

Universities in Cameroon - A Key to Economic Growth and Reducer of Poverty: the Case of University of Dschang

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Abstract

The paper examines the socio-economic role of Universities in Cameroon with evidence from the University of Dschang. The study has adopted a descriptive analysis supported with field work. The results show that Universities bring with them knowledge, employment, poverty reduction and general socio-economic growth.

Key words: Universities, knowledge, employment, poverty reduction, socio-economic growth

Introduction

The less developed countries (LDCs) have lagged behind because they depend on primary products, coupled with the fact that they lack technical know-how, trained manpower, stable political atmosphere, and financial means to explore the existing resources. For these LDCs, formal knowledge, which is the bedrock for improving upon the traditional methods of doing has always been obtained from overseas higher institutions of learning at high costs. The multiplier effects of higher learning centres like universities in the past have been abroad than at home. This is because most instructors in these learning centres came from abroad and their high remunerations were repatriated. With the independence of most developing countries in the late 50s and early 60s, a change occurred thus ushering in to an extent some independence in the academic milieu. The creation of universities in these new independent states brought with them a closer link between the knowledge gained and the economic or business sectors (Vinten,1996).

According to Tschannen-Maron et al (2000), universities are in the learning business with their central role to create an enabling environment for knowledge, skills and new technologies. Universities have a special public role to create contexts where learning, dialogue and professional development can take place, helping to extend opportunities for learning at work (Bryans et al, 1998). Coffield and Williamson (1997) observe that universities can make the space in our complex society where new thoughts can be taught and existing wisdom can be challenged. The fundamental role of universities can not be undermined, as they act as promoters of knowledge and application of experiences in the interest of the society (Bryans,1999). In this regard, universities have been developmental poles and drivers in the region(s) they happen to exist. Without such institutions, developing nations cannot hope to master and apply the latest advances in science and technology (Dumitru,1990). The knowledge economy, according to Newlands

(2000) has an increasing interest all over, leading to a growing recognition of the role of universities, bringing the local and global environments closer. The creation of universities have brought with them not only qualified academicians (raw material according to Shigeko et al., 1985) but also have introduced spending effects on the society in which they are found. These spending effects due to the existence of universities have direct socio-economic and political impact; and indirect externalities which can not be undermined on a given region and beyond (Haveman and Wolfe, 1998).

The presence of universities in the LDCs has helped to curb to an extent the “fundamental brain-drain” a common problem in LDCs (Iyare,1992). Otherwise, the drop in quality training may be quite expensive for the country according to Dumitru,1990.

Considering the above salient points for universities parse, we attempt in this paper to examine or evaluate the contributions of universities in Cameroon to the socio-economic growth point. This evaluation will be specific to the university of Dschang and its socio-economic influence on the West Province as a whole. Beyond, the international cooperation and exchange programmes with foreign partners can not be under-looked in terms of what such relations contribute economically and socially to the country.

After this introduction, section 1 examines universities vis-à-vis other higher learning institutions in Cameroon, with the history of university education in section 11. Section 111 and 1V consider respectively the methodology and conclusion of the paper.

Universities and other higher institutions of learning in Cameroon

Universities and other higher institutions of learning (CUSS, ENSP, IRIC, ESSTI, ENS)¹ in Cameroon are bundled together to form the Higher Education Industry. If this industry has been separated from the National Education and Scientific Research, no doubt, it is because of its distinct leading role in promoting economic and social well being of the people amidst its international recognition and research manpower based reputation. However, the higher education industry has directly or indirectly emphasised general education (Shigeko,1985). To say, the muster seed of higher education (universities) in Cameroon was planted in 1962 with the then Federal University of Yaounde. Since then, university education and accompanying socio-economic activities have been on the upward trend. With the division of Yaounde University into 1 and 11; and the uplifting of four university centres to full flesh universities by 1993, this has given Cameroon a total of six state universities. Comparing these universities to the about 15 millions population, we could imagine the accompanying academic and non-academic activities that have contributed substantially to the general economic growth of the specific region and the country as a whole. Further, the universities have brought with them a cutback on the external academic migration (brain-drain) in search of greener academic pastures. Of course, the supposed

spending abroad by the academic emigrants could now be of local economic and social growth, since higher education requires a lot of inputs (Umo, 1980)

The history of university education in Cameroon.

The general educational system in Cameroon has expanded over years. This is due to increased population, increased participation by school age population and working population. In so far as university education in Cameroon is concerned, one Federal university, the University of Yaounde created in July 1962 (Tafah, 1989) served Cameroon until 1972. This was the only university created to tailor in development for the country and equally make the country to be known academically on an international setting. According to Ahidjo (1964), a university was to bring among others, rational development of teaching at all levels, science and technology, adopt indigenous pattern of education than foreign, pursue vigorously and consolidate university and the independence of Cameroon.

The Federal University started with a small enrolment of about 600 and a staff of 22 in all its three faculties, Letters and Human Sciences; Law and Economic Sciences; and Science. As time went on the student enrolment increased substantially and the faculties could not accommodate the upsurge (Tafah, 1989). By 1970, the student enrolment was above 7 000, 18 000 by 1984, 32 000 by 1990, 45 000 by 1991 and more than 50 000 by 1992 with a staff of 537. This situation of exponential enrolment created a serious problem in the student teacher ratio (34 to 1 by 1984 and 132 to 1 by 1991 in the faculty of Law and Economics) resulting to congested amphitheatres. This state of crowdedness brought in academic inefficiencies and other related ills like massive failures of 70% each end of year (UNESCO, 1984; Tafah, 1989). This deploring atmosphere of academic affairs for a country aspiring for economic growth and knowledge development could not be under-looked. To remedy situation somehow, the Cameroon government by 1981 created four university centres viz Dschang, specialising in Agriculture; Douala in Business and Commercial Studies; Ngaoundere in Food Technology; and Buea in Translation and Arts. By decree N° 93/026 of 19th January 1993, reorganising university education in Cameroon and in the pursuit of academic excellence, the university of Yaounde was segmented into Yaounde 1 and 11 while the four university centres were raised to full-flesh universities. This gave a total of six universities constituting the higher education industry in Cameroon up to date. One could imagine what these universities have contributed vis-à-vis related local and international activities toward economic and social growth. This socio-economic university based impact is being evaluated in detail with the specific case study of university of Dschang.

Methodology

This study analyses the socio-economic impact of the university of Dschang on the metropolitan of Dschang and the province as a whole. The analysis makes much use of secondary data from various sources. Considering that experience is the best way of learning and appreciating, the

author's closeness to the subject matter and his eminent presence just three years after the creation of the university in 1993 to the environment adds more to the validity of the analysis. Denzin (1989) supports such an approach to data collection in stating that: "the closer a subject is to the event and as well as the greater the familiarity of the author with the event, the greater the validity of her/his statements".

The University Of Dschang, Students and Academic Staff.

The students and staff are the key players as much as the University of Dschang is concerned in terms of economic activities leading to economic growth and the eventual reduction to an extent of poverty on the west province and Dschang metropolitan in particular. The presence of students in Dschang has triggered high demand for the various food items and subsequently agricultural activities by the indigenes on commercial bases.

Table 1. Students' enrolment in the university of Dschang (UDS) per year
(from 1993/94 academic years to 2005)

	I		II		III		IV		V		VI		Total	
	S*	S**	S*	S**	S*	S**	S*	S**	S*	S**	S*	S**	S*	S**
1993/94	495	13	604	5	131	8	402	3	147	62	520	3	2299	94
1994/95	803	25	862	8	301	10	470	7	107	62	565	5	3108	117
1995/96	964	30	1201	17	341	15	562	13	142	62	589	12	3805	149
1996/97	1262	37	1450	19	466	19	724	14	129	63	624	15	4655	167
1997/98	2158	60	1858	20	802	22	871	24	721	65	676	18	7082	209
1998/99	2531	60	2291	29	1074	22	1375	40	503	65	672	20	8446	236
1999/2000	2771	96	3758	42	1331	28	2629	49	1080	74	743	32	12312	321
2000/2001	2859	103	2842	43	1547	28	2339	49	644	76	778	32	11009	331
2001/2002	3007	100	3240	43	1850	28	2642	49	651	76	803	32	12193	328
2002/2003	3006	101	3236	44	1842	28	2638	50	648	76	801	33	12172	332
2003/2004	3144	104	3301	48	1894	32	2649	52	664	79	822	36	12474	351
2004/2005	3310	104	3502	48	1997	32	2662	52	682	79	854	36	13007	351

Source: Faculties admissions' offices and division of academic affairs, University of Dschang.

S* : Students, S** : Academic staff, I= Science, II= Law &Political Science, III= Econs.& Management, IV= Letters & Human Sciences, V = Agriculture & Agronomy, VI= Institut Universitaire Technologie de Fotso Victor.

Table 2: The number of non-academic staff for all faculties excluding temporary workers

Year	1993/ 1994	1994/ 1995	1995/ 1996	1996/ 1997	1997/ 1998	1998/ 1999	1999/ 2000	2000/ 2001	2001/ 2002	2002/ 2003	2003/ 2004	2004/ 2005
Staff	550	550	500	485	460	467	537	541	545	549	561	563

Source : Archives of division of personnel, University of Dschang

Table 1 above shows that there has been a tremendous increase in the number of students registered with University of Dschang since 1993/94 academic years. The student-teacher ratio has remained quite high ranging from 34 to 1 in 1993/94 to 37 to 1 in 2004/2005 as from table 1 above. This range falls well above the required UNESCO standard of 20 students per teacher by 15 students or 75 % thus ushering in other academic ills resulting from this high students-teacher ratio. However, this increase number is a blessing to region as it reflects the high internal demand for the institution and at the same time increased demand for accommodation, foodstuff and other student-related exigencies. Landlords in the municipality have received some sort of windfall rent-incomes and local farmers have increased foodstuff production due to rising food demands. In this regard, incomes generated have greatly improved the welfare of the people in this region from a multiplier setting thus mitigating unemployment and poverty as marginal lands have been exploited to meet up with the food demand of the increased University population. From market survey carried out by writer, 81% of the 286 market women and the Buyam-sellam (local appellation for those who move into the rural areas to buy and resell to the urban population) contacted , declared that they make on average about 32 000 FCFA (about 16 US dollars) a day , above all on the weekly market day. To them, they have become serious breadwinners for their households and can equally sponsor their children in school as it is a typical duty for the Bambilike Woman in this region to cater for her own children in their polygamous homes. Even the men have abandoned cash crop production due to the fall of their prices in the world market and have taken up food crop cultivation in order to exploit this advantage of high demand as a result of the high University population. This economic phenomenon has made Dschang a centre of great attraction in the entire Province thus bringing to surface serious rural-urban migration . Not withstanding, the student/staff scenario or Universities have created a great and positive economic impact on the environment. Felsentein (1996) identifies two basic impacts of students related viz the backward and forward linkages. The backward linkage on its part directly implies effects of spending by university students and staff, which have sequential impact on the employment and incomes of the people in the area. Survey carried out by this study shows that a student's average spending per year is 300 000 francs for all directly related academic activities. This average spending considering the number of students enrolled for 2005 will imply 3 780 600 000 francs CFA changing hands within Dschang and its vicinity. The survey still reveals that 60 percent of students in a year receive parental or family visits. Yet, the female fold receive extra visits, every 6 out of ten from boy friends; or would to be husbands. These visits with accompanying spending coupled with those regular spending of students and staff give us a glaring contributing picture of Dschang University activities on the whole economy of this region and Cameroon as a whole. Thus, the University has provided a direct spending impact or university-borne multiplier spending that has generated employment, reducing poverty and increasing general economic welfare. This is confirmed from the general leap of businesses in Dschang in recent years reflecting the needs of

the university and its related interest groups. Table 3 below shows the leap in economic activities in Dschang more clearly.

Table 3: Business evolutional activities in Dschang, 1993 to 2004.

Years \ Business	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04
Bookshops	3	4	4	5	7	9	9	9	9	11	12	13
Restaurants	15	22	27	28	29	32	38	41	46	53	56	59
Banks	3	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2
Finance Houses	6	7	7	7	6	5	5	6	6	6	8	11
Laundries	5	5	5	6	6	5	5	5	6	6	8	12
Cinema	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	3
Video Clubs	5	5	4	6	6	5	6	6	7	7	9	14
Mini-cité	13	27	34	56	61	68	89	92	116	123	134	149
Buildings (flats)	24	28	29	37	49	78	88	154	208	316	328	359
Hotels	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	9	19
Religion bodies	3	3	4	6	7	7	9	9	10	10	11	11
Internet cafes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	5	7	13
Taxis	5	7	10	11	15	17	22	28	31	36	47	73
Flower Shops	1	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	7	12
Petrol Stations	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6
Pharmacies	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	6
Private Clinics	2	2	3	3	2	2	1	1	1	3	7	9
Medicine Stores	13	13	14	15	16	18	19	21	24	28	34	39
Carpentry	17	20	21	20	20	24	27	31	37	42	48	51
Garages	16	17	17	20	20	25	30	31	34	38	38	41
Beauty Saloons	12	16	17	17	22	27	31	33	37	44	47	49
Boulangeries	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	6
Night Clubs	3	3	3	4	4	4	3	2	2	2	3	4
Discotheques	8	8	1	0	11	11	11	12	13	16	19	21
Drinking Bars	140	141	138	140	147	152	151	161	182	187	189	199
Travelling Agencies	3	3	4	4	5	5	4	3	5	8	11	15
Motor Cyclists	17	24	28	33	46	47	52	72	79	129	249	497
Cafeterias	11	13	13	14	16	15	15	17	18	18	21	27
Secretariat/ Photocopying	2	2	3	3	3	6	8	11	14	17	24	36
Butcheres	14	14	15	15	15	13	16	17	17	17	23	29
Poissonneries	11	12	15	12	16	18	22	23	27	29	31	38
Telephone bouts	4	11	25	36	51	60	80	83	83	94	121	136
Provenderies	4	5	6	6	6	8	11	13	17	18	22	25
Spare part Stores	8	8	8	7	9	13	13	15	16	16	17	19
Super Markets	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	6	8
Photo Laboratories	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	5	7
Provision Stores	49	53	56	58	58	66	72	79	88	113	126	137
Cosmetiques	31	31	33	32	42	42	44	43	47	52	61	69
Sheaving Saloons	149	166	172	177	181	186	185	187	203	213	226	237

Source: Archives of the divisional office of taxation, Menoua Dschang.

: Office of Dschang Municipality.

Amidst the essential needs that have given birth to other businesses in Dschang is housing. Due to the rising number of students and staff each year, the demand for accommodation has increased. In this regard, construction investment is on the upward trend. Table 3 shows such an exponential increase in the construction of students' dormitories (mini-cités) and rentable apartments. On the basis of urban movements, the number of taxis and motor-cyclists ,above all with the arrival of cheap Chinese Motor-bikes have increased to meet the high demand for

transportation. Interviewing 204 of the Motor-cyclists, 84% of them confirm that their daily incomes have increased to averagely 16 000 francs CFA (about 8 US dollars). With this, if they can successfully work for 25 days a month, then they can earn about 400 000 francs CFA . This amount is far more than what most civil servants earn (a basic salary for a category A2 in Cameroon is about 190 000 francs CFA).The amount can serve for the basic needs of health, education, food and others for their families. This is why the motorbike business has been flooded with youths to give a daily record of accidents in the municipality. 89 provision store owners from table 3 above had similar stories to confirm about the increase in their business turn-over but refused to give detail statistics for the fear that this study was out to expose them to taxation. This status quo has brought a splendour business outlook for the Dschang municipality.

The forward linkage on its part portrays knowledge effects. This knowledge gained, skills and experiences acquired by students, staff, and businessmen of the private sector and other interested persons around has promoted general economic growth and development as normal wages for the skilled manpower has increased relatively, (Robert, 1957; Denison, 1980). With its five faculties, the University of Dschang has turn out degrees from First degree through Masters to Doctorates and diplomas in nearly all-academic specialities opening up the recipients to internal and international consumption and participation in the global market economy. The university has witnessed many international academic affiliations, conferences/symposia and exchange programmes on yearly basis. Cameroon being a peaceful country from independence has made the university and others to attract many foreign students like those of the university of Florida that spend 3 months internship every year in Dschang. This situation has opened up Dschang to the advantage of local qualitative and quantitative socio-economic and technological expansions.

Not all a blessing, some of the hurdles the increased University population and people around have to withstand are the environmental degradation conditions and crime wave. Because of high demand for housing, unchecked constructions have taken place leading to poor and risky habitations. In this way, solid and liquid waste disposal is already surfacing and being a serious problem to the municipality of Dschang. Some Non-Governmental Organisations have tried waste-management partnerships with this municipality to no great success. Water and electricity shortages have come to bear on the population, as the old water and electricity gadgets can not march current demands. Because of high demand for movement during rush hours, motorcyclists have increased with a correlation increase in accidents- on average 7 per week (Police accident ledger, Dschang 2003/2004). Yet another borne-with the increased student body is theft and double-dealing . Coupled with general economic hardship in the country since the devaluation of the CFA in 1994, theft around Dschang has increased. The survey traces this theft emanating from some students and job seekers who have moved in from the rural peripheries of Dschang. This allegation is confirmed from the statistics obtained from the Public Security Office in Dschang. The Police Officials do agree that other unwanted social events like drug abuse, alcoholism, abortion

and sect involvement were on the increase by some geometric progression among the Dschang University population.

Table 4: Reported student related crimes.

Case Year	Aggravated theft	Simple theft	Abuse of confidence	Escroquerie (swindling)	Complicity	Raped cases	Total
1999	6	13	6	8	7	4	44
2000	9	15	7	10	6	3	50
2001	11	17	9	9	10	5	61
2002	13	22	12	13	14	7	86
2003	16	23	15	16	17	8	95
2004	21	37	19	21	23	10	131

Source: Criminal statistics, central police office in Dschang.

From the above crime table and considering 1999 as base year, we realise that total crime number has increased by 87 from the year 2000 to the year 2004, giving an average of about 17 per year for the five year period without including the unrecorded cases. This is serious to be borne by the municipality and its immediate surroundings.

Conclusion/ Recommendation

The creation of Dschang University has changed positively the socio-economic life of the Dschang Metropolitan and the entire Province. And subsequently, where there is a University in Cameroon economic growth is abound. Since the creation of six State Universities in Cameroon in 1993, economic growth and other developments around the regions that benefited from the creation have not been the same. Economic growth in its entire ramification has taken place by some arithmetic or geometric advancement. This is because the Universities have brought with them knowledge, employment and general economic and social expansion that have improved upon the welfare of the people. Such expansions have not gone without some accompanying environmental and social ills as surveyed in Dschang and its immediate environments. The paper reveals that the immediate economic and benefits from the establishment of a university apparently more than offset the creating and running cost of such an institution. By consuming their own trained manpower, such universities will be able to generate other accompanying benefits whose multiplier effects will be milieu –borne to advance economic growth and reduce poverty. Therefore, in higher education, private investment and public-private partnerships should be encouraged as this system will dampen running cost, creating the possibility for more training and in this way connecting the trained citizens in a competitive manner to the World's Global Economy for more growth and knowledge spiral development.

Despite these benefits, to curb some of the academic problems, environmental and social ills that come with Universities, more Universities should be created. This will perhaps take advantage of effect student-teacher ratio for efficient knowledge gain, moral upbringing decongesting the already existing crowdedness of campuses not forgetting balanced regional economic growth and development so needed for Cameroon.

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