

## **The British Southern Cameroons HMs: Prestigious and dignifying professionals at the Service of the Nation**

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### **Abstract**

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*This study investigates the emergence of the Southern Cameroon corps of professional teachers and the influential role the Head Teachers or Head Masters as they were called, and the teachers in general played in shaping the Southern Cameroon culture and identity. The objective is to account for the popularity of this group of colonial servants and their rise to prominence. Using archival and secondary sources, the study reveals that they were well groomed and that their Christian upbringing and attachment to motherland against Nigerian domination was responsible for their admiration, uprightness and commitment to the Southern Cameroon nation.*

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**Key Words:** Southern Cameroon, Teachers, Nation, Education,

### **Introduction**

Teaching is generally the systematic presentation of facts, ideas, skills and techniques to pupils or students. It involves the sharing of knowledge for the progress of mankind. Overtime, teaching has developed into a profession as some designated people assumed responsibility for educating the young. In some parts of the world, especially ancient India, China, Egypt and Yola Emirate, teaching was performed by spiritual men such as priests and prophets, these category of persons enjoyed privileges and prestige. In the Greek and Roman civilisations teachers were part of the household staff of wealthy persons. By the middle ages in Europe, the church had taken over the responsibility for teaching in monasteries. Many of these learning centers in monasteries later developed into universities.

In north America there was also serious commitment to education. Grammar schools and colleges later gave birth to universities and in the 20th century teachers in the United States started to enjoy professional status. In different parts of the world, the teaching profession varies from country to country. In some countries the profession is highly respected and prestigious . This was the case in the British Southern Cameroons

In 1916 when Anglo-French forces partitioned German Kamerun at the end of the Kamerun campaign of the First World War, Britain obtained one-fifth of the territory. The British Cameroons was divided into two; British Southern Cameroons and British Northern Cameroons and attached respectively to Eastern and Northern Nigeria. The division which was simply for administrative convenience eventually became permanent and the Southern Cameroon evolved from a province of Eastern Nigeria to an autonomous territory by 1958. It was this territory, the Southern Cameroons, that decided at a UN organised plebiscite to gain independence by reuniting with French Cameroon in 1961 to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon, that is the focus of our study

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In this territory, the British inherited from the Germans, a battered education sector. Elementary schools were inadequate with no teachers and infrastructure. Not even a single secondary or post-primary school existed in the territory. There were no teacher training colleges and thus no indigenous teachers. When the war ended, the British therefore had the task of rebuilding schools and more importantly providing teachers who could erase the memories of the German era and create an image for Britain<sup>2</sup>. Since the territory was administered from Nigeria, teachers for this mission had to be recruited from Nigeria.

In 1922 H H Davidson was appointed Inspector of Education for the Cameroons with the task to revive education. The Baptist, Basel and Catholic missionaries also revived mission work in Cameroon and were fully engaged in education with emphasis on religious education. When Davidson revived seven schools in 1922 teachers like Essien Eniang Essien and Miss Ndiyo, Timothy Agbo, M O Nwosu and Jale Njang were brought in from Nigeria<sup>3</sup>. In 1926 more teachers were transferred from schools in Nigeria to the Southern Cameroons following the introduction of the Nigerian education regulations in the territory. In 1926 there were 228 Government, Mission and Native Authority teachers in the Southern Cameroons and 90 percent were Nigerians<sup>4</sup> By 1941 there were about 136 teachers of Nigeria origins in the various government schools in the Southern Cameroons because many returned home.

Nigerian teachers in the territory faced enormous challenges. First the indigenes accused the Igbo teachers, traders, businessmen of atrocities and disrespect for indigenous cultures<sup>5</sup>. Many of the teachers could not read or write German, the language of the first schools. They could not also understand the local languages. Transporting teachers from the interior of Nigeria to the Cameroons was also a problem and many who served in Cameroon were deprived of the annual leave granted to their counterparts back home because of distance and cost. The climate, health hazards and poor housing were amongst the grievances of these teachers when they petitioned their stay in Cameroon in 1941. Reacting to the problem of teachers serving in Cameroon, the Education Officer in Buea, Hunt Cooke wrote to the Assistant Director of Education, Enugu on May 27, 194 stating that

...it must not be forgotten that service in the Cameroons presents real hardship to Nigerians, who find the climate trying, and suffer from nostalgia far more than if posted anywhere in Nigeria. I am convinced that complaints of this nature are not frivolous: the suffering is genuine. Moreover, casual leave at a teacher's own expense, such as would be granted to a teacher posted nearer home, is impracticable. In these circumstances we cannot expect the morale even of the most conscientious teacher not to suffer progressively the longer leave is delayed<sup>6</sup>

Apart from these challenges, the need for indigenous teachers became more and more pronounced because the Nigerian teachers were arrogant, boastful, dictatorial, exploitative vis-a-vis their local most often untrained collaborators. They even claimed that they were on a civilisation mission in the Cameroons and as such no Nigerian teacher regardless of his grade was ready to serve under a Cameroonian Head Master (HM). The curriculum was dominated by Nigerian history, geography and stories of Nigerian heroes and heroines like Okonkwo and Enoma with the objectives of getting young Cameroonians to see Nigeria as their home.<sup>7</sup> The need for a local breed of teachers was not therefore only motivated by the departing Nigeria teachers but also by the nationalist desire for the Cameroonisation of the schools.

### **The Training of Southern Cameroon Teachers**

Since schools in Cameroon were treated as village schools following the Nigerian education regulations, teachers from Cameroon were not initially trained in the prestigious colleges of Ibadan and Umuahia.

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<sup>2</sup> This Policy was known as De-germanisation and it consisted of the systematic elimination of all German symbols, language, newspapers, institutions, officials, collaborators etc. For more on degermanisation see, G. W. Nkwi ., "Colonial Hegemonies at Loggerheads, British DeGermanisation Policy in British Cameroon", in Wazi Apoh and Bea Lundt (eds), *Germany and its West African Colonies*, Munster Germany, Litv erlag, 2013

<sup>3</sup> J L Nfi, *Nigerians on Mission in the British Southern Cameroons*, Bamenda, Baron Printers, 2014, p.61

<sup>4</sup> C P Musah, " Teachers in the Socio-Political Development of Anglophone Cameroon 1922-1972", MA Dissertation in History, The University of Bamenda, 2018, p.39

<sup>5</sup> The Igbo were accused of cannibalism, profiteering ,counterfeiting, adultery, rape, land expropriation, drug, kerosene and palm wine adulteration

<sup>6</sup>National Archives Buea (NAB),Ob/f/1941/3, African Staff, Appointments and Postings, p.2

<sup>7</sup> For details on this and other Nigerian activities in Cameroon, See Nfi, *Nigerians on Mission*

In 1925, the government started the training of Southern Cameroonian teachers at Victoria and in 1926 the school moved to Buea. Between 1926 and 1930, the Buea school trained a total of 76 teachers 40 for the government schools, 13 for missions and 23 for the Native Authority or NA Schools.<sup>8</sup>

In 1932 an Elementary Teacher Training College was set up at Kake-Kumba. The first graduates of the Kake school included Patrick Mancho, John Fru Ndze, John Takundo Emmanue Ayok and David Nde Zama.<sup>9</sup> The Kake school however trained only Grade 3 teachers thus teachers from Nigeria were still useful in the 1930s, 1940s and even 1950s. Since the creation of Kake did not end the shortage of teachers in the territory, some brilliant Cameroonians were later accepted to train in Ibadan and Umuahia . In 1935, there were 7 Cameroonian students at the training College at Umuahia, 2 at the High College at Ayaba, 1 at the Queens College Lagos and 40 students in the Nigerian Teacher Training Colleges especially the teacher training colleges at Uyo, Ogoja and St Charles College Onitsha<sup>10</sup>. Prominent graduates of these schools included J N Foncha, A N Jua, S T Muna, W P Lebaga and A D Mengot.

The shortage of teachers, the risk involved in training teachers in far away Nigerian schools and the desire for the indigenisation of the sector pushed the voluntary agencies to set up schools. In 1944, the Roman Catholics started a teacher training college in Njinikom and in 1947 the school moved to Bambui. In 1949 they started the St Francis Teacher Training College Kumba. In 1955 the Catholics started another training school, the St Paul's Teacher Training Center in Muyuka and moved it to Bojongo in 1956. The Basel started a teacher training college in Nyasoso in 1944 and in 1950, the Baptist created the Teacher Training College Great Soppo in Buea. In 1957 the Catholics again created St Pius X Teacher Training College Mankon which they later moved to Tatum. The voluntary agencies therefore came to dominate teacher training education in the Southern Cameroons and by 1955 only 27 out of a total of 104 student teachers were still receiving training in Nigerian institutions<sup>11</sup>

By 1961 there were 10 teacher training schools in the territory with a total of 726 students. The Missions controlled more than 70 percent of these schools and students and this greatly influenced the quality of the teachers of the Southern Cameroons. The curriculum of the mission teacher training colleges included morals, religious studies, agriculture, rural sciences, book keeping and indigenous languages which made the teachers polyvalent and conscious of their identity.

#### Mission Teacher Training Colleges in the Southern Cameroons

Year	College	Mission	Location
1944	T T C Nyasoso	Basel	Nyasoso
1944	St. Peters T T C	Catholic	Njinikom
1947	T T C Bali	Basel	Bali
1949	St. Francis T T C	Catholic	Kumba
1950	T T C Buea	Baptist	Buea
1955	St. Paul T T C	Catholic	Muyuka
1957	St. Pius X T T C	Catholic	Mankon

Source: Musah, " Teachers in the Socio-Political Development of Anglophone Cameroon", p.56

<sup>8</sup> NAB, Colonial Report for 1926-1930

<sup>9</sup> NAB, file Sb/a(1933)26, NA Teacher Training

<sup>10</sup> E A.Aka ., *The British Southern Cameroons 1922-1961 A Study in Colonialism and Underdevelopment*, Platteville, Nkeanji Global Tech,2002, p.127

<sup>11</sup> J A Ihims, *A Century of Western Education in Cameroon*, Bamenda, Unique Printers, 2003

### The Prestige and Dignity of the HMs

At independence in 1961, the Southern Cameroons had 3.157 teachers distributed as follows

Category of Teachers	Male	Female	Total
Certified	923	135	1058
Uncertified	877	96	973
Probationary	1025	101	1126
Total of all Categories	2825	332	3157

Source: Aka, *The British Southern Cameroons*, pp.119-120

The certified teachers were the graduates of the various teacher training colleges and it was from the highly certified (Grade 1) teachers that the Education Officers (EO) and the Head Masters (HM) were selected. Regardless of the grades, the teachers distinguished themselves as upright, courageous and disciplined people and as such most teachers were referred to in the countryside as HMs. The HM was in fact the head teacher and administrator of the school.

The emergence of teachers especially the HMs as public figures to take centre stage in some of the political and social activities in the Southern Cameroons was due to a number of factors. These included the strategic positions teachers occupied in society, their intellectual capacities, morals, rigorous training, resistance to Nigerian domination and their presences in all the nook and crannies of Cameroon.

The first factor in the moulding of the typical HM of the Southern Cameroons was the connection his motherland had with Nigeria. The first generation of these teachers trained in the 1930s and 1940s had to be hostile to their Nigerian counterpart who treated them as second grade subjects. They became determined to forge an identity for their land in order to halt the *Nigerianisation* of their schools. Rather than teach pupils about Nigerians heroes and heroines like Okonkwo and Enoma, they introduced stories of Cameroonians like Sama and Banla in an attempt to indigenise the curriculum. Again these teachers who became nationalists made use of the great deal of experiences which they gathered as teachers or student teachers in Nigerian colleges. Their contacts and interactions with seasoned Nigerian politicians like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and others helped in nurturing leadership and political aspirations in them. An example of such teachers was Paul Monyongo Kale who acquired a wealth of political experience while in Nigeria working as a teacher in the Salvation Army School Lagos and as a writer with the "West African Pilot" a newspaper founded by Dr. Azikiwe. While in Nigeria, Kale earned a lot of knowledge in politics, particularly, British and world politics which brought him to the limelight of Nigerian politics and he was able to transfer and employ such knowledge in the Cameroons. He was attracted by Nigerian vote catching slogans as "Freedom for all", "Freedom for Africa today, tomorrow, and forever", "Forward ever backward never". Such slogans tickled the young and aspiring Cameroonian teachers in Nigeria to start finding ways of putting into practical use such slogans in the Cameroons in order to stimulate political consciousness. Kale lucidly describe the impact of the interactions and experiences with the Nigerians in these words; "The growth of the politics in the Cameroons followed the rising tide of nationalism in West Africa and Nigeria where I was based. Like many youths, I was caught in the whirlpool and the ebullience threw me into the firing line-the political squabble so to speak."<sup>12</sup> In fact, due to these crucial contributions Kale has been regarded as the "spring-board of nationalism in Southern Cameroons."<sup>13</sup> This was not the case with others professionals or other colonial civil servants

The teachers in British Southern Cameroons were very much respected not only in their schools by their pupils, but also by every member of the society wherever they were found. A teacher was not only considered a transmitter of knowledge or moulder of characters and conduct, but as one who lived an exemplary life in the community at large. Becoming a teacher elevated one to the status of elite in the society.<sup>14</sup> The teacher was held in very high esteem and respected by everyone.

<sup>12</sup> Paul M. Kale, *Political Evolution in the Cameroons* (Buea: Government Printers, 1967), preface.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Zachary Njeuma, *Valiant Soldiers from Fako: An Extract from a Who's Who in Bakweri* (Yaounde: Mega Impression), 28-29.

<sup>14</sup> Helen DeKone, "The Builders of Identity: Education, Language and the Elites of Cameroon, 1916-1961" (B.A. Thesis in History, Wesleya University), 2012, 101.

Nerius Namaso Mbile, addressing the General Assembly of the West Cameroon Union of Teachers on April 30<sup>th</sup> 1970 painted a clearer picture vis-a-vis the prestige and dignity enjoyed by the teachers. He presented the picture as;

... the professional teacher is a character builder, a leader, a person who knows something about everything under the sun, abroad-minded person who is usually an umpire to parties in dispute and a peace maker wherever he is. That is why the majority of world leaders had been teachers. That is why the teaching profession is one of great importance in the world. Teachers, mostly those in the suburbs, would accept that they enjoy tremendous goodwill and respect from the villagers even sometimes more than their counterparts in the urban areas. They have been the beacon bearers, they are expected to live decent lives, hence they are revered, admired and respected among the villagers. They come to the teacher for advice and guidance about their life's nagging problems....<sup>15</sup>

The teachers felt more important than just being school masters. The fact that their responsibilities digressed from being school masters to almost "consultants" as they always readily dished out pieces of advice to the society, drove them into positions of "natural leaders."<sup>16</sup> As a result, the teacher became more of an administrator to just a teacher. This easily paved their way into public scenarios as they were always without hesitation listened to, whenever the opportunity presented itself. Anthony Ndi in another clearer and lucid way maintains that a teacher in the community was;

...the role model, leader and trusted adviser to the Fon, Chief or Council of Elders in the village. He and his staff set the standards for moral rectitude, integrity, social order and decorum. As the country evolved politically, they were popularly elected as local representatives into the N.A Councils and eventually as MPs to Parliament. On the whole, the HM [headmaster] was the point of reference and an epitome of the Missionary-Manager, Supervisor and Visiting Teacher in Voluntary Agency schools in many ways; as well as of the Education Officer and Divisional Officer.<sup>17</sup>

The teacher was a point of reference to each and every member of the society. He was a focal point both by his superiors and his fellow peers. This thus drove teachers to occupy a prestigious position in the society. In fact in some villages the HM served as the second in command after the chief as he was trusted by all.

Another factor that gave the HMs prestige and dignity was the intellectual capacity they possessed. Teachers were at the advantageous end comparable to their peers of other occupations as they made up the greater proportion of the educated elite. Teachers wrote speeches and petitions for traditional rulers, associations and tribal unions on special occasions.<sup>18</sup> They were also letter writers to a good number of people in the society thanks to the fact that most of them had a high proficiency of the English language and could write good English.<sup>19</sup> More to that, the teachers were scattered in every part of the Cameroons as schools were all over the territory unlike other public service institutions which made them come in close contact with the common man. Aka gives an insight understanding and puts it as follows;

...the teacher training college remained the nurseries of political leaders, and the teaching profession as a whole the reservoir of the most enlightened political personnel from the beginning of the nationalist movements. The reasons are clear; because of the belated development of post primary education, the insignificant number of secondary schools and university graduates was immediately absorbed into the civil service. They were moreover, concentrated in the few urban centres or administrative headquarters. On the other hand, teachers were spread throughout every nook and corner of the Southern Cameroons; they had close relations with every class of people and played the role of community leaders.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> *Cameroon Times*, Thursday, April 30, 1970, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Musah, *Teachers in the Socio-Political Development* p. 123

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Ndi, *The Golden Age of Southern Cameroons: Vital Lessons for Cameroon*, (Bamenda: Spears Media Press, 2016), 46-47.

<sup>18</sup> NAB, File, Td (1949)2, Petition from the Bamenda Improvement Association to the trusteeship Council.

<sup>19</sup> Musah, *Teachers in the Socio-Political Development.*, p. 124

<sup>20</sup> E A Aka, *The British Southern Cameroons*, p. 252.

As a consequence, teachers were always at the center stage of most activities in the society be it directly or indirectly. Again, a murmured crowd of teachers were gifted and as trained teachers, they spoke eloquently with confidence and authority. Teachers like P.M.Kale, John Ngu Foncha, M.N.Foju, John T. Ndze, Solomon Tandeng Muna, Augustine Ngom Jua, Humphrey Njambe Mula Ngo among others were blessed with such qualities.

The content of the curriculum of mission schools had in it a higher propensity to mould or prepare her graduates including teachers who were its vectors to fit in all sectors of society compared to government and N.A schools. In his comments on the content of mission school education, Ndi puts it as:

The role of the well-groomed, Primary School Teacher in general and Headmaster in particular... is well established. Such a teacher would invariably have received the rigorous physical, moral, intellectual and social formation either initially at Kake... and later at one of the highly rated Teacher Training Centres wholly run by the Missionaries of the Roman Catholic, Basel or Baptist denominations.<sup>21</sup>

This explains why most of the personalities who were key figures of social and political affairs were the products of mission education, including teachers who made up the greater proportion of those that were involved in politics. Thanks to their Christian educational backgrounds they squarely fitted themselves in the nationalistic wind of change which blew across the Southern Cameroons and as a consequence held top political positions and offices.

Apart from the content of the curriculum, the Missions especially the Basel Mission had developed a careful Africanisation policy after the Second World War that prepared the Cameroonians to handle responsibilities<sup>22</sup>. This was not the case with other Cameroonians in the other colonial services. Fortunately for these mission trained and mission employed teachers, they could take part in politics unlike their counterparts in the government schools. This early Africanisation of the schools build confidence and courage in the mission school teachers and this was reflected in their attachment to nationalist politics

The admiration for the Southern Cameroon teacher and his rise to prominence can also be attributed to John Ngu Foncha. This teacher of the Catholic schools of Njinikom and Mankon founded the Bamenda Catholic Teachers Union in 1940 and by 1955 he had successfully pulled many teachers like Isidore Diyen and W. Lebaga in to politics. He later became the Premier of the Southern Cameroons in 1959 thanks to the militancy of many teachers in his party, the Kamerun National Democratic Party( KNDP)<sup>23</sup>. He immediately embarked on the Cameroonisation of the civil service and this reform permitted him to recruit many mission teachers between 1959 and 1965 into the public service where they continued to excel because of their moral upbringing, polyvalent training and love for fatherland. Many mission teachers competently replaced the departing Nigerian civil servants in the police, marine, customs, agriculture, administration, taxation, judiciary and other sectors of the Southern and later West Cameroon administration. In these new functions, the distinctive characteristics of the Southern Cameroon teachers that brought prestige and dignity to the corps survived until 1972 when the Cameroon federation was abolished and the unitary state created.

## Conclusion

The Southern Cameroons HMs and teachers in general distinguished themselves as a set of professionals who were dedicated to their task, disciplined, serviceable, trusted, intelligent and patriotic. These qualities brought prestige and dignity to the profession. The difficulties encountered in their training in Nigeria and the bullying/biased character of their Nigerian counterparts who pioneered teaching in their land with a Nigerian-oriented curriculum pushed them to be jingoistic. The morally or religious oriented training the next generation received from the training schools set up by voluntary agencies in the 1940s and 1950s produced disciplined, polyvalent, God fearing, serviceable and patriotic teachers. These mission-trained teachers were posted and could be transferred to serve anywhere in the Southern Cameroons.

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<sup>21</sup>Ndi, *The Golden Age of Southern Cameroons*, 46.

<sup>22</sup> M B Gwanfogbe, *Basel Mission Education in Cameroon, 1886-1968*, Bamenda, Quality Printers, 2018, p.144

<sup>23</sup> In 1959 Foncha and the KNDP defeated Endeley and the Cameroons Peoples Convention (CPNC) in the general elections paving the way for Foncha the HM to become the second Prime Minister of the Southern Cameroons

This gave them the opportunity to share knowledge and serve the chiefs, village councils, improvement unions and village development associations wherever they worked. Fortunately the system permitted them to participate in partisan politics and one of them, John Ngu Foncha formed the KNDP in 1955. It was this solid and polyvalent formation, discipline, mastery of the queens language, readiness to serve, availability, and jingoism that brought prestige and dignity to the HMs and their colleagues.

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