

Dynamics of Catholic Vocational Training Centers in the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province, Cameroon : A Historical Analysis, 1970-2023

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the long-term transformation of Catholic vocational Training centres (CVTCs) in the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province (BEP), Cameroon, between 1970 and 2023. It investigates changes in institutional objectives, curriculum structures, teaching practices and infrastructural development within an evolving socio-economic and educational landscape. Guided by an integrated framework combining human capital theory, competency-based vocational education and Catholic holistic formation, the study adopts a qualitative historical research design. Data were drawn from archival records, institutional documents, secondary literature and semi structured interviews with key stakeholders across selected institutions. Findings reveal that CVTCs have undergone a significant but uneven transformation from mission oriented institutions focused on moral formation and basic technical skills to hybrid systems integrating employability, entrepreneurship, ICT competencies and holistic human development. Curriculum reforms and pedagogical innovations have improved alignment with labour market demands; however, persistent deficits in infrastructure, instructional resources and implementation capacity continue to constrain effectiveness. Teaching methods have also shifted from traditional apprenticeship models to competency-based and ICT-supported approaches although practical skill acquisition remains central and irreplaceable. The study concludes that CVTCs in BEP function as adaptive systems negotiating between global TVET imperatives and Catholic educational values. This dual orientation produces a distinct model of vocational education that integrates technical competence with moral and spiritual formation.

Keywords: Dynamics, Catholic, Vocational, Training, Ecclesiastical Province.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational education and training has become a central pillar in global development discourse due to its direct link to employability, productivity and economic transformation. Human capital theory conceptualizes education as an investment that increases individual productivity and national economic output (Becker, 1964; Heckman, 2008). Within this framework, Technical and vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems are increasingly viewed as strategic tools for addressing youth unemployment, skills mismatch and technological change (McGrath, 2012; UNESCO, 2010).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, however, TVET systems continue to face structural challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, weak industry linkages and outdated curricula (Oketch, 2017; World Bank, 2007). These constraints have led to renewed interest in alternative providers of vocational education, particularly faith-based institutions that complement state efforts.

In Cameroon, Catholic Vocational institutions have historically played a critical role in skills development, moral formation and community service. Within the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province (BEP), these institutions

constitute a dense network of training centres that include technical schools, health training institutions, agricultural centres, seminaries and rehabilitation centres. Despite their significance, limited research has examined their historical evolution as integrated systems of vocational and moral formation. This study addresses this gap by analyzing institutional transformation in CVTCs in BEP between 1970 and 2023. It argues that these institutions have evolved into hybrid systems combining technical training, human capital development and Catholic holistic education, shaped by both global and local pressures.

Several scholars have added their voices to the concept of vocational training centers as an instrument of national growth. For instance Chipfakacha (2007) on an early attempt, regretted that people in developing countries hold technical and vocational training in disdain and that results in an influx of individuals who are enrolled in universities. Wango (2013) chronicles on the relationship between vocational technical education and employment possibilities. She mentions that while it is true that vocational technical education produced graduates who could find employment without necessarily needing any further training after school, most of them were still seen roaming the streets unemployed. She suggests that such is because most graduates in Cameroon dreamt of being employed by the state or some renounce companies and also that technical students are not taught on how to create jobs. Kozik(2015)ascertains that technical education is primordial in the development of the society. Cognizant of its importance, he cautions that technical education be given more attention especially at the elementary level. Efande (2016) posits that the expansionist policy on technical education in Cameroon had a significant negative effect on the development of skills as quality was never assured. He suggests that libraries, curriculum contents, assessment methods, personnel qualifications be upgraded if the system has to be useful. Golwala (2017) argues that technical education has the potential to create skilled manpower, improve productivity and promote quality life. Goswami(2019) maintains that vocational training significantly boosts youth employability by bridging the gap between classroom theory and dynamic market demand. Eyong (2020) found interest in examining technical workshops in English speaking Cameroon secondary schools and its nexus on academic performance in public examinations. She said that the inadequacies in workshop materials for Anglophone Cameroon technical schools led to poor performance in such exams. From the aforementioned literatures, little attention was given to the changes emanating from technical education in the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province. This study will therefore fill the scholarly gap as it examines the changing nature of the objectives, training methods, curriculum design and infrastructural setup of some of the Catholic vocational centers in the BEP.

Conceptual Clarification of the Study

The study is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: human capital theory (Becker,1964), competency-based TVET frameworks(UNESCO,2010) and Catholic holistic education philosophy. Human capital theory explains education as productivity enhancement (Heckman,2008),while TVET frameworks emphasize labour market alignment(McGrath,2012). Catholic education adds a moral and spiritual dimension to skill formation. By an integrated conceptual framework combining three different theories ,Vocational and technical education is commonly defined as formal, non-formal, and informal education designed to equip learners with practical skills, applied knowledge, and competencies needed for specific occupations or industries (Atchoarena & Delluc, 2002; UNESCO, 2010). Such training not only facilitates employment but also fosters entrepreneurial capacity, problem-solving skills, and social responsibility. From a human capital perspective, vocational education is an investment in the productive capabilities of individuals, enabling them to participate effectively in the labour market and contribute to broader economic development (Becker, 1964; Carneiro, Dearden, & Vignoles, 2006).

In the Cameroonian context, Atayo (2000, 2007) conceptualizes vocational and technical education as “socially useful work” aimed at equipping learners with employable skills while fostering critical awareness of societal needs and promoting self-reliance. Vocational training is therefore both an economic and a social intervention, addressing unemployment and encouraging local development. Importantly, these programs are demand-driven: curricula, instructional methods, and training objectives are adjusted to respond to the needs of society and the economy (McGrath, 2012; Oketch, 2017).

Catholic vocational training centres expand this understanding by incorporating spiritual and ethical dimensions into skill development. Such centres do not limit themselves to practical or technical competence but integrate the holistic formation of the learner, encompassing moral development, social responsibility, and community engagement. This aligns with the philosophy of Catholic social teaching, which emphasizes the dignity of work, service to the community, and ethical engagement in economic activity (Davies, 2001; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2015). In BEP, this holistic approach ensures that learners develop both technical proficiency and personal qualities—discipline, cooperation, ethical decision-making—that are crucial for long-term employability and entrepreneurship.

For the purposes of this study, Catholic vocational training is defined as a structured educational process conducted by faith-based institutions that combines:

Technical skill acquisition: practical and applied training tailored to specific trades, professions, or entrepreneurial ventures; (UNESCO,2010)

Human capital development(Becker,1964) cultivation of employability skills, such as problem-solving, leadership, ICT literacy, and adaptability;

Spiritual and moral formation: (Catholic education philosophy) instruction in ethical behavior, social responsibility, and community-oriented values;

Institutional responsiveness: (McGrath, 2012) continuous adaptation of objectives, curricula, and infrastructure to meet labour market and societal needs.

This integrated conceptualization situates Catholic vocational centres at the nexus of skills formation, ethical education, and socio-economic development. It emphasizes that vocational training is not only a pathway to employment but also a means of fostering entrepreneurial initiative, personal development, and community engagement (Heckman, 2008; Cunha & Heckman, 2009; McGrath, 2012).

By combining technical, human, and moral dimensions, these centres serve as instruments of both individual empowerment and regional development. They exemplify a unique educational model in which vocational training is inseparable from the ethical, social, and spiritual mission of the institution. In this study, this conceptual framework guides the historical analysis of how Catholic vocational centres in BEP have evolved over five decades, responding to global, national, and local pressures while maintaining their distinctive mission.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework of Catholic Vocational Training in BEP

Dimension	Theoretical Basis	Explanation
Technical Skills	TVET Theory (UNESCO, 2010)	Competency-based vocational training aligned with labour markets
Human Capital	Becker (1964), Heckman (2008)	Education as productivity-enhancing investment
Holistic Formation	Catholic Social Teaching	Moral, ethical, and spiritual development
Institutional Adaptation	McGrath (2012)	Response to labour market and technological change

This framework positions vocational education as a multidimensional system where economic, social, and moral objectives intersect

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative historical research design to examine the dynamics of Catholic Vocational Training Centres in the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province (BEP) between 1970 and 2023. The design is appropriate for reconstructing long-term institutional change and interpreting how vocational education systems have evolved in response to shifting socio-economic conditions, educational reforms, technological

advancement, and labour market demands. The qualitative orientation allows for an in-depth exploration of institutional processes, meanings, and experiences rather than numerical measurement.

The study area is the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province of Cameroon, covering selected Catholic vocational and formation institutions in the Northwest and Southwest regions. These include technical schools, health training centres, agricultural training institutions, teacher training colleges, seminaries, and social welfare centres. The selection of BEP is justified by its historical prominence as one of the most active Catholic educational regions in Cameroon, with a wide network of institutions that have undergone significant transformation over the study period.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select both institutions and respondents. This method was appropriate because the study required information-rich cases capable of providing deep insights into institutional evolution. Institutions were selected based on historical relevance, diversity of training programmes, availability of documentary records, and accessibility of key informants. Consequently, institutions such as STAMS Bambui, CUIB, CATUC, CSHS Shisong, Nazareth Agropastoral Training Centre, SAJOCAH, Catholic Mission Technical Centre, and selected teacher training colleges were included in the study.

Data were collected from three main sources to ensure triangulation and depth of analysis. First, archival and documentary materials, including institutional records, policy documents, enrolment reports, and historical archives, were examined to provide verifiable evidence of institutional development, curriculum changes, infrastructural expansion, and enrolment trends. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators, lecturers, religious leaders, and long-serving institutional staff. This method allowed flexibility in exploring emerging issues while capturing institutional memory and lived experiences that are not fully documented in written sources. Third, secondary literature, including academic books, journal articles, and policy reports, was reviewed to situate the study within broader debates on vocational education, Catholic education, and human capital development.

Data were analysed using thematic historical analysis. This involved identifying recurring patterns related to institutional objectives, curriculum development, teaching methods, and infrastructural transformation. The data were then organized chronologically to trace continuity and change across different historical phases between 1970 and 2023. This approach enabled both temporal reconstruction and thematic interpretation of institutional dynamics.

To ensure credibility and reliability, triangulation was applied by cross-checking information obtained from interviews, archival sources, and secondary literature. Where discrepancies occurred, multiple sources were compared to establish the most consistent interpretation supported by evidence. This strengthened the validity of the historical reconstruction.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participation in interviews was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality of participants and institutional information was maintained. Sensitivity was also observed given the religious and organizational nature of the institutions studied.

Finally, the study acknowledges limitations, including potential recall bias in oral interviews, incomplete archival records in some institutions, and uneven data availability across the study period. The absence of standardized graduate outcome data also limited quantitative assessment of long-term institutional impact. Nevertheless, the use of multiple data sources and triangulation helped to mitigate these limitations and enhance the overall reliability of the findings.

Changing objectives, 1970-2023

From 1970-1980, the objectives of the various vocational training centers in BEP were to ensure the employability of the trainees. With this, focus was laid on the various courses that could enable them fit the

various employment opportunities in Cameroon. The various objectives evolved to include broader focus on lifelong learning, addressing societal needs and aligning with evolving labour market demand. To achieve this, the various vocational training centers in BEP evolved to include strengthening the social role of the various vocational education and training, emphasizing on technological advancement, innovation and re-evaluating vocational specialization to address skilled worker shortages (Fannyuy, interviewed, 2025). With this, the focus was then on the pathway for career development and advancement rather than just initial training.

At the turn of 1980s, the focus of most training centers changed and focus was placed in satisfying the international labour market. With this, the institutions became one of the training centers in BEP and Cameroon at large supplying labour to the different regions of the world. Agreeing to this, Osana holds that the objectives upon which most of these institutions were built became obsolete needing modification to suit modernity (Nganyuy, interviewed, 2024). In a discussion with Rev Sister Margaret, she revealed that;

Vocational training institutions witnessed some changes in its objectives and other facets. The gradual evolution in the objectives set by the various vocational centers was a means to follow global standards. Vocational training was to be conducted in a way that students trained in any field could be able to compete in the international and national scene and not only to satisfy the aspirations of the Catholics. These changes placed the various catholic Vocational centers to the standards of other vocational institutions (Margaret, interviewed, 2024).

In the religious vocational centers like the John Mary Vianney spiritual formation center Bafut, informants hold that its initial objectives were to ensure the spirituality of the society. The aim was to train persons who could assist in the spiritual domain. However, these objectives changed overtime. The center became a theatre serving as a preparatory ground for candidates before they entered the major seminary of Bambui. It provided a holistic approach to formation encompassing spiritual, intellectual and human development. With the passage of time, the center focused on fostering a sense of community solidarity among the candidates, promoting fellowship and fraternity on a communal living. This was opposed to the time when the aim of the center was to prepare the candidates only for intellectual studies at the Major seminaries, providing opportunities for spiritual growth and deepening the candidate's relationship with God. These were its initial objectives following its creation in 1990s. In 2003, the center was refined and their objectives were expanded upon. The level of formation was as well given a proper orientation to the general standards. For instance, those in the St. John Mary Vianney center undergoing preparation to qualify to be enrolled in the major seminary were to show proofs of effective evangelism skills (Kemjei, interviewed, 2024). Discussing with Rev Father Charles Berinyuy, the rector of the center, revealed that; just as other organizations evolved base on the growing trend of globalization, the objectives that was put in place at St John Mary Vianney center focusing on the formation of candidates who intended to do their priestly formation in St John Paul II Major seminary Bachu-Ntai and ultimately Saint Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary Bambui changed over time. The objectives were expanded and modified and it became a tradition that those in the institution must show signs of Christian fellowship and ensuring charity activities to the community. Also, the prove of outreach became a compulsory advocacy (Berinyuy, interviewed, 2024).

Just like the Bambui Major Seminary established in 1973, the objectives as well witnessed a lot of changes. From creation, its objective according to Rev. Father Charles was the preparation of Roman Catholic priesthood within the ecclesiastical province of Bamenda, in order for them to nurture the five dioceses within the province as well as other dioceses in Cameroon and beyond. At the turn of late 1990s and 2000s, most of these objectives were modified and expanded to focus on social justice where the seminaries incorporated a stronger emphasis on social justice and advocacy encouraging seminarians to engage with issues of poverty, inequality and environmental stewardship. Also, the formation institution incorporated interfaith dialogue. Here, the seminarians were to focus on fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding, preparing seminarians to engage respectfully with other faith traditions (Idem, 2024).

The objectives of the various formation spiritual centers became broadened and the seminarians were taught on how to survive under any cultural environment as the society was becoming more multicultural thereby

necessitating the need to train seminarians who were culturally competent. This was to create an environment of peaceful coexistence between the Catholics, traditional region and other denominations. Putting this to practice, the first rector of Bambui Seminary Cardinal Tumi Christian collaborated and soaked into the African Traditional Religion acquiring a traditional title and performing traditional rituals in Manjong and Mfu Fellowships (Idem, 2024).

Aligning with the dynamics in the objectives of Vocational training centers, Alkan, holds that rapid changes and developments in science and technology affected vocational education institutions, and students in the BEP. Vocational and technical education combines scientific-technological and applied aspects of education and focuses on the requirements and competencies of a particular profession. Its aim was to educate and train individuals as a qualified workforce for employment in industry, trade and service sectors, and to provide basic education necessary for transition to other higher institutions of learning. It emphasized that the relationship between vocational education and development was established directly and that vocational education had an important place in overcoming youth unemployment and promoting industrial development. With this, training was based now on global and not local standards (Alkan, interviewed, 2024).

The findings indicate that Catholic vocational training centres in the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province (BEP) have progressively evolved from mission-oriented formation systems into institutions focused on employability, entrepreneurship, and integrated human capital development. In the early period, particularly between the 1970s and 1980s, archival records from STAMS Bambui and Catholic mission training centres show that vocational education was primarily directed towards moral formation, basic technical skills, discipline, and community service. This orientation reflects the Catholic understanding of vocational education as a process of holistic human formation rather than mere occupational preparation.

Interview data support this finding. One rector explained that “the aim was not just to train people for jobs, but to form responsible Christians who could serve society with discipline and moral integrity” (Berinyuy, interviewed, 2024). This confirms that the early objectives of Catholic vocational institutions were grounded in both skills development and ethical formation.

From the late 1980s onward, institutional objectives began to shift toward labour market responsiveness, employability, and global competitiveness. This transition was driven by rising unemployment, changing economic conditions, technological advancement, and the need for graduates to acquire skills relevant beyond local contexts. A lecturer from CUIB observed that “the pressure from unemployment and changing job markets forced us to rethink our training objectives. We had to prepare students not just to serve locally, but to compete globally” (Damen, interviewed, 2025).

By the 2000s and 2010s, institutional records and interview evidence from CATUC, CUIB, and related institutions show that ICT literacy, entrepreneurship, innovation, and professional adaptability had become central to institutional objectives. However, modernization did not erase Catholic identity. As one interviewee noted, “Even when we modernized, we never abandoned formation of character, discipline, and spiritual responsibility” (Kombe, interviewed, 2024). Thus, the transformation of objectives reflects both continuity and change: Catholic vocational centres expanded toward human capital development while retaining their moral and spiritual foundations.

Table 1: Evolution of Institutional Objectives, 1970–2023

Period	Dominant Objective	Key Focus
1970–1985	Mission formation	Moral discipline, basic skills, community service
1986–2000	Transitional phase	Employability and locally relevant skills
2001–2010	Expansion phase	Entrepreneurship, ICT introduction, programme diversification
2011–2023	Modern phase	Global employability, innovation, digital literacy

The evidence in Table 1 shows that institutional objectives did not change abruptly but evolved gradually in response to social, economic, technological, and educational pressures. The early emphasis on moral discipline and basic skills gave way to employability and entrepreneurship, while the most recent phase reflects stronger concern for innovation and digital competence. Analytically, this shift demonstrates the movement of Catholic vocational education from a predominantly mission-service model toward a broader human capital development model, without abandoning its holistic educational identity.

Curriculum Development, 1980s -2000

On the whole, the vocational training sector (formal and informal) was neglected for several decades as illustrated by the absence of strategies that can enhance technological growth and the insufficiency of the resources allocated. Therefore, the country as a whole was suffering from a shortage of skilled workers in most of the industrial and commercial sectors although the training centers turned out thousands of graduates who did not masters specific trades. To correct this situation, the Cameroonian Government organized a National Forum on Education in 1998 and adopted an Education Orientation Law which laid down new guidelines for technical education and vocational training (Megan, 2007:333-35). This gave the guide for the authorities of the BEP to redefine their curriculum.

The authorities of BEP took the initiative to set and implement the expansion policy of VTC throughout BEP. The objective was to train skillful graduates for direct entry into the workforce that would contribute to the country's economic development. Though the reorientation of the curriculum took force in 1990s, the authorities started adjusting the policies since 1980s. However, despite the increase number of vocational training centers, many graduates found themselves unable to fulfil the requirements of the job opportunities, and employers continue to complain about graduates' skills not being efficient for the available jobs (Ibid, 2007). This circumstance prompted scholars to raise concerns about the skills imparted to students to ensure the quality of the centers. Hence bridging the gap between skill and the labour markets. With this, there was the need to reorient the curriculum in order to ensure the formation practices that could enable the graduate to secure jobs both nationally and internationally. To enhance this, the Rector of the Seminary at Bambui holds that research was conducted on how to strengthen the VTC system in BEP to limit the discord between graduates' skills and the job market. Therefore, carrying out further research on how to bridge the gap between VTC programs and the labour market was to enhance graduates' employability (Berinyuy, interviewed, 2024).

The need to satisfy the purpose of the training centers in the BEP pushed the authorities of BEP to update the curriculum design of the various vocational training centers. From 1990s the curriculum was updated to fit in ICT which was a necessity in the rapid changing world. The system was modified to become computer based where students were educated on the utilization of the ICT in their training. In CATUC, students of the medical field were taught on how to computerize didactics in the course of checking patience (Idem, 2024).

With this, the importance of the proper implementation of educational policy, infrastructures, curriculum and partnerships was needed. The Catholic School of Health Science (CSHS) found in Shisong was established in 1954 to act as the teaching arm of St. Elizabeth Catholic General Hospital Shisong. It should be noted that from when it was created, the medical training center functioned following its traditional curriculum. When the medical training center was authorized to operate by the Ministry of Public Health, it was training individuals who could only go out for outreach campaigns, and as well training nurses who could monitor the patience. In 1970s the curriculum evolved and CSHS started offering formation programs like laboratory technology, and midwifery (Mokube, 2015: 34). The changes witnessed in the curriculum was because of the need to meet up with the demands of the labour market in the medical field and to encourage investment in the domain of education so as to enable the institution to have the necessary and modern resources for the training of qualified medical personnel. In this dimension, the medical school in Shisong which was affiliated to the hospital acquired an electronic microscope graduating from the steam microscope. This electronic microscope was to enable the trainees match up with the international standard (Ibid, 2015: 37)

Wilson explains that changes were witnessed in the curriculum setting of CSHS as the syllabus of the training institution was updated to suit the international demand. As from 1980s, the curriculum and syllabus of the medical institution were outdated, the programs offered were not best suited to the market demands and the institutions lacked the supplies and equipment necessary for students to acquire practical skills. This explained why laboratory technicians were not common during this period, though the course was taught; it was only theoretical as the practical aspect of it was farfetched. The workshops and laboratory equipment were antiquated and had little in common with the technologies that were available at the moment. Corroborating this, Father Evans Shang holds that when practical classes were overcrowded due to inadequate training equipment, most students were unable to participate in hands-on practice and were forced to watch the demonstration. With this, there was the need to reorient the formation programs and to improve on the existing technology while adding the technical know-how of the institution (Chung, interviewed, 2024).

In addition, Sandra Mbong holds that the dynamics witnessed in VTC in BEP in the 1990s, was owing to the fact that the centers had the objectives of training skillful students capable of satisfying the labour market needs, however, technological advancement and globalization posed challenges to the institutions to fulfill their objectives, causing a supply mismatch. They found it difficult to adapt their curriculum to the labour market standards. With this, there was need to reorient the curriculum in order to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. This simply implies that VTC programs relied on institutions with limited modern theoretical knowledge and practical inputs. This resulted in training programs that did not align with industry requirements. Consequently, there was the need to embrace and adapt to the global technologies in the various fields (Mbong, interviewed, 2024).

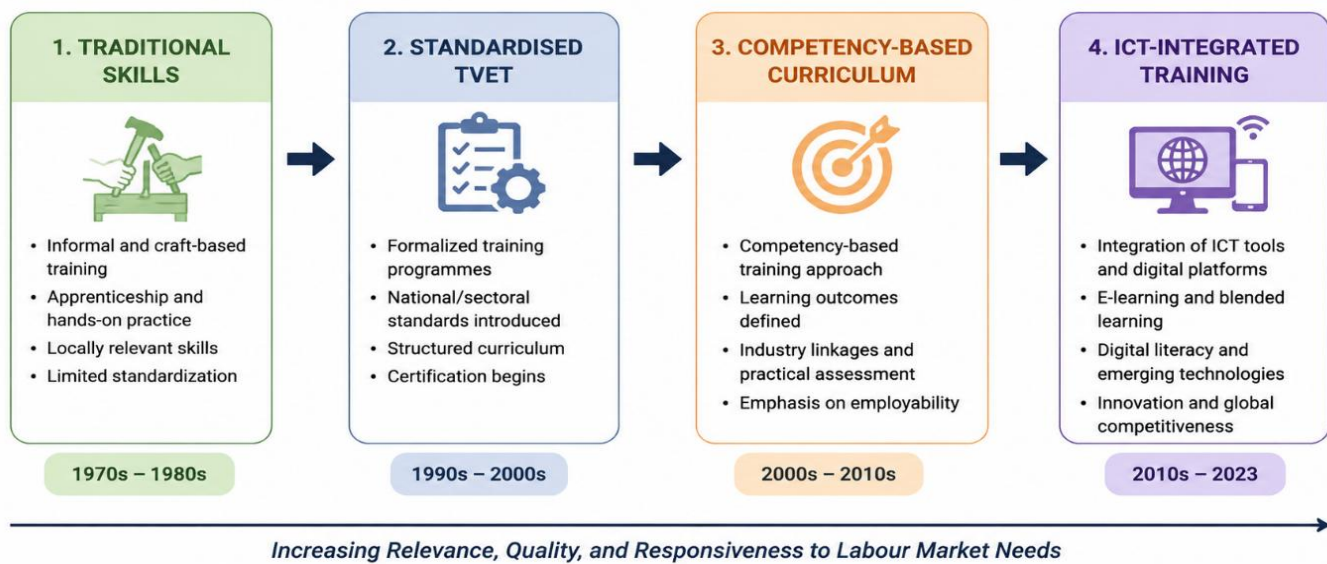
Rv. Father Berinyui holds that the changes witnessed in the curriculum of the various Vocational Training Centers in the BEP were to ensure that the skilled students meet the global demand. Despite producing a large number of graduates, it is apparent that these graduates struggle to get employment in the labour market because they have insufficient technological skills. However, some VTC have made minimal efforts to link their curriculum to the dynamic market needs. This includes updating their curriculum and providing their teachers with professional development programs to ensure the programs offered meet the demands of the current labour market and the training imparted on students aligns with the rapidly advancing technologies.(Berinyuy, 2024).

Curriculum development therefore emerged as one of the clearest indicators of institutional transformation. The findings reveal a movement from informal, craft-based instruction to structured, competency-based, and ICT-integrated programmes. In the 1970s and 1980s, archival curriculum records show strong emphasis on manual skills, agricultural training, domestic science, and practical apprenticeship. These early curricula were closely tied to immediate community needs but were limited in formal standardization.

Interview evidence confirms this pattern. An experienced trainer stated that “training was very practical. Students learned by doing, but there was no standardized curriculum like what we have today” (Wilson, personal communication, January 23, 2025). This suggests that early vocational training was effective in promoting practical learning but lacked the structured curriculum systems required for wider certification, mobility, and labour market comparability.

From the 1990s onward, institutional records from CSHS Shisong, CUIB, and other Catholic institutions indicate significant curriculum expansion. New programmes incorporated laboratory technology, ICT, software engineering, applied sciences, agricultural technology, business, and entrepreneurship modules. A lecturer explained that “we moved from purely manual teaching to structured programmes that included computer systems, networking, and applied science courses” (Anyanwu, interviewed, 2024). This shift reflects the growing need for demand-driven training aligned with labour market needs.

Figure 2: Curriculum Evolution Pathway



Archival and interview data show that the curriculum transformation followed a gradual path from traditional skill acquisition to more formalized and technology-supported training. The introduction of ICT, laboratory sciences, software engineering, and entrepreneurship reflected the institutions’ attempt to prepare learners for modern employment conditions. However, this transformation also produced implementation challenges. One respondent noted that “the curriculum changed faster than the equipment and infrastructure could support it” (Mbong, interviewed, 2024). This reveals a major gap between curriculum reform and institutional capacity.

The findings therefore show that curriculum modernization was both necessary and uneven. While it improved the relevance of Catholic vocational education, its effectiveness depended heavily on the availability of trained instructors, laboratories, workshops, ICT facilities, and adequate funding.

Changing Teaching Methods 1970-2023

The study also found that teaching methods in Catholic vocational training centres evolved from traditional apprenticeship and demonstration-based instruction to more structured, competency-based, ICT-supported, and hybrid learning systems. In the early period, teaching was highly practical and instructor-centred. Students learned mainly through observation, imitation, repetition, and supervised practice. One respondent explained that “students learned mainly by observing and practicing under close supervision” (Fabrice, interviewed, 2024).

From the 2000s, institutions such as CUIB, CATUC, and teacher training colleges began to introduce more structured pedagogical approaches. These included competency-based learning, industrial placements, visiting lecturers, practical workshops, and ICT-supported instruction. A senior administrator explained that “we started integrating ICT tools and bringing in industry professionals to bridge the gap between theory and practice” (Tafon, interviewed, 2024). This shows an increasing effort to connect classroom learning with professional and industry-based experience.

Table 2: Teaching Methods Transformation

Period	Teaching Model	Characteristics
1970s–1980s	Apprenticeship-based learning	Observation, imitation, supervised practice
1990s–2000s	Structured instruction	Classroom teaching combined with practical work
2000s–2010s	Competency-based learning	Industry exposure, practical assessment, visiting lecturers
2010s–2023	Hybrid digital learning	ICT-supported teaching, remote learning, online supervision

A major pedagogical shift occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and periods of regional instability in the Northwest and Southwest regions. In response to disruptions in physical learning, institutions adopted digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom. One respondent explained that “during the crisis, we used WhatsApp and Zoom to continue teaching. It was not perfect, but it kept students active” (Berinyuy, interviewed, 2024).

However, the findings also show that digital learning had clear limitations for vocational education. While online platforms supported theoretical instruction and communication, they were less effective for practical skill acquisition. As one lecturer observed, “online teaching worked for theory, but vocational training requires hands-on practice, which was difficult to sustain” (Damen, personal communication, 2025). The evidence therefore suggests that digital pedagogy improved access and continuity but could not fully replace the practical and embodied nature of vocational learning.

The change in the Curriculum was out to match the standards of the labour market and thus warranted a new teaching method. Also, Imoro et al. opine that the orientation provided by the Vocational Training Centre system based on students' competency, did not provide them with the necessary skills to keep pace with the demands of society and the labour market. The system did not emphasize on bringing out the potentials of students to provide high personal qualities and interests. This, therefore, limited trainees' potential and initiatives resulting to fewer chances of securing jobs (Imoro and Nti, 2009: 250-267). With this, visiting lecturers from the various training schools in Cameroon who were competent were often invited to deliver teaching in the training schools in the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province. Distance teaching was also conducted where teachers taught the learners especially in medical schools from a distance. This helped to close the gap of teachers' scarcity.

Also, with the advent of technology and globalization, zoom teaching was conducted; this was especially during the crisis periods where it was impossible for the learners to attend classes physically (Ndiya, 2013: 56). The change in the teaching method especially in the training sectors of CATUC helped the students to be more active with their classes. Further, in CUIB, the teaching mechanism changed as from 2017, as several lessons were done on social Media through zoom, and WhatsApp calls. This kept the students' minds active as other lecturers from far off distances could effectively deliver their lectures. The major difficulty was to carry out practical lessons but the theoretical aspect of the teaching was delivered effectively. Again, during the Covid19 period, a lot of modification was done in the teaching methods. It should be noted that during this period, gatherings were not permitted due to the fear of contamination. With this, lectures were done from the home through social media platforms (Berinyuy, interviewed, 2024). This evolution in the teaching methods especially during the period of intensification of the arm conflict in the Northwest and South West Regions as from 2017 reduced the efficiency of the centre to effectively train students. That notwithstanding, the school authorities in BEP developed different teaching strategies to keep the students busy. The rector of CATUC holds that: the students could have gone completely blank if not of the combined efforts of the various authorities of to ensure that they were kept busy while at home.

The period 1990s/2000s witnessed a different orientation in the evolution of VTC in the BEP with most educators trying to acquire competency to prepare trainees for the job market and the opportunities for professional development programs that could help enhance their skills. They were exposed to industry trends, ensuring updates in their teaching methods. This resulted in teaching that certainly matched the labour market standards. This was also to enable them match up with the newly designed curriculum. Only a well-designed curriculum could ensure the training of quality graduates. In the Catholic Teachers Training college Tatum created in 1971 and which became Saint Pius X Teachers Training College Tatum in 1973, with the amalgamation of Catholic Teachers Training College Bambui, the teachers were trained on the effective delivering of lessons using the ICT tools. This became trans-generational and helped graduates to be able to operate in any school after graduation. This was a way to balance up with the standards of the 21st century formation process. Thus, emphasis was on the ability of vocational training educators in inculcating skills thereby ensuring a promising future for the trainees who could easily liaise with global 21st century standards (Berinyui, 2024).

It was therefore vital to train students in order to reflect the labour market needs if economic growth was to be enhanced. It is imperative that VTC institutions acknowledge the significance of updating teachers' skills so that graduates could acquire the appropriate training. Giving the fact that by 1980, the government of Cameroon under presidential decree number No-80-416 of December 1980, authorizing and recognizing the catholic education and training center agencies, it therefore became the government prerequisite to ensure that the formation of students in the various centers were smooth. With this, any educational institutes that failed to hire or upgrade their educator's skills was considered institutes with little credibility as their training quality could be reflected on the quality of the graduates. Therefore, VTC needed to emphasize continuous professional development programs and industry internships so that educators could gain adequate hands-on experience in their respective fields. This opportunity enhanced the teaching and learning process, thus adequately preparing the students for the labour market. With this, there was therefore the need to upgrading VTC teacher training institutions in order to train qualified teachers with the required skills that would enabled them to teach and transmit relevant knowledge to students (Fabrice, Interviewed, 2024).

Also by 2012, the software engineers applied principles and techniques from computer science engineering and mathematical analysis to specify, design, implement, evaluate, and maintain software systems.. The Bachelor of Science in software engineering prepared students for a wide range of careers in the computing fields, as well as related positions in other domains, such as healthcare, finance, communications, government, industry, education, marketing, and academia. Programming skills were one of the basic skills of a successful graduate of the Software Engineering program. Students also acquired requirement specification, design, quality assurance and project management skills. Problem solving in teams through effective use of oral and written communication was also emphasized in the programme. Students specified, designed and implemented non-trivial software systems and completed one semester capstone project (Idem, 2024).

Each student was required to obtain professional experience (e.g., through an internship or a research project) prior to graduation, which was facilitated by the program's collaboration with industrial and academic partners. The industrialization of the school curriculum was to shape the students towards an emerging world with everything digitalized. In this regard, all the courses in CUIB were reoriented to fit into the global demand.. It should be noted that most of them while schooling were already receiving survey and other industrial contracts that permitted them to gain wider relevance (Damen, 2024).

Further developments was made in the Department of Software Engineering with the introduction of Information Technology. This course introduced students to the technologies that were fundamental in the gathering, processing, representation and storage of information. Based on the fact that students had been interacting with some of these technologies in their everyday activities, the course paints a formal picture of the concepts of Data, Information, Hardware (Input and Output), Software and Networks. Practical aspects were made on modern information representation technologies (HTML). This course was also to introduce students to the area of computer programming, taking into consideration the fact that this was to be the first course on computer programming that the students were encountering in their educational career. Emphasis was also placed on algorithmic thinking and algorithm representation. In the mathematical domain, changes were as well made where most mathematical formulae were generated with intended purpose of solving real world issues through the use of software applications (Idem, interviewed, 2024).

The course was built on advanced level mathematics to further strengthen students' analytical view to mathematical problems. This drilled students to formulate mathematical problems as well as equipping them with techniques for solving these problems. Topics such as Mappings, Functions, differentiation and Integration were treated. Also this period 2012 saw the introduction of Discrete Mathematics with focus on finite systems as an increasingly important concept in the computer age and a founding pillar in information technology. The digital computer was basically a finite structure, and many of its properties were understood and interpreted within the framework of finite mathematical systems. With focus on formal mathematical objects like Sets, Graphs, Matrices, recurrence relations, these courses examine how these objects arise in computer science- related problems (Kombe interviewed, 2024).

In the various teacher training institutions, the training was more practical than theoretical. This was characterized by Manual Science, Arts and Craft, Domestic Science etc though this gradually declined over time. Training was now more focused on certification without the development of skills. Of recent, efforts have been made by the state to make the training of teachers more practical by initiating the competency-based approach. Also, students were enrolled into training colleges with just the First School Leaving Certificates (Standard six) about two to three years course Along the line the training period was reduced to 9months. This posed a great challenge as the required skills could not be grasped due to time constrain. With the change of grades from grade 1, 2and 3, there was progression amongst the teachers. For instance, Francis Nkwain was able to move to Ghana for further studies and upon return subsequently rose to the position of Minister. But with the modification of laws by the government, all became grade 1 teachers. This made distinction and progression very difficult (Berinyui, 2024).

Dynamics in the various infrastructures

Infrastructure development was another major dimension of institutional transformation. Findings from archival construction records, enrolment reports, and interview evidence show that infrastructural expansion was both a driver and outcome of institutional growth. In the early years, many institutions operated with limited classrooms, workshops, laboratories, and accommodation facilities. Some centres relied on mission buildings or temporary structures that were not originally designed for vocational training.

A long-serving staff member recalled that “in the beginning, we had very few classrooms and limited equipment for practical training” (Lukong, interviewed, 2024). This confirms that inadequate infrastructure was one of the major constraints facing early Catholic vocational institutions.

Considering the case of STAMS Bambui it went operational in September 15th 1973 with a pioneer class of twelve students in the campus of former St Peter’s Teacher’s Training College Bambui following the Decision of the Apostolic Nunciature at Yaoundé in its letter No. 239/72 of October 18th 1972. It is worthy to note that St Peter training college was opened in Bambui in 1971 and operated only for two years after which it merged with the Catholic Teachers training college Tatum to form Saint Piux Teachers training College with it campus at Tatum. The former Campus in Bambui was then temporarily used in 1973 to host the newly created seminary before its modification and upgrade in 1974 to 1976. This was based on the growing trend of the number of student enrolment. Dynamics in the enrolment statistics of the formation center determined the changes made in the formation center (Idem, 2024).

Enrolment statistics in 1973/1974 academic year were made up of twelve (12) pioneer students from the three Diocese. Garoua had one student, Buea four and Bamenda seven. Each one of them had completed the secondary school programme required as pre- condition for entrance into the major seminary. In the 1974/1975 year, the enrolment increased to twenty-five. With time, thirteen added and all the thirteen students were from the Minor Seminary of Buea. It should be noted that the progression in the enrolment necessitated the expansion of the various infrastructures. (Lukong, 2024).The table below demonstrates the dynamics of the enrolment from 1973-1985

Table 1: Years and enrolment statistics of STAMS, 1973-1985

s/n	Years	Number of students
1	1973/1974	12
2	1974/1975	25
3	1975/1976	10
4	1976/1977	42
5	1977/1978	50
6	1978/1979	59

7	1979/1980	53
8	1980/1981	60
9	1981/1982	56
10	1982/1983	55
11	1983/1984	58
12	1984/1985	54

Source; Obtained from STAMPS secretariat, 12th April 2024

During the1980/1981 academic year, STAMS registered major successes from the government of Rome. This was to appreciate the rate of transformation witnessed in the area as a result of its numerical growth. The enrolment during this period had skyrocketed from fifty-three persons in 1979/1980 to sixty students between 1980/1981 as illustrated in the table above. Besides an expansion in infrastructure, with decree No277/81/2 issued at Rome on the 8th April 1981 under the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education declared the Theological Department of STAMS to be an affiliate of the Pontical Urban University, Rome. Another success was registered following decree prot.No.4907/80 of 30th September 1980,in which the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of People’s appointed Father Engelbert Nyamnsai Kofon, priest of the diocese of Bamenda to be the Rector of STAMS Bambui (Idem, 2024).

Table 2 below further represents the number of candidates from STAMS from 2015 to 2021.

Table 2: Years and enrolment Statistics of STAMPS,2015-2021

Year	Candidates
2015	136
2016	152
2017	146
2018	151
2019	167
2020	177
2021	175

Source: field work Initiative, 12th July 2024

The statistics above show that the total number of candidates increased from 2015-2021 though with some slight fluctuations. With the steady increase in the number of priestly candidates, there was therefore the need for improvement in the infrastructure. In this dimension, the STAMS administration launched the construction of more classrooms and hostels that could accommodate the number. The project carried out in 2010 included the construction of seven new classrooms to meet the growing number of the candidates. Some other old classrooms were also extended to contain the growing number of seminarians (Lukong, interviewed, 2024).

Physical materials in terms of adequacy and quality have been noted to have a great impact on the performance of students in examinations. A vocational school that has adequate infrastructure is likely to post better than the one which has poor physical resources. A vocational school with inadequate classrooms will be forced to accommodate more students than recommended. This will exert a lot of pressure on resources such as teachers who may compromise their methodology as part of adaptive mechanism (Idem, 2024).

In Saint John Mary Vianney Spiritual Formation Center Bafut, which was founded in the early 1990s to cater for the formation of candidates who intended to carry out their priestly formation in St John Paul II Minor

Seminary Bachaw -Ntai and subsequently STAMS Bambui became inadequate in terms of space. This necessitated improvements in the infrastructures. For example, the formation center which was built for a maximum of 40 candidates started accommodating 70 and more candidates before the end of 1990s. There was therefore need for the modification of dormitories, the chapel and classes. Consequently in 2021, a new chapel was constructed and modernized to meet up with the standards (Idem, 2024).

Further, in Elak Oku Parish, a catholic commercial college was set up in 2016 to accommodate students that were interested in technical education in the locality. Being in the heart of Oku town, the technical school started operating effectively and the enrolment was encouraging. Initially, the training institution was operating in CS Elak but in 2019, an area for the school was earmarked and construction work started just below the Parish House at Ebfanekwak Oku. These changes in the level of infrastructures were due to the fact that the enrolment of the school was encouraging. The evolution witnessed in the infrastructures of the school encouraged other students to enrol at the institution. (Miben, interviewed, 2024). This therefore enabled the effective growth of the school. Just like the theory of human development, by which humans can increase their productivity by constant innovations and development in technologies. The increasing level of innovations was therefore vital in the parish as it became one of the best vocational institutions in terms of development in infrastructures. This therefore pushed the members of the Oku Community to choose the school over other schools in the Fondom (Idem, 2024).

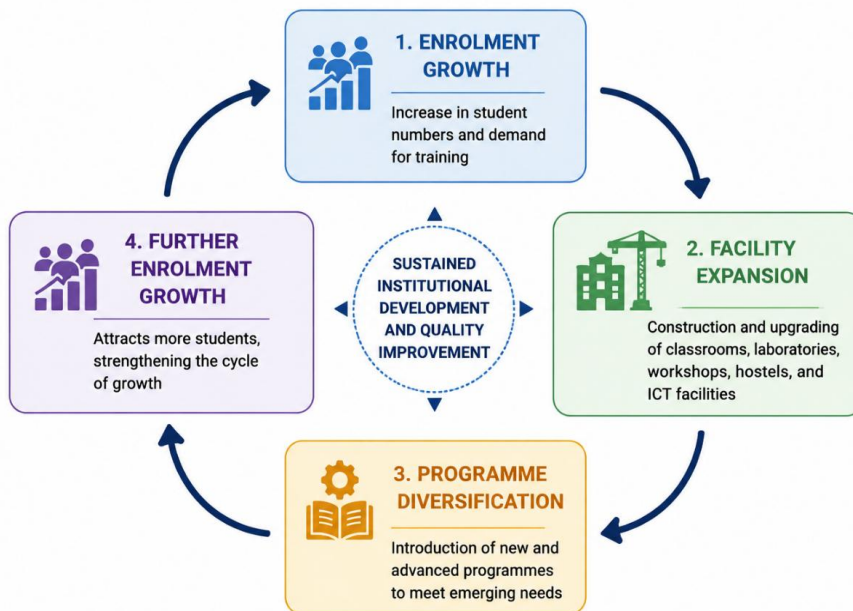
In CATUC Bamenda, the authorities of the school hinted that when the school was created in 2010, the infrastructures were still under construction. The incomplete buildings and designs were finally completed in 2016 and officially launched to the public. The innovations in the construction of the buildings contributed to the growing enrolment in the school. The buildings which were subject to constant transformation of the various training schools in BEP acted as an attracting force to the general public.

In St Pius X Technical College Bota-Limbe established in 2021, changes were as well witnessed at the level of infrastructural development. When the school officially began in 2021, the students were attending classes in uncompleted structures. With the efforts and guidance of Lordship Michael Bibi, the structures were modernized in 2023 to meet up with the modern taste. SPICOTEC was opened in 2021 for professional training of students by his Lordship Michael Bibi. The school was created to instill vocational skills into the students, training them to meet up with the rapid changing technological advancement. Students were trained in tailoring and other crafts. By 2023, the institution had grown in leaps and bounds with a population of about four hundred students. Also, the Mechanical and Electrical Engineering departments were founded with students undergoing intense practical training on car manufacturing. With this, the founders of the school were on constant supervisory missions to ensure that the students were efficient at their respective domains. The inspections were guided by his Lordship Bishop Michael Bili, Dr. Appoloniari Mbah and Dr. Robert Wessel

(Idem, 2024). This tutoring and supervision is paying off as the young creative minds in the department of Electrical Engineering in 2023 just two years after creation presented and exhibited a mastery of skills impacted on them by their tutors. They displayed at home electric bells and some electrical switches. They as well impressed the proprietors in by displaying a chargeable range rover designed to function without the use of fuel but rather with the use of electricity.. As a matter of fact, the growth of the school was quite outstanding and could be seen as one of the best in Buea precisely and the South West in general. (Nonsi, interviewed, 2024). Amazed by the student's creative display, Dr. Apollinairis Mah, who had been at the forefront of the school, expressed satisfaction in the professionalism exhibited by the students. The students were promised a scholarship if the exhibited skills were further improved upon to ensure standardization.

As a matter of fact 1990s onward was characterized by increasing enrolment and programme diversification that led to substantial investments in classrooms, dormitories, laboratories, ICT centres, workshops, and specialized training units. STAMS Bambui enrolment records from 1973–1985 and 2015–2021 show steady increases in student numbers, which contributed to the construction of additional classrooms and residential facilities. A similar pattern was recorded at CUIB, where infrastructural expansion followed programme growth. As one respondent explained, “the infrastructure expanded as the programmes grew. Without expansion, we could not accommodate students effectively” (Hako, personal communication, 2024).

Figure 3: Infrastructure Development Cycle



The development cycle presented in Figure 3 shows that infrastructure and enrolment reinforced each other. As student numbers increased, institutions expanded facilities.

These improved facilities then made it possible to introduce new programmes and attract more students. At SAJOCAH and Nazareth Centre, infrastructural development also supported practical training and income-generating activities. One interviewee noted that “we expanded workshops and farming units to support both training and sustainability of the institution” (Nonsi, personal communication, 2024).

Table 3: Infrastructure Trends in Selected Institutions

Institution	Early Stage	Recent Development
STAMS	Limited facilities and shared spaces	Expanded academic buildings, classrooms, and residential facilities
CUIB	Buildings under construction during early phase	Full campus system with diversified academic and technical facilities
CATUC	Partial and developing facilities	ICT-enabled infrastructure and improved learning spaces
SAJOCAH	Basic structures and limited workshops	Specialized rehabilitation units and upgraded practical training spaces

The evidence in Table 3 confirms that infrastructural growth varied across institutions. While some centres made significant progress, others continued to face resource and equipment constraints. This uneven development affected the quality of training and the ability of institutions to fully implement competency-based curricula. The findings therefore support the argument that vocational education infrastructure is not merely physical but directly linked to training quality, institutional capacity, and graduate preparedness.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the evolution of Catholic Vocational Training Centres (CVTCs) in the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province between 1970 and 2023. The findings indicate that these institutions have undergone significant but uneven transformation, evolving from mission-driven centres focused on moral formation and basic technical skills into hybrid institutions that integrate vocational training, employability skills, and holistic Catholic education. This shift has been shaped by labour market pressures, educational reforms, and

technological change, which collectively redefined institutional priorities toward competency-based and more market-relevant training.

Despite these advances, the effectiveness of reforms remains constrained by persistent infrastructural limitations, inadequate practical training facilities, and uneven institutional capacity. Curriculum modernization and pedagogical innovation have improved the relevance of training, particularly through ICT integration and competency-based approaches, but these gains are not fully matched by corresponding improvements in implementation conditions. As a result, CVTCs continue to reflect a dual institutional identity, balancing economic imperatives with moral and spiritual formation.

Overall, the study concludes that institutional change within CVTCs is better understood as adaptive rather than linear, reflecting an ongoing negotiation between global TVET expectations and the enduring values of Catholic education. From a policy perspective, the most critical priorities are strengthening curriculum–industry linkages to ensure relevance, investing in core vocational infrastructure such as laboratories and workshops to support practical learning, enhancing teacher capacity through continuous professional development and industry exposure, and maintaining the holistic formation model while aligning it with contemporary skills demands.

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