



CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

This article explores Cameroon higher education landscape, a sector crucial to the socio-economic development of the country. In the past, Cameroon higher education was directed by various political and economic considerations that have generated its current structure. Areas of concern in the institutions of learning, include structural problems that weakens its effectiveness, governance, the quality of education, professionalization, accessibility to facilities, state of the art infrastructures, digital technology, financial constraints and matching training and degrees with the exigencies of the job market. The two research questions that guided the study, were to what extent does effective Strategic Planning Influence Quality teaching in Higher Education in Cameroon and to what extent does good governance promote quality teaching in higher Education. The statement problem according to observation states in Cameroon, the situation is access to education is a fundamental concept that refers to the possibility for higher education students to benefit from quality education, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical origin (Amartya Sen, 1999). This article uses a literature review and methodology, supporting its analyses with the core-periphery theory to analyze the historical evolution and contemporary challenges facing the sustainable development of higher education in Cameroon. The study proposes innovative reforms to improve governance and quality assurance, which is an indispensable resource for policymakers, educators, and all stakeholders interested in the future of higher education in Cameroon. Policymakers, scholars, and employers must collaborate to recreate curricula to keep up with the demand of the job market and aligning the teaching-learning processes with digital technology.

Key words:

Higher Education, Challenges, Governance, Cameroon, Contemporary.



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Introduction

Access to education is a fundamental concept that refers to the possibility for Higher Education students to benefit from quality education, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical origin (Amartya Sen, 1999). According to Martha Nussbaum (2011), access to education is essential for the development of individual capabilities and participation in economic, social, and political life. For Sabina Alkire (2002), access to education is a key factor in human development and poverty reduction. Higher Education students are students who face significant obstacles in accessing education due to their contemporary challenges such as, governance, economic, professionalization geographical origin, or family situation (UNICEF, 2020). According to Paul Glewwe (2002) Poverty is a factor that can limit access to education for students, as poor families may struggle to pay tuition fees and school supplies (World Bank, 2018).

The factors of contemporary challenges that hinders access to quality Higher Education are multiple and complex. Poverty is one of the main obstacles, as poor families often struggle to pay school certain amount of tuition fees. Higher education in Cameroon has undergone significant evolution since the country's independence in 1960. At that time, the education system was largely influenced by colonial models, but it has progressively transformed to meet the needs of a changing society. The expansion of higher education institutions in Cameroon over the past decade demonstrates a concerted effort by the government to enhance educational access and quality across different regions as well as developing the third mission of the university which is making the university entrepreneurial and a catalyst to socioeconomic development of the country. The establishment of new universities, coupled with an increase in student numbers and diversification of academic programs, illustrates a positive trend towards improving higher education infrastructure and opportunities within the country. According to a study conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education in 2024, the number of higher education institutions has increased by 400% since 2000, from 20 to over 400 institutions. The most significant recent change in the legal framework governing higher education in Cameroon is the promulgation of Law No. 2023/007 on July 25, 2023. This law replaces the previous Law No. 005 of April 16, 2001, marking a critical evolution in the legislative approach to higher education. Objectives of Law No. 2023/007: The primary aim of this new law is to adapt the higher education system to meet contemporary socio-economic realities within Cameroon. This adaptation is crucial as it seeks to address challenges such as access to quality education, relevance of curricula to job markets, and integration of technology in teaching and learning processes. The governance of higher education in Cameroon is marked by structural challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Research by scholars such as Nguefang (2022) highlights that problems related to administrative management, insufficient funding, and teacher training are widespread. Indeed, a survey conducted by the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF) in 2023 reveals that only 45% of graduates find employment in their field of study within two years of graduating. This finding highlights an alarming mismatch between the skills acquired by students and the requirements of the labor market, which directly questions the relevance of the diplomas awarded.

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In the face of these challenges, it is imperative to adopt a proactive approach to reforming the higher education system in Cameroon. Experts like Tchouassi (2024) recommend strengthened collaboration between universities and the private sector to ensure that academic programs are aligned with current economic needs. Furthermore, according to a report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2025, investing in research and development could also play a key role in improving educational quality. "The Governance of Higher Education in Cameroon and the Relevance of Diplomas" aims to be a call to rethink not only how we train our students but also how we value their qualifications in a globalized world.

Statement Problem

The Research Problem on Contemporary Challenges to Higher Education in Cameroon, according to Sen's capability approach theory (1999), education is considered a key factor in human development, as it enables individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of their community. In an ideal context, all Higher Education students should have access to quality education, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical origin. However, statistics collected in the field show that reality is far from meeting this standard. According to a study by the Directorate of Studies and Statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education (2017), 45% of students who drop out of school do so due to poverty and bad governance while 30% do so due to distance to school, according to the National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon (2015). Lack of family support is also an important factor, also according to Teshome Yizengaw, (2008), higher education institutions in Africa have seen little or no infrastructure improvements for the last few decades. Learning infrastructure is widely deficient due to insufficient budget and overdependence on public financing. Infrastructure, such as internet access, library, textbooks, equipment, laboratories and classroom space are critical bottlenecks resulting in deterioration of quality of education and learning. The poor state of facilities also affects the quality of research and its ability to contribute to societal development and progress. Africa's higher education institutions face a decline in quality of education, learning and research. Universities operate with overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, insufficient equipment and instructional materials, the contrast between theory and observed facts in the field shows that there is indeed a research problem of contemporary challenges of Higher Education to

be solved. Reason the researcher sought to find out the contemporary challenges of Higher Education in Cameroon.

Specific Research Question

To what extent does Effective Strategic Planning Influence Quality learning in Higher Education in Cameroon.

To what extent does good governance promote quality teaching in higher Education.in Cameroon.

Review of Literature

Today, Cameroon has 11 State Universities with 9200 permanent teachers who teach over 500,000 students enrolled regularly, (MINESUP, 2024). From the socio-economic context of the last two decades and the perspective of an emerging national economy by 2035, these universities operate in the face of challenges which inhibit their development and reconstitute an evaluation and a continued renewal of mechanisms of the governance of the system. Governance in Higher Education has four axes (managerial, financial, academic and social) based on the 1993 university reforms which were influenced by professionalization, globalization, information and communication, technology, and the liberation and growth of societal knowledge. The reform of University Governance forms part of the mission of the Ministry of Higher Education.

This implies the redefinition of the relation between the university and the state and the relations between the different universities. For example, in 2008, the government presented an embodiment of fundamental reforms fixing the new university orientation towards 2020. This concept called the new university governance program which aim at revolutionizing Higher Education, had 07 priority programs among which figured the reinforcement of the national system on teaching and learning. However, students, such as children from poor families, displaced or refugee children, children living in remote rural areas, or children with special educational needs, face significant challenges in accessing education (UNICEF, 2020). Financial constrain is an important factor that can limit access to education for vulnerable students. According to the World Bank (2018), poverty is the main cause of school dropout in many developing countries. Poor families may struggle to pay tuition fees and school supplies, which can prevent students from accessing education (Sabina Alkire, 2002). Distance to school is also an important factor that can limit access to education for vulnerable students, particularly in remote rural areas (National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon, 2015). According to Martha Nussbaum (2011), education is essential for the development of individual capabilities and participation in economic, social, and political life. However, vulnerable students may need special support to access education and succeed in school (Julian Schweisfurth, 2013).

Effective Strategic Planning Influence on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Cameroon

According to Teshome Yizengaw, (2008), higher education institutions in Africa have seen little or no infrastructure improvements for the last few decades. Learning infrastructure is widely deficient due to insufficient budget and overdependence on public financing. Infrastructure, such as internet access, library, textbooks, equipment, laboratories and classroom space are critical bottlenecks resulting in deterioration of quality of education and learning. The poor state of facilities also affects the quality of research and its ability to contribute to societal development and progress. Africa's higher education institutions face a decline in quality of education, learning and research. Universities operate with overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, insufficient equipment and instructional materials,

According to the MINESUP 2015 Document "University Standards" Universities must maintain a constructive interaction in their areas of concentration and must have enough structures for lectures, tutorials and practical works as well as sufficient secured laboratories/workshops that meet the required technical standard.

Universities offering training in medicine, pharmacy and dentistry among others must; have a clinical teaching site which has an adequate number of patients and materials necessary for clinical teaching. Have a University teaching hospital, have a pharmacy.

establish, with teaching hospitals, conventions, define their respective roles: and include in the resources for clinical training, first aid services, secondary and tertiary hospital services, emergency services, ambulatory structures and structures for basic treatments as well as health centers, and others. The current context of globalization, socio-linguistic disparities and socio-economic vulnerability of many necessitates HEIs in Cameroon, anxious to be part of the modernity, certain requirements of social governance. A HEI should have at least a university hall of residence, which is functional, with enough capacity as regards enrolment. Every school should define a policy for housing students which encourages agreements and conventions with private operators.

A HEI should make available a quota of the rooms of their Halls of Residence to vulnerable students (physically and socially challenged students, foreign students...). A HEI should have at least a restaurant which is functional and ensures strict respect for hygiene and cleanliness. Investment in teaching personnel (Human resources) is very important for any effective student centered teaching to take place. Astin (1984) asserts that one resource measure that is particularly popular is the student-faculty ratio. Many administrators believe that the lower the ratio the greater the learning and personal development that will occur. Without sufficient teachers, Graduate Assistants and non-academic staff, it is likely that the class sizes may be large, the teacher overworked and lectures becomes the predominant teaching method. Gibbs (1992) argues that one of the reasons why university lecturers use lecture is because they are overworked. This is confirmed by the findings on teaching methods and activities where teachers say they use lectures most of the time due to time constraints and overcrowded halls. In such an environment, student-centred learning may be compromised, critical thinking and creativity necessary for the workplace may not be achieved and the goal of professionalization may not be attained.

In the review of contemporary human resources management (HRM) literature, there are methods and procedures traditionally used in the context of employment situations that may be applied to improve the experiences of those serving in a voluntary governance role at a not-for-profit organization. The goals of HRM are four-fold: attracting qualified applicants to an organization; motivating the individual to commit themselves to a contributing role; creating meaningful opportunities whereby the person may maximize their professional talents; and retaining experienced members for a sufficient period of time in order to capitalize on their competencies and experiences. If done well, such HRM programming may stimulate strategic applications for the organization where such efforts are aligned with the mission, values and goals of the institution (Dessler, Rekar-Munro and Cole, 2011).

Good Governance Promote Quality Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Cameroon

Transformative education in Cameroon also involves strengthening institutional governance to enhance accountability within universities. The establishment of three Deputy Vice-Chancellor positions across all public universities has streamlined decision-making processes and encouraged consultation and engagement with all institutional stakeholders. Notably, the institutionalization of monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) tools facilitates improved planning and timely adjustments, ultimately reducing financial losses and aligning budgets with available resources. Additionally, universities are increasingly generating revenue through various business ventures; for instance, the University of Buea operates a microfinance institution, while the University of Dschang has established a cooperative society. Such economic activities facilitate the translation of research outputs into marketable products and ease graduates' transition into the workforce.

Transformative education necessitates reimagining teaching and learning processes and fostering stakeholder participation in curriculum reviews. Traditional models where the teacher is the sole authority must evolve into collaborative environments where teachers guide and learners actively engage. The adoption of the Bachelor-Master-Doctorate scheme has shifted focus towards a student-centered approach. Currently, approximately 30% of the curriculum at UBa is delivered online via its dedicated Learning Management System (LMS), which has increased enrollment in certain programs and enabled the use of online laboratories and simulations from partner institutions. These advancements require staff retraining and the establishment of robust industrial partnerships to enhance experiential learning, initiatives that public universities in Cameroon are actively pursuing. For example, a recent course on data analysis using R attracted significant interest from postgraduate students, reflecting a growing enthusiasm for digital tools in education. Campus internationalization is another critical component of transformative education embraced by public universities in Cameroon. Credit mobility and transferability are essential for enhancing internationalization efforts. All public universities participate in the Pan African Quality Assurance Alliance (PAQAA), with some engaging through CAMES and others

through the AAU, ensuring their credit systems facilitate comparability. This engagement invites external evaluations that improve institutional performance and competitiveness. The implications are significant, as clearly defined learning outcomes translate into measurable skills. Increased diversity in the student population fosters cross-cultural learning experiences. For instance, the Universities of Maroua and Ngaoundéré host substantial foreign student populations from neighboring Chad and the Central African Republic, who pay the same registration fees as local students. Additionally, UBa hosts PhD students from South Sudan under the RUFORUM GTA scheme, benefiting from tuition waivers.

A potential barrier to internationalization is the language barrier. To address this, UBa has established a Language Centre to assist foreign students with language challenges, exemplifying efforts to foster robust international exchanges and partnerships. A pertinent question arises: Has higher education always been accessible to all? In Cameroon, as in many other nations, certain segments of the population—such as internally displaced persons, refugees, individuals with disabilities, and those from marginalized backgrounds are often inadvertently excluded from higher education. Thus, true transformative education must be inclusive and provide safeguards for these underserved groups. Prime Ministerial directives exist to support these individuals' access to universities. While universities waive fees for qualified individuals, there is a pressing need for more intentional efforts to promote inclusion and safeguard vulnerable populations on campuses. Collaborating with the Cameroon Baptist Convention as a technical partner, UBa has initiated programs to raise awareness among university staff regarding the needs of these individuals. Supported by the TAGDev 2.0 Program, this campaign for inclusion has extended to private higher education institutions under UBa's mentorship. Notably, a recent workshop attracted over 40 students with disabilities, several of whom applied for the inaugural cohort of TAGDev 2.0 scholarships. There also exist a mutual partnership between Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) and the University of Maroua that succeeded to open an academic laboratory for inclusive Education under the Department of Sciences of Education in the Higher Teachers Training College of the University of Maroua. This is to incorporate the inclusive education and learners in the teaching-learning programmes in the said University. Furthermore, partnerships between UBa and organizations like the Cameroon Muslim Development Association aim to enhance training in Islamic banking and engage with small farmers from this demographic.

Explanatory theory of the study

The capability approach theory of Amartya Sen (1999) provides a theoretical framework for understanding the obstacles face by students of Higher Education in accessing education. According to this theory, education is a key factor in human development, as it enables individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of their community. Individual capabilities are defined as the ability of individuals to act and make decisions that enable them to achieve their goals and improve their well-being. In the context of contemporary challenges of Higher Education, individual challenges may include the limited access to quality teaching.

The capability approach theory suggests that students may have difficulty developing their individual capabilities due to various obstacles, or contemporary challenges faced by Higher Education such as poverty, distance to school, special educational needs, Governance, Professionalization, Digitalization of the teaching-learning process. etc. These obstacles can limit their access to education and other development opportunities, which can in turn limit their ability to fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of their community. The capability approach theory can be used to explain the results of the study on contemporary challenges of Higher Education in Cameroon. According to this theory, Higher Education students who have access to quality educational opportunities and receive special support to develop their individual capabilities are more likely to succeed in school and fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of their community compared with students who studied in Universities with challenges. The results of the study can be used to inform educational policies and programs aimed at improving access to Higher Education.

Methodology

Research Design

The design used for this study was a mixed method design. This was because the approach was both quantitative and qualitative. A quantitative research is one in which it tries to bring out an understanding of the problem in terms of quantity. This means that it quantified the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into usable statistics. Qualitative research is used to get an in-depth understanding of the opinions, and reason of respondent. The research design is suitable for this study because the research involved seeking opinion of contemporary challenges to Higher Education in Cameroon. The data collection technique used is a questionnaire, which was administered to the selected Higher Education students.

Target Population

Table 1: Showing the Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Information of Staate Universities

Variable	Sub Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Name of HI	University of Buea	50	27.8
	University of Douala	40	22.2
	University of Bamenda	40	22.2
	University of Yaounde 1	50	27.8
Gender	Male	81	45.0
	Female	99	55.0
Age range	20 – 25	43	23.9
	26 – 31	100	57.2
	31 – 36	15	8.3
	36+	21	16

The table above shows that 180 respondents, 50 (27.8%) were from University of Buea, 40(22.2%) University of Douala, 40(22.2%) from University of Bamenda and University of Yaounde 1 50(27.8) Majority of the respondents were from ages 26-31 years who provided the responses on the Contemporary problems on Higher Education.

Sample and sampling technique

The sampling random sampling technique was used to select the sample. Simple random sampling was one in which each member in the sample has equal chance of being selected. A ballot method of selection was carried out to determined students who will participate. Following the rules of ballot, the student who picked yes were eligible. This was done to give the students equal chances to participate in the study.

The demographic characteristics of respondents included students from four state Universities all in level 400 final year.

The questionnaire includes questions on the sociodemographic characteristics of the students, their school experience, the obstacles they face in accessing education, as well as their needs and expectations regarding education. Data were also collected through interviews with some stakeholders and administrators who provided information on the educational policies and challenges faced by students. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The data were entered and analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The study results were presented in the form of tables, figures, and graphs, which allow for visualizing trends and relationships between the contemporary challenges and quality access of teaching and learning.

Target Population

The target population of this study was made up of all state Universities in Cameroon.

Results of Findings

Table 1: Effective Strategic Planning and Access to Quality Education

Item	\bar{X}	S	Dec
	3.09	0.80	A
1. Poverty and access to quality education	2.89	0.92	A
2. Distance to school and access to quality education	2.97	0.84	A
3. Special educational needs and access to quality education	3.14	0.80	A
4. School support and access to education	3.49	0.67	A
5. Educational professionalization and policies and access to education.	3.08	0.77	A
MRS	3.11	0.80	A

The data analyzed in the table above shows that effective strategic planning is a means to improved quality access to education to hinder some obstacles of quality education and poverty play a significant setback to quality education. Firsthand information about the school helps them to become wiser given at the beginning of the school year; poverty might limit the access to quality education. Distance from home to school also influence the access to quality education and majority of the respondents' accepted to the fact distance always hinders their performance of some students. Educational support needs and Educational policy and orientation gives them knowledge on time management and punctuality; and the knowledge gotten from educational policies and governance improve their access to quality education. Conclusively, there is a better understanding to the significant impact of contemporary challenges to quality Education

The interview excerpts with participants provided valuable information on the experiences of students. A student stated: "I couldn't go to school for several years because my family couldn't afford to pay the school fees." Another student emphasized the importance of school support: "School support really helped me succeed in school. I was able to get better grades and I feel more confident." A teacher also emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive and welcoming school environment for vulnerable students.

These qualitative results can be used to develop strategies to promote access to education for vulnerable students. The study highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to address the barriers faced by students in accessing education. By understanding the specific needs and experiences of these students, educators and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to support their educational success. The findings of this study can inform the development of policies and programs that promote inclusive and equitable education for all students, particularly those who are most vulnerable. Furthermore, the study's results suggest that educational policies and school governance programs can play an important role in promoting the quality access of students learning. This is consistent with Sen's theory, which highlights the importance of education as a means of promoting individual capabilities and human development. The study's results can be interpreted as an illustration of Sen's capability approach theory, which emphasizes the importance of taking into account the specific needs of individuals to promote their human development and well-being. The study's findings highlight the need for policymakers and educators to prioritize the needs of students and to develop targeted interventions to support their educational success.

Discussion of Findings

Effective Strategic Planning on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

The results of the study highlight the importance of taking into account the specific challenges faced by students of Higher Education and human development. According to Amartya Sen (1999), education is a key factor in promoting individual capabilities and human development challenges promotes hindrance to the capabilities. Other authors such as Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Jonathan Kozol (2005) have also emphasized the importance of education in promoting social justice and equal opportunities. These

institutions were strategically created to cater to various academic disciplines and regional needs, thereby expanding the educational landscape across Cameroon. The University of Buea, for instance, became particularly notable for its focus on social sciences and management programs, which attracted a diverse student body from different parts of the country. By the early 1990s, the total enrollment in higher education institutions across Cameroon had reached approximately 30,000 students.

This figure reflects not only the establishment of new universities but also an increasing recognition among Cameroonians regarding the importance of higher education for personal and professional development. The growth in student numbers indicated a rising aspiration among youth for advanced learning opportunities that could lead to better employment prospects and contribute to national development. The introduction of these universities played a crucial role in enhancing both the quality and accessibility of higher education in Cameroon. With more institutions available, students had greater choices regarding their fields of study and could pursue specialized programs that aligned with their career aspirations. Additionally, this expansion helped alleviate some pressure from existing universities, which were often overcrowded and struggling to accommodate growing student populations. Furthermore, these developments coincided with broader socio-political changes within Cameroon during this period, including calls for democratization and increased public participation in governance. The establishment of new universities was seen as part of a larger effort to promote educational equity and empower citizens through knowledge. The creation of public universities in Cameroon during the 1990s represented a pivotal shift towards improving access to higher education while also diversifying academic offerings tailored to meet national needs. The results of the study are also consistent with Paulo Freire's (1970) theories on education as a means of liberation and emancipation of marginalized groups. According to Teshome Yizengaw, (2008), higher education institutions in Africa have seen little or no infrastructure improvements for the last few decades. Learning infrastructure is widely deficient due to insufficient budget and overdependence on public financing. Infrastructure, such as internet access, library, textbooks, equipment, laboratories and classroom space are critical bottlenecks resulting in deterioration of quality of education and learning.

Good Governance and Quality Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

The poor state of facilities also affects the quality of research and its ability to contribute to societal development and progress. The governance of higher education in Cameroon is marked by structural challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Research by scholars such as Nguetang (2022) highlights that problems related to administrative management, insufficient funding, and teacher training are widespread. Indeed, a survey conducted by the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF) in 2023 reveals that only 45% of graduates find employment in their field of study within two years of graduating. This finding highlights an alarming mismatch between the skills acquired by students and the requirements of the labor market, which directly questions the relevance of the diplomas awarded. In the face of these challenges, it is imperative to adopt a proactive approach to

reforming the higher education system in Cameroon. Experts like Tchouassi (2024) recommend strengthened collaboration between universities and the private sector to ensure that academic programs are aligned with current economic needs. Furthermore, according to a report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2025, investing in research and development could also play a key role in improving educational quality. "The Governance of Higher Education in Cameroon and the Relevance of Diplomas" aims to be a call to rethink not only how we train our students but also how we value their qualifications in a globalized world. Africa's higher education institutions face a decline in quality of education, learning and research. Universities operate with overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, insufficient equipment and instructional materials, according to the MINESUP 2015 Document "University Standards" Universities must maintain a constructive interaction in their areas of concentration and must have enough structures for lectures, tutorials and practical works as well as sufficient secured laboratories/workshops that meet the required technical standard.

Conclusion

This study focused on contemporary challenges to Higher Education, a crucial topic for promoting social justice and equal opportunities in the education system. The research problem was to understand the obstacles that prevent students from accessing education and succeeding in their studies. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study. The results of the study showed that contemporary challenges of Higher Education hinder students access to quality teaching and learning.

Recommendations

- Effective school management should be encouraging among Higher Education Stakeholders
- Encourage horizontal accountability and facilitate integration of school stakeholders in accountability structures.
- Help decentralized levels to identify and integrate local stakeholders in accountability processes. Promote inclusiveness so that diversity of stakeholders reflects all relevant perspectives.
- Avoid competing accountability demands between different governance levels and policy programmes by employing a whole of system approach.
- Build capacity to manage competing demands between horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms in school administration.

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