

Parents Teachers Associations in the Development of Public Secondary Schools in Mezam Division (Cameroon), 1979-2023

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2025.v13i09.006>

| Received: 13.07.2025 | Accepted: 22.09.2025 | Published: 25.09.2025

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Abstract

Review Article

Parents Teachers Associations (PTA) are major actors in the governance and management of academic institutions in Cameroon schools and colleges yet their engagement is most often undermined in scholarship. This study that centrally sets out to fill a literature gap, explores the extent to which PTAs have responded to their mission of serving as private non-interest partners to complement government actions in the development of public secondary schools. Using a qualitative historical embedded design informed by primary and secondary sources, the study investigates the workings of the Association from the specific case of Mezam Division of the North West Region, Cameroon a hub of forty public secondary schools with significant and ever-growing student enrolment. The paper maintains that through a strategy of resource mobilization from philanthropic gestures to volunteerism and later to the introduction of official functioning texts specifying, among other aspects, the introduction of levies, PTAs have left visible imprints of infrastructural uplifts, human resource mobilization and the provision of extra-curricular and social utilities in public secondary schools. These achievements notwithstanding, the PTAs faced tethering challenges such as ignorance to the statutory functioning principles from the management, poor devotion by members to the Associations' objectives due to distrust and conflicts of interest between the school administrators and the PTA management leading to corruption and misappropriation. In spite of the challenges, the PTA remains a strategic partner in the development of secondary schools in Mezam and Cameroon as a whole as it continues to bring community support to boost the inadequate government investments. It is perhaps for this consideration that the supervisory Ministry of Secondary Education has kept a strict lens to monitor and provide a productive environment for the operations of the PTAs to enable them attain their vision and missions in public secondary schools.

Keywords: PTAs, Development, Public Secondary Schools and North West Region.

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INTRODUCTION

Mezam Division is one of the seven Divisions of the North-West Region of Cameroon. The Division is deconcentrated into three administrative units: Bamenda I, II and III that serve as hubs to a host of public secondary schools ran and sustained by state provisioned human resources, logistics and infrastructures. In spite of government titular management of the schools, other stakeholders, especially Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) play a vital role in the development and management of the schools. Evidence to this is the sustained culture of instituting PTA levies for new and returning students of the schools. The presence of the PTA in public secondary schools suggests scenarios of collaboration between parents, teachers and school administrators in the holistic upbringing of students. It is

equally an indication of public-private partnership in forstoring development through the agency of education. In this instance, PTAs are essential structures envisioned to bridge the gap between home and school as well as promote a supportive learning environment that benefits students. During the colonial period in Cameroon there was no direct evidence of a formal colonial policy establishing PTAs in schools and colleges. Parents only provided leap contributions to assist the schools. For the most part, their roles were centrally to provide their children's school needs like fee, books and to ensure they were assiduous and punctual in school.

The remote roots of the PTA in Cameroon could be traced from the English London Baptist Missionary Society. This religious-cum-educational body believed

Citation: Melanie Nchunke, Nixon Kahjum Takor, Richard Tanto Talla. Parents Teachers Associations in the Development of Public Secondary Schools in Mezam Division (Cameroon), 1979-2023. Sch J Arts Humanit Soc Sci, 2025 Sep 13(9): 335-345.

that effective education was possible only when parents were implicated in the education of their children. Although their system of education brought parents closer to the school, there were no official legal frameworks in that line. At independence therefore, with the creation of public secondary schools in the various administrative Divisions in the North West Province, parents desiring to support and serve as partners in providing quality education for their children developed the initiative to constitute themselves into an Association. This intention was accorded legal and operational support in 1979 by a Presidential Decree no. 242/L/729/MINEDUC/MJS of 15th October 1979 (Republic of Cameroon (1979), Interministerial Circular No.242/L/729/MINEDUC/MJS of 25th October 1979). The creation and actions of the PTA in public secondary schools induce reflections along optimist and pessimist divide.

The school system naturally provides space for parent and teachers involvement in the environment where children are exposed to learning. This is given that both actors have crucial inputs to make (Kartika *et al*. 2022). PTA optimists are worried about the inconvenient learning environment in secondary schools characterized by dearth in basic infrastructure and materials that compromises the fulfillment educational objectives. This is further compounded by the introduction of near free education policies that attracts students' enrolment beyond the accommodation capacities. Parent Teachers Associations play vital roles in school development by establishing collaborations with the school administration in areas that strengthen social and emotional development of students and decision-making processes in the schools. Parent Teacher Associations from these perspectives become germane in meeting the extra charge on school resources (Onyango, 2011; Morton, *et al*: 1997; Rattenborg, *et al* 2018). On the other hand, pessimists question the importance of PTAs by arguing that by intervening in school financing and provision of infrastructures, PTAs take the role of the government to provide education as a basic social asset. It also infringes into the responsibilities of private school proprietors in ensuring that students get the best education (Tasmania, 2012) upon meeting the conditions of registration.

Developing from this scholarly contention, the paper using the specific case of Mezam Division, explores the extent to which the PTA exhibited relevance as a strategic partner of the state in ameliorating the quality of the learning environment for the holistic social upbringing of students. It is argued that for the most part, the PTA functioned in line with the mission assigned to its operation but this was not without setbacks that weathered its potency as an indispensable stakeholder in school development. The study x-rays the role of the PTA in supporting students' education through infrastructural development, financial support and moral

and civic guidance. The narrative is structured into.... major themes. The first theme situates the legal frameworks creating and conditioning the operations of the PTA and the academic debate on PTA. This is followed by an assessment of the role of the PTA in infrastructural boosting and then support to human resource improvement. The last two themes attend to the roles in financial assistance and challenges in effectively implementing the actions of the PTA. The paper rounds off with conclusion synthesising the principal findings.

Nascent beginnings and Legal Framework of PTAs

There are forty public secondary schools in Mezam today but the idea of the PTA began with just two schools in the 1970s. The PTA officially started in Mezam in 1979 with its creation in the Government Bilingual High School (GBHS, Bamenda) and the Cameroon College of Arts, Science and Technology (CCAST), Bambili. The first PTA President was Clement Achu Bernard Mba who initiated the idea as a concerned parent in the Government Bilingual High School (GBHS, Bamenda). The first members of the Association were mostly traditional rulers (*Fons*) in the Bamenda area notably; the Fon of Nkwen, the Fon of Bafut, the *Fon* of Mankon and all the other Fons around the present Mezam Division. The *Fons* together with parents met occasionally to discuss specifically on strategies to boost the infrastructural component of the schools. This was on the backdrop of the increasing enrolment which was not accompanied commensurately by government provisioned infrastructures.

The PTA in Cameroon is regulated by legal frameworks beginning with the Decree no 242/L/729/MINEDUC/MJS of 15th October 1979 and complemented with various ministerial circulars and decisions. Ministerial circular No. 23/JI/25 of 14th May 1990 additionally emphasized the role of the PTA within the school set up. This operational framework was further facilitated by the Law of 19th December 1990 on the Freedom of Associations which gave the PTA the right to function freely. In addition, Law No. 98/004 of 14th April 1998, Article 2, sub paragraph 3 recognized the role of private partners in the provision of education in Cameroon. (See Republic of Cameroon. Law No. 98/004 of 14th April 1998.). This law which came on the heels of the 1995 National Education Forum (MINEDUC, 1995) where critical recommendations on the promotion of quality and sustainable learning in the school system were taken. In February 2005, the inter-ministerial technical committee which held in Yaoundé, involving the Ministries of Education with support from the Ministries of Economy and Finance, Planning and Regional Development, Labour and Professional Training and UNESCO reflected on a sector-wide approach to education in the country. The National Education Forum discussed a variety of ways in which education as a whole could be strengthened along public-private partnership. To further strengthen the PTAs, the

Minister of Secondary Education in circular no. 07/08/MINESEC.CAB of 25th February 2008 specified the modalities for the functioning of the PTA in public secondary schools in Cameroon. (MINESEC. Circular No. 07/08/MINESEC.CAB of 25th February 2008). The major novelty in the text was the concept of internal grouping arrangement to facilitate good schools. In this perspective, parents were opportune to understand what existed in the school milieu, as well as constraints in the administration and functioning of schools.

The PTA in infrastructural development

Infrastructural support constituted one of the crucial interests of the PTAs in Public secondary schools within Mezam Division. School infrastructural development refers to the process of planning, designing, constructing, maintaining the physical facilities and environment of a school. Well-equipped classrooms, sufficient resources and contemporary technology cultivate an atmosphere conducive to academic performance for students. Infrastructural development extends beyond mere physical structures; it includes vital educational resources, libraries, laboratories and ICT facilities which are needed for contemporary education. (Adebayo & Jolaosho 2025, 20). This includes, buildings and classrooms, facilities and equipment, safety and security, accessibility and inclusivity, sustainability and environmental considerations. The importance of infrastructural developments in public secondary schools by PTAs was crucial as the government brought up circulars to clearly outline the functions of PTAs in schools, (see Republic of Cameroon, MINESEC: circular no7/08, 25/02/2008, 3). In most of the 'nation's secondary schools, teaching and learning took place under a less conducive environment which lacked the basic materials and thus, hindered the fulfillment of educational objectives. (Binla Ernestine, 4 January 2025).

Following Law No. 98/004 of April 1998, education was made a major national priority and the state took robust measures to subsidize its functioning by making secondary education accessible and affordable. This action contributed to a surge in the creation of public establishments in various Divisions and Sub Divisions of the country. The creation of schools, for the most part did not go along with the desired infrastructural boost. As the enrolment of students continued to increase, the facilities to accommodate them were constrained. It was behind this backdrop that the PTA set in as a support structure to enliven the infrastructural exigencies in the schools. In the nascent phase, there were not established source of funding to carry on such projects. The PTAs began their actions by appealing to persons of good will to intervene as philanthropists and/or volunteers. These entailed parents bringing in

free-will material and financial resources that could meet the demands of the earmarked projects. An example of a project realized in this way was the administrative block of the Government Bilingual High School Bamenda constructed in 1980. The construction of this building saw labour mobilized among parents with some sacrificing the services of their cars for the transportation of materials to the construction site. It was after this phase that the idea of a collective levy for each student enrolled in school came up. Ministerial circular no. 07/08 of 25 February 2008 authorised and regulated the fiats on the collection and management of funds by PTAs in public secondary schools. This circular was later amended and supplemented by circular no. 15/08 19 August 2008 which stated levies on school children were compulsory except for disabled students as prescribed in circular no. 283/07/L.c/MINI:SI:C/MINAS of 14 August 2007 of the Ministry of Social Affairs. (Republic of Cameroon. MINESEC: Circular No 15/08 19 August 2008: 2). PTA members placed compulsory levies on parents of students to meet school projects geared at providing basic needs. The collection of these levies was only authorized after an application sent by the PTA President and Principal of the school to the Divisional Delegate of Secondary Education was approved. (Republic of Cameroon, Divisional Delegation of Secondary Education, Mezam. Ref. no. 00805/23/MINESEC/RDSENW/MEZAM/CSECA, 1 October 2023, 1-2).

The levies introduced in the different schools were not uniform across the schools. They differed in range depending on the strength of enrolment and the anticipated projects. Generally, the levies conservatively, was not to be above 20 000 FCFA. The levies were usually agreed in a General Assembly meeting upon presentation of projects to be executed by the PTA steering committee. For instance, when PTA levies were initially introduced in schools like GBHS¹ Bamenda and CCAST Bambili, a toll of 5000FCFA was placed as levy per student. With the increase in the number of students, the levies were augmented from the year 2008 when the circular on the by-laws of the PTA in schools was endorsed by the Minister of Secondary Education, Louis Bapes Bapes. The PTA levy fluctuated between 10,000 and 15,000 FCFA. With the increasing number of students, it required an increase in facilities which made most school to augment their levies. Schools in the administrative headquarters of Mezam like GBHS Bamenda, GBHS Atiela, GBHS Bayeelle, GBHS Down Town, placed their levy within the range of 15,000 for returning students and 20,000 for fresh students and in others 20000 for old students and 25000 for new student. In schools in the rural parts of Mezam Division like GSS Mewungne, GHS Kwang, GHS Akum, GHS Choubou, GSS Baligham and GHS Alatening levies were kept

¹ GBHS is a generic expression in Cameroon for Government Bilingual High school while GHS stands for

Government High School and GSS, Government Secondary School.

within the range of 10,000 to 15,000. (PTA Minutes, CCAST Bambili, 2014: 2). This was mainly because of the low-income levels of the parents. In cases where funds from levies could not readily meet the projections for project realization, fund-raising events were initiated by the PTA in the various schools to augment the financial resources.

With the mobilization of funds, and the absence of specific statistics on effective spending to realize each of the projects in the various schools especially from

1979 to the opening decade of the 2000s, the PTAs from 2010 to 2023 were able to provide administrative offices in GBHS Bamenda, GBHS Atiela, GBHS Bayeelle, GBHS Down Town; staff rooms in GBHS Mbatu, GBHS Mankon, GBHS Nitob, GBHS Nsongwa; classrooms in GHS Mankah, GHS Mambu, GSS Agyati in Bafut, laboratories in CCAST Bambili, GBSS Sabga in Tubah; hostels in GTHS Nkwen and in GTHS Bamendakwen staff houses, workshops, equipment, and play grounds as visible in the picture below.

Plate 1: PTA constructed Classrooms and Administrative Block



A



B

Source: M. Nchunke. 23 January 2025 Field Notes (Photograph).

Plate 1 is a testament of infrastructural works carried out by the PTA in Mezam. Plate 1 (A) show a storey building of classrooms constructed by the PTA of GBHS Bamenda in 2008. 1(B) for its part shows the administrative block of GBHS Bamenda constructed in 1984 and renovated in 2014.

The PTA infrastructural boost in the schools were warmly welcome by the community. Parents of GBHS Bamenda, CASST Bambili, GBHS Atiela, GBHS Bayeelle, GTHS Nkwen, and GBHS Bamendankwen, confirmed that, the well-built school infrastructure contributed to a sound learning environment and enhanced the overall quality of schools. It also impacted the educational experience and delivered better educational outcome geared towards developments. They equally affirmed that, these school infrastructures helped to build an environment where students could find the security and comfort of their homes in schools. The engagement of the PTA in supplementing school facilities is vividly captured in the words of the PTA chairperson of GTHS Nkwen:

...Our school infrastructures were well built to incorporate all necessary amenities for students, such as assembly halls, well-furnished and equipped classrooms, spacious dormitories, dining halls, playgrounds, sports courts, surveillance rooms, medical rooms, libraries and laboratories. Our goal was to offer progressive learning equipped with modern technology to cater for the educational needs of students. By providing a range of infrastructural facilities and amenities, we strive to offer a comfortable learning environment for students that foster holistic development, educational growth and sound learning. We pay attention to students' extracurricular needs and focus on their academic growth (Yokum Nicholas, 14 January, 2025, Interview).

The activities of the PTA were visible with the provision of infrastructural development to enhance education in various aspects especially the exigencies in Competence Based Approach (CBA) introduced for public secondary schools in 2012-2013. It was an outcrop of law No. 98/004/07 April 4, 1998 aimed at upgrading education from the traditional methods of teaching to a more experiential and practical approach.

This was to reduce the number of students per classroom to 40 students such that they could be well monitored in the application of skilled gained. The application of these skills could not be achieved if these students never practiced what they learned from books in various libraries. The PTA working in line with the provision of state policies according to circular No. 07/08 of 25 February 2008, stipulated and outlined the realization of technical projects (construction of classrooms and any other type of development) had to carry out in accordance with the official administrative regulations enforce. (see Republic of Cameroon, MINESEC: circular no7/08, 25/02/2008). The PTAs saw the need to equip public schools with libraries filled with diverse books, study materials, reference materials and multiple

educational resources which facilitated reading. Some schools had E-libraries which were technological solutions that offered remote learning to students. The PTA of GBHS Down town had well-stocked libraries with diverse collection of books that catered for various interests which was same with that of GBHS Bayelle, (Tankor Rose, 24 February 2025). These equipped libraries which had well-sectioned study areas to make reading comfortable for students was indispensable. Picture one is the school library of GSS Awing constructed and equipped by PTA in the year 1993 to aid effective student learning. And picture two is a soil test machine bought by the PTA of GTHS Nkwen to be used by student of building and construction for testing the soil.

Plate 2: Library facility and Soil Test Machine provided by the PTA



A

B

Source: M. Nchunke. 23 January 2025. Field Noted (Photograph).

Plate 2(A) shows a library facility provided by the PTA at GSS Awing. The goal of the library was to ensure that students as well as teachers and other members of the school community had access to books for studies and research. This facilitated the government desire and process of modernizing knowledge transfer through the CBA format. The PTA school library served as the center for most of the learning resources I used in the school (Asenui Simon, 23 January 2025). Plate 2(B) for its part is soil test machine provided by the PTA at GTHS Nkwen to enable students in the specialization of Civil Engineering to blend theoretical and practical experiences on ascertaining the quality of basement at construction sites.

The PTAs provided water storage and supply facilities for drinking, washing, and cleaning of facilities

like offices, classrooms and toilets. It was equally required to allay the needs of cooking and washing of utensils in the school canteens and also in laboratories as solvent for reagents and solutions. In some cases it was used for watering of flowers and crops on the school farms. These facilities were evident in GBHS Down Town, GBHS Bamenda, GBHS Akum, GHS Mewungne Awing, GHS Penyin and CASST Bambili. The PTA in line with its health and environmental safety measures provided the schools with accessible and hygienic toilets. The toilets were constructed to serve the needs of the staff and students. The provision of these facilities were imperative in most of the schools in Mezam and particularly evident in GTHS Nkwen, GBHS Atiela, GBHS Nitop and GBHS Bali.

Plate 3: Water reservoir and Toilet facility provided by the PTA**A****B****Source: Melanie Nchunke. 23 January 2025. Field Notes (Photograph)**

Plate 3(A) is a water reservoir provided by the PTA of GBHS Bayelle in 2013 to supply potable water as well as for use in the school laboratory and other school facilities. Plate 3(B) are toilet facilities constructed by the PTA of GBHS Nitop in 2006. It was aimed at improving on the state of hygiene and sanitation of the school. Both projects were geared towards

guaranteeing a clean and healthy environment for studies.

Table 1 gives statistics of infrastructural development carried out by the PTAs in Mezam Division between the years 1979-2015, which was important in the advancement of learning within the area.

Table 1: Random Statistics of infrastructural development carried out by the PTA in schools in Mezam from the year 1979-2015

Development	Schools	Number
Class room	GBHS Bamenda	10
Administrative block	GTHS Nkwen	2
Science laboratories	GBHS Akum	2
Bore holes	GHS Mewengne	2
Water Tank	GBHS Bayelle	2
Play grounds	GBHS Down Town	1
Computers lab	GSS Bangshie	3
Toilet	GBHS Nitop	2
Library	GSS Awing	1

Source: Melanie Nchunke, compiled from Minutes and Reports of PTA activities, 2025.

Table 1 presents a synoptic view of the commitment in infrastructural development that the PTAs engendered in public secondary schools in Mezam to complement government actions. From the random statistics, it is clear that the greatest attention in infrastructural provision was accorded to classrooms to accommodate the burgeoning numbers of students. Besides infrastructure, most of the schools were in dire need of human resources.

Assistance to auxiliary hired personnel

The growing enrolment besides exposing infrastructural issues equally created a need for auxiliary staff in most of the Secondary schools in Mezam Division. These personnel had to provide administrative, secretariat, security, discipline and teaching roles which were all crucial for the effective functioning of the

schools. The hiring of this support staff were strictly within the purview of the PTA. This was given that the state only catered for the salaries of the state functionaries; civil servants and contract workers, mainly teachers and appointed administrators. By considering to take care of the payments of the hired auxiliary staff, the PTAs were operating along the prescription of the Ministry of Secondary Education circular no. 07/08 of 25 February 2008, that provides for the payment of the wages of temporary teachers, security and maintenance of staff. (see Republic of Cameroon, MINESEC: circular no7/08, 25/02/2008, 3). The PTA spent a significant proportion of its annual budget to service the wages of auxiliary personnel hired by the school administering board. This was an almost recurrent intervention considering that in a good number of the public secondary schools in Mezam, in the urban, peri-

urban and rural setting most of the schools had inadequate permanent personnel. Some, especially newly created could only boast of a principal and a few teachers who could not meet the demands of teaching the various subjects and taking care of discipline. Schools that ran the General certificate of Education Examinations at the Ordinary and Advanced Level did not want to spare any opportunity to fill in the personnel gaps that could enable the students receive maximum teaching and preparations. This importance was articulated in one of the reports of the PTA of GBHS Bamenda. Again, in GSS Mewenne Awing transformed to GHS Mewenne and GSS Mbenjum Awing, the hiring of personnel by the PTA included teachers, pedagogic animators for teaching subjects in Departments, as well as a senior administrator to perform the role of the school principal who had abandoned duties as a result of the intensity of the socio-political crisis in the North West Region of Cameroon from 2016. In GSS Mbenjum, the PTA solicited the services of a school administrator (locally considered as the principal) before the government through the Minister of Secondary Education could appoint one (Alaper Vincent, 23 February 2024). The PTAs in Mezam spent a reasonable portion of their budget on assisting hired auxiliary staff. For instance, Akondeng Gabriel, the PTA President of GHS Mewungne-Awing, mentioned that in 2011, the PTA recruited a Geography, History, Physics, and Chemistry teachers and placed each of them on a monthly incentive of 30,000 FCFA. The PTA therefore spent 270,000 Francs CFA for each teacher and for the four of them a sum of 1,080,000. (Akondeng Gabriel, 25 February 2024). In the annual report of GBHS Bamenda for 2018/ 2019 academic year, the PTA spent 15,009,000FCFA to pay locally recruited teachers. In the Annual financial report for Mezam for 2022/2023 academic year; the PTA spent in GBHS Downtown the sum of 11,310,000FCFA on auxiliary staff. In CCAST Bambili, the sum of 10,600,000FCFA and in GBHS Bamenda-Nkwe 9,875,000FCFA, respectively were allocated and used. (PTA Annual Financial Reports for Mezam Divisional Delegation of Secondary Education, 2022/2023 academic year).

Support to co- curricular activities and provision of social amenities

Decree No. 242/259/MINESEC/MJS of 15th October 1979 bearing on the organisation of co-curricular activities in schools authorized the PTA to carry out co-curricular activities in schools as part of its objective of defending and promoting the material and cultural interest of the school (Republic of Cameroon, 1979). In this direction and in line with the ministerial application Circular no 07/ 08/MINESEC /CAB OF 25 February 2008, the PTA assumed the responsibility of organising leisure activities as well as providing educative talks on diverse interests like the school and family connections, child education and health and nutrition awareness, sex education, drug and alcohol

abuse, civic and moral mindedness, sport and physical education (Republic of Cameroon. MINESEC. Circular No. 07/08/MINESEC.CAB of 25th February 2008). The PTA by attending to co-curricular school needs had as objective to give students a social balance by contributing to their mental and personality, intellectual, emotional, social, moral and artistic developments. (Ojong Stephen, 24 May 2024). These activities were committed into actions that were not part of the usual academic curriculum but were beneficial for the students overall rearing. In this way part of the PTA funds were used to carry out sporting activities, Manual labour, and finance the functioning of school canteens and animate health talks. Sporting and leisure activities were organised in the school milieu by the school cooperative, coordinated by the Service for Co-curricular Activities. These involved games organized by the Divisional Delegation of Secondary Education which included athletics, basketball, football, gymnastics, judo, handball, volleyball, wrestling and table tennis. These Sporting activities for the most part were sponsored or co-sponsored by the PTA. The PTA in similar manner provided financial assistance to school clubs, especially those aligned with one or more of their objectives, to facilitate their functioning (Ojong Stephen, 24 May 2024). The PTA sponsored sporting activities in GBHS Akum, GBHS Santa, GBHS Nitop, GBHS Nsongwa, GBHS Mankwi, GBHS Bali, GSS Baligham and GSS Alatening (MINESEC, North West Region. PTA Annual report for 2012). The PTA equally provided funds for the organisation and the animation of school festivities, cultural animations, school outings (excursions, class outings and inter-school competitions) under the coordination of the principal and authorities of co-curricular activities.

The PTA was equally very instrumental in the promotion of manual labour in schools. This was seen in the purchase of manual labour tools such as hoes, spades, wheelbarrows and cutlasses. Seedlings were also purchased for planting on school farms and funds were also disbursed towards creating environmentally friendly greenery (notably flowers and trees). Students benefitted from these gestures by being trained on agricultural, horticultural and sustainable environmental practices. Each school had its own day of trees and flowers planting and the students were trained on the importance of trees and flowers and the medicinal values of some of those trees and flowers. Students in the various schools respected the hours of manual labour on the timetable for each class as they were subjected to close monitoring and followed-up. (Afanyu Ngenge, 24 Mach 2024). The PTA equally provided funds for the school canteen to operate in its best ensuring good feeding for the students. The PTA in GBHS Bamenda-Nkwe, developed an area (Dining shed) for the sale of food items, controlled the quality of the food items on sale and followed up its hygiene and sanitation. In GBHS Bayelle, canteens were equally provided by the PTA and fallouts generated by

the canteens were usually ploughed back into the coffers of the Association and used in carrying out other emerging exigencies of the school. (Forsuh Presclia, 15 November 2024).

In the domain of health as laid down by the dispositions of the Inter-Ministerial Decision No.242/L/729/MINEDUC/MJS of 5th October 1979 bearing on the organisation of co-curricular activities in schools, health education was a combination of information and training aimed at creating awareness in the students for the necessity of good health. Beyond classical pathologies, health education was equally extended to reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and the necessity of a balanced diet. In the school milieu, health education was placed under the responsibility of the service for Co-curricular Activities. (Republic of Cameroon (1979), Interministerial Circular No.242/L/729/MINEDUC/MJS of 25th October 1979). The PTA in various schools funded health talks and equally sponsored health personnel to educate the students on basic health issues. These were the cases of GBHS Bamenda, GBHS Down Town, GTHS Nkwen, GBHS Akum and GBHS Santa. Health talks were most often given to students on hygiene, HIV, gastric, malarial, corona virus, Ebola virus, polio and generally on epidemics and pandemics as they occurred. (Afanyu Ngege, 24 Mach 2024). This was to ensure the prevention of illnesses and promote a conducive environment for a vigorous life in school. Co-curricular activities carried out in schools in Mezam were vital and contributed to students' holistic development, fostering essential life skills like leadership, teamwork, communication, and time management, while also building confidence and resilience. They allowed students to explore hidden talents, discover their passion and develop physical and emotional well-being beyond academics.

Setbacks in fulfilling the missions of the PTA as a moral entity

Parent Teacher Associations in Mezam like the rest of the North West Region has been quite an important, ambitious moral entity as far as the holistic development of schools are concerned. However, in spite of the sublime mission assigned to them, the optimization of results has been disconnected by some setbacks. This includes poor conception of the modus operandi of the partnership between the school and the PTA culminating in distrustful collaboration, blurred boundaries of roles and responsibilities and fragile good governance cultures of transparency and accountability leading to bribery and corruption.

Lack of cooperation among PTA members and the PTA executives was noticed by the authorities of Delegation of Secondary Education for the North West Region. These challenges cropped up from the fact that the information furnished to schools by the inspectorate

of Orientation and School Life and the Services of Sport and Co-curricular activities of the Region and Divisions on how PTA activities were run and supervised were not strictly followed-up. The PTA in schools in Mezam Division suffered from conflicts of interests that compromised cooperation as each member desired his/her ideas accepted on how the activities were to run. In the event of where the ideas were side-lined even for just reasons, there was lack of participation leading to creation of pockets of cleavages of members who refrained from participating at PTA meetings where collective and sustainable decisions could be taken on the development trajectory of the schools. (Chowage Ndifon, 23 January 2025). There was therefore an ever-existing misunderstanding between parents and the school administration on who was in command of PTA initiatives. Again, some of the parents did not longer show sufficient interest in PTA meetings as they were not in favour of certain decisions taken by the school administration who they perceived as working in connivance with 'some imposing' leaders of the PTA. (Chefor Mercy, 21 April 2024). On the other hand, the teachers were trapped in between the parents where they belonged as an Association and the school administrators to whom they owed their loyalty as collaborators. In this way the strategic voice of teachers as partners in the management of certain school activities as well as the welfare of the students, and the progress of the school became overshadowed by policy dictates from the PTA management. (Akondeng Gabrile, 25 February 2024).

Tensions and conflicts were underpinned by blurred boundaries of roles and responsibilities and, changing roles and functions of various actors within the school governance structure. In this regard, Huber argues (Huber, 2004) that, "due to changing roles and functions of the various actors involved in school governance, tension between and within groups of actors became evident". (Fru Donatus, 24 February 2025). Among various actors in school governance, it was evident that tensions and conflicts between the chair of the PTA and principals were prevalent and widespread. A number of conflict and tension related cases involving chairs of PTA and principals were reported in Mezam Division. Some PTA chairs like Azinwe Simon of GBHS Atiala-Nkwen reproached that, as PTA chair, he was more or less a figurehead given that he had never laid hands on the PTA account booklet since it was only in the keeping of the treasurer who was more answerable to the principal than him. He also averred that in his one year of service before his resignation, the only work he did was to attend seminars in which his transport was handed to him by the principal of the school. He had sometime received computers bought by the Principal from the PTA coffers to hand to the school as coming from the PTA support system. As chair therefore, it was difficult for him to promote accountability as most of the finances and projects were single handedly decided upon and carried out by the principal. There were allegations by

the chairperson that PTA reports were written and forwarded to hierarchy by the principal without his consent. Such reports were marred by inaccuracies and manipulation of facts. Transparency and accountability were therefore sacrificed for ulterior motives. The query of the PTA chair of GBHS Atiala is a reflection of the overriding influence that some school Principals in Mezam had over PTA executives who were sketchily socialized on the binding principles established by the Ministry of Secondary Education on the functioning of the PTA. It also bears proof of the level of machination that obscured the PTA setup and provided a breeding ground for corruption, influence peddling, embezzlement and mismanagement that hindered the smooth functioning of the Association (Azenui Simon, 23 January, 2025).

The PTAs equally encountered certain challenges in assisting the school administration to maintain discipline among students in the schools. There were most often, conflicts between school council members and the PTAs. Each of these bodies felt that they were better placed to handle disciplinary matters in the schools. Such divided opinions discouraged harmony and led to poor working relationship between the two bodies. This made it difficult for the PTA to achieve its objectives as required. Parents were in the dilemma of how to cooperate with the school administration to maintain discipline in schools without being misconceived in their actions. This was because the roles of parents were inadequately defined or were substantially unknown as far as the maintenance of school discipline was concerned. In this case, parents or their representatives (PTA) were not sure on how to act in certain situations related to discipline. Where conflict and role ambiguity existed, satisfaction and commitment declined. This explains why parents through the school council and PTA were less involved in many school activities in general and discipline in particular. This was the case in GBHS Pinyin where parents and the PTA were less involved in disciplinary issues up to the extent that a student armed with a knife threatened to assault another student in 2012. This issue was raised during a PTA meeting but overlooked exposing the degree to which issues of grave indiscipline were handled by the Association (Tankor Rose, 24 February, 2025). In order to circumvent the challenges, the issues of conflicts of interest between the PTA and the school administration, the PTAs were advised to function in accordance with the official texts regulating their actions and should report any such infringements to the supervisory officials notably the Divisional Delegate and Regional Delegate of Secondary Education or the Divisional officer where the schools were located for investigation and report to the Minister of Secondary Education for the appropriate sanctions to be taken.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined the pivotal but challenging role of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in the development of public secondary schools in Mezam Division of the North West Region, Cameroon. The research has shown that PTAs play crucial roles in promoting school-community relationships geared towards instituting propitious learning and working environment for students and the school administration. It has been established that the idea of PTA modestly developed from parents craving to produce improved learning conditions for their children. To attain this goal, they began with philanthropic and volunteering gestures that soon caught the attention of policy makers and culminated with legal enactments that formally conditioned the functioning of the Association. The study maintains that in the period roughly around 1979 when the Association officially began to 2023, the PTAs made significant contributions in infrastructural uplifts, improvement of human resource needs and promotion of extra-curricular activities as well as enhancing social amenities. These supports positively shaped the academic, moral, civic and entrepreneurial upbringing of the students in the different schools. The paper also observed that the PTAs encountered some challenges to fulfil their missions. These included lack of cooperation among members, ignorance of the existing texts and operational parameters, inadequate recognition of their role in discipline, and conflicts with school administrators. The findings of this study have implications for policy and practice. Policymakers should consider the role of PTAs in school development and provide support for their initiatives. School administrators should work collaboratively with PTAs to promote school-community relationships. The study recommends that capacity-building programs should be encouraged to socialise the various stakeholders on their roles and responsibilities in the effective implementation of the actions of the PTA as defined by the regulations in force.

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