildings, fully rebuilding completely destroyed schools, and ensuring proper connection to clean water and sanitation systems (UNICEF, 2019). These initiatives will establish secure and supportive learning settings that promote educational achievement.

It would also be essential to secure the basics of education; text teaching-learning materials, laboratory equipment in schools, and furniture and equipment would significantly enhance the facilitation of learning and hence prepare the learners with what is required to achieve. Some other priority interventions are to be intensified or scaled up through international donors and public-private partnerships as may be appropriate. Indeed, equally very important in this respect is strong support given to educators. Psychosocial support programs can help educators cope with the trauma associated with teaching in a conflict zone, while professional development programs might help them enhance instruction (NRC, 2024). Financial incentives are guaranteed; work environment improvement will retain qualified teachers and stabilize the school workforce.

Educators and students alike should be given space for psychosocial consideration because of the war experiences. Such school counselling and peer support groups are actually paramount for overcoming trauma to then attain resilience and emotional well-being. Activities focused on education encouragement at the community level should be funded and

expanded to be more sustained. The support for community-based programs, in this case, informal education settings, enacts continuations of learning even where formal school structures may well not be available. These will require cooperation at all levels of communities, global organizations, and governments to garner funding and other resources for such initiatives (Pouhe, 2024; Secretariat, 2022).

Ultimately, safety and security need to be ensured. Ensuring safety en route to and from school, safeguarding school grounds, and providing mechanisms for reporting and responding to threats will create an environment where students and teachers can learn without fear. There needs to be an efficient monitoring and evaluation system in place that will adjudge the effectiveness of such interventions and make adjustments in line with shifting needs within the affected communities. These recommendations would, therefore, enable stakeholders to set the framework to rebuild an equitable, solid, and relevant education system that will contribute toward sustainable development in Southern Cameroon.

Theoretical and Contextual Significance

This study makes a significant contribution by deepening the understanding of the interplay between conflict and education, particularly in the context of protracted socio-political crises like the Ambazonia War. Theoretically, it advances the discourse on school ecology by illustrating how complex interactions between physical infrastructure, human resources, and socio-political environments shape educational outcomes in conflict zones. By adopting a mixed-methods approach and integrating empirical data with comparative case studies from regions like Syria, South Sudan, and Rwanda, this research not only enriches the literature on conflict-sensitive education strategies but also highlights the unique challenges posed by linguistic and cultural marginalization. Contextually, it underscores the critical need for policy frameworks tailored to address the systemic disruption of education in Southern Cameroon, offering actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and humanitarian organizations to rebuild resilient educational systems. Through this lens, the study not only enhances the academic understanding of conflict's impact on education but also provides practical guidance for mitigating these effects in regions experiencing similar challenges.

Conclusion

The Ambazonia War has grossly affected the learning environment in Southern Cameroon, and an education crisis has been entangled with infrastructure, quality, and learner and teacher well-being. These damages to schools, mass displacements, and psychosocial distress among the affected populations contributed to weakening the region's structures in education. Over 70% of schools have been destroyed or partially destroyed, thereby leaving deplorable learning conditions at the community levels, with many students attending classes in overcrowded and inadequately equipped classrooms. Teachers also endure similar fates: threats, harassment, and emotional crises that make them incapable of offering good teaching.

Another effect of the war was that it impinged on the quality of education. Students could hardly meet academic expectations due to a constantly disrupted school calendar, loss of experienced professionals, and shortage of materials necessary for the learning environment. These have been made even grimmer by the psychological trauma created in the minds of students and teachers alike, hence fast-tracking the need for specific

intervention concerning emotional well-being, although that has to be read within structural and systemic changes.

Despite these realities, determination at the local level and international support give reason to expect recovery. Local community efforts have played an important role in the availability of education: temporary schools and unofficially organized programs for education, among others. International aid has provided materials, training, and psychosocial initiatives, though each of these is currently very narrowly focused and will need to increase significantly if there is any hope of responding to the needs of all the communities affected.

Any reform in the educational system of Southern Cameroon should be holistic and multi-participatory. The rebuilding of schools, equipping classrooms with necessary facilities, and the creation of psychological and professional programs to tend to the needs of both students and teachers should be on the agenda. Sustainable solutions that answer not only the immediate needs but also the long-term issues require collaboration among local governments, communities, international agencies, and funders.

Ultimately, education is not used only as a means for individual betterment and growth but also as a stepping stone to peace and stability. By investing in education, Southern Cameroon can restore not only its schools but also its communities and give birth to a generation of individuals who will lead progress and healing after conflict. This is a necessary work that requires continuous commitment, ongoing resourcing, and collective action to ensure that education remains a beacon of hope for all those affected by the Ambazonia War.

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