



The Current State of Senior Library Staff and the Particularities of Their Professional Training in the Republic of Cameroon

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Abstract: In Cameroon a policy for the management of human resources in the field of Librarianship and Information Science is lacking. A brief history of the development of professional training in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) education and the results of the analysis of the current state of librarians and information workers of the Republic of Cameroon reveal that, the system of continuous training of library Executives and staff lack some complementary levels of training. The main principles of the content of the training of such a system, which must be the basis of the corresponding training programs, are not defined. There is no mechanism for cooperation between the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Arts and Culture in the process of training of library staff. The normative and legal documents regulating the career of the library specialist and their training are lacking. The training programs of the main departments offering training in Documentation and Information, at the Advanced School of Mass Communication (ASMAC), University of Yaounde II and the Department of Library and Information Science of the Protestant University of Central Africa (PUCA), are not standardized nor have the required experience to provide high-level continuing training. Equally, there is no professional publishing house in the field of library science in Cameroon, which is necessary for discussions and debates on issues related to the application of technology in the field of LIS. Based on the above results, this study concludes that training of librarian specialists is not yet well developed and the current state of affairs is not satisfactory for the development of the national culture.

Keywords: Librarianship, Professional Training, Senior Library Staff, Educational System, Republic of Cameroon

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is based entirely on literature review and the author's extensive knowledge, teaching experience and research in Library and Information Science (LIS) education and training in Cameroon. This study provides an overview of the present situation of senior library staff and the particularities of their professional training in Cameroon. Also, this article analyses the current difficulties, barriers and problems affecting higher library education in Cameroon. The reason therefore is that librarianship and in particular LIS education in Cameroon has been influenced by the situation in the countries that colonized Africa. Each

colonial power approached librarianship differently; this greatly affected the discipline in the colonies, Cameroon inclusive. In terms of LIS development, Cameroon can be divided into two language blocks, namely, Anglophone and Francophone blocks

2. Background

Library services were first mentioned in the Republic of Cameroon at the end of the 15th century (during the initial colonization of the country from the 15th to the 18th centuries). A new phase of colonization with the English, German and French missionaries began in the end of the 18th

century—beginning of the 19th century. It is important to note that the colonizers and missionaries from Europe brought a significant number of books and magazines, which contributed to the development of culture and education. The network of Roman Catholic, Protestant and other Christian religious communities, Bible reading centers and book points were actively developed. English, German and French clubs and courses were organized. In some cases, the clergymen created a “secular” library to help educate. The influence of religious missions in the Republic of Cameroon is still very great [1, 9, 11, 13-16].

There are currently 150 libraries in the Republic of Cameroon. The structure of the library network is as follows: national library, parliamentary library; 45 public libraries of the Ministry of Arts and Culture (12 of them – children's libraries); 50 libraries of secondary schools and colleges; 20 libraries of line ministries; 16 academic libraries; 5 libraries of branch research institutes; 12 libraries of religious denominations [2]. Table 1 below presents a representation of the number of specialists and level of training in each group of library network.

Table 1. Level of training of library staff in the Republic of Cameroon.

Library network	Number of Specialists	Level of training		
		High-level library training	Internships	Without formal training
National library of Cameroon	15	3	3	9
Public libraries	46	3	36	7
Libraries of State Universities	206	32	0	174
Libraries of Private Universities	20	3	11	6
College libraries	42	3	19	20
Libraries of Research Institutes	19	4	5	10
Ministry libraries	87	19	5	63
Total	435	67	79	289
Percentage representation		15.4%	18.2%	66.4%

Source: Researcher Personal Data (2016-2017)

The above table indicates that at the beginning of 2017, libraries in the Republic of Cameroon had 435 employees, among them 67 (only 15.4%) had high-level training in librarianship, while 289 (66.4%) had no library education. Furthermore, 79 (18.2%) had their training in the form of internship in major libraries in the Republic of Cameroon and other African countries. Furthermore, very few (7%) graduates from the Department of Documentation and Information at the ASMAC, Yaounde University II and the Department of LISat the Protestant University of Central Africa are employed by the various library networks in Cameroon.

3. Training of Library Staff

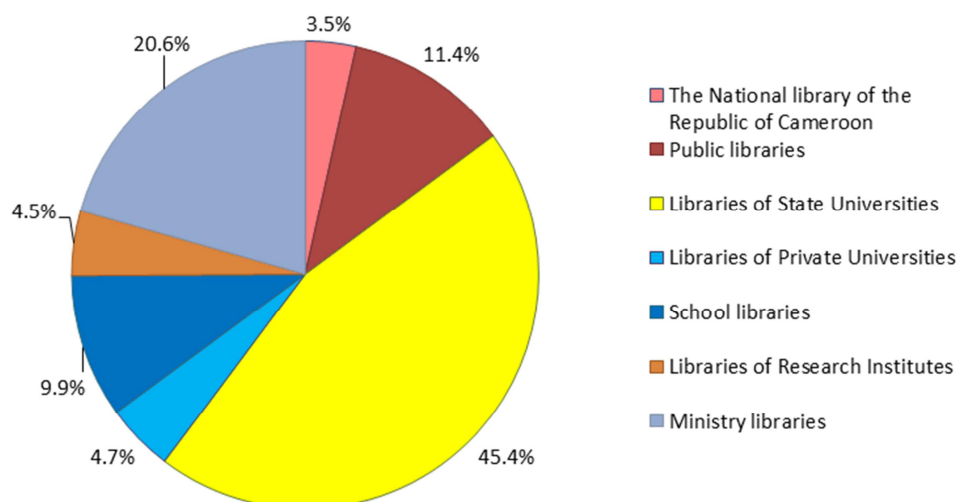
Early training of French-speaking library staff was offered by educational institutions out of the country (Canada, Morocco, Senegal, France and Switzerland). In addition, top-level training was provided at the School of Librarians and Archivists of the University of Cheikh Anta Diopin Dakar - Senegal, which continues to play an important role in the training of Librarians in French-speaking countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, including Cameroon. Indeed, between 1979 and 2015 this school trained 2072 information specialist. Of the 27 African countries represented in this school, Cameroon registered 200 graduates and ranked second after Senegal [1]. However, after their training, many of these specialists diverted as they were employed in other areas.

Equally, training of English-speaking librarians in

Cameroon was conducted in Africa mostly in Nigeria, as well as in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. In the former USSR, 10 librarians were trained (8 in Minsk and 2 in Leningrad Cultural Institutes). By the mid-1990s, 72% of workers in Cameroon libraries were male and 28% female. This disparity in sex distribution of library staff can be explained by socio-cultural and religious factors in the country. Among the library staff who has not through a formal training in librarianship, some work with different degrees from the educational system of the Republic of Cameroon. For example for the primary school: the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC); general secondary and technical education: General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level ("O Level"), General Certificate of Education (GCE) (Technical/Commercial) Ordinary Level, General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level ("A Level"), General Certificate of Education (Technical/Commercial) Advanced Level; high school: general and technical education: Higher National Diploma (HND), Diploma of General University Studies (DEUG), Bachelor's and Master's degrees.

4. Distribution of Library Staff

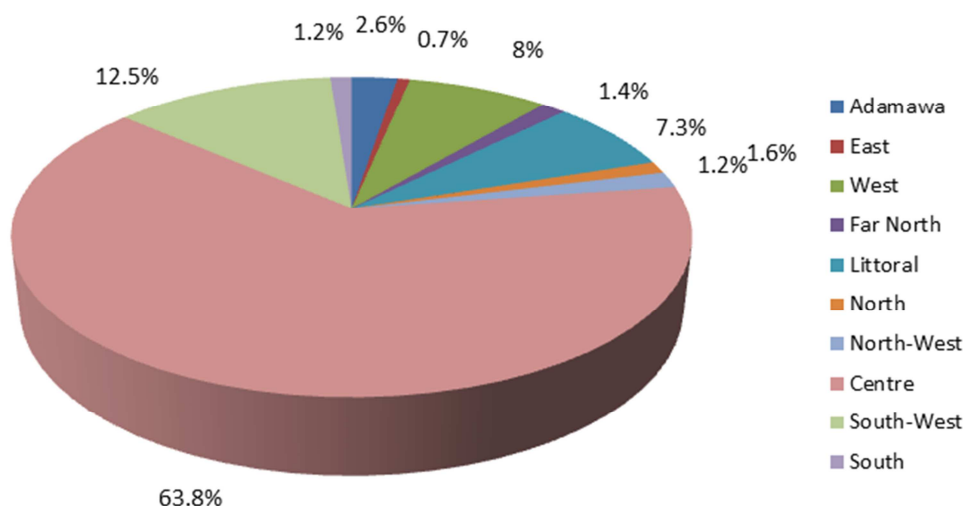
With regard to staff composition, it should be noted that the largest number is employed in libraries of state universities (45.4%), libraries of various ministries (20.6%) and public libraries (11.4%) [2] (See figure 2).



Source: Researcher Personal Data (2016-2017)

Figure 1. Distribution of library staff by types of libraries.

Library human resources are unevenly distributed across the country. A great number of library staff work in the Centre Region and particularly in Yaounde, the capital (63.8%), the South-West Region recorded 12.5%. The percentage of staff serving in libraries is very low in the various regions [2].



Source: Researcher Personal Data (2016-2017)

Figure 2. Distribution of library staff by region.

Looking at the main reasons for the uneven distribution of library staff throughout Cameroon, it should be noted that this is closely related to the history evolution, cultural policy and ideological influence of a country that was colonized by France and England [2].

5. History and Evolution Library Sector in Cameroon

The process of library education in the Republic of Cameroon begins in the middle of the XIX century with the arrival of American and European missionaries. They were engaged in education with objective to reduce illiteracy. By

the mid-1940s, 45% of Cameroonians and 35% of its vocational schools were attached to Roman Catholic, Protestant and other Christian missions. The founders of the missionary libraries simultaneously served as Evangelists, teachers and librarians. The advent of libraries has enabled the people and society of Cameroon to gain a first understanding of the librarianship profession, on the one hand, and all those who were interested in this profession work in libraries as assistant librarians on the other hand. It was the missionaries who were the first to teach the basics of library management processes including the collection, processing and arrangement of books and newspapers.

After the Declaration of independence on January 1st. 1960, Cameroon began training local librarians and

information workers in foreign educational institutions and libraries:

- 1) in regional library schools (in Nigeria and Senegal) with the support of the West African librarians Association;
- 2) during the internships of Cameroonian librarians in major libraries in other African countries;
- 3) through the participation of Cameroonian librarians in various foreign educational programs and courses in librarianship and archives management in England, the United States of America and France. The most active cooperation was with France, this was, maybe due to the historical relations between the two countries and the fact that 8 out of 10 regions are predominantly French-speaking.

6. Professional Education and Training

Short courses: From 1970 to 1985 library day short-term courses and internships for the training of librarians in the cities of Yaounde and Douala operated periodically by the Association for the training of administrative personnel and a pan-African development institution. The purpose of these courses was to provide a library worker without special education with the basic knowledge and skills of library acquisition and document processing. The length of internships varied according to the needs of library staff and could last from 3 to 6 months. The certificate was issued upon completion.

In 1974, the Association of librarians, archivists, documentaries and Museum workers was established with the aim of further improving the library business in Cameroon, increasing the prestige of the librarian profession and improving their educational level. Its members discussed actual problems of professional training of library specialist, developed cooperation and exchange of experience with library associations of near and far abroad. The establishment of the Association has facilitated professional contacts and made the exchange of experience between Cameroonian librarians more effective.

In 1988-1990, disciplines in library science and documentation were taught in order to acquire a certain level of information culture of future specialists in the field of communication at the ASMAG, which trained journalists.

In 1989-1999, thanks to a ten-year partnership agreement between the Main public library in Yaounde and the Association of librarians of France, six-month courses were organized for employees of public libraries in Cameroon and particular countries of Central Africa. They had a practical orientation. In addition to the basics of the library profession, students acquired the ability to organize mass events in public libraries. Graduates received a certificate of assistant librarian, confirmed by the Association of French librarians. Later, however, the partnership agreement between the two organizations was not renewed, and the educational process that began under the agreement was interrupted.

7. Solutions to Training Challenges

For more than three decades to come, Cameroon has been

using two options in addressing the challenges of library training:

- a) training of top-level specialists in various educational institutions in Africa, England, Germany, USA, Canada, France and the former USSR;
- b) professional development of local specialists with the support of international organizations. Foreign specialists were invited to give lectures, seminars and participate in library conferences held in Cameroon. Equally, internship programs were organized abroad for Cameroonian librarians.

The most active in these areas were international organizations such as: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), UNESCO, International Federation for Information and Documentation, (FID), Association of Information and Documentation Professionals (ADBS), African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AFLIA), Commonwealth Library Association (COMLA), International Francophone Association of Librarians and Documentalists (AIFBD), Standing Conference of African University Libraries (SCAULWA), Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern African Library and Information Association (SCECSAL), International Information Bank for French-Speaking Countries (BIEF), International Development Research Centre (CRDI), Association of Partially or Wholly French Language Universities, Network University of French Language (AUPELF), Network University of French Language (UREF), French: Francophone Publishing and Distribution System (SYFED, 'Francophonie' University Association (AUF), Canadian International Development Agency, etc [1, 12, 14-16].

7.1. Higher LIEducation in Cameroon

Higher-level training in librarianship in Cameroon began only in 1994, when, as a result of the University reform and in accordance with presidential decrees No. 93/026 and 93/027, the Second State University was opened in Yaounde (Yaounde II) on 19 January 1993 [3, 4]. A training program for highly qualified librarians began at the ASMAG in 2000; this program acquired the status of a Department. Since 2006, it has become known as the Department of Documentation and Information. This Department became the pioneer institution in the provision of higher-level library training in the Republic of Cameroon.

Currently, about 180 students study at the Documentation and Information Department of ASMAG. The annual enrollment plan for the budget and paid form of education ranges from 60 to 70 students. The training program of the department envisages the training of specialists in the field of documentary information, professionals who can perform the following duties: librarian-documentalist-archivist in libraries, documentation centers, archives, public administration, businesses and international organizations. The duration of studies is three years. At the end of the training, the students obtain a Professional Degree in

Information and Communication Science with majors in Library science, Documentation and Archival science. The training curriculum for professionals mainly consists of the following teaching units: Disciplinary foundations and documentary information professions, Techniques and practices in Library science, Documentation, Archival science and Records Management, General and complementary courses, Knowledge of document, Expression and communication, Information management in organizations/management of organizations, Theoretical approaches to information and communication, Documentary computer, Archival Management and Processing, Information Science and Document/Information Management in the Digital Age, and Practical work.. The teaching staff of the Department comprises eight (08) lecturers, of which six (06) are holders of Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph.D.) in the field of Library Science, Bibliography, Bibliology, Computer Science and Communication, and Archival Science and Records Management.. Lecturers in this department obtained their diplomas (Ph.D) in the former USSR (Republic of Belarus), Cameroon, Nigeria and France. Apart from these full-time lecturers, high-level information practitioners working in libraries, information centers and archives in Yaounde are part of the teaching staff.

7.2. Private Initiatives in the Training of Senior Library Staff

In 2007, the Department of LIS was opened at the Faculty of Social Sciences and International Relations at the Protestant University of Central Africa (Yaounde). The training of specialists is paid in this department and the annual intake of students is 20. The training plan for specialists has as teaching units: Librarianship, Documentation, Bibliographic description, Archival science, Book and publishing technology, Communication and communication tools, Information system, Information dissemination, Copyright and related rights, Educational tools. At the end of the three-year course, the learner will be a Bachelor's degree holder in Information Science and can work as Librarian, Documentalist, Archivist, Information Systems Manager, Information Manager, Database Manager, Business Intelligence, Documentation Inspector in the Cameroonian Public Service. The majority of the teaching staff is made up of lecturers from the Department of Documentation and Information at the ASMAC, University of Yaounde II and senior information practitioners working in libraries, information centers and archives in Yaounde. The existence of partner libraries, information centers and archival services in Yaounde, has permitted these students to carry out their internship and to master the practical part of their training.

8. Challenges

Analyzing the current policy of training library staff in the Republic of Cameroon, it should be noted that it is not

designed for a wide range of applicants. Even those students who study at the expense of budgetary funds have to pay about 100 US dollars per year for study. The cost of paid Higher LIS education in Cameroon is \$ 1000 – a significant amount for a country where the average wage is \$ 60 per month. The creation of the Department of Documentation and Information of the State University of Yaounde II and the Department of LIS of the Protestant University of Central Africa also make it possible to solve gender problems. Cameroonian women had gained access to the profession of librarian, since up to that time higher LIS education had been available only abroad, which was unacceptable to most Cameroonian women because it did not conform to cultural and historical traditions. Only in 1982, 20 years after the establishment of the School of Librarians, archivists and documentalists at the University of Dakar (Senegal), that it became possible to see the first Cameroonian woman to receive a diploma from that school [5]. According to statistics from the school of librarians, archivists and documentaries in Dakar, among 120 Cameroonians who received education in 1962-1994, there were 33 women, i.e. 27.5% against 87 (72.5%) men [5, 11-13]. During the period from 1998 to 2016, in the Republic of Cameroon the Department of Documentation and Information of the ASMAC of the State University of Yaounde II trained 677 specialists, of which women accounted for 63% and men – 37%, and the Department of LIS of the Protestant University of Central Africa only for five years (in the period from 2011 to 2016) trained 80 personnel (women 70%, men 30%) [7-10, 12].

9. Policies and Legislation

The Republic of Cameroon does not yet have clear criteria for the state's personnel policy in the field of library science. Only slightly more than 15% of library specialists have higher education. They are unevenly distributed throughout the country. Training of library staff is carried out by the Department of Documentation and Information of the ASMAC of the State University of Yaounde II and the Department of LIS of the Protestant University of Central Africa. The country does not have a system of continuous library education, which would include several interrelated educational levels. The basic principles of building such a system, which should be the basis for the implementation of appropriate educational programs, are not defined. There is no mechanism for interaction between the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Arts and Culture in the training of library staff.

There are no normative and legal acts in the country that would regulate the career of a specialist directly depending on the level of his education. The main schools in the country, which train library specialists are, Departments of Documentation and Information of the ASMAC and the Department of LIS of the Protestant University of Central Africa, do not have an educational standard, and are experiencing staffing shortage.

10. Staff Quality and Other Related Problems

Speaking about the quality of trainers or teaching staff of librarianship in Cameroon, it is important to note that the Department of Documentation and Information in ASMAC and at the Department of LIS in the Faculty of Social Sciences and International Relations of the Protestant University of Central Africa operate without lecturers at the professorial level– they do not have Associate Professors and full Professors. These departments therefore do not allow students to continue to the Master or Doctorate level in Library Science. Such an opportunity has been provided by foreign library schools, for example, in West Africa (Nigeria, Senegal), as well as in America and Europe. There is an acute shortage of teaching materials, relevant software systems, and limited access to the Internet and poor connectivity, etc. Furthermore, there is no professional publication in the field of LIS necessary that could have provided the ground to discuss issues related to evolutions and innovations in librarianship in Cameroon.

Established in 1974, the national public professional association, the Association of librarians, documentarists, archivists and Museum workers, has not been able to take over the function of consolidating Cameroon's professional library community. The Association does not have structures that could determine the policy of library business in the country, training and advanced training of library staff, contribute to the improvement of the social status of the librarian profession in society. There has not been any press organ that could be an important means of professional communication and consolidation for Cameroonian librarians.

11. Conclusion

In total, it should be emphasized that this study identifies a number of barriers to higher library education in Cameroon, the system of training library staff has not yet developed, and the current state of affairs does not correspond to the urgent needs of cultural construction of the country.

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