Education under attack: Teachers' perspectives on the effects of anglophone crises on secondary schools and implications for Cameroon's educational development

Authors' Detailes

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Abstract

The ongoing Anglophone Crisis has severely affected Cameroon's education system, with over 80% of schools closed, disrupting the educational trajectory of an entire generation, denying more than 600,000 children access and right to education in the Northwest and Southwest regions. This study explored teachers' perspectives on the effects of the Anglophone Crisis on secondary schools in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions. The study employed a qualitative research methodology. The participants were 27 teachers from 12 Cameroon secondary schools. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants; only secondary school teachers who are still actively involved in teaching and residing in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions

participated in the study. A semi-structured interview guide was used as the instrument for data collection. The data was analyzed thematically. The study found that the ongoing anglophone crisis has affected secondary schools in several ways, including (1) damaged educational infrastructure (2) teacher shortages and professional challenges (3) disrupted learning continuity (4) students displacement (5) psychological impact on students. We, contend that the ongoing Anglophone crisis in Cameroon has profound impact for schooling and with long-term implications for educational development, quality and broader societal progress in areas such as; human rights violation; student/teachers well being, exacerbated inequalities, peace-building, poverty reduction, human development, social cohesion and economic growth etc. Addressing these challenges is essential for restoring and enhancing the quality of education in the affected regions. The study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions that consider the unique context of the Anglophone Crisis, aside resonating with other affected areas across the globe.

Introduction

The hopes that the world would become a more peaceful place with the end of the Cold War have not yet been fulfilled (Eposi & Ewange, 2021). The ongoing Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon, which erupted in 2016, disrupting every aspect of life including the educational system, in the Northwest and Southwest regions, is an evident to this assertion. While some educators and students continue teaching and learning in turbulence (resilience in ruins), other children have their education in exile, following the widespread displacement. This post a long-term threat to the country's educational development. Already confronted with low incomes, poverty, unemployment, rapid urbanization, income shocks and inequalities between groups, the Anglophone crisis has only continue to exacerbate the dysfunction of Cameroon's socio-economic institutions that were already manifesting signs of weakness (Ollong, 2021). A sustainable solution is needed to resolve the aforementioned problems, and education has a key role to play.

Background and context

The ongoing Anglophone crisis in Cameroon, one of Africa's newest struggles for liberation, began in October 2016 as a peaceful strike by lawyers and teachers' trade unions against the French language's compulsory use in schools and law courts in the two English-speaking (Anglophone) regions of North West and South West. Although the grievances were valid, the government responded harshly by imprisoning protest leaders and launching a violent crackdown on protesters who joined to denounce the perceived marginalization and assimilation of Anglophones. The killing of several peaceful protesters by Cameroonian security forces and reluctance of the government to rapidly resolve legal and educational grievances in the Anglophone regions peacefully and tactfully seem to have transformed it into an acute complex emergency. In November 2017, the sociopolitical crisis progressively translated into insecurity and armed violence, with military occupation of the

Anglophone regions following President Paul Biya's declaration of war on the separatist groups. Since then, armed secessionist groups have emerged as a response, demanding the independence of the Anglophone regions, aka the Ambazonia Republic. Violent confrontations continue to occur between the secessionist groups and the regular military, creating a tense living environment where insecurity thrives (Sonkey; 2017;Ambe, 2019; Mateş, 2019; UNOCHA 2018; Ekah, 2020; Eposi & Ewange, 2021; reviews in Bang & Balgah, 2022; Beseng et al., 2023). The crisis has compounded pre-existing vulnerabilities, exacerbated by sporadic violence, with a negative impact on the civilian population of these regions (UNOCHA 2018; Ollong, 2021). While figures are approximate and underestimated, the armed conflict has continued intense, with at least 6000 deaths, mainly civilians, forced displacement of about one million people, huge educational disruption, and atrocities and human rights abuses committed by both belligerent parties (Beseng et al., 2023;Bang, 2024; Ketzmerick, 2022).

The Anglophone crisis has caused massive population displacement with over 900,000 internally displaced persons and 60,000 refugees, with thousands fleeing to French-speaking regions and across the border into Nigeria for safety. Around 80% of inhabitants in conflict hotspots have escaped, and sought refuge in the surrounding bushes/forest, with the most affected areas being Boyo and Meme Divisions in the North West Region and South West Region respectively (Fig. 1) where many village's population have almost been emptied (UNOCHA 2018; Eposi & Ewange, 2021; Ketzmerick, 2022; reviews in Bang & Balgah, 2022; Bang, 2024).
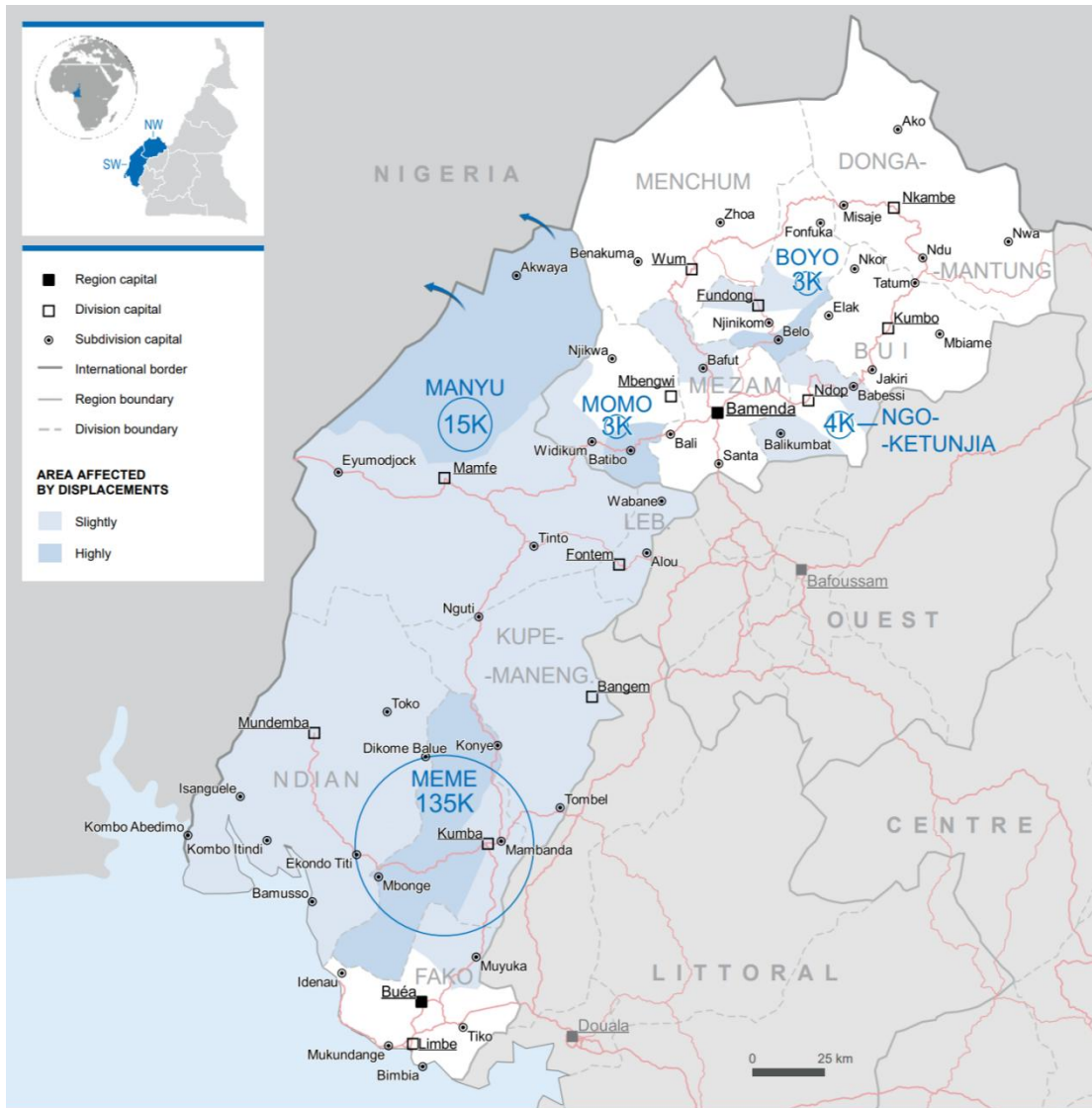
Fig. 1. Map of the North West Region and South West Region showing areas most affected by population displacement (slightly and highly). (source: UNOCHA, 2018)

The anglophone crisis has negatively impacted children's right to education, for many children, it has been over several years since they last stepped foot in a classroom, undermining the "Education for All" agenda (UNICEF 2020; Ambe, 2019; Eposi & Ewange, 2021). By adopting the school boycott strategy, separatist demand educational establishments in the region to shut down until all grievances have been resolved. Several educational facilities and schools that defy or resist these orders (especially on weekly "ghost towns" and lock down days) have been subjected to violence, leading to the destruction of most institutions and their students/teachers threatened, intimidated, kidnapped, abducted or killed, keeping over 780,000 children out of school, as over 80% of schools have been closed following several attacks and insecurities. For example (Fig. 2) a school was attacked in Kumba At least seven children have died and 12 were injured (CNN, 2020)

Fig. 2. Gunmen attack school in Kumba Cameroon, killing at least 7 children (sand covers a puddle of blood) and injuring at least 12 others (source: CNN, 2020)

Following numerous attack in schools, the perception that schools could be targets of attack at anytime result in most parents refusing to send their children to school. This has resulted in a drop in primary school to university attendance, with implications for enrolment to write the the General Certificate of Education Ordinary and Advanced Levels dropping by 28% in 2017 to 75% in 2019. Where schools are still functional, there are significant gaps in teaching and learning material. The disruption of education and non-school attendance has led to social ills such as child exploitation, child labour, early marriages, sexual violence, teenage pregnancies, sexually transmittable diseases, juvenile delinquencies, increased teenage drugs and alcohol consumption, and stealing/robbery, recruitment into armed groups. The long-term consequences of these issues include an increase in illiteracy, poverty, accompanying trauma and long lasting emotional distress. (UNOCHA 2018; UNICEF 2020; Akame et al., 2021; Bang & Balgah, 2022; Beseng et al., 2023; Ngala, 2020; Narondo, 2023).

The closure of several schools, coupled with the targeting of educational institutions and personnel, has created an environment where both students and teachers continue to face significant challenges. Teachers, who are central to the educational process, have been particularly affected. While many have been forced to flee their homes, leading to a shortage of qualified educators in the affected regions. Those who remain often work under duress, facing threats from armed groups, and contend with the destruction of educational infrastructure. The crisis has also exacerbated existing educational inequalities, with marginalized communities bearing the brunt of the disruptions. Armand et al., (2024) found that school factors like school type, location, resources, and class size, have a bigger impact on inequality than students' family background and recommends that reducing class sizes may be more effective in reducing educational inequalities (Armand et al., 2024). The lack of access to quality education during this period threatens the future prospects of an entire generation, potentially entrenching cycles of poverty and underdevelopment (UNICEF 2020). That why UNICEF (2020) calls on all parties to the conflict to protect and re-open schools and ensure safe learning spaces for children without condition.

Although some efforts have been made to resolve the anglophone crisis, including humanitarian assistance, (UNOCHA 2018; Bang, 2024), there is still a long way to go in ending this crisis. A study by (Bang, (2024) revealed limited humanitarian assistance, livelihood challenges for internally displaced persons, poor management of humanitarian fund , and weak government-local agencies collaboration. It also highlights the need for local organizations to support self-reliant livelihoods.

Statement of the problem

Secondary schools play a pivotal and significant role in every country's education system. While it receive students from the basic / primary level, it prepares students for higher education and other tertiary institutions. The ongoing Anglophone Crisis has severely disrupted the educational system in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions, especially secondary schools. Both learners and teachers have been subjected to threats, displacement, and have witnessed the destruction of educational infrastructure.Teachers, as key stakeholders in the educational process, offer a unique and invaluable perspective on the crisis and its impact on education. Their firsthand experiences can shed light on how the conflict has affected secondary schools in the regions, such as teaching practices, learning and student performance. Despite the critical role of teachers in mitigating the effects of the crisis and facilitating educational continuity, there is a scarcity of research focusing on their perspectives regarding the effects of the conflict. Previous researches has mainly focused on general description, causes, course, consequences and some interventions in the crisis (e.g. Bang & Balgah, 2022) and the reasons why education is under attack in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon (e.g Eposi & Ewange, 2021), which is the unsatisfied grievances. At the same time, understanding teachers' insights is essential for developing targeted interventions to address the challenges faced by the education sector in these regions.

Objective of the study

To explore teachers' perspectives on the effects of the Anglophone Crisis on secondary schools in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions.

Research question

What are teachers' perceptions on the effects of Anglophone crisis on secondary schools in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions?

Significance of the study

This study is significant as it seeks to amplify the voices of teachers who are on the front lines of education in conflict zones. Their insights are invaluable for policymakers, educational authorities, and humanitarian organizations aiming to design effective interventions that address the specific needs of educators and students in the Anglophone regions. This will not only be restoring educational opportunities in the affected regions, but ultimately contributing to the broader goals of sustainable educational development in Cameroon. By focusing

on teachers' perspectives, the research also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the crisis's impact on education and highlights the resilience and adaptability of educators in the face of adversity.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research methodology. 12 secondary schools were selected as sample sites. The secondary schools were from Southwest and Northwest Regions of Cameroon. The researchers employed purposive sampling to choose these two regions among ten since they are Cameroon's only official English-speaking (anglophone) regions which are currently experiencing crisis. The study population consisted of Cameroonian secondary school teachers. Only secondary school teachers who are still actively involved in teaching and residing in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions participated in the study. The sample size consisted of 27 secondary school teachers (10 females and 17 males) in the Southwest and Northwest Regions of Cameroon. The researcher met with the principals of the schools to explain the aim of the study. After obtaining permission from the school principals to conduct the research, teachers from these secondary schools were invited to participate. Consent forms were distributed to the identified teachers via their personal emails and whatsapp messaging. Out of 39 consent forms that were sent to teachers, 27 were returned (privately) with their signed approval to participate in the interviews on the condition that their identities be kept anonymous and the information used only for the present research purpose.

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide. The researcher considered the semi-structured interview guide to be appropriate for this study due to its flexibility in allowing the interviewer to ask follow-up questions and obtain additional information by way of probing to elicit further information, while participants had the opportunity to seek clarification by asking questions within the interview sessions when the need arose. Interviews engaged the participants and allowed them to communicate and freely express their feelings, ideas, experiences, opinions, and emotions. The interview guide included questions about "Teachers' perspectives on the effects of anglophone crises on secondary schools". The questions also allowed for other areas to be explored that were not originally included in the interview guide. The interview questions were in English and no translation was required. Examples of interview questions from the guide included: "How has the crisis affected the availability and quality of teaching materials and resources in your school?"; "What specific challenges have you encountered in your teaching practice based on the anglophone crisis?"; "In your view, how has students' education affected during this period?"; The interviews were conducted via mobile phone calls and whatsapp call, for convenient and safety of the participants and the researcher, ensuring confidentiality and participants' anonymity. Each interview lasted between 64 and 93 minutes and all the participants felt comfortable responding in English because it is their language of instruction.The interview duration was determined by data saturation, which occurs when no new information is obtained from the participants. This study strictly followed the ethical procedures for scientific research, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent. After obtaining consent from participants, the interviews were audio-recorded for the purpose of this study. The qualitative data collected from this study were analyzed thematically. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase (steps) for undertaking a thematic analysis were followed. To protect the confidentiality of the participants involved, pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper.

Findings

This study identified significant themes regarding the effects of anglophone crises on secondary schools in several ways, including (1) damaged educational infrastructure (2) Teacher shortages and professional challenges (3) disrupted learning continuity (4) students displacement (5) psychological impact on students. The findings are presented below.

Damaged educational infrastructure
Conflict-related incidents in the ongoing anglophone crisis has led to severe destruction and damage of school buildings and neglect of numerous facilities, reducing the availability of safe and functional learning environments in the Northwest and Southwest regions. Many teachers reported that many schools have been attacked, burned or looted, leaving teachers and students without safe teaching and learning environments. The following quotes attest to this;

"Our school was set on fire; we have no classrooms to teach in…only 3 out of 14 classrooms survived that fire attack, so since then we have been managing to teach all students in these classrooms…the rebuilding has been neglected by the government, even when the impact is very glaring" (T 8, Male)

"The lack of teaching materials is evident that we are struggling here; we are forced to teach without basic resources….after looting by unidentified individuals, our computer and Chemistry lab were completely destroyed, how my colleges and I teach such practical subjects without necessary teaching aids"(T2, Male)

"Government funds and resources meant for educational development are now diverted to security, leaving us with nothing…the teaching and learning quality here is dropping day by day because of limited resources (T6, Female)"

This situation severely limits the availability of safe, functional learning environments and quality instructional materials. Combined with diverted funding, where resources are reallocated to security measures, this degradation and damage of educational infrastructure severely limits the availability of teaching materials, technological aids, and basic amenities, undermining the overall quality of education in these regions.

Teacher shortages and professional challenges
The prolonged insecurity compel many qualified educators to flee the two affected regions due to safety concerns. This have led to a decline in the number of qualified teachers, as many leave the region or are unable to work safely, impacting instructional quality.Those who remain often face challenges such as increased workloads and safety concerns, including threats of violence, abductions, and harassment. These challenges are affecting their professional well-being and their ability to provide quality education. Interviewees frequently mentioned an increased workload, heightened stress, and an overwhelming sense of insecurity. With many qualified teachers leaving the region, those who remain often face the dual burden of managing large classes and ensuring their own safety. Crowded classroom (high teacher student ratio), indiscipline, poor assessment, and inability of teachers to complete the syllabus result in ineffective teaching and learning. This environment of

professional uncertainty affects not only their teaching efficacy but also their morale and commitment to educational development. Some schools are now forced to recruit and retain unqualified or untrained teachers to fill the gaps. The conflict has also strained relationships between schools, families, and communities. Teachers noted that parental involvement has diminished, local support systems have weakened, and traditional community networks that once reinforced educational development are eroding. This loss of social cohesion further diminishes the collective capacity to support and sustain educational initiatives in the regions. The following quotes illustrate their views;

"Many of my colleagues have left; I am now teaching multiple classes alone…. to be honest, the increased workload make it difficult to teach, asses or give effective feedback to a large number of students (T4, Male)"

"Our safety and professional growth is compromised,… we use to have seminars and workshops for professional development purpose, but this has ended long time ago, because the resource persons who usually come down here to drill us on new pedagogical strategies, classroom management and other skills for effective teaching, no longer come because of this crisis (T11, Male)"

"We live in constant fear, it's hard to focus on teaching, even when my school has a fence, its not a guarantee that teacher can not be attack…the risk here is very high (T16, Female)"

"Parents are too scared to come to school meetings or raise funds to support schools as usual; we are left to manage everything... in the past, such meetings can help in recruiting PTA teachers to assist us, as well as discuss student and school progress (T5, Male)"

"The threat of abduction is real; many teachers have been targeted…. in 2019, two of our colleges were abducted by unknown gun men and ransoms was made…after their family paid some huge amount of money, they were still killed… their only crime was going to school on a day, said aside as ghost town, a day where no business or school is expected to operate, they were among the many victims (T17, Male)"

Disrupted Learning Continuity

Due to ongoing crisis, persistent violence and insecurity many secondary schools are forced to shut down for extended periods. Teachers describe how the ongoing violence and insecurity have led to frequent and prolonged school closures.The prolonged school closures, which interrupt the academic calendar and lead to significant gaps in curriculum delivery, creates a discontinuity in curriculum delivery and hindering continuity in learning. Teachers report that the lack of regular instructional time hampers academic progression, making it difficult for students to grasp complex concepts and maintain a steady pace of learning. Frequent disruptions mean that curriculum delivery is inconsistent, leaving students with gaps in their education and a weakened foundation for future learning. Many teachers observe that students are falling behind academically, and the crisis has exacerbated existing educational inequalities, particularly affecting marginalized communities. The combined impact of prolonged school closures, unsafe environments, and disrupted services results in reduced student enrollment, as illustrated by the following quotations;

"Students are missing out on critical learning….their progress is severely hindered.(T3, Female)"

"The gap between students from different backgrounds is widening due to this crisis… students who where already struggling academically, will be left behind , although I can try my best as a teacher, it may not be enough to close the gaps (T26, Male)"

"Many students have lost interest in learning… they feel hopeless as a result of this crisis (T8, Female)"

Students Displacement

Ongoing conflict has forced families to flee their homes villages and towns, resulting in high rates of student displacement and loss of access to local secondary education. Teachers noted that displaced students often face challenges in accessing education, resulting in increased dropout rates and a loss of educational opportunities. The crisis therefore undermines the social fabric of educational efforts to build resilience and sustainable human capital. The resulting social fragmentation hampers broader developmental goals such as economic growth and poverty reduction. The following quotations reflect their views

"Many students have left for safer regions, especially the Littoral and Central regions…those who remain are few.(T20, Female)"

"Displaced students struggle to adapt to new schools and environment, many eventually drop out (T11, Male)."

"The dropout rate has skyrocketed; it's heartbreaking to witness to this regression in our education system.. and some of the students might eventually become criminals, and nuisance to society after being frustrated… because we have seen similar cases in the past (T22, Female)"

Psychological impact on students

Exposure to conflict and instability causes deep emotional distress and psychological issues among students. Teachers report that students are exhibiting signs of trauma, anxiety, stress and reduced motivation, which directly influence classroom experience and academic performance. These challenges are affecting students' ability to concentrate, engage in learning, and maintain regular attendance, impair cognitive development, and overall academic performance. Educators are compelled to address these psychosocial challenges through informal counseling and adaptive teaching strategies, often without sufficient training or resources. Students who manage to stay and attend school often suffer psychological trauma from exposure to violence, which adversely affects their cognitive and emotional capacity to learn. Exposure to conflict and instability causes emotional distress and trauma among students, which can impair concentration, cognitive development, and overall academic performance. The following quotations reflect their views

"Living and schooling in a conflict zone is just a suicide mission, most students are also anxious, stressed and scared for their lives based of the numerous killings that is going on here. Some may have even witness some shot and killed before them... they can't focus on their studies. (T13, Female)"

"Many students are traumatized because of this crisis... most of them can't cope with the normal school routine.(T19, Male)"

"The emotional toll on students is evident; they need psychological support... we are compelled to address these challenges through informal counseling and adaptive teaching strategies even though its not our direct responsibility (T15, Male)"

Discussion: Implications on the educational development and recommendations

This study explored teachers' perspectives on the effects of the ongoing Anglophone crises on secondary schools in Cameroon, highlighting five primary themes: damaged educational infrastructure, teacher shortages and professional challenges, disrupted learning continuity, student displacement, and the psychological impact on students. In examining these themes, this discussion situates the findings within broader educational and conflict-related literature, underscoring the ongoing educational challenges faced by schools, teachers and students in conflict zones and the implications for educational development in the region. The subsequent section also present the implications of the anglophone crisis on the educational development and recommendations (the way forward).

Damaged educational infrastructure

The findings of aligns with the growing body of literature on the detrimental effects of conflict on physical school resources (Poirier, 2010; Ekah, 2020; Eposi & Ewange, 2021; Akame et al., 2021; Narondo, 2023). As highlighted by participants in this study, the destruction of school buildings and the looting of teaching materials have severely undermined the teaching and learning environment. This finding reflect similar reports from conflict zones around the world and Nigeria to be specific where schools are often directly targeted or suffer collateral damage, leaving students without safe places to learn (UNICEF, 2021; Oladunni et al., 2025). In the context of Cameroon's Anglophone crisis, the diversion of government funds meant for educational development toward security measures exacerbates the problem, depriving schools of necessary resources (UNOCHA 2018; Bang & Balgah, 2022; Bang, 2024). This lack of adequate infrastructure not only limits access to safe learning spaces but also affects the quality of education and widening of educational inequality, as teachers are left to navigate overcrowded classrooms with minimal instructional materials (Bang & Balgah, 2022; Yenika, 2024). These findings underscore the urgent need for both international and governmental support to rebuild and restore educational infrastructure in conflict-affected areas.

The destruction of school buildings and neglect of facilities severely disrupts learning and hampers the delivery of quality education, leaving students without safe spaces to study. Government and donor resources (funds) which could be used in rebuilding the damaged educational infrastructure from classrooms and laboratories to libraries and sports areas are increasingly diverted to security and crisis management, resulting in lower

investment or diminished funding in educational development, such as teaching/learning materials and teacher training. We recommend an immediate investment in the reconstruction of educational infrastructure as a necessary. This includes repairing damaged schools and restoring access to safe, functional / conducive learning environments and ensuring that schools can operate effectively. Allocate resources and funds specifically for the restoration of educational facilities, including the provision of teaching materials, furniture, and technological resources. We further advocate for the government's commitment to education in conflict zones, ensuring that education remains a priority in national policies and budgets. Engage international organizations and donors to provide financial and technical support for educational initiatives in the affected regions.

Teacher shortages and professional challenges

The findings reveals teacher shortages and professional challenges as a profound impact of the crisis on the teaching workforce. Many teachers reported that their colleagues flee the region due to safety concerns, which results in a reduced pool of qualified educators. Similar challenges have been documented in prior literature in similar conflict settings where insecurity and violence force teachers to leave, thereby depriving students of qualified instruction (Eposi & Ewange, 2021; Bang & Balgah, 2022). In the current study, participants noted an increase in workload and stress among the remaining teachers, many of whom are required to teach multiple classes simultaneously and handle larger student groups. This situation aligns with findings from other conflict-affected countries where teachers, under duress, experience heightened stress and burnout due to increased responsibilities and safety risks (Poirier, 2010;). Furthermore, the shortage of qualified teachers has led to the hiring of untrained or unqualified personnel is compromising education quality in these regions, resulting in a decline in educational quality. This situation run the risk of producing mediocre graduates in the nearest future, which affect human capital and growth. This points to the necessity of prioritizing teacher recruitment, retention, and professional development as part of the broader educational recovery strategy in conflict zones.

The flight of qualified educators due to safety concerns results in a reduced workforce, leading to overcrowded classrooms, increased stress, affects professional well-being and diminished teaching quality. High teacher student ratio means that teachers will have to teach crowded classroom where there is increase indiscipline, poor assessment, and inability of teachers to complete the syllabus resulting in ineffective teaching and learning. This crisis is compounded by diminished local community engagement in education, as local stakeholders become less involved due to fear and instability. Thereby undermining support systems that are essential for fostering a stable and enriching learning environment. We recommend the development of policies that attract and retain qualified teachers, such as offering safety guarantees, financial incentives, and professional development programs. Support for existing teachers should also be enhanced to reduce stress and prevent burnout.

Disrupted learning continuity

The findings revealed disrupted learning continuity amongst students in the anglophone region which highlights the academic setbacks caused by the persistent violence and school closures. The prolonged absence of regular school activities disrupts the delivery of the curriculum, leaving students with significant gaps in their education. This finding is consistent with the broader literature on conflict and education, where school closures are

identified as a major barrier to educational continuity (Bang & Balgah, 2022;). Studies in regions affected by conflict, such as Gaza Strip, have similarly shown that the halt of schooling, often due to safety concerns results in a widening achievement gap, particularly for marginalized students (Abudayya, et al., 2023; El-Khodary, 2020). The current study further highlights the inequities exacerbated by the crisis, where students from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer disproportionately from interrupted schooling. UNOCHA (2018) reported that where schools are still functional in the anglophone regions, there are significant gaps in teaching and learning material. This disruption not only impedes academic progress but also reduces students' chances of academic success in the long term, emphasizing the need for alternative education models (e.g., online education, mobile classrooms) to mitigate the effects of school closures.

Consequently, the prolonged school closures and curriculum interruptions hinder academic progression. Disruption in learning continuity exacerbates pre-existing educational disparities and inequalities, further marginalizing vulnerable groups, even more disadvantaged in terms of access to quality education and long-term human development. For instance, according to Armand et al., (2024) despite several education policies related to the Sustainable Development Goals, educational inequalities persist at the primary school level in Cameroon. This suggest and confirms that the the current crises add to existing educational inequalities of learners in Cameroon. We therefore recommend the exploration of alternative learning models, such as remote education, online learning, mobile classrooms, or community-based learning centers, to reach displaced students and those in inaccessible areas, ensuring continuity in education and help bridge the learning gaps caused by disruptions. Establish robust systems for collecting data on school attendance, enrollment, and performance to monitor the impact of interventions and inform policy decisions. And feedback mechanisms that allow teachers, students, and parents to voice concerns and suggestions, ensuring that educational programs are responsive to the community's needs.

Students' displacement

Student displacement, underscores the social fragmentation caused by the Anglophone crisis. The movement of families, often in search of safety, results in a loss of educational opportunities for displaced students. The findings are consistent with prior research on the impact of forced migration and displacement on education (Bang & Balgah, 2022; Bang, 2024). Displaced students often face challenges in adapting to new educational environments, which can lead to high dropout rates, as reported by teachers in this study (Eposi & Ewange, 2021). Yenika's (2024) study revealed that due to the anglophone crisis, school enrolment has decreased significantly and dropout rates have increased. For example, Akame et al., (2021) reported that following the Cameroon's anglophone crisis, internally displaced and refugee families have faced financial difficulties in their new refuge, considering they had lost their means of livelihood and could not afford school fees among other needs. This situation reflect the educational challenges faced by refugee populations, where displacement often results in interrupted schooling, and face difficulties reintegrating into new educational systems (UNOCHA, 2018). Furthermore, the study's findings align with previous studies that suggest displaced students are at an increased risk of social exclusion, a phenomenon that is compounded by the loss of local support structures and community networks (Bang & Balgah, 2022; Eposi & Ewange, 2021). The displacement of students in Cameroon reflects the need for inclusive educational policies and support mechanisms to ensure that displaced

children can continue their education despite the challenges posed by displacement.

Most family have lost their sources of livelihood to support their children education leading to increasing dropout rates. Non-school attendance and and increase in school dropout rate run the risk long-term consequence and potential social ills such as; illiteracy, increase in poverty, child exploitation, child labour, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, juvenile delinquencies, increased teenage drugs and alcohol consumption, and stealing/robbery to survive. The crisis therefore undermines the social fabric of educational efforts to build resilience and sustainable human capital. The resulting social fragmentation hampers broader developmental goals such as economic growth and poverty reduction.we recommend the implementation of policies to support displaced students, including access to educational resources, flexible curricula, and safe spaces in schools, ensuring that these students can continue their education despite their challenges.

Psychological impact on students

Finally, psychological impact on students highlights the emotional toll that the Anglophone crisis has on learners. The findings point to widespread mental health related issues such as trauma, anxiety, and stress among students exposed to violence and instability. This aligns with the extensive body of prior research pointing to the psychological effects of conflict on children (UNOCHA 2018; Ekah, 2020; Eposi & Ewange, 2021; Abudayya, et al., 2023; Bang & Balgah, 2022; El-Khodary, 2020; Beseng et al., 2023;Oladunni et al., 2025). According to Akame et al., (2021) schools have been regularly attacked by armed groups, and tragically this has led to the loss of lives and the horrific traumatisation of many children and teachers. Similarly UNOCHA (2018) reported that Health centres are increasingly under pressure due to the influx of injured people and people suffering from severe trauma. This suggest that the anglophone crisis has had a greatly impacted students in the Northwest and Southwest region, which negatively impacts their emotional well-being and academic performance. Teachers in this study observed that the emotional distress experienced by students hinders their ability to concentrate, engage in lessons, and perform academically. Psychological distress in conflict zones often results in cognitive and emotional challenges, making it difficult for students to retain information and participate in learning activities (Fazel et al., 2012). The current study also underscores the critical need for psychosocial support services, which are often absent or underfunded in conflict-affected regions. The lack of adequate support for teachers to address students' mental health needs further exacerbates the issue, highlighting the importance of integrating psychosocial interventions into educational recovery plans. Evidendly, a study by El-Khodary (2020) found that, after the counselling department at the Ministry of Education in the Gaza Strip applied a counselling program in schools in order to alleviate the effect of exposure to war, the prevalence of PTSD (according to DSM-V) decreased from 57.5% to 45.6% among the children and adolescents who were exposed to war-traumatic events. Additionally, PTSD symptoms, and emotional, somatic and cognitive functional impairment symptoms decreased after the implementation of the counselling program especially among girls. This suggest that proper implementations of interventions can help students recover.

It is therefore imperative to integrate psychosocial support programs into the recovery plans of schools and Cameroon's educational system, to address the emotional needs of students, enabling them to regain motivation and focus on learning. This includes recruiting trained school guidance counselors, establish counseling centers in all functioning schools, providing effective counseling services, training teachers in trauma-informed practices,

and creating spaces for students to manage and express their emotional challenges. It is important to also let student know through counselling that violence is bad and not an option. To prevent future cycle of violence in school and society, it is important to integrate peace education into the curriculum to foster understanding, tolerance, and conflict resolution skills among students.

Conclusion

As of February 2025, the ongoing armed conflict in Anglophone Cameroon is now in its 8th year, with devastating impacts for Anglophone citizens in particular and Cameroon as a country (Ambe, 2019; Ollong, 2021; Bang, 2024;Yenika, 2024). There are little prospects for its resolution, or a sustainable solution that addresses the longstanding grievances of the minority Anglophone population (Beseng et al., 2023). The absent of a sustainable solution to the crises make it possible for continues attack on education. At the same time, the effective attainment of educational goals of a nation can only be guaranteed in a safe school environment (Achuo & Dinga, 2024), so prioritizing safety of schools, and protection of innocent lives of the students and teachers is a necessity (Oladunni et al., 2025). We remain optimistic that warring / conflicting parties will eventually seek peaceful resolutions, through a successful dialogue to restore sustainable peace in the affected regions, creating a stable environment conducive to education. This study underscores the multifaceted impact of the Anglophone crisis on the educational system in Cameroon's Northwest and Southwest regions with severe consequences for educational infrastructure, teacher quality, learning continuity, student displacement, and psychological well-being. The disruption of education and non-school attendance is putting children at greater risk of child exploitation, child labour, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, juvenile delinquencies, increased teenage drugs and alcohol consumption, and stealing/robbery to survive. The long-term consequences of these issues include an increase in illiteracy and poverty (UNOCHA 2018; UNICEF 2020;Eposi & Ewange, 2021; Bang & Balgah, 2022; Bang, 2024). The findings therefore contribute to the growing body of literature on the educational consequences of conflict, demonstrating the need for comprehensive, multifaceted responses to educational recovery in crisis-affected regions. Effective strategies must address the rebuilding of infrastructure, supporting teachers, effective curriculum delivery, ensuring the continuity of learning, providing psychosocial support, communities engagement, advocating for supportive policies, monitoring progress, and promoting peace-building efforts. Implementing these recommendations can help restore and and enhance the quality of education, ensuring that education remains a viable and sustainable tool for development even in the face of ongoing conflict. Hence contributing to the overall development and stability of Cameroon because conflicts and violence are major obstacles to peace and development (Ollong, 2021). The implications for educational policy in Cameroon are clear: immediate attention to the restoration of safety, resources, and social cohesion is essential for the future of the country's educational system.

Disclosure statement

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this work.

Informed Concern

Written informed concern was obtained from all participants involved in the study

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to writing, data collection, analysis, editing, or revising the article, and have agreed on the journal to which the article should be submitted, gave final approval of the version to be published, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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