

Looking Back, Looking Forward: The Future of History Education in Africa Focusing on History Education and the Graduate Employability Equation in Africa, the Case of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This presentation explores the connection between history education and graduate employability in Africa, the case of Cameroon. As the continent grapples with the challenges of the 21st century, it is imperative to re-examine the purpose and relevance of history education in Africa. Through a critical analysis of existing literature and empirical data, this research argues that history education in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular has the potential to enhance graduate employability by providing students with critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills. However, this potential can only be realized if history education is contextualized to reflect African experiences, perspectives, and challenges. The presentation concludes by proposing a framework for rethinking history education in Africa, one that prioritizes contextualized learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and community engagement. By doing so, history education can become a powerful tool for enhancing graduate employability and promoting sustainable development in Africa.

Keywords: History Education, Graduate Employability, Contextualized Learning.

INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has brought numerous challenges to Africa, including high levels of unemployment and underemployment. As the continent grapples with these issues, it is essential to re-examine the purpose and relevance of history education in Africa. This presentation explores the nexus between history education and graduate employability in Cameroon, arguing that history education has the potential to enhance graduate employability by providing students with critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills through project-based learning. The introduction of history education in Africa particularly in higher education has a long history, tracing back to the first millennium when few universities existed (Ajayi et al 1996, Lulat, 2005; Assie-Lumumba and Dri 2006) accounted for the establishment of academic institutions, including the Alexandria Academy, Al-Azhar university in Egypt and others that followed the trend. During the colonial time especially after the Berlin conference in 1885, the development of history education in Africa took a different direction where education was oriented by the colonial powers to suit European perspectives. History education was adopted to suit the French, German and UK colonial rules. History education during pre-colonial Africa as Woldegiorgis and Doeverspec (2013) report, was embedded in the cultural setting of the time without having formally established institution. colonial powers disconnected the pre-colonial foundation of higher education by ignoring cultural identities and indigenous knowledge systems. The main purpose of the colonial education system was to produce elites who will support them in the colonial administration. The transition from pre-colonial to post-colonial era left few graduates in many African countries. In Cameroon the first university was established in 1962 in Yaoundé known as the federal university oriented in French. From the 1990, the level of graduates has tremendously risen due to increasing number of public universities still European oriented like the university of Buea created in 1993 (Educational reforms, 1993). History education started producing the highest number of graduates which today are grappling with unemployment and underdevelopment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study centres' on History education and graduate employability in Cameroon as an African example. The work is interested in the Literature put down by various authors on graduate employability in Africa, and Cameroon in particular. Investigations in the writings of different scholars to that effects and their correlation with the study is therefore important. Much work has been written about history education and graduate employability in Africa though little in Cameroon. However, this will endow the work with a rich literature. However, this literature is uneven and so this work seeks to contribute to previous research by bringing to lamb light the unexplored elements of graduate employability in Cameroon which are expected to go a long way to enrich the educational historiography of Africa in general and Cameroon in particular and to bring in recommendation to enhance graduate employability in Cameroon. There is growing interest through research on how higher education can become influential for development and growth as well as employability of history graduate. Studies on Cameroon include: Fonkeeng Ntembe (2009), investigated the potential of history graduate from higher education in the development of Cameroon using households' survey data from the first Cameroon household survey analyzing the effects of the earnings and private returns to education, revealing among other things a positive significant relationship between graduate employability and development. Samfoga (2015), evaluated the strategic objectives of history education in higher education through the balance scored, evaluating the increasing need of the curriculum to decolonize colonial tendencies and enhance graduate employability. She concluded that, Cameroon could learn from business organizations to adopt its curriculum that would tailor graduate into the job market. This paper is contribution of how skill oriented Higher education history curricula could become the safest route of escaping unemployment trap and growing graduate employability once in the work field. Agborbecheun (2016) conducted a study on curriculum structure and the Cameroon labour and industrial market. The study aimed to investigate the effect of curriculum structure in Cameroon on graduate's integration into the job market. For the methodology, the data was collected with the use of self-efficacy and curriculum outcome questionnaire for students, interview guides for labour suppliers, and focus group discussion guides for students and employees. The survey research design was used with sample size of 100 participants drawn from four higher institutions of learning in Cameroon. the data was organized using the one way analysis of variance and the fastest least significance multiple comparison analysis and the results revealed that present curriculum content in Cameroon no longer meets the demand of the society and the labour market. A curriculum revision was recommended by the study. The study is limited by a small sample size of 100 adding to the fact that contextual or methodological issues may have influenced the findings. However, the work is related to this present study in that, it throws more insights into the value of a curriculum structure and contents to the graduate employability equation which is the focus of this present study.

In Africa as a whole, there is a wide variety of studies on the phenomena of history education and graduate employability. Pitan and Muller (2020), focused on the students perspectives on employability development in higher education in south Africa. The objective was to examine the extent to which selected South African universities are supporting their students in developing employability skills and the influence of such employability support on students 'on enhanced employability. Through a purposive sampling technique, 407 final-year students from two South African universities were selected to participate in the study. The data collection was done with the use of structural questionnaires and analyzed quantitatively. The findings reveals that, the curriculum content has the highest influence, on students employability followed by personal development planning while real-world activities and extracurricular activities were not found to influence students self-perceived employability. This is relevant to this present study in that, it places high value on the curriculum content as the most important element in influencing graduates employability thereby informing this present study on the value of curriculum to graduate employability.

Barton and Levstik (2004) emphasize the role of history education in promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills. History education enhances graduate employability by equipping students with valuable transferable skills and a broad understanding of societal contexts, making them adaptable and well-rounded individuals in the job market. These skills include critical thinking, research, analysis, communication, and problem-solving, which are highly sought after by employers across various sectors. Grever and Stuurman (2007) argue that history education should be contextualized to reflect African experiences, perspectives, and challenges. According to these authors, contextualizing African history education involves integrating local

and indigenous perspectives, challenging Eurocentric narratives, and emphasizing the diversity and richness of African experiences. This approach aims to foster a sense of ownership and relevance among African students by connecting historical narratives to their own lives and communities. It also promotes critical thinking about historical sources and interpretations, encouraging students to analyze power dynamics and biases in historical accounts. Husbands (2011) highlight the need for interdisciplinary approaches in history education. An interdisciplinary approach to history education is crucial for providing students with a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the past. By integrating history with other subjects like sociology, psychology anthropology, geography, and even science, students can develop a more holistic view of historical events and their impact on society. This approach fosters critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to connect seemingly disparate aspects of the human experience.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted in this study is a survey and qualitative analysis in order to have an in-depth of the study. The sample population constituted of unemployed graduate in social sciences of up to 5 years of public universities of Buea, Bamenda ,Yaounde and Douala where close to 200 PhD graduate staged a demonstration for their non-recruitment in the public service as lecturers in February 2025. Data collection was through interviews and questionnaires. Open and closed end questions were administered to allow these graduates exposed their mines on the subject matter. This however permitted us to gain a comprehensive analysis. This research employed a critical analysis of existing literature and empirical data. The data collection was from mainly secondary and primary sources to explore the nexus between history education and graduate employability in Africa and Cameroon in particular. The study has also treated published papers as units for data collection and analysis. Following the identification of the literature, the study deployed a systematic review of the literature were renowned educators focused on Cameroon universities and examined the curricula, teaching methods, and outcomes of history education programs.

RESULTS

The findings of this study indicate there is a high rate unemployed history graduate in Cameroon particularly PhD holders. The results equally revealed that history education in Cameroon in particular and Africa in general has the potential to enhance graduate employability by providing students with critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills and decolonizing the curriculum because there is significant relationship between content of curriculum and graduate employability particularly of higher education in Cameroon. Most of the history graduate jobseekers said there were never exposed to internship and other work related activities. This implies that universities teach mostly theoretically with hardly any practice, which can be very detrimental to 21st century graduates in the knowledge economy.

Table 1: Shows unemployment level of PhD graduates in Cameroon for some selected disciplines by February 2025 engaged in a strike.

SUBJECTS/ DISCIPLINES	No OF UNEMPLOYED PhD GRADUATES ENGAGE IN A STRKE IN FEBRUARY 2025
English Modern Letters	10
French	09
Geography	22
Science of Education	12
History	70
Psychology	15

Anthropology	15
Sociology	15
Economic	14
Law and Political science	09/ 09
TOTAL:	200

Source: Author's collection from the petition fired to the Prime minister by disgruntles PhD graduates in February 2025.

Table 1 above shows that the graduate employability equation in higher education in Cameroon is real. The unemployment level of history graduates in Cameroon as of February as depicted from the table above stood at 70 PhD graduates unemployed more than other disciplines as illustrated on the table. It should be noted that this table considered only graduates who participated in the said strike in February 2025.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the findings was done according to the results obtained from existing literature empirical data. The results of this study have significant implications for history education in Cameroon and Africa as a whole. The high level of unemployed history university graduates in Cameroon is alarming, this was proven during field research in some state universities in Cameroon when unemployed PhD graduate stage a strike in Yaounde . There have been strikes and planned protests in Yaoundé, Cameroon capital city, by 200 non-recruited PhD holders, in February 2025, during a government recruitment program for university lecturers. This number excluded those graduate from distant universities like Ngoundere, Maroua and Dschang who due distant did not participate in the strike. The protesters demand additional recruitment rounds to accommodate those excluded from the selection process. The protests have aimed to address perceived injustices and inconsistencies in the selection criteria and candidate eligibility according to Guardian Newspaper (February 2025) .The background and Grievances of the demonstration was dissatisfaction with recruitment. Out of this 200 unemployed PhD graduates, 70 were historians according their petition signed and addressed to prime minister in February 2025. This justifies the view that the higher education curricula in Cameroon is Eurocentric tailored mostly to teaching job and need to be decolonize to suite African perspective and experiences in order to meet up with 21st century market demands. By prioritizing contextualized learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and community engagement, history education can become a powerful tool for enhancing graduate employability and promoting sustainable development in Africa.

In Cameroon universities should increase their efforts in embedding work-related activities into their curricula, either through internships, or other co-curricular or extra curricula activities. In consonance with this, Phillips (2007) observed that for youths to acquire skills required for future employment there must be an on-going partnership between universities and the world of work. According to Phillips, inclusion of work experiences in higher education curricula will improve students' employability and equip them with skills such as team building and business awareness. Higher education therefore must adopt and continue to adopt contents of curricula to reflect labour market needs if they want to produce work ready and competitively employable graduates because of higher education curricula have a high and positive influence on graduate employability.

Barton and Levstik (2004), analyses that history education promotes development of transferable skills by fostering the ability to analyze information from various sources, evaluate evidence, and form well-reasoned arguments, crucial for informed decision-making in any field.

Adu and Olatunji (2018) indicate that through research and Information Literacy Students learn to locate, evaluate, and synthesize information from diverse sources, a skill highly valued in today's information-rich environment. History students develop strong written and oral communication skills through essays, presentations, and discussions, preparing them to articulate ideas effectively. Ajayi, Lamech and Gomach (1996) they emphasized that history education enrich students with problem-solving and analytical skills. History education encourages students to approach complex issues from multiple perspectives, developing

their problem-solving and analytical abilities. History provides a deep understanding of past events and societal structures, enabling graduates to contextualize current issues and challenges. Studying history exposes students to diverse cultures and perspectives, fostering empathy and cultural awareness, valuable assets in a globalized world. History will also promote adaptability and flexibility. The ability to adapt to new situations and learn from past experiences, cultivated through historical study, makes history graduates more flexible and adaptable to changing job requirements.

Contextualizing African history education is very relevant in numerous dimensions. Firstly, decolonizing of the curriculum. In this perspective, there should be a moving away from Eurocentric perspectives that have dominated historical narratives and incorporating diverse African voices, experiences, and interpretations. This is particularly with universities in both French and English regions of Cameroon which are oriented to colonial experience thereby limiting graduate employment. Emphasizing local and indigenous knowledge is also significant. Recognizing and valuing the rich oral traditions, cultural practices, and historical narratives that have been passed down through generations in African societies. The historical narratives of the past and rich cultural practices should be connected to present. This will demonstrate how past events have shaped present-day realities in Africa, fostering a deeper understanding of contemporary issues and challenges. The contextualization of history education also promoting critical thinking fosters a sense of agency and pride. This can be implemented using diverse historical sources, Incorporating oral histories, artifacts, and other non-traditional sources alongside written documents to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the past. Focusing on specific African contexts is relevant. By contextualizing African history education in these ways, educators can create a more engaging, relevant, and empowering learning experience for students, fostering a deeper understanding of their own heritage and its place in the world.

CONCLUSION

The study initially set out to investigate on history education and graduate employability in Africa the case of Cameroon concludes that graduate employment in Africa as a whole and Cameroon in particular is mainly associated with lack of employability skills, including social skills, lifelong learning skills and also highlights of the importance of re-examining the purpose and relevance of history education in Africa decolonizing the curricula. By contextualizing history education to reflect African experiences, perspectives, and challenges, we can enhance graduate employability and promote sustainable development in Africa. The proposed framework for rethinking history education in Africa prioritizes contextualized learning, interdisciplinary approaches, and community engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following specific recommendations are made for policy makers and educators. Before

For Policymakers

1. Integrate contextualized learning: Policy makers should develop and harmonize policies that support the integration of contextualized learning approaches in history education, reflecting African experiences, perspectives, and challenges so as to enhance graduate employment..
2. Promote interdisciplinary approaches: There is need to encourage interdisciplinary approaches in history education, incorporating subjects like sociology, psychology, anthropology, and geography in the Cameroon universities.
3. Support community engagement: Policies that promote community engagement and partnerships between educational institutions and local communities are necessary. This will engage graduate thereby promoting employment.

For Educators

1. Use of diverse historical sources: Incorporate diverse historical sources, including oral histories, artifacts, and non-traditional sources, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the past.

2. Focus on specific African contexts: Educators should explore the histories of different regions, nations, and communities within Africa, rather than relying on generalized narratives. This will make graduate producers instead of remaining consumers.
3. Foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills: Design curricula and instructional strategies that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills. This will increase chances of employment in the job markets.
4. Encourage community-based projects: Incorporate community-based projects and activities that provide students with practical skills and real-world experience.

For Curriculum Developers

1. Decolonize the curriculum: Review and revise curricula to reflect African experiences, perspectives, and challenges, and to move away from Eurocentric perspectives. In this perspective, all state holders (higher education administration, industry, curriculum designers and students) should be consulted before designing curricula, in order to embed the needs all stakeholders, while monitoring the evolving employability attributes and skills as dictated by the changing patterns in labour market needs and trends to align them with higher education curricula. These mechanisms include regular feedback from employers and alumni on curriculum relevance, the creation of a curriculum advisory board with industry representation, and endeavor to cover a wide range of topics as this ensure the readiness of the graduates.
2. Incorporate local and indigenous knowledge: Incorporate local and indigenous knowledge and historical narratives into the curriculum.
3. Emphasize transferable skills: Ensure that the curriculum emphasizes the development of transferable skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication.

These recommendations can help policymakers and educators develop more effective and relevant history education programs that prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY



Dr. NDAPE EPIE Benjamin is a historian and researcher with expertise in Political history, States and International Relations. He holds a PhD in History from the University of Douala, Cameroon and has published an article and others pending publication. Dr. Ndape has participated in research methodology seminars, conferences and has taught history in secondary schools and education courses at The ARIMA and ALPHA Higher Institutes in Douala. His current research focuses on the Role of Traditional Rulers in sustainable peace and Development in Africa and rethinking history education in Africa for sustainable development. He is currently a part time lecturer of history at the H.T.T.C of the university of Buea- Cameroon.

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