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Accountability and Perception of Effectiveness in Public Universities in Cameroon: Case of the  
University of Buea

BY

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*This thesis is submitted to the Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen, Norway in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master of Philosophy Degree in Public Administration.*

Prof. Ishtiaq Jamil (Supervisor)

## Declaration

I, Ngege Ransom Tanyu, declare that this thesis entitled: “**Accountability and Perception of Effectiveness in Public Universities in Cameroon: Case of the University of Buea**”, submitted to the University of Bergen for the Master of Arts in Public Administration has never been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, it is my own work and all material have been duly acknowledged.

## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my father, Ngenge Simon Tayoba, and elder brother, Nfor Alvine Buake, who are of blessed memory.

## Acknowledgement

I thank my thesis supervisor Prof. Ishtiaq Jamil of the Department of Administration and Organization Theory, University of Bergen. He consistently allowed this paper to be my own work but steered me in the right the direction whenever he thought I needed it.

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I thank my family and friends for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

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## Abstract

This research study provides an understanding of accountability and the perception of its effectiveness in public universities in Cameroon using the University of Buea as case-study. Through the principal-agent theory, patron client model and Weber's bureaucracy theory, it examines the effects of government appointment and control of academic leaders at the University of Buea on its accountability mechanism. It departs from the assumption that government appointment and control of university leadership impedes accountability. The objectives of the research study are to understand accountability, implications of government appointment and control of university leadership at the University of Buea on legal and professional accountability and faculty and students' perception of the effectiveness of accountability with regards to university leadership. The research questions are attempted using a structural qualitative research design achieved through content analysis and interviews. The limitation of the research study ranges from narrowing it down to the University of Buea of eight public universities in Cameroon. However, the case provides an in-depth analysis of accountability public universities in Cameroon, what legal and professional accountability at the University of Buea entails given its exploratory nature.

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### List of Acronyms

ADEA-	Development of Education in Africa
ASTI-	Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters
CA	Central Administration
COT-	College of Technology
TPDIC-	Development of Information and Communication Technologies
EU-	European Union
FUC-	Federal University of Cameroon
HOD-	Head of Department
HTTTC-	Higher Technical Teacher Training College
ICE-	Internal Control and Evaluation
POSSCUB-	Political Science Students' Council
RCRB-	Research, Cooperation and Relation with the Business World
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UBAC-	University of Buea American Corner
UBa	University of Bamenda
UBSU	University of Buea Student's Union

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1 Introduction

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Accountability in public universities in Cameroon falls within public sector accountability. Types of public sector accountability in Cameroon include political, public, managerial, professional and legal accountability (Selaratana, Sannudee, 2009; Sinclair, 1995). Public universities are undergoing transformation with regards to accountability. These institutions of higher education in Cameroon face myriad pressures and responsibilities from the need to account for funds received from the governments, private donors and charity organizations which combines with others to pressure them into establishing numerous mechanisms for accountability (Leveille, 2006). Common within public universities in Cameroon are legal and professional accountability. Legal accountability entails external oversight for compliance with legislative and constitutional structures formulating and regulating public universities (Vokasovic, 2010). For professional accountability, public officials are accountable to an expert group of which they are a member. In other words, subordinates are accountable to superiors with a low degree of external oversight (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987; Selaratana, Sannudee, 2009).

Legal and professional accountability are increasingly becoming institutionalized in higher education especially in public universities around the world (Huisman and Currie, 2004). Today, both legal or professional accountability and the perception of their effectiveness in public universities in terms of university leadership tend to structure the relationship between governments, university leadership, faculty and students in most countries with regards to policy making, implementation and evaluation. According to Freidman (1955), governments are most often found to be responsible for the setup and control of the rules and regulations governing legal and professional accountability in public universities in regions where public universities are usually largely paid for by the government or its institutions. In Africa for instance, the tendency for governments in majority of countries to hold university leadership accountable is high though it limits their academic, financial and managerial autonomy

(Eisemon & Salmi, 1993). However, accountability should not always be seen as limiting the institutional autonomy of public universities because accountability is also a way to ensure autonomy in itself.

In most African countries, governments play a big role in the establishment and implementation of rules and regulations governing legal and professional accountability in public universities. However, Raza (2009, p. 2) has posited that irrespective of the role of government, public universities deserve some degree of autonomy to be able to achieve their objectives, both in research and in teaching. This is one of the reasons why public universities over the years has seen management go beyond government-controlled to government-supervised systems thereby allowing for some level of institutional autonomy (Vukasovic, 2010).

It is a similar situation in Cameroon with two higher education systems existing side by side and eight public universities funded almost entirely by tax-payers money. The universities include:

- University of Yaoundé I in the Centre Region
- University of Yaoundé II in the Centre Region
- University of Douala in the Littoral Region
- University of Dschang in the West Region
- University of Maroua in the Far North Region
- University of Ngoundéré in the Adamawa Region
- University of Bamenda in the North West Region
- University of Buea in the South west Region

Besides the degree of autonomy that these public universities enjoy, this research study aims to understand the context of accountability particularly legal and professional accountability in public universities in Cameroon with the University of Buea (UB) as case-study. First, by decoupling the implications of government appointment and control of the university leadership at UB. Second, by investigating the perception of the effectiveness of accountability by faculty and students in terms of academic leadership. This is because leadership effectiveness is an indicator of accountability. In other words, university leadership with an effective leadership track

record, stand to perform better with a certain degree of trust and responsibility when it comes to accountability

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Huisman and Currie (2004, p. 530) make mention of the general acceptance of accountability as “answerability for performance” citing (Romzek, 2000, p. 22). They take special note of the obligation to report to others, explain, justify and answer questions about the use of resources and with what effects. This research study focuses on legal and professional grounds for university leadership at UB to be held accountable by the government and faculty as well as its implications on university leadership. The challenge is that in the case of UB, the reasons and circumstances under which university leadership are supposed to render accountability to either government officials and within faculty and students are not clear cut (Thaddeus Metz, 2011). One of the reasons for such indistinctiveness is the hierarchical structure of the university vis-à-vis its mission and objectives. Moreover, majority of university leadership in the chain of command are appointed by the government supposing that they pay loyalty to the state. In such a situation, there is a clash between fulfilling the objective of the university and satisfying the interests of the state given that the state in Cameroon is personalized, i.e. it is not separated from the leadership.

In contemporary higher education studies, governments worldwide are becoming more determined to limit their involvement in steering higher education even with the increasing importance of legal and professional accountability on their policy agendas Vukasovic (2010, p. 107). On the contrary, the government in Cameroon appears to instead be tightening its grip on the control and management of public universities. As a result, the context of accountability in public universities in Cameroon has become blurred. What happens to legal and professional accountability when university leadership are appointed by the government on party nepotistic line is unavoidably a question of academic research. That is why this research study intends to factor such a policy into the accountability relationship between government officials and the university leadership at UB. The contestation is grounded on legal and professional accountability of university leadership to government officials as well as faculty and students’ perception of the effectiveness of these two accountability types in terms of

leadership at the University of Buea. For example, the impact of the appointment of university leadership at UB by the Cameroon government, reaction from faculty and students to inefficient and ineffective behaviour of university leadership in handling matters of professional accountability.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

The following are the research questions for this study:

- What factors explain accountability in public universities in Cameroon?
- What are the implications of government appointment and control of university leadership on legal and professional accountability at UB?
- How do faculty and students perceive the effectiveness of accountability at the University of Buea in relation to academic leadership?

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The following are the objectives of this research study:

- To understand accountability in the context of public universities in Cameroon.
- To unpack the consequences of government appointment and control of university leadership on legal and professional accountability at UB.
- To determine faculty and students' perception of the effectiveness of accountability on academic leadership at the UB.

### **1.5 Rationale and Significance of the study**

Before and during the 1980s, there was a relatively strong bond between governments and public universities through funding, legislation and planning mechanisms. Nowadays, governments appear to be rolling back by granting public universities greater autonomy (Huisman and Currie, 2004; Gornitzka et al, 1999). Besides governments retreating and granting greater autonomy to public universities, various kinds of new and interrelated trends of governance are becoming visible in public universities amongst which is accountability. Therefore, stepping back by governments in favour of autonomy for public universities is being accompanied by demand for accountability. However, variations exist in accountability trends based on country and context.

The rationale for selecting Cameroon as case country is because the country has two different educational systems. It is worthwhile to study to legal and professional accountability in Cameroon because of the disparity in the accountability mechanism pitting the two educational systems. Second, in a personalized system of state leadership and hierarchic governance like Cameroon, it is interesting to analyze how leadership in universities are chosen, what academic freedom exists, and how the state controls and steers universities. It is of primary concern for this research study to unravel the intricacies surrounding legal and professional accountability of leadership at the University of Buea; decoupling implications of government appointment and control of the university leadership at UB and investigating the perception of the effectiveness of accountability by faculty and students in terms of academic leadership. While government officials are seen to supposedly rely on legal norms ensure accountability at the University of Buea, professional accountability is considered to be a tool used by faculty and students to measure efficiency of academic leadership in handling educational matters.

The choice of the University of Buea is circumstantial. To begin with, the struggle surrounding its establishment in 1993 was part of a decentralization process of public universities in Cameroon. It was sparked by demands from English speaking Cameroonians for a university to reflect their Anglo-Saxon heritage (Jua & Njamnjoh, 2002). This has contributed to the selection of UB as case-study for the research study. Secondly, the usually conscious nature of faculty and students at the University of Buea of their rights make it a good case to observe. They have exhibited it severally through strikes and protests. The attempt throughout the research study is to understand what constitute legal and professional accountability at the University of Buea.

## **1.6 Scope**

The scope of this research study is fixated by, but not limited to, the observation of legal and professional accountability at the University of Buea. Accountability in public universities in Cameroon falls within the scope of the research study even though little is said about other public universities in Cameroon. Instead, the University of Buea is used as a measuring tool of what legal and professional accountability stand for in



other public universities in Cameroon. The scope also goes beyond accountability per se to discuss the implications of government appointment and control of the university leadership at UB and investigate the manner in which faculty and students at the University of Buea view its effectiveness in a university leadership context.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

Conceptual definition is quite important in research studies because concepts and/or terms are not always clear-cut. Most concepts are often used in abstraction and thus require operationalization. Consequently, this research study defines key concepts such as accountability, legal accountability, professional accountability in this section. This is in order to enable the reader to know the context within which the concepts are used. Beyond mere definition of the concepts, the research study serves the purpose of revealing and simplifying ambiguities, explaining connotations in ideas, and clarifying assumptions that warrant questioning (Metz, 2011, p. 42).

### **1.7.1 Accountability**

Accountability is a concept with many connotations. Whereas some scholars see accountability as “answerability for performance” (Huisman & Currie, 2004; Romzek, 2000), others consider it to mean the requirement to demonstrate responsible actions to some external constituenc(y)ies (Thaddeus Metz, 2011: 43-44). Yet, some think that “one is accountable to someone or something and for something or other subject to possible sanctions” (Du Toit, 2007; 121; Behn, 2001, p. 3–4). All the same, this research study is short of Metz (2011, p. 43-44) hypothesis because it is concerned mostly with the implications of government appointment of university leadership on accountability views from an angle of university leadership. Truly, a generally acceptable definition of accountability should include elements of both being accountable (demonstrating responsible action) and holding accountable (responding to non-compliance).

However, the focus in this research study is restricted to analyzing accountability “as an asymmetrical relationship between social actors in which one actor is obliged to report or justify his actions to another” (Vukasovic, 2010, p. 107). Of particular interest

in Vukasovic’s work is the distinction between legal and professional accountability with regards to higher education institutions. Whereas legal accountability involves compliance with academic mandates, professional accountability upholds deference to individual judgement and expertise in universities. These two accountability types in this research study are expatiated in the proceeding section. They form the basis on which arguments in the research study are built. Legal accountability is structured within the framework of government institutions while professional accountability is determined by faculty and students’ perception of the effectiveness of academic leadership in management and discharge of their duties.

**Table 1.1. Two Types of Accountability Source of Expectations and/or Control**

Type of Accountability	Source of Expectations and/or Control
Legal	Government
Professional	Peer, i.e. Faculty and Students, adherence to norms of code of conduct and ethics (professional norms)

Source: Adapted from Rumzek (2000, p. 24)

The table above indicates the two types of accountability covered in this research study and their source of expectations or control in public universities.

### **1.7.2 Legal Accountability**

Romzek (2000, p. 26-27) refers to legal accountability relationships as involving “detailed external oversight of performance for compliance with established performance mandates, such as legislative and constitutional structures”. Further arguments suggest that the use of the term legal is meant to convey the level of detailed scrutiny typical in judicial proceedings, “most constraints that seek to guarantee . . . accountability to the courts are . . . ultimately designed to ensure that decisions are technically correct”. Going by the theoretical framework of this research

study, the underlying relationship of legal accountability is that of a principal and an agent; where the contractual paradigm focuses on whether an agent has complied with a principal's expectations. In the words, the question of whether university leadership at the University of Buea have complied with expectations of government officials or have acted contrary to it. Oversight is considered to be anticipatory, especially through informal inquiries and direct communications between government reviewers and administrators from the ministry.

### **1.7.3 Professional Accountability**

Professional accountability are systems reflected in work arrangements that afford high degrees of autonomy to individuals who base their decision-making on internalized norms of appropriate practice (Vukasovic 2010, p. 107; Romzek, 2000, p. 26-27). In higher education parlance, one can take this to mean peer review and accountability. The use of the term 'professional' reflects the type of deference to specialized knowledge and expertise that is accorded to academic professionals and where the sense of responsibility is to satisfy the academic demands of the university. In this research study, professional accountability is used where faculty and students acknowledge institutional leadership and recognize that they possess special skills, experience or working methods needed by the university and look up to them to deliver accordingly. This is about academic legitimacy.

## **1.8 Structure of the Thesis**

This research study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter one is predominantly empirical. It offers an introduction, background discussions, statement of the problem, research questions and objectives, rationale and significance, scope and limitations of the study and definition of concepts. It also gives recourse as to why it is important to study accountability in public universities in Cameroon. It equally connotes how faculty and students perceive of the effectiveness of accountability in terms of leadership at the University of Buea. In detail, chapter two discusses the context of the research study, chapter three reviews literature and chapter four presents the theoretical framework of the research study.

Chapter five focuses on the research methodology and design of the study. It gives a critical analysis of how the research was conducted, what tools were used in data collection, for what reasons and how the findings were reached. Chapter five discusses the findings and analysis of the research study. It details the implications of government appointment and control of the university leadership at UB as well as faculty and students' perception of the effectiveness of accountability as far as academic leadership at the University of Buea is concerned. Some of the findings are primarily descriptive and draw on data from both newspapers, documentation review and interviews. Chapter seven provides a summary and conclusion to the research study. It also discusses the quality of the research study.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the preliminary aspects of the research study, offering an introduction and a background on which the research study is furthered. Chapter one also detailed the concerns related to statement of the problem, spelling out the research questions and objectives, mapping out the boundaries and scope, defining key concepts and presenting the structure of the research study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2 Context of the Study

#### 2.1 Evolution of Higher Education in Cameroon

The evolution of higher education in Cameroon dates back to 1962 with the creation of the Federal University of Cameroon (FUC) in Yaounde. Opening in September of 1962 with a student enrollment of 600, all registered in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Science, and the Faculty of Law and Economics. In 1993, rise in student enrollment, congestion in the University of Yaounde, social and political exigencies led to university reforms which saw the splitting up of the lone university into six independent state universities. (Fonkeng and Ntembe, 2009, p. 232).

Today, there exist eight independent state universities in Cameroon with the University of Buea and the University of Bamenda (UBa) founded on the Anglo-Saxon system of education with English as the only language of instruction. These two universities are located in the South West and North West Regions of the country which make up the English-speaking regions of Cameroon. The remainder of the universities have French as the main language of instruction and are reminiscent of French colonial culture (Nyamnjoh, Nkwi, and Konings, 2012).

A report of July 1999 of the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Working Group on Higher Education states that the University of Buea was created in 1993 as part of a decentralization and decongestion of the University of Yaoundé-the lone public university in Cameroon from 1962 to the 1990s. The creation of the University of Buea was announced in May 1991 and confirmed by Decree No. 92/074 of 13 April 1992. The Universities of Buea replaced the Buea University Centre. Decree No. 93/034 of 19 January 1993, organized the University of Buea. Below is a satellite map of the campus of the University of Buea.

The University of Buea (UB) is located in the historic town of Buea, in the South West Region of Cameroon. South West Region is one of two English speaking regions in Cameroon. The presidential decree No. 92/074 of 19 January 1993 organizing UB stipulates that the governance structure of the university should be based on Anglo-

Saxon traditions and values with limited government interference (Awasom, 2006). Accordingly, its university leadership from vice-chancellor to heads of departments are to be elected on recommendation of UB Senate and Council. Nyamnjoh, Nkwi, and Konings (2012, p. 4-6) have posited that this stipulation is only working in theory because the Cameroon government continues to influence the management of the university through the appointment of university leadership as laid down by Decree No. 2012/33 of 29<sup>th</sup> June 2012 on the appointment of vice-chancellors and rectors of public universities in Cameroon. This is somewhat a contradiction of the very text which created the University of Buea.

Jua & Njamnjoh (2002) have further elaborated that violation of the laws establishing the University of Buea such as the appointment of university leadership without consultation with UB Council and Senate, suspension and/or dismissal of staff and lecturers at short notice without any meaningful explanation affects the functioning of the university as a whole and has rendered the the UB Senate and Council useless. Therefore, it is questionable if the leadership at the University of Buea answer to government officials with the intention to protect their positions or they simply serve the purpose of legal accountability. Faculty and students' perception of the effectiveness of professional accountability could also and largely be influenced for reasons of insubordination.

Besides, the organigram of the University of Buea shows that it has been presided over by three pro-chancellors since its inception. First by professor Victor Anomah Ngu from 1993-2005, Dr Peter Agbor from 2005-2008 and professor Maurice Tcheunte from 2008 till date. The existence of the post of a pro-chancellor downplays the post of the vice-chancellor. At the inauguration of the university in 1993-2005, the post of vice-chancellor was occupied by Dr Dorothy Limunga Njeuma. She was succeeded by professor Cornelius Mbifang Lambi who served from 2005-2006. Professor Vincent P.K. Titanji took over in 2006 and served until 2012. He was replaced by Dr Nalova Lyonga who remained vice chancellor until 2027 when she was replaced by the current vice chancellor in the person Dr Ngomo Horace Manga. In the line of registrars, Dr Herbert Endeley served from 1993-2005, professor Victor Julius Nghoh from 2005-

2007, professor Samson Negho from 2007-2014 and professor Roland Ndip from 2014-present.

Majority of the above-mentioned university leadership have so far been directly appointed by presidential decrees in contrary to the internal rules and regulations of UB. Therefore, the focus of this research study is to find out whether their appointments have impacted on the legal and professional accountability mechanisms of the university. An attempt is also made to understand how faculty and students perceive the effectiveness of such accountability mechanisms.

## **2.2 Contextual Analysis of Accountability in Cameroon**

Legal accountability as I understand is about procedural accountability such as abiding by rules and regulations in terms of recruitment, budgeting, etc. professional accountability, on the other hand, is to uphold some academic excellence and standards. In theory, legal and professional accountability rules establishing public universities in Cameroon suppose that university leadership answer to both the government through the ministry of higher education and to faculty and students through quality leadership and education. However, it is something else in practice as university leadership in public universities in Cameroon; ranging from the top tier of administration to the bottom such as chancellors, rectors or vice chancellors, registrars, directors, deans and vice deans, and heads of departments are appointed according to Law No. 005 of April 2001 on the orientation of higher education and Decree No. 2012/33 of 29<sup>th</sup> June 2012 on the appointment of vice-chancellors and rectors of public universities. The act of appointment in itself could be an indication that accountability is not what it seems to be in practice as on paper.

The appointment and control of university leadership in public universities leans both legal and professional accountability towards the government for obvious reasons such as the desire of the appointees to protect their positions, pay loyalty to their bosses and avoid sanctions. Ngu (1993, p. 29-30) for example states that the structure of university governance in Cameroon is controlled by the government through the Council of Higher Education under the Minister of Higher Education. He further elaborates that emanates from the government being responsible for the allocation of

the budget with less than 0.4 per cent coming from other sources. Moreover, the performance of higher education is evaluated by the Higher Education and Technical Scientific Research Council, set up in 1972 by decree No. 741358 and the decree modified in 1982 (D No. 82/465). His argument describes a situation where legal and professional accountability can be said to be top-down. The case of the University of Buea will confirm or dismiss such as assumption in this research study.

### **2.3 Corporate bodies of the University of Buea**

Presidential Decree no. 93.034 of 19 January 1993 establishing the University of Buea established with it the following corporate institutions:

- the Council, the Senate,
- the Congregation,
- the Faculty Board,
- the Departmental Board.

### **2.4 Structure of the University of Buea**

At the helm of the organisational setup of the University of Buea is the chancellor who doubles as the minister of higher education. The post is presently occupied by professor Jacques Fame Ndongu. He is assisted by a pro-chancellor in the person of professor Edward Ako who has the rank of junior minister. The first two posts have little to do with direct management of the university. The chancellor and pro-chancellor are more or less representatives of government interests in the university. The most senior Senate member is the vice chancellor (VC). The Council is chaired by the Pro-Chancellor. The VC attends as a rapporteur, along with the Registrar. The Deans attend Council as observers (guests).

The next official in the line of hierarchy is the vice-chancellor who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the university. The incumbent vice-chancellor is professor Ngomo Horace Manga. He took over from Nolova Leonga (Ph.D) in 2017. The vice-chancellor is assisted in the discharge of his duties and responsibilities by a Registrar and deputy vice-chancellors. There exists deputy vice-chancellors in charge of Teaching, Professionalisation and Development of Information and Communication



Technologies (TPDIC), deputy vice-chancellor in charge of Internal Control and Evaluation (ICE), deputy vice-chancellor in charge of Research, Cooperation and Relation with the Business World (RCRB), and a United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) chair. Directly under the registrar and deputy vice-chancellors are directors of the library, academic affairs, student affairs, information technologies and finance.

The University of Buea has eight faculties and three schools or colleges. The three schools are headed by directors and assisted by deputy-directors. Faculties are headed by deans and assisted by vice-deans.

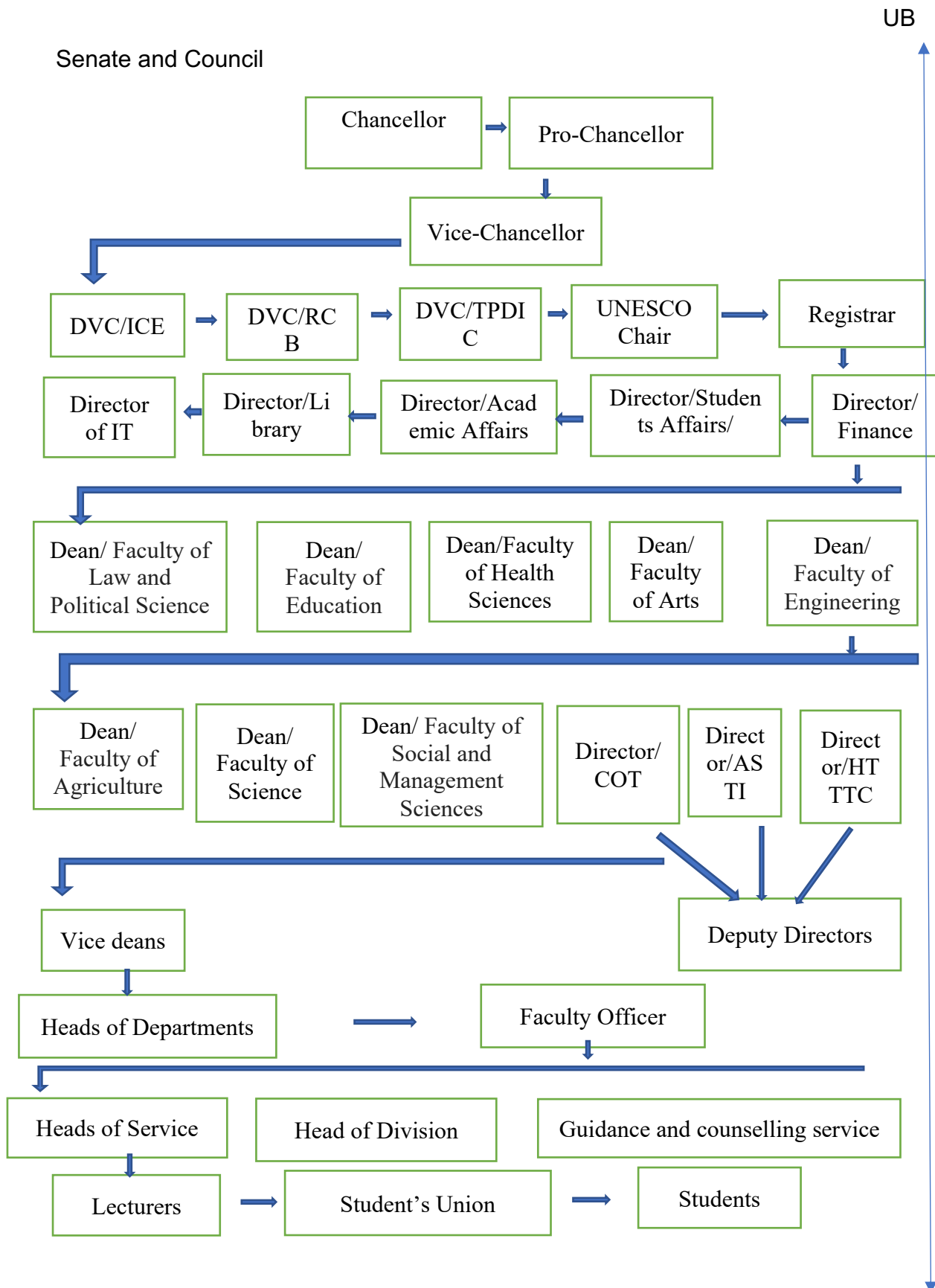
**Table 2.1: Faculties and Schools at the University of Buea**

Faculties	Schools
1. Arts	1. College of Technology
2. Science	2. Advanced School for Translators and Interpreters Colleges
3. Health Sciences	3. Higher Teachers Technical Training College Kumba
4. Education	
5. Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine	
6. Engineering and Technology	
7. Laws and Political Science	
8. Social and Management Sciences	

Next in the chain of command are heads of departments, heads of service, head of division, faculty officer, guidance and counselling service, lecturers, student's union and students. The University of Buea has forty departments. Below is a diagrammatic

representation of the organizational structure of the University of Buea. There is also director of information technologies.

**Figure 1.1. Organizational Setup of the University of Buea**



*Source: researcher's*

Higher education in Cameroon after 1980 still follows a government-controlled model. According to Ngu (1993), the system in Cameroon is grounded on the following premise:

the titular head of the university is the chancellor who is assimilated into the government... He is assisted by an academic head, the Vice-Chancellor, appointed by the Head of State from among the full professors. The Chancellor reports directly to the Minister of Higher Education and obtains instructions from the Government through him, although the supreme governing body of the University is the Governing Council... (p. 31)

The description gives an indication of the direction of accountability whether legal or professional with concomitant effects on academic leadership and quality of education. The appointment of heads to public universities is usually for an indefinite period and depends on the discretion of the Head of State. There are no statutory provisions for censure, impeachment or dismissal of these institution heads. In other words, the government is the principal coordinator of higher education through the control of the Ministry of Higher Education.

The organigram above shows the nature of such a hierarchic structure. It clearly indicates a top-down accountability system whereby decision making and information flows down the line from Government through the Ministry of Higher Education, through the minister and his deputy (pro-chancellor) to the vice-chancellor. The vice-chancellor then discharges it in the form of rules and regulations to his subordinates through the Senate and University Council to other administrative staff in the interest of the university supposedly. This type of mechanism begs for an inquiry into the accountability dimensions of public universities in Cameroon and the implications of government appointment and control of the university leadership at UB and an investigation into the perception of the effectiveness of accountability by faculty and students in terms of academic leadership.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has touched on the evolution of higher education in Cameroon without which it would have been difficult to understand the context of the research study and the rhetoric of accountability in its public universities. The chapter narrows down to the case of UB under study. It presents the organizational structure of the university which is quite helpful especially in selecting participants in the interviews for research study in the chapter on methodology and research design.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **3 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework of the research study. It hinges on various paradigms through which legal and professional accountability in public universities are studied. Special emphasis is laid on principal-agent theory, patron-client model and Weber's theory on bureaucracy and its applicability to the case study. Various scholars have written extensively on accountability and its underpinnings in higher education with particular interest in public universities. From governments' funding policies that condition public universities to drive towards performance to types of accountability and how it affects the quality of leadership in higher education. This chapter also presents the literature review of the research study after the theoretical framework where different studies of principal agent theory and its usage have been discussed.

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

This research study uses the principal-agent theory, patron-client model and Weber's theory on bureaucracy. With regards to the principal-agent theory, accountability is taken to mean the function of the capabilities of a principal(s) to judge the performance of an agent(s), and a function of the institutions involved (Gailmand, 2012, P. 1-4). The choice of theories is no accident given that they are widely used paradigm for studying accountability in higher education. However, applicability of the theories to public universities in Cameroon is little known. This research study has taken upon itself to apply these three theories in order to offer an understanding of accountability relationships that exist in public universities in Cameroon with the case-study of the University of Buea. The patron-client model and Weber's theory on bureaucracy are discussed in detail the literature section in this chapter. Besides the three theories, this chapter presents general perspectives through which accountability can be understood in higher education institutions.

#### **3.2 Critical Perspectives in Understanding Accountability in Higher Education**

Continuous increase in the demand for accountability in higher education has led to the emergence of a number of critical viewpoints. They range from internal and external, inward and outward, vertical and horizontal, upward and downward,

professional legal, political and economic, soft and hard to positive and negative accountability (Metz, 2011). These viewpoints cut across all higher education institutions both public and private even though some are more predominant in public unlike private universities and vice-versa. However, there is a difficulty to ascertain who should be accountable, to whom, why, how and under which institutional arrangements given legal and professional guidelines for most public universities today.

In stressing the importance of legal and professional accountability in public universities, Mayer (2005, P. 177) argues that irrespective of the dimensions or institutional frameworks, these two accountability types remain the most pressing and problematic. This research study seeks to unravel the parallels of legal and professional accountability in public universities in Cameroon. It so happens that the University of Buea suffers from repeated rivalries resulting from continuous interference in management and control by government official on the one hand and protests and strikes from faculty and students on the other hand on matters of educational quality and academic leadership.

In what Leveille (2006, p. 55) has termed “a public agenda and state-level accountability”, structuring of higher education institutions around the world presents a situation where rationality presupposes that rules and regulations of establishment should be implemented and upheld. But is difficult to determine the direction of legal and professional accountability in the interest of academic leadership and management in public universities in Cameroon such as UB. Evidence from practice in the case of the University of Buea shows that government officials and university leadership face each other in grappling with established rules and procedures.

Poole (2011) in “The Relationship Between External Accountability Policy and Internal Accountability: A Cross-State Analysis of Charter and Traditional Public Schools”, touches on aspects of internal and external accountability in the educational sector stating that external accountability could be defined “as the pressures, demands, and expectations from and responsibility to state, district, and local legislators and school boards, charter authorizers, parents, donors, and other actors outside the

organizational unit” while internal accountability is a system in which internal collective behaviors and conditions that exist direct the attention and effort of public universities to continuous improvement. In the case of this research study, external accountability is such pressures, demands, and expectations from the Cameroon government channeled to the University of Buea through the Ministry of Higher Education. The following table provides a clearer explication of the discussion

**Table 3.1: Dimension of Accountability at the University of Buea**

	Accountability	
Level of accountability	Internal	External
Horizontal	Peer accountability inside the organization	Peer accountability outside the organization such as to association of universities
Vertical	Top-down accountability mechanism within the organization	X To Ministry of Higher Education

As illustrated above, X is concerned with top – down legal accountability. When it concerns professional accountability, it is both internal/horizontal and external/horizontal. The synthesis revolves around government (specifically referring but not limited to officials in the Ministry of Higher Education) appointment of UB leadership and its repercussions for legal and professional accountability. These viewpoints from which accountability in public universities is understood cannot be overemphasized. Be it internal or external accountability, legal and professional, what is of great importance is whether it fits the specific context within which this research study is constructed.

### 3.3 Operationalisation of Variables

#### 3.3.1 Dependent Variable.

The dependent variable is defined as the degree of responsiveness of legal and professional accountability. Legal and professional accountability performance are

dependent on government appointment and control of university leadership at UB. The ability or inability of government officials to observe fairness, objectivity and the rule of law in its employment policies of university leadership and the failure of governance practice in assessing their quality and performance is a predictor of the consequences on legal accountability. Professional accountability is measured using performance indicators such as promotion criteria which is based on publications, supervision of master/PhD students, efficiency of teaching staff, employability of graduates, competition at enrollment stage (i.e., the ratio of the number of applications to the number of available places) and flexibility in entry and education type (full time/part time) (UNESCO, 2001). Due to practical considerations in finding a way to measure the degree of response, the research study focused mostly on the responses specifically related to legal and professional accountability.

### **3.3.2 Independent variable**

The independent variables are the government appointment and control of university leadership at the University of Buea. Indicators of legal and professional accountability at the University of Buea play an important role in determining the quality of leadership and education at the University of Buea. They influence the spectrum of mission areas, values, history, services and stakeholders (government officials, university leadership, faculty and students at the university). However, such indicators have been thwarted because they heavily rely on informal networks that guard the relationships between government officials and the university leadership thereby determining the nature, level and direction of accountability. For instance, highly publicized scandals in The Guardian Post and The Post Newspapers such as trading of sex for marks and award of fake certificates have raised questions about accountability and organizational governance at the University of Buea. Accountability indicators in the areas of teaching and research, mission and programme, governance, fundraising and development, employment practices, financial management, public accountability by informal networks that structure accountability all stem from government appointments of UB leadership.



### **3.4 Adaptation of the Principal Agent Theory**

The principal-agent theory has its roots in economics and is based on a contractual relationship between a principal and an agent such as the relationship between employer and employee. The main idea is for a principal to contract an agent, to administer duties and responsibilities that the principal does not have the, knowledge and specialized skills to carry out. (Smart, 2008; Whynes 1993; Moe, 1984; Shepsle and Boncheck, 1997; Ortmann & Squire, 2000). Lane and Kivistö (2008, p. 144-146) explain further in the following statement; “the model is based on the rational assumption that an individual prefers to pursue self-interest before the interests of others.

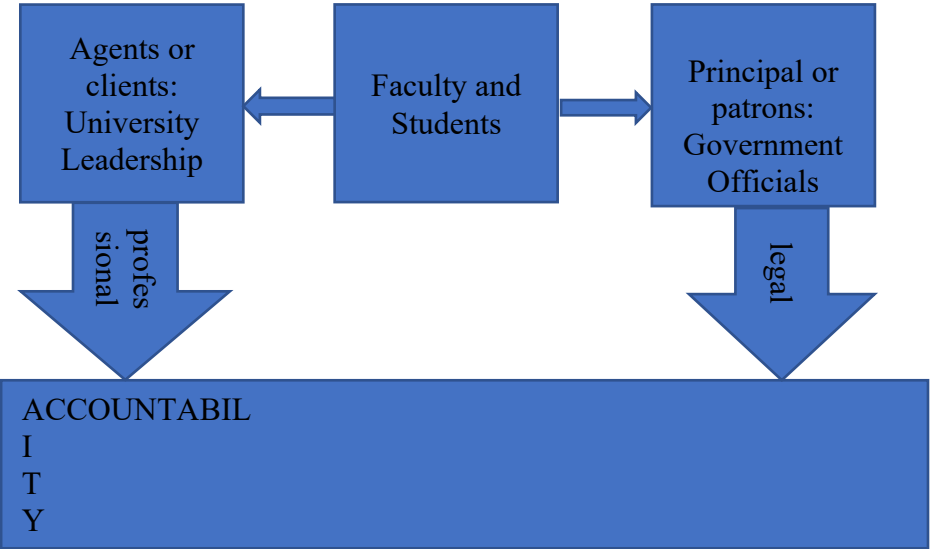
The contractual paradigm requires the principal to ensure that the agent’s specialised abilities and knowledge advantage the agent in using the principal’s resources to pursue ends that benefit the agent”. There is a high probability of shirking in the principal-agent theory defining the situation of evading one’s responsibilities. A quotation from Gailmand (2012) reads:

analysis and evaluation of public accountability requires a specification of who is (or is supposed to be) accountable to whom. This is a core ingredient of principal-agent theory. In principal-agent models, some actor (or group of actors) called an agent undertakes an action on behalf of another actor (or group of actors) called a principal. The principal, for its part, can make decisions that affect the incentives of the agent to take any of its various possible actions. This process of structuring incentives for the agent is the central focus of principal agent theory (p. 1-4).

From the foregoing, it is reasonable to apply the principal-agent theory to study accountability between governments and public universities despite its limitations. Perhaps the most elemental point about principal-agent theory is that it is not in fact a single overarching theory with a specific set of assumptions or conclusions and therefore cannot adequately answer all the questions that are concerned with addressing the relationship between government officials and academic staff in public universities in Cameroon.

The diagram below is an attempt at presenting what can become of the principal-agent approach in the case of the accountability of leadership at the University of Buea to officials in the Cameroon government. Specific emphasis is placed on legal and professional accountability which are connected by two giant arrows representing accountability considered to be the background concept. Government officials and the University of Buea faculty and students constitute the principals to which leadership at the University of Buea are obliged to answer for their actions in the discharge of their responsibilities. Administrative staff are placed in between government officials and the University of Buea faculty and students to illustrate the kind of relationship that could exist between them as far as legal and professional accountability at the university are concerned. Due to mistrust, control and compliance, the principal agent theory is simple and straightforward to understand the intricacies involved since university administrative staff are considered to behave opportunistically if they are not held accountable for the resources they manage (Kivisto, 2008, p. 340).

**Figure 3.1. Principal Agent Theory and Accountability at the University of Buea**



The relationship between agents and principals affect accountability as shown in the figure above. The assumption is that the appointment of the leadership of the university by an external actor is found wanting for accountability. Similarly, internal rules and regulations of the university compels the leadership to or not to account for their actions and decisions as expected by government officials.

University leadership being agents in the research study are assumed to be legally accountable to the government and its institutions. They are monitored and audited by government officials, faculty and students. Given that the government appoints and controls the leadership at the University of Buea such as the vice-chancellor, registrar and directors, and subsidizes budgets of the university, the research study seeks to confirm whether government appointments of university leadership have consequences on the legal framework for accountability such that it is tilted towards satisfying the aspirations of government officials (Awosom, 2006). In respect to the internal rules and regulations governing the university as well as the text creating it, the research study also seeks to establish if there is any conflict of interest between the government, faculty and students on the subject of accountability. Finally, the research study observes how pressure from the government officials play on the accountability of the university leadership with resultant consequences. The next section looks at each of the actors separately and their objectives.

### **3.5 Actors and Objectives**

Three categories of actors are identified in this research study. They are Cameroon government officials, university leadership, faculty and students at the University of Buea. This goes to confirm Ortmann & Squire (2000, p. 379-380) suggestion that institutions of higher learning can be conceptualized as a barrage of principal-agent games where institutional constraints determining their interaction and consequently, answerability.

#### **3.5.1 University Leadership**

In institutions of higher education like public universities, professionals with specialised skills are usually hired to occupy managerial positions. Academic leadership is made up of a chain of command who are referred to in this research study as university leadership. According to Ortmann & Squire (2000) and Zemsky (1992), leadership in public universities are concerned with keeping their job and building their reputations. They include chancellors, vice-chancellors, registrars, directors of schools, deans and vices, heads of departments amongst others. Objectives of university leadership is in collusion with the demands of their positions. Will it be fair to say that to keep their jobs, university leadership try to satisfy the government, to the detriment of the quality of

education which is a great expectation from faculty and students (Ortmann & Squire, 2000, p. 381)? Below are corporate bodies at UB which make up part of the university's leadership.

### **3.5.2 Faculty and Students**

Faculty and students form the core of a university and have a huge role to play in ensuring the accountability of leadership. This is especially true of the University of Buea where students are known for always taking the law into their hands in times of crisis resulting from administrative misconduct and during the introduction of new policies or changing of established rules and regulations which they deem are not necessary (Nyamnjoh, Nkwi, and Konings, 2012). It was also the objective of this research study to find whether faculty and students can be considered as watchdogs to ensure the accountability of the university leadership in managing the University of Buea based on their perception of its effectiveness.

### **3.5.3 Government Officials**

The government is the whole-body of government officials of national or regional public institutions performing political or administrative functions and the public bureau responsible for the management of universities, in this case the Ministry of Higher Education (Laking, 2005; Kivisto, 2008, p. 340-341). Tasks delegated by the government to the university via the university leadership include teaching and research. Such tasks come with allocation of resources by the government and an interest for the university leadership to answer for the management of those resources (Kivistö, 2007). The relationship between the government and university leadership at the University of Buea is more or less structured on the European framework, where universities are regulated by relatively strong and unitary central governments.

The principal-agent theory as used in this research study is not all encompassing. For example, whereas university leadership is considered to be the lone category of agents in the research study, it can be considered a principal to the faculty and students. Since the focus of the research study is to observe the accountability of the university leadership, faculty and the students are rather seen ensuring that university leadership work in accordance with rules and regulations such as non-appropriation of university funds, ensuring law and order on campus, and making that teaching methods and

student performance meet needed academic standards. Positive feedback from faculty and students in each case was considered as professional accountability in this research study.

The adaptation of the principal-agent theory in this research study is based on the existence of informational asymmetries and goal conflicts which are conditions relevant to an examination of principal agent relationship. They can be operationalized in the context of government, university leadership, faculty and students' relationships in public universities (Moe, 1984; Waterman & Meier, 1998). The legal claim for accountability by the government is seen to be in conflict with the cultural emphasis on academic freedom and institutional autonomy which is a springboard for professional accountability according to faculty and students (Kivistö, 2007).

### **3.6 Literature Review**

#### **3.6.1 Origins of Accountability and its Usage in Higher Education**

Accountability is of Anglo-Norman origin and closely related to the meaning of accounting or bookkeeping (Stensaker and Harvey, 2010, p. 9; Bovens, 2006, p. 6). Modern day accountability is defined by Shedler (1999) as “formalized means of feedback and control established with governance structures of states and corporates entities”. It has roots in Athenian democracy. Both Anglican and Athenian versions of accountability give us knowledge of what accountability can mean in everyday usage (Dubnick, 2003, p. 408). However, it is worth noting that earlier records of account-giving go back to “governance and money-lending systems developed in ancient Egypt, Isreal, Babylon, Greece and Later Rome” (Ezzamel, 1997; Walzer, 1994; Urch, 1929; Roberts, 1982; Plescia, 2001).

In higher education, accountability emerged in the educational sector in England in the early 1900s. Subsequent changes to the meaning of accountability followed, from it being the governance structure that regulates the inputs of universities (McLendon, 2003). It became a prominent issue in higher education in the 1980s. (Leveille, 2006, p. 6). Brown (2017) uses the late 20th century to historically situate when colleges and universities started receiving persistent accountability calls from multiple social sectors in American higher education.

Generally speaking, the development of accountability is closely related to three main forces that dominate coordination of higher education systems: state priorities, the market model and academic concerns. Clark (1983) termed them as “the accountability triangle”. State priorities reflect the public need and desire for higher education services. Academic concerns involve the issues and interests of academic communities and market forces cover the needs of the stakeholders of higher education (Ming Cheng, 2012).

Etymologically, accountability is a combination of “accountable” and -ity. Accountable is being “answerable”, literally “liable to be called to account” (mid-14c. in Anglo-French). Ity is from Middle English -ite, Old French -ete (Modern French -ité) and directly from Latin -itatem (nominative -itas), suffix denoting state of being or condition. Roughly, the word in -ity means the quality of being what the adjective describes, or concretely an instance of the quality, or collectively all the instances. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines accountability in this sense as “the quality or state of being accountable especially an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions”. In higher education parlance, accountability is synonymous to responsibility, liability, culpability, answerability, chargeability, or blameworthiness of actions taken by university leadership, faculty and students.

### **3.6.2 Accountability in the Context of Principal Agent Theory**

Accountability can be approached from both national and institutional contexts (Huisman and Currie, 2004). It has external and internal variants as well as bottom-up and top-down approaches. These approaches are not theories in themselves but offer a comprehensive analysis of certain theoretical underpinnings of accountability in higher education. In the case of public universities, this research study has adapted the principal agent theory even though the principal agency theory has its critics (Donaldson, 1990, 1995; Perrow, 1986), part of which is relevant to higher education (see Kivisto, 2007). The principal agent theory has been criticized partly because of the behavioural assumptions it makes concerning human motivation and behaviour. The critics of the principal agent theory argue that the theory presents too narrow a model of human motivation and that it makes unnecessary negative and cynical moral

evaluations about people. According to these critics, focusing on self-interested and opportunistic behaviour makes it possible to ignore a wider range of human motives, including altruism, trust, respect and intrinsic motivation of an inherently satisfying task. These criticisms are valid when the principal-agent theory is utilized for analyzing government–university relationships. If universities are considered only as aggregates of self-interested shirkers, a high level of realism, objectivity and tactfulness will, undoubtedly, be lost.

Principal-agent theory works better when business is as usual, i.e. when there is political stability, rule of law is honored, contracts are upheld and honored, and when there is less corruption. Principal-agent theory may not be useful when there is systemic neglect of rule of law, corruption, and informalism dominate human relations. However, its adaptability to this research study is justified by the fact that there is a government and faculty on the one hand and there is the university leadership on the other with a relationship built on the need of the service or specialized skills of the university leadership just like the principal and the agent in an economic dimension. It is but normal to state that the relationship between a principal and an agent can or cannot be reciprocal and the systemic neglect of rule of law, corruption, and informalism that dominate human relations are taken in this research study to mean the principal agent problems such as moral hazards and conflict of interests.

### **3.6.3 Patron-client model**

Apart from the principal-agent theory, accountability in public universities in Cameroon is tackled using the patron-client model or political clientelism. Speaking of patron-client systems in general, Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith (2004, p. 164) speak of a classic collective action or free-rider problem: “What might be rational at the level of society (a fairer political and administrative system for all) makes less sense at the level of the individual, and creates disincentives for people to go along with changes in patron-client systems that would benefit the majority”. Individual-level incentives explain why clientele systems tend to be reinvented over time because clientelism and patrimonialism are always functional in some sense,

Politics has been defined as the system that determines who gets what, when and how in society (Lasswell 1958). To help understand who gets what, when and how in public universities in Cameroon such as the University of Buea, clientelism and patrimonialism could be the best applicable model. It can also be argued that patron-client model of politics permeates contemporary accountability systems in public universities around the world today. Clientelism connotes to a complex chain of personal bonds between political patrons or bosses and their individual clients or followers founded on mutual material advantage: the patron furnishes excludable resources to dependents and accomplices in return for their support and cooperation. The patron has disproportionate power and thus enjoys wide latitude about how to distribute the assets under his control (Kettering 1988). In Cameroon, the relationship between the government and university leadership is built on this backdrop as seen in the case of UB. Appointment of university leadership at the University of Buea reflects ethnic, geographic, or religious undertones. For example, all former and the current vice-chancellor of the University of Buea is from the Southern West Region of Cameroon which is where the university is located.

Cameroon has arguably a superstructure set up of rational-legal administration, which nonetheless continues to rest on a deep foundation of patrimonial rule. Appearances and juristic procedures to the contrary, they implement policy mainly through networks of personal retainers and dependents. The administrative system seems to be marred by circumlocutions with bottlenecks and red tapes being common phenomena. (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2004).

Clientelism also has latent functions. On the downside, firing university leaders as part of a spoils system is disruptive and leads to loss of organizational memory; replacing them with unqualified political hacks could negatively affect leadership and quality of education at the University of Buea. Favoritism in recruiting UB leaders discourages underlings from speaking their minds and using their expertise if it threatens their career (Prendergast 1993). However, clientelism helps the government to gain or maintain control over UB. This is presumably a strategy of the Cameroon government to stay in control.



Using data from the Afro barometer (Bratton, 2007) has touched on patron client relationship in an African context arguing that unwritten rules hold far more sway. Africa is viewed as a continent where the role of informal institutions is predominant in structuring relationships between governments and university leaders. As examples of informal institutions clientelism (the expression of political loyalty to providers of patronage). Within this rich social matrix, clientelism, corruption, and presidentialism appears to be the bedrock on which the relationship between the Cameroon government and the leadership at the University of Buea is built. With disregard to constitutional arrangements, power is personalized around the figure of the president. Corruption, clientelism, and “Big Man” presidentialism is the order of the day. As discussed in the chapter on data analysis, informalism (informal behavior, neo patrimonialism, i.e. lack of institutionalization of legal rules, procedures, Weberianism) that affect formalism (legal and professional accountability). The principal-agent framework merely describes the contractual relation between the principals and the agents or patrons and clients.

### 3.6.4 Weber’s Theory of Bureaucracy

Weber’s theory of bureaucracy was propounded by German sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920) based on rational authority, where authority in organizations was given to the most competent and qualified people, would be more efficient than those based on who you knew (Schein, 2004). The bureaucratic approach is based on clear organizational hierarchy, i.e., each hierarchy has legal-rational authority and clear rules about decision-making.

Table 3.2 Weber’s rules of a bureaucracy.

<b>Hierarchical management structure</b>	Each level controls the levels below and is controlled by the level above.
<b>Division of labour</b>	Tasks are clearly defined, and employees (university leadership) become skilled by specializing in doing one thing.

<b>Formal selection process</b>	Selection and promotion are based on experience, competence, and technical qualification demonstrated by examinations, education, or training.
<b>Career orientation</b>	University leadership is separate from government ownership. Protection from arbitrary dismissal is guaranteed.
<b>Formal rules and regulations</b>	Rules and regulations are documented to ensure reliable and predictable behaviour.
<b>Impersonality</b>	Rules are applied uniformly to everyone. There is no preferential treatment or favouritism.

*Source: Adapted from Prof. Dr. Juergen Weichselgartner 2020 Seminar Lecture on Organization Theory at the Berlin School of Law and Economics.*

Accountability in public universities Cameroon demonstrates an arguably complete negation of Weber's theory of bureaucracy. Contrary to the explanation in the above table, university leaders at UB follow strictly formal and hierarchical structure of power and authority built on loyalty as opposed to ability and efficiency. There is little elaborate, rationally derived and systematic division of labor. The University of Buea is governed by a set of general, informal, inexplicit, non-exhaustive and largely unstable rules that are personally applied by the government through the university leadership in decision-making (Jain, 2004). This is discussed in detail in the chapter on data analysis.

### **3.6.5 Literature Gap**

The literature gap in this research study revolves around exploring accountability in the context of Cameroonian higher education particularly in public universities. Scholarly literature that exists so far ends at describing how the Cameroonian higher education system operates. Little has been said about the influence of government appointment of university administrative staff on legal and professional accountability specifically in the case of the University of Buea. The appropriateness of principal agent theory which has been borrowed from economics and adapted to this research study has to do with the hierarchy, informalism, corruption, and less respect for rule of law or contracts which is common in public universities and practiced not just by the university

leadership (agent) but also by the government (principal). Just like in economics where market mechanisms are the rule of thumb, informal networks are used at the University of Buea to structure the relationships between government officials (appointers) on the one hand and university leadership (appointees) on the other. These relationships are also visible at different levels of academic leadership within the University of Buea with concomitant effects on accountability.

Other researchers have focused on issue of academic freedom, impact of higher education on development in Cameroon and the law governing higher education in Cameroon. Awasom, (2006) has written on institutional autonomy and academic freedom in Cameroon in “The Academic Freedom Conference: Problems and Challenges in Arab and African Countries, convened in Alexandria 10–11 September 2005” by UNESCO. He argues that the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon University of Buea in 1993 raised hopes among Cameroonian academics for academic freedom and autonomy but turned out to be the opposite as explained by crisis of nation building in the 1990s that led academics instead fighting to conserve their positions and improve their political fortunes.

Fonkeng and Ntembe (2009) have investigated the actual and potential impact of higher education on the development of Cameroon. Their study concludes that higher education plays an important role in the development process of Cameroon and that this role can be enhanced provided measures are taken to improve the efficiency of the higher education system, improve equity in attainment and ensure greater professionalism of academic programmes.

Ngu, (1993) has written on the relevance of the higher education system in Cameroon and its contribution to development. His work exposes the type of university governance in place in Cameroon and the effects it has on the functioning and performance of institutions of higher learning. Nyamnjoh, Nkwi, and Konings (2012) have done extensive studies on higher education in Africa with Cameroon as case study. From colonial times to the post-colony; they have concentrated on the implications of external interference while calling for a global conversation of

universities and scholars in which Africa participates on its own terms and interests with concerns of ordinary Africans as its guiding principle.

Jua & Njamnjoh (2002) covered the correlation between enactment of Liberty Laws in Cameroon in the early 1990s and the contribution of its universities to worldwide intellectual endeavours.

However, none of the above scholarly literature, amongst others, has touched on accountability in higher education in Cameroon and that is the subject matter of this research study. This research study examines and analyzes the legal and professional accountability in public universities in Cameroon as well as faculty and students' perception of their effectiveness in terms of university leadership. Sections on statement of the problem statement, definition of concepts and theoretical framework cover a greater portion of literature review.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the theoretical framework of the research study with emphasis on the principal agent theory and patron client relationships and other critical perspectives from which accountability can be descended in public universities. The major actors involved in the principal agent relationships and their impending objectives were mentioned in this chapter. The chapter also summarized the literature on accountability into its historical origins, semantics, etymology, theory and context. It equally touched other works on the higher education in Cameroon as well and ended with identifying the literature gap.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **4 Research Design and Methodology**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research design of the study, methods and instruments used in collecting and analyzing data, and reasons for the choice of research methodology.

#### **4.2 Choice of Research Method**

There are basically three types of research methodologies which include quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. According to Creswell (2012), quantitative approaches involves the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study, while qualitative approaches meant for data collection, analysis, and report writing differing from the traditional, quantitative approaches. In the same vein, it involves numeric or statistical approach to research design and is common in surveying and experimentation with an assumption of an empiricist paradigm. (Leedy & Ormrod 2001; Creswell, 2003; Carrie Williams, 2007). Given that this is arguably the first research study conducted with reference to accountability in public universities in Cameroon, the quantitative research method was not used because it is not suitable for a small sample.

According to Carrie Williams (2007) and Creswell (1994), qualitative research involves a holistic approach to discovery and purposeful use for describing, explaining, and interpreting collected data. Qualitative research is premised on inductive, rather than deductive reasoning. This research study centers on the case of UB, with the case-study being one of many types of qualitative research methods used in public administration. Creswell (2003) defines it as a method in which the researcher explores a programme or an event or one or more individuals. The qualitative research method was ideal because is good for the exploration and validation of concepts with a small sample and the purpose of this research study was to do an in-depth analysis of accountability and perception of its effectiveness at the University of Buea, Cameroon with a sample of 30.

The main reason for choosing the qualitative research methodology was because of its suitability to governance studies which incorporates the concept accountability (Shaughnessy and Jeane, 2011). In this research study, focus was solely on accountability in public universities in Cameroon with the University of Buea as case-study. Government's appointment of university leadership casts doubts on feedback from the university's accountability mechanism and explains why faculty and students look at the effectiveness of accountability at the University of Buea with a sense of pessimism.

### **4.3 Instruments of Data Collection**

In collecting data, this research study employed both interviews and document analysis.

#### **4.3.1 Interviews**

This research used interviews which were conducted face-to-face, some via telephone calls and others through email. The interview method was chosen because of its reliability in securing detailed information and the fact that it allowed government official, leadership, faculty and students at the University of Buea to share information in their own words (Moses and Knutsen, 2012, p. 131). In situations where face to face interviews was not possible, participants were either contacted via telephone or received interview questions in their email to fill and return to the researcher. Out of a total of 23 successful interviews conducted, 20 were face to face, 2 emailed and 1 telephone.

The selection of participants for the survey interview was primarily based on the type of actors involved in the research study including university leadership, government officials, faculty and students. Interviews were later transcribed and converted into written form. Participation in the survey interview was partial especially on the campus of the University of Buea. The interviewer also met difficulties relating to access to government offices and its officials, UB leadership especially high-ranking university leadership like the vice-chancellor, registrar and deans who were unwilling to grant audience. Of the 23 successfully completed interviews, 15 participants did not answer all the interview questions in section one or two as some of the questions did not directly concern them.

Apart from interviews, the research study made use of books, newspaper articles, journal articles and court cases directly or indirectly related to accountability at UB. Document reading can also be part of an observational study or an interview-based project. In the words of Yanow (2007, p. 411) “documents can provide background information prior to designing the research project, for example prior to conducting interviews. They may corroborate observational and interview data, or they may refute them, in which case the researcher is ‘armed’ with evidence that can be used to clarify, or perhaps, to challenge what is being told, a role that the observational data may also play”.

Limitations arising from the use of interviews as method of data collection included difficulty in conducting them because each interviewee had different characteristics. Although there is always the possibility of obtaining in-depth information, if interviewees do not tell the truth or do not know the true situation, information is devalued. Also, a case study cannot be used for statistical generalization, it provides only a narrow basis (Yin, 2003). Therefore, the interview method of data collection in this research study was supported by document analysis.

#### **4.3.2 Document Analysis**

This research study used document analysis as another method of data collection and analysis. In pointing out the importance and use of documents in research, Owen (2014, p. 10-11) and Lindsay Prior (2003) states that documents are usually given little consideration. However, Max Weber’s (1978) and (Prior, 2003, p. 4) have articulated that “the modern world is made through writing and documentation” and as such “documents form a field for research in their own right, and should not be considered as mere props for action”

Other types of documents covered in this research study include annual reports of the University of Buea, laws establishing and managing the functioning of public universities in Cameroon, newspapers, previously published and unpublished works in the field and the texts creating the University of Buea. Analysis of laws establishing and managing the operation of public universities in Cameroon concentrated on areas related to measures taken to ensure accountability. Previous works on accountability

in higher education institutions were critically examined and factored into the research study. Having access and understanding of documents on the research topic improves the richness of information for qualitative study.

To emphasize the importance of documents, Boampong Baryeh, (2009) and Guba and Lincoln (1981) state that documents and records no matter how old, are stable and rich resources that serve as the basis for investigating phenomena, serve as checks and balances on the truthfulness or falsity of a statement, and can easily be accessed especially public records.

**Figure 4.1 Tools of data collection**

Tools of data collection	Types of questions asked to whom/type of documents	Type of data collected
Primary data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>		
Secondary data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chapters in edited volumes academic journal articles</li> <li>• Court cases</li> <li>• Academic online source</li> <li>• Newspaper articles</li> </ul>	Opened-ended questions addressed to university administrative staff, government officials, faculty and students.	Nominal data (profession, qualifications, job titles, longevity in service, views on accountability)

#### **4.4 Sampling and Sample Selection**

##### **4.4.1 Sampling**

Any research study needs a “sample” which is sufficiently large and representative of the entire population because it is practically impossible to study the entire population



(Acharya et al, 2013). This research study made use of the non-probability sampling given that it is a qualitative research study. The specific types of non-probability sampling employed were quota sampling because they ensured that certain characteristics of the population sample were represented. In a successful sample of 23, the research study sought to achieve a quota of equal representation from the actors involved (principals and the agents). Data were obtained from self-administered interviews, telephone calls and others that were emailed to participants. The initial target was to interview 30 participants with equal representation from both the groups, i.e. principals and agents. Principals consisted of government officials, students, faculty members, student leaders, lecturers. Agents included university leadership from those with the highest to the lowest ranks.

Among those who were interviewed was an undergraduate student in the Faculty of Sciences, a postgraduate student in the Department of Educational Foundation and Administration, Faculty of Education, a graduate student in Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, a PhD holder in Linguistics, an undergraduate student in the Faculty of Arts, a final year student in the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI), an assistant lecturer and a postgraduate student, an MA student in Translation and a course delegate of Literature and Translation, a student in the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, an Assistant Lecturer of Civics and Ethics, a former student executive in the Department of Accounting, and a student in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration.

Interviewees with leadership positions included the General Secretary of the Political Science Students' Council (POSSCUB) from 2012-2013 and Chairman/President of Saint Peter and Paul Parish (UB Parish) for all catholic students in the University of Buea from 2015-2016, Student Ambassador for the University of Buea American Corner (UBAC), a worker at the university library, an office clerk at the Records Office, a technician at ASTI and Mailing Officer, an administrative assistant in the Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Administration, a Student President, Head of Department of Educational Psychology, and a worker at Central Administration of the University of Buea and an Assistant Lecturer in the Department of Plant Science.

#### **4.4.2 Sample Selection**

The sample population for this research study included the Cameroon government officials, leadership at the University of Buea, faculty, lecturers, student leaders, and students. As indicated in previous chapters, the University of Buea has approximately 13, 000 students, 300 permanent and 200 part-time teaching staff (University of Buea, 2020). The sample was drawn from this population and from government institutions involved in the management of public universities in Cameroon.

The selection of the sample was guided by the fact that they constituted part of the population that was being sampled either as university leadership, government officials, student leaders, faculty, students or lecturers. Government officials, UB leadership, faculty and students interviewed for the research were selected based on posts of responsibilities, academic background, and department of studies. This was done with the intention to have an equal representation of government officials, for example, working in the Ministry of Higher Education, UB administrative staff working at all levels within the university milieu, faculty in each UB department or college and students with leadership roles.

#### **4.5 Method of Data Analysis**

This research could not have been completed without data analysis. Qualitative data analysis was a major component of this research study. Results of this research study were impacted by the approach to accountability in Cameroon and the choice of content examples like financial scams, trading of sex for marks and awarding of fake certificates, discrimination in grading students and unqualified leadership used to detail the deteriorating state of accountability at the University. This was followed from Xia and Gong (2014) definition of data analysis with the goal of discovering useful information and making supporting conclusions.

The deductive approach to qualitative data analysis was used in order to group data that was collected and look for similarities and differences. It was also used because of limited time and resources. The choice of method of data analysis was to examine the primary accountability content at UB, evaluative opinions of government officials, leadership, faculty and students towards the topic and determine whether their

opinions represented individual or shared ideas of the Cameroon government and the university as a whole. Content collected in relation to accountability in Cameroon public universities and at UB assisted in the attempt to categorize verbal or behavioural attitudes of government officials, leadership, faculty and students for the purpose of classification, and summarization for description and Interpretation. Discourse analysis conjured the naturally occurring talk and written texts about UB, its history, structure, mission, and ranking that was gathered for the research study with the aim of finding useful traces of aspects related to accountability.

#### **4.6 Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity are used mostly in quantitative research. However, it was adapted to the study of accountability in public universities in Cameroon which was predominantly a qualitative research study (Brock-Utne, 1996; Cohen et al, 2000).

Reliability was taken to ensure 'dependability and consistency' in the use of interviews and document studies for recording the observations of government officials, university leadership, faculty and students consistently (Neuman, 2000, p. 170; Sannudee, 2009, p. 142). During the research data gathering process, there were concerns such as errors and bias because only 30 out of which only 23 sample among government officials, university leadership, faculty and students actively participated i.e. in a ministry of more than 5000 staff and a university with a population of more than 20000. The target of reliability was to reduce the errors and bias in the data collected by making sure that the selected government officials, UB leadership, faculty and students were a true representation of the entire Ministry of Higher Education and the University of Buea (Yin, 2003).

The validity of personal observations, group discussion and measurement of government officials, university leadership, faculty and students said they were or stood for was highly considered. Using LeCompte and Goetz (1982) description of internal validity, there was good match between researchers' observations, opinions of government officials, university leadership, faculty and students and the principal agent theory borrowed and adapted to this research study. A semblance of view on how government officials, university leadership, faculty and students respond to

accountability demands was highly dependent on clientelism. However, the degree to which findings could be generalized to other public universities in Cameroon is limited by differences in the history of formation, educational systems, discrimination across party lines and discretionary university policy which rested in the hands of government all at once influencing accountability (Baryeh, 2009: 40). That said, the appointment of university leadership cuts across all public universities in Cameroon which is enough reason to argue that similar accountability practices would accrue.

This research study was mindful of both reliability and validity by choosing documents that were relevant to the study, designing the interview questions and using interviews as a complement to documents analyzed. During interviews, cross-checked questions were helpful to ensure reliability. For example, the same questions were asked more than once but phrased differently and at different times, or asked a question related to prior questions to check that interviewees' answers are similar. The researcher also used evidence from other sources to confirm information the researcher received from the interviews (Sannudee, 2009).

#### **4.7 Limitations of the Research Study**

The objective was to get an equal representation of interviewees for the research study based on its structure. With a target of 30 interviews, the research study aimed at interviewing 15 principal actors and 15 agents. The 15 principal actors were supposed to include at least 6 government officials and 7 faculty and students. The 6 government officials were expected to be a mix of administrators at the Ministry of Higher Education, Office of the President of the Republic of Cameroon, Office of the Prime Minister or generally, government officials who work with the higher education sector and have and understanding of recruitment policies of university leadership and accountability mechanisms in public universities. The 7 faculty and students were supposed to come from the faculties and schools of the University of Buea that is at least one from each. The 15 agents interviewed were to include university leadership at the University of Buea. This was intended to be in proportion to the structure of the university leadership. In other words, it was to include, university leadership at the Central Administration (CA) of the university, one or two deans of faculties, one or two heads of departments,

one or two directors of schools and one or two student leaders and leaders of teachers' associations on campus as well as civil society actors.

Unfortunately for the research study, none of the above criteria were met in the process of data collection for the following reasons and others which have been numerated already:

- Unwillingness on the part of majority those contacted to participate in the interviews.
- No access to selected government offices and officials.
- Little or permission to access the offices of specific university staff at the University of Buea like vice-chancellor and registrar.
- Most interviewees especially deans and heads of departments did not cooperate during the interview process because of time, availability and other reasons best known to them.

In the end, majority of those who were interviewed included faculty and students and a few university leaderships which made the primary method of data collection (interviews) unreliable in the case of Cameroon. Just three university leadership were interviewed and only one of them meet the selection criteria defined in the research study. While this was considered a weakness given the quality of the data that was finally collected, it was also considered a strength as it justifies the stiff and top-down approach to educational administration at UB with concomitant effects on legal and professional accountability.

There is oversimplification which could have resulted in false generalizations about legal and professional accountability in the context of Cameroonian public universities. The research study also fails to make use of comparative analysis which could have made its arguments more solid. That notwithstanding, the case study of the University of Buea is the springboard for a comparative study of legal and professional accountability in Cameroonian higher education institutions.

#### **4.8 Ethical Consideration of the Research Study**

Contextually, the research study spans accountability as observed at the University of Buea from both legal and professional viewpoints. Additionally, it looks at how faculty

and students perceive of the effectiveness of accountability of university leadership. Ethical considerations hold that the research study strove for honesty in reviewing literature, data collection methods and analysis procedures duly acknowledging all sources. Objectivity is prioritized by avoiding bias in its research design, data presentation, analysis and interpretation. Carefulness is observed by avoiding errors and negligence of minor but very important points in the empirical chapters. Again, respect for intellectual property through acknowledgement of all sources consulted and contributions to the research study is acclaimed. Confidentiality and informed consent of the interviewees, personal records, and acquired government documents and financial reports throughout the research study followed due process.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

This chapter addressed the research design and methods of data collection and analysis. It has also dealt with the sample selection procedures and the instruments of data collection. The next chapter will focus on presentation and analysis of the research findings.

## **5 Data Analysis and Discussions**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter gives an analysis and discussion of the collected data of the research study, specifically analyzing and showing the relationship between dependent and independent variables. First present the status of your dependent variable, i.e. legal and professional accountability. Second, the implications on legal and professional accountability and the independent variables which is government appointment and control of UB leadership and struggle over control of the university. The objective is to confirm or dismiss the assumption that government appointment and control of university leadership at UB has implications for the legal and professional accountability of the institution. It also ascertained how faculty and students at the university perceive the effectiveness of this accountability mechanism as far as academic leadership is concerned. Research findings reflect the research questions, theory and mirror the choice of research methodology. However, the primary data was not used actively, i.e. comments, remarks and statements of respondents, because of the limitations highlighted in the chapter on methodology stating the non-cooperative attitude of the interviewees which made the collected data lacking in quality. To a greater or lesser extent, this chapter relied on content gathered from newspapers, journal articles, books, researcher's participation and personal observation.

First, legal and professional accountability were discussed in connection with the status of accountability at UB in accordance with the theoretical framework of the research study. In the case of the University of Buea, the adoption of the three theories was because of the complicated nature in which the relationship between government officials, university leadership, faculty and students is structured. For example, the appointment and control of the University of Buea vice-chancellor by presidential decree could be taken to mean that he or she in that position is expected to answer to the office of the president of the Republic of Cameroon in the discharge of his or her responsibilities. In such a situation, the tendency was to define the basis of such a relationship on the basis of government appointment and control of vice-chancellor which might be constrained by the laws regulating the university. This could lead to

conflict of answerability and place the relationship between the principal and the agent in a state of dereliction.

Second, how government appointment of university leadership affect accountability such as informalism mechanism and arbitrary use of leader's preferences (government leadership) was analyzed. The analysis and discussions departed from the professional and academic background information of research participants such as students, faculty members, student leaders, lecturer, university leadership, or government officials. The second part of the analysis and discussions focused on accountability dimensions between university leadership on the one hand and government officials on the other. It also touched on the perception of the effectiveness of legal and professional accountability at the University of Buea by faculty and students.

## **5.2 Data Analysis**

The causality of government appointment of university leadership on professional and legal accountability was recurring theme in this section. Government appointment and control was understood to go beyond university leadership to include normal lecturers which is unheard of in the academia. Interestingly, majority of lecturers and assistant lecturers appointed do not merit their positions. Most student leaders are elected while some opt to serve and receive no objection or opposition from other students.

### **5.2.1 Status Legal Accountability at the University of Buea**

Going by Romzek's (2000, p. 26-27) of legal accountability relationships as involving "detailed external oversight of performance for compliance with established performance mandates, such as legislative and constitutional structures", it is tempting not to argue that Legal accountability at the University of Buea is beset with inconsistencies because of continuous government appointment and control of university leadership. In other words, legal accountability is lost when government appoints its own who may not possess the required qualification and are not legitimate candidates. As such the leadership is not accountable legally but accountable to the political master. In such a way, legal accountability loses its meanings.



For example, since the transformation of UB into a fully-fledged university in 1993, all university leadership who have served in the capacity of vice-chancellors (including the incumbent) were appointed by the president of the Republic of Cameroon. The problem is not appointment in itself but the fact that all the appointed vice-chancellors were members of the ruling Cameroon People's Democratic Movement (the CPDM). This was somewhat a bridge of legal disposition of UB requiring the not just the appointment of qualified academic leaders but appointment only on recommendation of UB Senate and Council. This is possible because the Senate and Council are presided over by the chancellor who double as the minister of higher education and is answerable to the president

Again, the partiality of the UB Senate and Council in exercising its authority in matters pertaining to the rights of teachers and students to organize strikes on campus seems unfounded. Teachers have been sanctioned with dismissals for merely being outspoken or organizing sit-ins to demand for government payment of research allowances which they rightfully deserve and students leaders have been arbitrarily arrested, stood trial in state courts, and imprisoned and dismissed from UB for organizing strikes on campus to protest against the payment of additional 10,000FCFA for late payment of tuition fee and 1000-5000FCFA for transcript of records. So long as this is in the interests of the government, vice-chancellor regimes that have perpetuated these acts have not been questioned or sanctioned. This array of events left a mark of indifference for establishing legal standards as the struggle over control cannot be separated from the failure to render accountability. Consequently, vice-chancellors and other university leadership serve at the behest of government officials who appointed them without paying any liability for violating legal procedures. This argument is supported by Awasom's (2006) writing on academic freedom in Cameroon.

The use of the term legal accountability in the context of public universities in Cameroon was not meant to convey a level of detailed scrutiny typical in judicial proceedings. On the contrary, it unpacked a system of higher education management intentionally or unintentionally designed to push the interest of the government and enable government officials to have control over university leadership without the non-

observance of the negative consequences on teaching and research which is the goal of every higher education institution. Due to disobedience or disloyalty from some UB leaders as opposed to the majority, legal accountability became an issue. Restating the theoretical framework of this research study, it is seen that the underlying relationship of legal accountability is that government officials lord over university leadership not for the purpose of pushing them to perform the task for which they were appointed but to have control and authority of the management of the universities. This eroded the institutional autonomy of UB and made its leadership to focus more on securing their posts through political posturing without either of them paying attention to the prevailing challenges that it is causing for legal accountability. In simple terms, the principal was not principled. This means that legal accountability issues were not the concern of government officials. Their concern is for the UB leadership to abide by their preferences. This kind of informal relations affect legal accountability because legal issues are ignored, rather narrow political interests dominant.

There is a shift in the focus of the contractual paradigm from employment of university leadership to nurture UB into a citadel of knowledge, to them being the eyes and ears of government officials on campus to monitor other staff, lecturers and students are against overbearing government interference in higher education. This is explained by the political landscape of Cameroon as argued by Konings (2002) given that UB is perceived by the government as hotbed for Anglophone political agitation and therefore a threat to its survival and that is why oversight at UB is mostly anticipatory through informal inquiries and direct communications between government reviewers and administrators from the ministry rendering accountability highly controversial.

Leadership inconsistencies emanating from disregard for legal and professional accountability norms like selection of the vice-chancellor without recommendation from UB Senate and Council has led to a decrease in the quality education. This is coupled with the fact that UB has irked on meager or limited resources and educational facilities since its inception.

As a result of government appointment and control of university administrative on the basis of party colors and nepotism, accountability indicators such as teaching and research quality at UB has dropped. Most of the appointed leadership are either

incompetent or lack the needed specialized knowledge to administer the university properly. There is a slowdown in strengthening graduate programmes, a drop in the graduation of students who are highly valued in their professions, decrease the number of graduates and increase time to degree, students have low-impact educational experiences including international experiences, development of irresponsible servant leaders with little or no commitment to public service, meager multidisciplinary and multi-modal research. University leadership are not accountable for resources entrusted to them, they squander return on funds invested by the state and benefactors and are maintaining no public trust. The mission and programme of the university have been derailed. UB does not have accurate financial records, conduct periodic reviews of compliance, or reduce exposure to risks, governance is vague and employment practices are characterized by favouritism, fraud and irregularities Konings (2005).

**Box 5.1: Example No1 of Leadership Inefficiency at UB at Effect on Legal Accountability**

A case in point is the dismissal of a lecturer from the University of Buea because he set a question on the “Anglophone Crisis”. The anglophone crisis is the associated with the problems facing the English-speaking minority in Cameroon. While Anglophone Cameroonian lecturer was sacked for setting a question on the crisis in the anglophone regions of Cameroon as to whether “the Anglophone crisis since 2016 was caused by lawyers’ and teachers’ strike. Asses the validity of this statement”, no sanctions were applied to lecturers who set similar questions at the University of Yaoundé-a French Cameroon university. The course LAW 243 titled “Political and Constitutional History of Cameroon” in the Department of English Law, Faculty of Laws and Political Science was suspended. This goes to confirm the argument that accountability is selective and politicised.

**5.2.2 Professional Accountability at the University of Buea**

Professional accountability are systems that are supposed to be reflected in work arrangements that afford high degrees of autonomy to individuals who base their decision-making on internalized norms of appropriate practice (Vukasovic 2010). This was visible at the University of Buea when it was just established with the university producing excellent students even without adequate resources at its disposal. With a mixture of full-time, part time, visiting, assistant lecturers, the aim has always been to

groom UB students to do well in academics. This can be buttressed by the spirited youth volunteerism, leadership and activism of students who graduate from UB. UB can be said to be the most prestigious Anglo-Saxon universities in Cameroon.

However, the staffing conditions at UB is not satisfactory given the teacher/student ratio is 1:100 on average. The Cameroon government has slacked in recruiting new and qualified lecturers at the university. Instead, the government is transferring lecturers from UB to new universities it is creating in other regions thereby weakening UB's staffing capabilities. The university is also suffering from "frenchification" with the mass influx of lecturers from the French speaking regions of Cameroon whose mastery of the Anglo-Saxon system of education practiced in the English-speaking regions is inadequate. The university is understaffed, the facilities are inadequate given that the institution is forced to cohabitate two systems of education in Cameroon thus far from its mission and goals. Professional accountability seems under looked as most UB graduates suffer unemployment and underemployment with reduction in competition at enrollment stage, no robust criteria for the evaluation of teaching and research activities of individuals and departments, and little flexibility in entry and education type (full time/part time) (World Bank, 2015).

The relationship between senior and junior university leadership at UB is one characterized by wanton pressures, insubordination, intimidation, and threats. Apart from normal pressure from bosses for junior staff to meet up with deadlines, they can be fired and hired at any time by their bosses where the bosses possess such powers or on their instructions by government officials. Therefore, the term 'professional' at UB just like in other public universities in Cameroon does not reflect the of deference to specialized knowledge and expertise that is accorded to academic professionals and the sense of responsibility is not necessarily meant to satisfy the academic demands of the university. Professional accountability at UB is more of a farce with faculty and students having little cognizance for institutional leadership without recognition and acknowledgement of role and responsibility to make UB "a place to be". As such, there is little respect for university leadership which in turn affects academic legitimacy.

One of the important areas to touch on when it comes to professional accountability at UB had to do with examination malpractices. Although it is supposed to be severely punished according to the law, taking up such cases is always a bit slow and inimical due to administrative bottlenecks and red tape. Students too keep developing different methods of cheating. Some of the students caught have connections up the hierarchy and it makes it difficult for ordinary lecturers to hold them to account for their actions. Another area has to do with the issue of sexually transmitted marks. It takes real courage for female students to publicly denounce lecturers who want to sexually exploit them for marks and even when they do, they need backup from other lecturers or senior university leadership or face the consequences for doing something good. Students also go to lecturers to buy marks and lecturers force students to buy their books and forfeit marks or threatened with not being allowed to attend and sit in for examination classes of the said lecturers. These are acts of irresponsibility, but nobody is ever held accountable for such malpractices in the end. These are some of the reasons why faculty and students have a negative perception of the effectiveness of professional accountability at UB.

### **5.2.3 Government Appointment of UB university leadership and Effects on Accountability**

Any individual bestowed with a leadership position is entitled to account to his or her nearest head. Nobody can work in isolation. This appears to be the rule of thumb in public and corporate institutions. The extent to which these institutions are centralized, decentralized, accountable, and democratic depends on the internal and external rules and regulations governing the system in place. The University of Buea is one of such corporate institutions. It has a hierarchical system of administration. In other words, administration at the university is top-down. Access to the top is quite difficult because of too many protocols. However, there is some degree of answerability which has without doubt boosted the effectiveness and performance of the institution since creation.

Over the years, the quality of university administration and accountability at UB diminished. There is considerable lack of rigor from persons in leadership positions since the system appear to have become a bit loose. Accountability at the university

now relies heavily on the integrity and disposition of those who are supposed to render it. In short, meeting up with the responsibilities of accountability at the university is becoming primarily an issue of upholding morale values and personal integrity.

Government appointment and control of university leadership at UB is one of many reasons that has weakened accountability. For example, all vice-chancellors of UB from the time of creation to now have been appointed by the president of the Republic of Cameroon without recommendation from UB Senate and Council. This is, “in violation of decree no. 93/034 of January 19, 1993, establishing the University of Buea which required that a Vice-Chancellor shall be appointed from professorial rank following the recommendation of Senate and Council of the University”. The appointment by the president of the Republic of Cameroon is usually for an “indefinite term of office in violation of Article 26(b) of the statute of the University articulating that the Vice-Chancellor shall hold office for four years renewable once”. According to Awasom (2006).

just as the government appoints all the principal officers of the universities, so can they be disappointed by being dropped at any time if they do not live up to expectations especially by showing pro-opposition sympathies. Individuals who enjoyed the support of the Vice-Chancellor could accumulate several offices (p.106).

Arguably, the direction and effectiveness of accountability at the University of Buea seemed to be conditioned by the appointment of its university leadership. Since UB is largely funded by the government (tax-payers money), government turns to dictates its internal policies. Awasom (2006) writes that sometimes, the government even decides to appoint all members of the university governing council who have to be responsible to government and act according to government directives. With government actions, university laws become overridden, government officials are in control of several procedures on several issues ranging from day-to-day administration, disbursement of funds, staff discipline, appointments and promotions and appointments of vice-chancellors and other principal officers. Despite measures put in place to ensure accountability such as outsourcing the payment of registration and tuition fee to MTN (Mobile Telephone Network) and Orange Cameroon Mobile Money Services, which

are partners to the university, thereby reducing direct collection of the fees by administrative staff which would have encouraged corrupt practices, students are still required in other instances where students have been deprived of the 50,000FCFA presidential grant given by the president of the Republic of Cameroon, Paul Biya as a means to encourage academic excellence like such having to do with the payment of the so-called 1000FCFA platform fee to access their examination results through the university online study portal. This has come under criticism from the University of Buea Student's Union (UBSU) and civil society organizations as it is conceived as a means to extort money from students. They view all these as results of a loose legal and professional accountability system in the university.

**Box 5.2: Example No2 of Leadership Inefficiency at UB at Effect on Legal Accountability**

For example, In November 2016, UB students amidst the above grievances rose against their then Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Nalova Lyonga, under allegations of embezzlement of their share of 50,000FCFA given in presidential grant, imposing penalties on students to pay 10,000FCFA for late course registration as well 10,000FCFA as late payment of school fees. Instead of addressing the grievances of the students, the then vice-chancellor Nalova Lyonga, called riot police to campus to molest students even when students used "No Violence" as their strike slogan. Students were finally dispersed from campus using tear gas, batons and warning gun shots. This incident attracted widespread condemnation, but the vice-chancellor was never held accountable. Instead, she was later promoted to the post of the Minister of Secondary Education one year later by another presidential appointment.

There is no doubt that her ability to come out unpunished following the incident was because the fate of university leadership in UB is dependent on their relationship with the government and not the rule of law. The ideal situation of legal and professional accountability should have permitted such irresponsible actions to be sanctioned but that was never the case, one of the reasons being here close and friendly ties to the government. In the end, she was rather rewarded with a promotion and she is the minister of secondary education in Cameroon today.

The consequences are that those who are appointed to serve as university leadership do so at the mercy of the government which tends to hinder them from performing their noble objectives by the overbearing interference of the government in their day-to-day affairs to the extent that they become no better than mere appendages to government parastatals. Under these circumstances, university leadership have to compromise and work according to government directives or risk losing their positions. It is maybe right to say that accountability at UB follows the dictates of government appointments of university leadership who are required to work according to the whims and caprices of government officials are always sanctioned or replaced while those who do are rewarded. The principal agent relationship is that of friendship known in Cameroonian parlance as “man know man”, loyalty and trust as opposed to culpability and liability for accountability related actions. This has made job security to become a big priority even though majority of university leadership still deny it. University leadership at UB, especially those who have fallen out with government officials, seems to be work under an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty and intolerance with devastating consequences.

According to one of the interviewees in this research study, another shortcoming of legal and professional accountability at UB is because of an inefficient academic leadership.

Leadership at the University of Buea suffers from a plethora of incongruities as a result of the fact that most of those appointed at the helm of power, get there along party lines and not merit. Consequently, they tend to serve their masters thereby jeopardizing the mission of the very much cherished institution (Fieldwork, 2019)

**Box 5.3: Example No3 of Leadership Inefficiency at UB and Effect on Legal Accountability**

An example of leadership inefficiency was an event on the campus of the University of Buea in 2017 concerning the then Mayor of Buea, Patrick Ekema Esunge. Faced with accusations of forged academic credentials upon admission into the University of Buea; accusations which he refuted. Legal action was initiated by Human Rights Activist following an article of the Cameroon Postline of November 14, 2017,



confirming Mayor Ekema's fake certificates. A petition was filed by Christopher Tambe Tiku, the Regional Secretary of the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (NCHRF) to the Southwest Attorney General titled: "Allegation of Fraud by Mayor Ekema Patrick Esunge." Part of the petition read:

I have decided to avail myself of the Criminal Procedure Code which enjoins anyone having credible information relating to the commission of an offence to bring to the attention of the Judiciary. The Mayor of Buea, Ekema Patrick Esunge was engaged in an academic fraud by introducing fake certificates to earn admission in the Department of History, University of Buea.

It is important not to under-estimate the gravity of the offence of academic fraud as it "discourages potential students from going to school and working hard, leads to loss of respect for authority and Government and is inimical to public administration".

#### **Box 5.4: Example No4 of Leadership Inefficiency at UB and Effect on Legal Accountability**

Another online news outlet known as BaretaNews in one of its 2017 publications quoted Tambe Tiku expounding that:

The decision to withdraw certificates obtained through false or dubious admission into the university should not be obfuscated with political considerations. It is a purely scientific issue. It is either the applicant meets the criteria for admission or not. In the case of Mayor Ekema Patrick, there is ample evidence furnished by the examination authority, the GCE board. Apparent from their report is that Mayor Ekema Patrick Esunge did not pass the Advanced levels in all four occasions he attempted,

After police investigations and a decision of the 73rd Senate of UB that was sent to the Minister of Higher Education and Chancellor of Academic Honours to revoke the UB Degrees conferred on Ekema, the University of Buea Senate resolved to revoke Patrick Ekema Esunge of all academic certificate donned from bachelor's degree to Master's Degree. The UB Senate decision came after a sitting, following findings of a committee that was set up by UB Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Horace Ngomo Manga, to investigate the matter. Accordingly, the decision by the Senate, which is the highest

organ of the varsity, are non-appealable. The committee found out at the level of the General Certificate of Education, GCE Board, that Ekema registered the GCE Advanced Level seven times and actually wrote four times but got only an 'E' Grade in History each of the times. An "E" does not meet the minimum requirement for admission into UB which is at least two papers in one sitting or at least two papers in two sittings with 'C' grades. It was thus established that Ekema fraudulently got admission into the prestigious institution.

The above scenario illustrates an instance where accountability was served, however, incomplete. This is because in a country where the rule of law prevails, all what Ekema earned predicated on the fake certificates would have been refunded and relieved of his duties as mayor of Buea municipality. A quotation from The Post Newspaper after the UB Senate resolution stated that "the State should have an interest in the matter because he introduced fake certificates to be raised from Category 7 to Category 8 and earned money at that level. The State should have asked for a refund without prejudice to the criminal charges". Ekema earned undue allowances from the university based on the fake credentials; and the university is a state institution. That is state money. But loyalty to the state earned him little sanctions.

Under common law jurisdiction, a criminal cannot be allowed to be given public regard and continue to hold public office. Section 207 of the Cameroon Penal Code dealing with "Official Certificates" states that: "(1) Whoever forges or alters any official certificate shall be punished with imprisonment for from six months to three years. (2) Whoever makes use of any such certificate shall be punished in like manner." Section 132(2) states that the penalty becomes imprisonment for from one year to six years where the offender is a public servant. In the case of Mayor Ekema, no university administrative staff at UB was accused of having facilitated the process, Ekema was not incarcerated after he was found guilty even though he was stripped of the certificates. Justice was not served and Ekema as well as any other person within the university who was involved in the scam was held accountable. These are consequences of a breakdown in legal and professional accountability at UB in particular and in public universities in Cameroon in general.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on data analysis and discussion with the principal agent theory serving as a recurring theme throughout. First, the status of legal and professional accountability at UB were discussed and second the consequences of the government appointment of university leadership. With a combination of useful examples, the difficult nature of accountability was explicated. This is based on research questions that were asked during the interview such as; How do you find the quality of education given the goals, resources, facilities and staffing conditions of this university? How would you describe accountability and leadership perception on educational performance at the University of Buea? And What are the established rules and regulations governing the practice of accountability in this university?

## **6 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter presents the summary, conclusion and recommendation of this research study. The first part deals with a summary of the research study. The second dwells on the conclusion

### **6.1 Summary**

This research study focused on understanding the environment of accountability in public universities in Cameroon. The University of Buea was chosen to be the primary focus of study. The research study carefully examined the effects that the appointment of university leadership at the UB by the Cameroon government has on its accountability mechanism. These appointments mostly take the form of presidential, prime ministerial, and/or ministerial appointments of university leadership. University administrative staff appointed include vice-chancellors, registrars, deans, vice-deans, heads of departments and directors of various schools such as University of Buea College of Technology.

The assumption in this research study was that because university leadership at the University of Buea are appointed, it leads to a top-down accountability mechanism of the university is strictly hierarchical, vague and politicised. Therefore, the objectives of the research study were to understand (1) legal and professional accountability of university leadership in the context of Cameroonian public universities with the University of Buea as case study and (2) explore faculty and student's perception of the effectiveness of legal and professional accountability in terms of leadership. The research study set out to answer the following research questions; what factors explain legal and professional accountability in public universities in Cameroon? Does the appointment of university leadership at the UB by the Cameroon government influence their accountability? How do faculty and students perceive the effectiveness of professional accountability at the University of Buea in relation to university leadership?

In order to answer the research questions and attain its objectives, the principal agent theory was used as the theoretical framework to help understand accountability

between governments and public universities in Cameroon. In the case of the University of Buea, the adoption of the theory was chosen purposely because of the complicated nature in which government officials relate with university leadership as far as accountability is concerned, and how effective faculty and students evaluate the leadership of the university leadership.

The research methodology used was qualitative with a case study approach. The main reason for choosing the qualitative research methodology was because of its suitability for governance studies which incorporates the concept accountability (Shaughnessy, J. Z. E. & Jeane, Z. 2011). Focus was mainly on accountability with the Cameroon government, university leadership, faculty and students at the University of Buea being fundamental actors.

Data was collected using interviews and document analysis. This research study made use of the non-probability sampling. The specific types of non-probability sampling employed were quota sampling because they ensured that certain characteristics of the population sample were represented. In a successful sample of 23, the research study sought to achieve a quota of equal representation from the actors involved (principals and the agents).

The sample population for this research study included the Cameroon government officials, administrative staff at the University of Buea, faculty, lecturers, student leaders, and students. Data was analyzed using a deductive approach.

Research findings were structured into the appointments of university leadership at UB by government officials and the implications it has for accountability, quality of education at UB, accountability relationships between senior and junior university leadership, accountability relationships between university leadership, faculty and students, and reform suggestions for better observance of accountability in public universities in Cameroon.

In the first case, the University of Buea was viewed as a corporate institution with a hieratical system of administration. Administration at the university is top-down. Access to hierarchy is quite difficult because of too many protocols. Consequently, the

university has diminished in its provision of quality education, administration, and accountability parameters over the years. Accountability at UB now relies on the integrity of those who are supposed to render account in most situations. In short, meeting up with responsibilities is mainly an issue of upholding morale values and personal integrity.

Government appointment and control of university leadership at UB is one of many reasons that has weakened accountability. With university laws overridden, government officials are in control of several procedures on several issues ranging from day-to-day administration, disbursement of funds, leadership discipline, appointments and promotions and appointments of vice-chancellors and other principal officers.

The educational quality was considered to be relatively good. However, it was argued that the university is suffering from frenchification with the mass influx of Francophone lecturers and students from the French speaking part of Cameroon sent by the Biya's regime whose mastery in the Anglo-Saxon system is inadequate.

The relationship between senior and junior university leadership at UB was characterized as marred by wanton pressures, insubordination, intimidation, and threats. Apart from normal pressure from bosses for junior university leadership to meet up with deadlines, they can be also be fired and hired at any time by their bosses where the bosses possess such powers or on their instructions by government officials.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

Legal and professional accountability which would motivate university actors (from leadership to faculty to administrative employees) are not functional because of informalism and patron-clientelism where personal relations are important rather than formal and legal rules. This has made the system and its actions unpredictable as such also the system of accountability. Who is accountable to whom depends on personal relations? Formal and professional norms are not institutionalized, and actors are not socialized to these norms. What they are socialized to is informal relations where personal interference from top political leaders is common which is also central in the selection of top leadership at the university and other types of recruitments.

Objectively, consequences of government appointment and control of UB leadership on legal accountability are more prominent. However, faculty and student perception of the effectiveness of accountability on academic leadership is more inclined to professional accountability. Government appointment and control of UB leaders are prevailing factors (independent variables affecting the issue of accountability the most).

In order to ensure accountability in public universities in Cameroon in general and the University of Buea in particular, the government has to roll back and allow universities to function without too much interference or state control. The rolling back of the state will enable public universities to set up rigorous policies that will ensure effective checking of university leadership.

Public universities like the University of Buea and the University of Bamenda which are Anglo–Saxons universities should be able to run without interference from the government. There is no doubt that the centralized system of management in public universities is time consuming as evaluation and budgeting are not treated on time. Therefore, faculties and departments should be decentralized from the central administration to allow prompt evaluation of job description and precised budgets that reflect the faculty's training standard methodology.

There is also the need for universities in Cameroon to open cooperative ties with other universities across the globe through exchange programmes on accountability training and short courses. Cameroonian universities should carry out interval presentation of its accounts to the students after each semester and it could be three times a year so that the students will have confidence in the system”.

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Appendix

Interview Guide on the Research Topic: **“Accountability and Perception of Effective in Public Universities in Cameroon: Case of the University of Buea”**

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The following interview questions are to serve as guide for my master’s thesis on the above-mentioned topic. The interviews will be conducted with 30 interviewees amongst whom are academic leaders, state actors, lecturers, deans and vices, heads of departments, directors of schools, student union leaders, lecturer’s association representatives, lecturers and students at the University of Buea. The questions are asked based on the category of the interviewee.

### **Part 1.**

#### **Personal Question: Getting to know the Interviewee**

1. Could you tell me about yourself; academic-wise?
2. What is your position at the University of Buea. Were you elected or appointed?
3. What are your roles and responsibilities?
4. What is the standard procedure to have access to your office?

#### **Part 2. Accountability and Perception of Effective in UB**

1. Why did you choose to work or study at the University of Buea?
2. How do you find the quality of education given the goals, resources, facilities and staffing conditions of this university?
3. What has been the greatest challenge for you so far as a staff, lecturer, student etc?
4. Would things have been a lot easy if you were in another public university? and why?
5. Are you faced by any pressures from your bosses or subordinates? if yes, in what ways.

6. Looking at the decisions you have to make, what comes first? securing your post or working within the reach of your roles and responsibilities and why?
7. How would you describe accountability and leadership perception on educational performance at the University of Buea?
8. What are the established rules and regulations governing the practice of accountability in this university?
9. Who do you answer to and who answers to you and for what reasons?
10. Describe the structure of the University of Buea in relation to staff, budget, facilities, leadership and criteria for evaluating performance.
11. How do faculties and departments evaluate teaching effectiveness?
12. Do faculties and departments reserve some powers from the central administration?
13. What are departments' processes in disseminating materials regarding the program's objectives and courses.
14. Do you receive adequate evaluation regarding your development of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to your programme of study?
15. Is it difficult for you to access information from central administration faculty, department, administrative staff, lecturers and student leaders?

### **Concluding Question**

So, what advice do you have for the University of Buea and other public universities in Cameroon with regards to accountability, academic leadership and educational performance?