Education crisis and strategies of teachers in Cameroon

Abstract

This presentation delves into the education crisis in Cameroon, emphasizing the personal experiences of teachers and the strategies they employ to mitigate school dropout during the crucial transition from primary to secondary education. The research, based on a teacher training program, involved interviews with primary and secondary school teachers. An exploratory research design with an inductive thematic approach was utilized to identify key themes and establish code categories, allowing for a comprehensive investigation of contextual crisis factors through interpersonal stories and case dynamics.

Findings

The study identifies three types of dropout prevention strategies: network-based, opportunity-based, and service-based, which are either used standalone or in combination, depending on network opportunity or service factors. Network-based strategies emerged as the most effective and popular due to the significant influence of students' social backgrounds and the critical role of teachers in community life. However, opportunity- or service-based strategies often create unrealistic expectations and dishonesty about educational outcomes. Each strategy type faces significant limitations due to the fragmented education system in Cameroon.

Context of the Education Crisis

The persistent education crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, including Cameroon, is characterized by resource shortages, poor education governance, deteriorating infrastructure, low teaching quality, and overcrowded classrooms, leading to poor learning performance and low motivation among students. School dropout is often the final barrier to any future educational opportunities, influenced by various social, political, or cultural factors. The weak public education authorities in the region struggle to address the declining quality of the learning environment for both teachers and students. A comprehensive and long-term approach is necessary to address multiple aspects of this global crisis simultaneously, including the root causes of school difficulties, continuous support mechanisms, evidence-based observation and assessment of each strategy, and contextualized intervention plans.

Literature Review

The complexity of the school dropout problem in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond is influenced by family and community factors, with parental guidance and family educational background being primary determinants of

educational choices at various transitional stages. Despite free state primary education, associated costs and fees act as additional barriers, contributing to social exclusion among the poor. The cumulative effects of socioeconomic disadvantages are evident in how children start and remain in secondary education. Overcrowded classrooms and unfavorable school environments lead to inadequate curriculum quality and school instruction, often resulting in a lack of discipline and educational interest. Rising dropout rates in secondary education may also be caused by peer influence, particularly during adolescence, if the value of education is not adequately emphasized.

Teacher and Education Quality

Teachers in underdeveloped educational systems face challenges such as unsustainable class sizes, making it impossible to offer individualized curriculum instruction and guidance. Poor teacher quality, inadequate training, and a lack of essential teaching resources and materials further exacerbate the education crisis. Teachers' efforts to prevent school dropout are often hindered by these systemic issues, leading to ineffective pedagogical processes and a lack of individual attention to students' learning needs. High-quality teacher education, including curriculum and pedagogy skills, financial motivation, and stability, is crucial in reducing dropout rates. Effective collaboration among different teaching positions and support from high-quality schools are essential for improving and strengthening teachers' connection with the school environment.

Cameroon's Dual Education System

Cameroon's education system is characterized by two distinct subsystems for the Anglophone and Francophone populations, managed by unified ministries. However, national education policies predominantly reflect the French system of education, despite the official vision of promoting bilingualism and interculturalism. This dual system has several drawbacks, including inefficiencies in resource allocation, poor learning outcomes, and large disparities among schools within the country. Francophone teaching styles seem to be more effective in curriculum instruction, fostering better teaching practices and enhancing the performance of Francophone primary school students compared to their Anglophone counterparts. The fragmented educational landscape and multiple disconnected ministries hinder cohesion between the two systems, affecting the quality and equality of education.

Discussion and Conclusion

Network-based strategies were found to be the most effective in preventing school dropout, emphasizing the importance of building strong relationships with students' families and broader communities. However, the fragmented education system in Cameroon significantly hampers the effectiveness of these strategies. Opportunity-based and service-based strategies, while providing

some benefits, often create unrealistic expectations and do not address the root causes of school dropout. A national pedagogy plan is required to harmonize the Francophone and Anglophone education systems, identify best practices, and propose realistic schemes that adapt to the current needs of each local context. The poor quality of education, overcrowded classrooms, and cumulative underperformance of students contribute to demotivation, which cannot be reversed by isolated, fragmented dropout prevention strategies. Teachers generally operate in isolation due to a lack of clear national policy guidance, relying predominantly on their community networks to promote education with unrealistic arguments about future opportunities. A comprehensive and cohesive national approach is essential to address the education crisis in Cameroon effectively.