

Lessons from the United States: Improving Accreditation and Quality Assurance in CEMAC Higher Education

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Abstract: This study compares higher education accreditation and quality assurance systems in the United States (U.S.) and Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) countries, highlighting the potential for selective adaptation of the U.S. model to improve the CEMAC higher education landscape. A comparative policy analysis approach was used, which included legal texts, policy documents, reports, and scientific publications from CEMAC higher education organisations and subregional entities as well as U.S. government and accreditation bodies. The data reveals that the U.S. system excels in financial stability, openness, and constant quality improvement, while CEMAC countries, on the other hand, confront obstacles as a result of weak legislative frameworks, varying accrediting requirements, and limited financial resources. Higher education institutions in CEMAC could enhance their credibility and performance by adopting U.S. standards, such as expedited accreditation procedures and enhanced regulatory monitoring, while also taking into account the unique challenges of their respective countries.

Keywords: Accreditation, Quality Assurance, Higher Education Reform, CEMAC Subregion, Authorisation.

Introduction

Rising costs associated with higher education and increased scrutiny of the value of an academic degree are now being influenced by a decrease in public perception of its value, financial constraints, declining enrolment rates and the complexities of marketing (Clark, Selingo, and Cluver 2023). The above constraints collectively highlight a noticeable absence of continuous and extensive research into the foundational principles that shape contemporary higher education, from incorporating pre-existing knowledge systems, developing critical thinking skills, promoting metacognition and self-regulated learning, providing ample practice opportunities, recognising student diversity and fostering an environment conducive to learning, promotion of critical consciousness, dialogic teaching strategies, problem-posing education, and individual empowerment (Ambrose et al. 2010; Hutchings, Huber, and Ciccone 2011). This work draws attention to the CEMAC subregion in the areas of authorisation, quality assurance and accreditation processes, which is at the crossroads, as it faces several obstacles and prospects for improving and restructuring its higher education system(s). With specific reference to the U.S. model, the review identifies possible policy adjustments and strategic headways that may be adapted to the unique socioeconomic and cultural setting of CEMAC member states. While recognising the disparities in available financial and human resources that may exist between the U.S. and CEMAC countries, the study invites the latter to selectively adapt programs and processes that have been successful in the U.S. programmes to their own context and setting, and preferably funded using local finances to avoid the dependence and limits often imposed by foreign borrowing. Consequently, this analysis is not another effort to legitimise the Bretton Woods institutions' liberalisation practises, which has traditionally resulted in unfavourable outcomes, largely due to the attached conditionalities that often fail to consider the unique circumstances of the recipient African countries, a situation exacerbated when the policies are shaped by neocolonial interests and funded by external sources that restrict autonomy over the use of the funds. The study rather argues in favour of policy transfer and adaptation, synonymous to internationalisation at home by comparing the higher education authorisation, accreditation, and quality assurance systems in CEMAC countries to that of the U.S.

Methods

The approach used in tackling the subject matter can be described as the "Comparative Policy Analysis" intended to ascertain optimal practices, areas requiring enhancement, and distinctive obstacles encountered by the systems being compared. Through document analysis, legal texts, policy papers and official reports that are relevant to higher education policies in both CEMAC countries and the U.S. were thoroughly scrutinized. Comparative policy analysis is a well-recognised approach in social science research, especially in disciplines such as public policy, education, political science, and sociology, the development of which is not attributable to a single scholar but rather has evolved through the contributions of multiple experts over time, amongst which are trailblazers such as Talcott Parsons and Max Weber in the field of sociology, George Bereday and Joseph Lauwerys in the domain of comparative education. Comparative policy analysis provided a strong framework for studying higher education policies, characterised by its in-depth approach to data collection, nuanced comprehension of contextual variations, and meticulous multi-layered analysis encompassing policy, structural, and impact evaluations. This guaranteed diligence and dependability in the results while also tailoring the knowledge to the distinct socioeconomic and cultural circumstances of the CEMAC subregion and the U.S. Nevertheless, the approach suffered from the obscurity of handling varied data sets, the possibility of making broad generalisations across various educational systems, and potential biases in the selection and interpretation of data. Effectively addresses the inherent limitations typically associated with comparative research. Extensive literature review was conducted, involving an array of sources such as materials from the websites of the United States Department of Education (USDE), Pennsylvania State Department of Education (PDE), and the Council for Higher

Education Accreditation (CHEA). The review additionally incorporated data from constitutions, the Ministries of Higher Education and other relevant government websites in CEMAC countries, in addition to education sector reports from the World Bank, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and Education Cannot Wait. Analysis included authorisation, accreditation, and quality assurance processes, enrolment statistics, graduation rates, financial frameworks and academic accomplishments in both CEMAC and the United States. Various sources, including policy-relevant documents from each country and constitutional materials accessed through electronic databases, current high impact journal articles, and book chapters from the University of Pittsburgh’s online library, supported the analysis.

U.S. authorization and accreditation

The process of granting the right to operate for higher education institutions to operate in the U.S. dates back to the formation of individual states (Paulsen 2018), while accreditation has a more recent history of just over a century, “emerging from concerns to protect public health and safety and to serve the public interest” (Eaton 2015, 1). CHEA (2023) highlights that authorization and accreditation are synonymous in the U.S. and have shared obligations between states and the federal government. Authorization is carried out by states, while accreditation involves participation from various stakeholders including state governments, higher education institutions, accrediting organizations, recognition bodies, students, families, and the general public. This process entails self and peer review, site visits, evaluation by accrediting organizations and periodic external assessments. The CHEA (2023) further states that the importance of authorization and accreditation in educational institutions. Authorization signifies that institutions meet state-set criteria, while accreditation signifies academic excellence. In most states, authorization can be granted independently of accreditation. The National Centre for Education Statistics (2023) highlights the significance of establishing authorization and accreditation standards for quality assurance and improvement. The analysis focuses on Pennsylvania, a state within the U.S. authorization and accreditation system, discussing accreditation at both state and federal levels. This simplifies the literature and allows comparisons to countries within the CEMAC subregion.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

The process of authorization is a mandatory requirement for the establishment of any higher education institution within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The obligation in question is included under Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code, which relates to matters concerning education. Therefore, the regulatory framework governing postsecondary institutions in Pennsylvania may be described as multifaceted, since it covers several aspects such as authorization, governance, accreditation and student advocacy. This system is designed to guarantee that educational institutions maintain rigorous standards in both curriculum and governance, thereby enhancing the overall quality of higher education within the state. PDE assumes responsibility in the supervision and regulation of postsecondary educational institutions, which includes colleges, universities and seminaries. The job of the PDE equally includes regulatory oversight, establishment of governance frameworks, monitoring of academic records and implementation of protocols for handling student grievances. The process of obtaining licence to operate is subject to certain regulations that apply to all postsecondary institutions in Pennsylvania. Institutions are required to comply with reporting obligations and, depending on their characteristics, may be obligated to get clearance for the implementation of new programmes (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023). Chapter 40, Subpart C, Part I of the Pennsylvania Code delineates a comprehensive and complex structure that governs the process of authorization for higher education institutions within the state. Table 1 below presents a summarizes the principal divisions under Chapter 40 of the Pennsylvania Code whilst emphasizing the extensive legislative structure governing the authorisation and supervision of higher education establishments in Pennsylvania.

Table 1. Comprehensive chapter 40 analysis: Pennsylvania higher education institutional authorization criteria

Section	Title	Key points and description
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Preliminary provisions		
§ 40.1	Scope	Sets the scope for the chapter, applicable to the authorization of various types of institutions including independent colleges, state-related and state-aided institutions. Emphasizes foundational criteria like mission and financial stability.
§ 40.2	Statement of Philosophy, Mission, and Need	Requires institutions to submit a detailed statement of philosophy and objectives, demonstrating their mission alignment with educational needs of the Commonwealth and avoiding program duplication.
§ 40.3	Financial Stability	Institutions must demonstrate financial viability, including a projection of income and expenditures, and a report on financial operations for existing institutions.
§ 40.4	Applicability	Clarifies the applicability of the chapter's provisions to different types of institutions, including foreign corporations and nonprofit institutions.
Eligibility for State System Status		
§ 40.11	Mission and Governance	Specifies requirements for an institution's mission and governance, aligning with the State System's Board of Governors' policies.
§ 40.12	Programmatic Information	Requires detailed descriptions of all offered programs and staff qualifications.
§ 40.13	Fiscal Information	Institutions must provide financial reports, including revenue and expenditure comparisons.
§ 40.14	[Reserved]	-
Eligibility for State-Related/State-Aided Status		
§ 40.21 - § 40.26	Various Requirements	Cover requirements for state-related and state-aided institutions, including mission statements, board composition, and programmatic information. Emphasizes the provision for Commonwealth residents and the development of articulation agreements.
Application and Evaluation		
§ 40.41 - § 40.46	Various Application and Evaluation Procedures	Describes application procedures and evaluation criteria for approval of different institution types. Involves committee review assessing various aspects like mission, financial resources, and program offerings.
Approval		
§ 40.51 - § 40.57	Approval Procedures for Various Institution Types	Details authorization process for independent colleges, universities, professional schools, and state system/status institutions. Focuses on compliance with academic standards, financial stability, and ongoing adherence to state educational policies and standards.

Source: *Pennsylvania Code changes effective through 53 Pa.B. 5486 (August 26, 2023).*

The first provisions (Sections 40.1-40.4) delineate the jurisdiction and extent of applicability, including a diverse array of educational institutions such as independent junior colleges, colleges, seminaries, universities and state-affiliated schools. The Commonwealth's commitment to ensuring alignment with the state's educational goals and demonstrating fiscal responsibility and long-term viability is evident through its emphasis on a clear mission statement, financial stability and compliance with relevant statutes. These conditions are essential in guaranteeing that institutions have the capacity to provide high-quality education while maintaining financial viability. The criteria for determining eligibility for State System Status, as outlined in sections 40.11 to 40.14 include the alignment of the institution's purpose and governance with the principles set out by the Board of Governors of the State System, as well as the provision of comprehensive

programmatic and budgetary information. This alignment guarantees that the institutions maintain the educational standards and governance principles that are considered crucial by the educational authorities of the state. Through the implementation of comprehensive programmatic and budgetary requirements, the state effectively guarantees that these institutions possess not only a strong educational foundation but also a solid financial standing, therefore enabling them to operate sustainably. The criteria for determining eligibility for State-Related and State-Aided status, as outlined in sections 40.21 to 40.33 touches on several aspects such as the alignment of the institution's purpose, the membership of its board and the specifics of its programmes. One notable characteristic of this institution is its focus on catering to the needs of Commonwealth inhabitants, which demonstrates a public dedication to ensuring that higher education is both accessible and relevant to the state's populace. The presence of articulation agreements signifies a concerted effort to promote collaboration and facilitate the transfer of credits, bolstering the interconnection and effectiveness of the educational environment.

The section of the text titled "Application and Evaluation" (sections 40.41-40.46) stipulates that application and evaluation procedures are characterised by a meticulous and thorough process, which includes a full assessment conducted by a specifically chosen committee. This examination goes beyond simple paperwork by including on-site assessments, therefore guaranteeing a comprehensive evaluation of the institution's capacities, resources, and compliance with academic criteria. The aforementioned procedure highlights the need of a comprehensive assessment in maintaining elevated educational standards. Authorization is a significant aspect that is discussed in sections 40.51 to 40.57. The sections on authorization stresses the importance of adhering to academic conventions, complying with the standards set out by the Board, and abiding by relevant legislation. The comprehensive examination of permission, taking into account different kinds of institutions, illustrates the state's adaptable but rigorous standards for guaranteeing educational excellence. The inclusion of measures for sustained adherence and the possibility of rescinding the authority to confer degrees underscore the state's commitment to upholding consistent excellence in the realm of higher education. Therefore, the framework presented in Chapter 40 of the Pennsylvania Code demonstrates a well-rounded strategy that accommodates many kinds of institutions while still enforcing rigorous criteria that are essential for preserving the integrity and quality of higher education within the state. Furthermore, it is essential for higher education institutions to regularly produce reports that adhere to established criteria and financial prerequisites in order to maintain their operational status.

Table 2. Synopsis of authorization process and fees for postsecondary institutions in Pennsylvania

Requirement/Process	Details	Fees
Reporting Requirements	Submit reports on English fluency of instructors, gifts, sexual violence awareness training, campus crime, graduation rates and program offerings.	N/A
Registration for Out-of-State Distance Education	Voluntary registration for out-of-state providers enrolling Pennsylvania residents. Non-SARA participants.	\$5,000
Authorisation for Out-of-State Institutions	Required for those seeking to establish a location in Pennsylvania and must be approved as an Education Enterprise. Renewal every five years.	Initial: \$10,000; Renewal: \$2,000
Establishing a New Institution	Required for any institution offering programs for academic credit or a degree in Pennsylvania. No religious exemption.	\$5,000
Minimum Requirements for Degree-Granting Institution	Must comply with 24 Pa. C.S.A. § 6502(b). Requirements include a minimum endowment, faculty specifications, and adherence to certain regulations (22 Pa. Code Chapters 31, 36, 40, 42).	-
Program Approval (Act 69 of 2012)	Accredited not-for-profit institutions operating in Pennsylvania for over 10 years are exempt. Others must obtain approval for new degree programs (22 Pa. Code Chapter 42).	\$1,400 (if not exempted)
Use of "College," "University," "Seminary" in Names	Approval required for using these words in corporate names or fictitious names.	\$100

University Status Application	Approval required for changing status (e.g., from college to university) or establishing a new institution.	\$1,000
Changes to Articles of Incorporation	Submit cover letter, evidence of Board of Trustees' approval, current and revised Articles of Incorporation. Must be published in the PA Bulletin for 30 days.	-

Source: Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2023

Table 2 above provides a methodical abstract of the essential procedures and corresponding expenses that schools must undertake in order to function as postsecondary education providers in Pennsylvania. Chapter 741a of the Pennsylvania Code refers to the State Authorisation Reciprocity Agreement (SARA), which has considerable importance in the authorisation of higher education institutions in Pennsylvania, particularly those that provide distance education.

In accordance with Section 741a.1, the following are the provided definitions: The chapter starts by providing explicit definitions for key terminologies, including “remote education”, “postsecondary institution” and “SARA”. The meanings provided are fundamental in understanding the extent and implementation of the chapter. The concept of “distance education” is broad, including a range of remote instructional methods, while specifically excluding some kinds of synchronous video training conducted inside the same geographical area. The differentiation between various educational delivery techniques is crucial in order to clearly define the categories of instructional approaches that fall within the purview of SARA rules

The membership of the SARA in Pennsylvania is outlined in sections 741a.11 and 741a.12 of the relevant legislation. These sections provide specific information on Pennsylvania’s involvement in both the regional compact and SARA. The state’s association with the Southern Regional Education Board has considerable importance in allowing the interstate provision of remote education. The Department of Education functions as the designated agency for the SARA, highlighting the state’s commitment to upholding national benchmarks in the area of remote education. Institutional involvement in the SARA is outlined in Section 741a.13. This section mandates that institutions must submit yearly applications and ensure that their data aligns with the Federal Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. This method guarantees that institutions providing remote education conform to a standardised set of criteria, so easing the delivery of education beyond state boundaries.

The pricing structure for postsecondary schools to participate in SARA is detailed in Section 741a.21. This structure is determined by the money generated from distant education tuition at the university. The implementation of a tiered fee structure is a means by which an institution may align the financial contributions of its remote education operations with the volume of its offerings in this domain. This approach ensures that the fees paid by the institution are commensurate with the extent of its distance education programmes. The non-refundable nature of fees and the yearly renewal requirement are reiterated in Sections 741a.22 and 741a.23, emphasising the ongoing commitment that institutions must maintain in order to continue their participation in SARA. Section § 741a.24 stipulates the designated commencement date of these fees, providing a well-defined schedule for institutions to adhere to.

In brief, Chapter 741a provides evidence of Pennsylvania’s adherence to national standards for distance education by virtue of its involvement in the SARA. This chapter provides a systematic approach for schools within a particular state to effectively provide distance education services to students residing in other states, while assuring compliance with established quality and regulatory benchmarks. The state’s dedication to ensuring distant education is of high quality, easily accessible and standardised is evident via the incorporation of explicit definitions, well-defined membership criteria and a transparent cost structure.

Accreditation in PA

As previously mentioned, the responsibility of accreditation in the United States is not limited only to state governments. Hence, it should be noted that PDE does not possess the authority to officially provide accreditation to public postsecondary schools. In contrast, the granting of accreditation is carried out by entities that have been duly acknowledged by the USDE (2023). Chapter 52 of the Pennsylvania Code delineates the laws and protocols governing the accreditation of organisations, as mandated by the State Board of Education. This chapter assumes a vital role in comprehending the underlying structure to the accrediting process of privately-owned educational institutions within the state of Pennsylvania.

Table 3. Pennsylvania code chapter 52 accrediting organisation policies and procedures

Section	Title	Description
§ 52.1	Purpose	Outlines the chapter's objective to detail the State Board of Education's policies regarding applications by accrediting organisations under the Private Academic Schools Act.
§ 52.2	Process	Describes the Department's role in administering the application process for accrediting organisations and making recommendations to the State Board, with the final decision resting with the State Board.
§ 52.3	Application	Details the requirements for an application for approval as an accrediting organisation, including staffing, operations, accreditation criteria and other relevant information.
§ 52.4	Reporting	Mandates annual reporting by accrediting organisations on their activities and immediate reporting on changes in accreditation status of educational institutions, ensuring transparency and ongoing monitoring.
§ 52.5	Renewal	Explains the accreditation authority's expiration every five years, with renewal requiring a self-study, evaluation, and plan of action, ensuring that accrediting organisations continue to meet required standards over time.

Source: Pennsylvania Code changes effective through 53 Pa.B. 5486 (August 26, 2023)

The challenges arising from accreditation within the education system in the United States mostly centre on the presence and activities of entities often referred to as “degree mills” and “accreditation mills”. These entities pose a threat to the integrity of higher education by capitalising on deception and providing fraudulent academic credentials. Degree mills basically denote institutions that provide academic degrees and certificates without respect for established educational processes. These credentials are often not acknowledged or accepted by reputable educational institutions and companies, leading to a situation where students allocate their time and money towards acquiring credentials that fail to provide the desired educational or professional benefits. Accreditation mills, in contrast, purport to provide certification for schools without a legitimate foundation, thereby deceiving students on the academic rigour of the courses they may be contemplating. Both degree mills and accreditation mills have a role in diminishing the value of genuine academic accomplishments and may have wider social repercussions by decreasing confidence in the educational system. In an effort to address these concerns, the educational landscape in the United States tries to provide tools that may mitigate these issues. One such resource is the databases maintained by CHEA and USDE, which compile comprehensive lists of properly accredited schools and programmes. The use of databases plays a crucial role in the process of validating the legitimacy of educational offers. However, it is still incumbent upon students and employers to actively pursue this information in order to safeguard themselves from deceptive organisations. Despite the combined efforts of governmental and corporate entities to provide information to the general public, the burden of determining the authenticity of educational institutions and accrediting organisations often rests with the individual. The persistent difficulty is further exacerbated by the regular alterations in the functioning of mills and the corresponding knowledge accessible pertaining to them. CHEA and USDE provide recommendations and indicators to facilitate the identification of diploma mills. These indicators include the absence of legitimate accreditation, inadequate academic standards and the option to buy degrees.

Employers are confronted with the task of validating the authenticity of educational qualifications provided by their workers or prospective candidates. This issue is tackled by the use of services such as the National Student Clearing House, which provides degree verification, as well as the resources provided by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the U.S. Department of Labour, which are specifically intended to assist in the identification of counterfeit degrees. At the state level, a distinction is made between state approval and accreditation, where the former does not always entail the latter. States such as California, Oregon and Minnesota provide comprehensive data about recognised degree mills and accreditation mills. Additionally, states like Oregon and Michigan maintain listings of non-accredited educational institutions and accrediting bodies that lack official approval. Furthermore, several states have implemented restrictions and legislation as a means to address the widespread existence of mills. Globally, there exists a concern over the perception of educational standards in the United States, since the presence of unaccredited educational institutions may negatively impact the reputation of authentic U.S. degrees and accreditation on an international scale. USDE's National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation (NCFMEA) and the United States Network for Education Information (USNEI) provide materials aimed at aiding foreign organisations in comprehending and evaluating the accreditation status of activities conducted inside the United States. While the above mechanisms exist to detect and endorse valid certification, the enduring presence of degree and accreditation mills presents ongoing difficulties to higher education in the U.S. To safeguard the integrity of higher education and its societal worth, it is essential for students, educators, employers and government entities to engage in continuous education, remain vigilant and undertake verification processes.

Federal level accreditation in the U.S.

At the federal level, USDE and CHEA serve as prominent proponents for the practise of self-regulation in maintaining academic standards through the process of certification. CHEA, for instance, comprises a network of 3,000 higher education institutions that confer degrees, as well as acknowledges the accreditation of 60 organisations responsible for evaluating the quality of institutions and academic programmes. According to CHEA, the principal objective of accreditation is to establish a minimum standard of quality in higher education and to facilitate continuous improvement in educational institutions and programmes. The 2013 CHEA Almanack of External Quality Review provides an in-depth analysis of the many roles and responsibilities that exist within the accrediting domain. The process of accreditation involves a substantial number of higher education institutions and courses, over 7,800 in total. Among these institutions, around 63% are authorised to confer degrees, while almost half of them operate as non-profit entities.

Table 4. 2013 CHEA almanac of external quality review

Aspect	Details
Total Institutions	More than 7,800
Degree-Granting Institutions	63% (associate degree or above)
Non-Degree Institutions	37%
Non-profit Institutions	49%*
For-Profit Institutions	47%*
Total Programs	More than 22,000
Institutions with Unspecified Control	271 institutions not indicated
Review Process	Based on accrediting standards
Self-Study	Undertaken by institutions based on standards
Peer Review	Includes site visits and team reports
Decision Making Commissions	Affirm, reaffirm, or deny accreditation
Review Cycles	Ranging from a few years to every 10 years
Federal and State Funds Requirement	Necessary for access
Private Sector Support Basis	For decisions on tuition assistance, charitable giving, research
Credit Transfer	Eases transfer of credits among institutions

Aspect	Details
Quality Assurance for Public	Accreditation is the primary means
Federal Funds Eligibility	Must be accredited by a recognized organization
State Licensure Requirements	Graduation from accredited institutions often required
Quality Assurance and Improvement	About assuring and improving quality in education
Government Funding Relationship	Complex, especially regarding funding
Accreditation Value	Assures quality, aids government and private sector decisions
Recognition of Accrediting Organisations	Based on specific set of standards

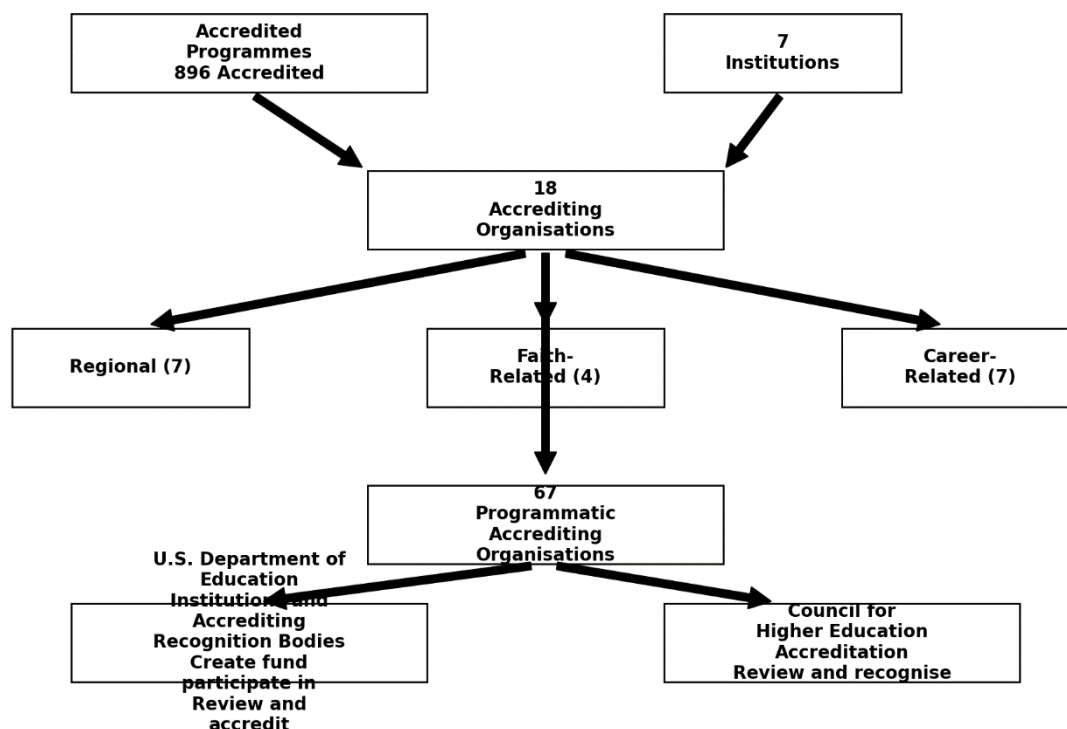
Source: CHEA, 2013

Out of the total number of certified institutions, namely 271, it has not been specified or suggested whether institutional control is in place. Table 3 provides a concise overview of accreditation, including the participating institutions and programmes, the certification procedures they undertake, and the ramifications of accreditation on financial accessibility and quality assurance. There are a total of 85 accrediting organisations, which are independent nonprofit organisations that originated from the higher education industry rather than being government entities. These agencies have the responsibility of certifying a diverse array of institutions, including public and private colleges, institutions with religious affiliations, career-oriented institutions and specialised courses. The primary sources of funding for these accrediting organisations are derived from yearly membership fees, costs associated with accreditation visits and sporadic financial assistance from sponsoring corporations, government bodies and private foundations. Accreditation serves various functions, surrounding the assurance of quality for students and the general public, the requirement for obtaining federal and state funds, the influence it exerts on decisions made by the private sector, the facilitation of credit transfer and the provision of information regarding the standing of U.S. institutions within both domestic and international contexts. Recognition agencies, such as CHEA and USDE, play a vital role in the educational landscape. Academic institutions engage in a rigorous examination of accrediting bodies to verify their compliance with predetermined criteria, consequently safeguarding and augmenting the calibre of educational establishments and curricula. Accreditation serves as a crucial criterion used by the federal government to assess eligibility for financial resources, whilst state governments often mandate accreditation for the purposes of licencing and financing. USDE (2023) states that “the goal of accreditation is to ensure that education provided by institutions of higher education meets acceptable levels of quality.”

To oversee higher education quality, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) relies on accrediting agencies (accreditors). Only institutions and programs accredited by a federally recognized accreditor can provide students with access to federal student aid, including Pell Grants and student loans. Periodically, a subset of the more than 60 federally recognized accreditors come up for review by ED and the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI). When the ED requests federal recognition applications, the accreditor recognition process begins. Once recognized, NACIQI reviews each accreditor at least every five years and meets twice a year to review agencies and advise ED. Accreditors then submit applications, demonstrating compliance with the Secretary of Education's Criteria for Recognition. Following this, the ED announces the NACIQI meeting several months in advance and invites public comment. ED staff reviews the applications, public comments, and other relevant information to assess each accreditor's compliance, producing a preliminary draft report. The ED then sends this draft report to the accreditors, who have 30 days to respond and may provide additional documentation to demonstrate compliance. NACIQI, the accreditors, and the public receive the final staff recommendations compiled by ED. NACIQI holds a meeting where ED, accreditors, and public commenters provide input, and NACIQI makes separate recommendations for each accreditor to review. A senior ED official makes the final recognition decision, considering both staff and NACIQI recommendations within 90 days of the meeting. Accreditors can appeal the decision to the Secretary of Education within 10 days and have 30 days to file the appeal, but the Secretary has no deadline to decide its decision (US Department of Education (USDE), 2023).

The requirements for accreditation are comprehensive, including several aspects such as student performance, curriculum excellence, teacher credentials, facilities, financial capability and student support services. The significance of certification in maintaining elevated educational standards, guaranteeing financial support and enabling academic and professional mobility is emphasised by this all-encompassing assessment system.

Figure 1. Relationship between accrediting bodies, institutions, and recognition bodies



Source: CHEA, 2023

The table above presents a comprehensive list of 896 officially acknowledged programmes and 7 educational establishments, overseen by 18 accrediting organisations. These include regional bodies, faith-based authorities, and career-related bodies. There are also 67 programmatic-accrediting organisations involved. USDE and CHEA, ensuring their adherence to specified standards. This framework facilitates the process of accrediting, funding, and regulating educational institutions and programs. USDE supervises institutions and accrediting bodies, while CHEA conducts independent evaluations and grants recognition.

Authorization and accreditation in CEMAC countries

Despite 78% literacy rates (“Adult literacy rate is the percentage of people ages 15 and above who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement about their everyday life”) seen in Cameroon as of 2020, 81% in the Republic of the Congo as of 2021, 86 % in Gabon as of 2022 and 94% in Equatorial Guinea as far back 2010 (World Bank 2023a; 2023b), it is remarkable that the CEMAC subregion still has a very low level of educational development compared to other parts of Africa and the world. The severity of the problem is such that several CEMAC countries, such as Chad, lack even an official website for their respective ministry of higher education. The ministry disseminates its information mostly via its official Facebook page. The limited availability of data on higher education in a majority of CEMAC countries underlines the need for this research. The available data on higher education policy is mostly structured according to individual countries, with a limited number of common regulations at the subregional level.

Cameroon

Cameroon, arguably, has the largest and most advanced higher education sector in the CEMAC subregion. The majority of the students from Chad, CAR, and even Gabon and the Republic of the Congo attend university in Cameroon. Legal advancements that have recently taken place in

Cameroon represent a landmark in the historical evolution of the country's higher education system (Ngalame 2023). This has culminated in the formal acknowledgment of both the Anglo-Saxon and Francophone subsystems of public university education, signifying a paradigm shift that profoundly influences the approval, authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance processes of Cameroonian HEIs. Public HEIs are created by Ministerial or Presidential decree and receive automatic accreditation for all their programmes directly under MINESUP, as per order N° 93/026 DU 19 JANVIER 1993. Private HEIs, on the other hand, must navigate a more complex accreditation process. They must receive authorisation from both the Commission *Nationale de l'Enseignement Supérieur Privé* (CNESP) and MINESUP, as outlined in order N° 01/0096/MINESUP of December 7, 2001. Despite this authorisation, private HEIs cannot award their own degrees but must operate under the “*Tutelle académique*” or mentorship of a state university, which then awards the final degree, ensuring conformity and quality of studies. According to the new Law no. 2023/007 of July 25th, 2023, approval is defined as the “authorisation granted to higher education institution to function autonomously, with the exception of issuing certificates,” and authorization to open is defined as “approval granted by the Ministry in charge of higher education to a private higher education institution to provide training in specific fields” (Presidency of the Republic 2023, 4-5). On the contrary, quality assurance is a term that refers to the systematic approach including many tactics, behaviours and attitudes aimed at maintaining and enhancing the overall quality of a product or service. The legislation provides definitions for many applicable terminology, such as certification, quality assurance system, course accreditation, supervisory authority, university accreditation, validation of acquired experience (VAE), subsystem and credit as detailed below (Presidency of the Republic 2023, 5-7).

Table 6. Summary of laws on higher education in Cameroon

Term	Definition
Approval	Authorisation granted to a higher education institution to function autonomously, except for issuing certificates.
Authorisation to open	Approval granted by the Minister of higher education to a private institution for specific field training.
Board member	Member of a university Board, participating in the institution's administration.
Certification	Official confirmation of training program completion, obtainable through various means.
Course accreditation	Recognition of a training programme's effective and regular functioning.
Professionalisation	Set of rules and processes for training and awarding employment-oriented certifications.
Quality Assurance system	Process to ensure students attain an institution's standards.
Quality Assurance	Strategies and actions to maintain and improve quality.
Supervisory authority	State's power to define, guide, and assess policy in the higher education sector.
University accreditation	State's recognition of the quality, organisation, and social function of an educational institution.
University-business	Status of a higher education institution in the entrepreneurship sector.
Validation of acquired experience	Process to acquire university certification based on professional experience.
Validation of learning outcomes	Assessment of an individual's achievement of learning objectives without assuming participation in a training programme.

Source: (Presidency of the Republic 2023)

A noticeable feature of the new law is the unrivalled position of the Cameroonian body politic as stated in Chapter 1, Section 4, and Article 3 that “the State shall organise the higher education system.” This top-down approach to higher education management in Cameroon is further channelled through the Minister in charge of higher education, who is responsible for granting permission for higher education institutions to function. This emphasises the government's role in overseeing both public and private higher education, ensuring alignment with national educational standards and priorities. The new law also introduces a quality assurance system and a process for quality assurance, highlighting the importance of continuous evaluation and improvement in higher

education institutions. This system is not just about meeting minimum standards but involves a continuous effort to enhance the quality of education across the sector in Cameroon. In effect, the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission is created and designated to assist the Minister in charge of higher education in accreditation and quality assurance processes. Despite the considerable advancements that have been achieved, it is important to point out that stakeholders still need to consistently work hard in order to overcome challenges resulting from administrative bottlenecks and bureaucratic red tape that continue to beset higher education in Cameroon.

Republic of Chad

A significant change in Chad's post-secondary education system occurred in the 2006/07 academic year with the shift to the license-master-doctor (LMD) system. Admission to first-level university programmes in Chad requires a *Baccalauréat*, a reflection of the French influence on the country's education system (Bulder 2007). These programmes typically span two years and lead to the *Diplôme d'Études Universitaires Générales* (DEUG) in arts, humanities, law, and management, or the *Diplôme Universitaire d'Études Scientifiques* (DUES) for science students. The DEUG and DUES programmes were replaced with a 4-year licence and a 4-year professional licence. This transition was a part of a broader movement in many African countries to harmonise their higher education systems with international norms (Bloom et al. 2014). Graduate education in Chad includes a one-year *Maîtrise et Maîtrise Professionnelle*, followed by doctoral programmes requiring three years of research. While there is relatively little material on the subject of authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance, it is possible that the promotion of global educational benchmarks and the prioritisation of thorough assessment and analysis in Chad might potentially incentivise higher education institutions to implement more rigorous internal quality assurance measures, therefore conforming to globally recognised benchmarks, particularly those set by the Bologna Process in the European Higher Education Area (Curaj, Deca, and Pricopie 2018). In addition to academic routes, Chad also offers vocational and technical post-secondary education. These programmes are typically two years in length, leading to the *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur* (BTS). Admission to these programmes also requires a *Baccalauréat*, either the *Baccalauréat de Technicien* or a general *Baccalauréat* (Global Education Cluster, 2018). The inclusion of these vocational tracks highlights the importance of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in developing countries, as emphasised in global educational development discussions (World Bank 2016).

A classic example is the agreement that delineates the formation and functioning of the American International School of N'Djamena (AISN) in Chad (Government of the United States of America & Government of the Republic of Chad 2007). This educational institution is the result of a cooperative effort between the governments of the United States and Chad. This document, which has been in force since April 6, 2007, offers an analysis of the structure of authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance in higher education in Chad. In relation to educational programming and accreditation, it should be noted that AISN was originally established with the primary objective of providing educational services for children in the pre-school and grades 1-8 age range. The management of the programme was required to comply with the regulations set by the educational accrediting agencies in the United States, as well as the guidelines established by the Department of State's Office of International Schools (Article 1). This demonstrates a dedication to upholding global educational standards, hence guaranteeing the provision of high-quality education at AISN. The legal and operational dimensions of AISN are equally crucial. The educational institution was bestowed with legal personality in accordance with the laws of Chad and was obligated to adhere to both domestic and global norms, as stated in Article 1. The simultaneous commitment to both local legal obligations and worldwide educational standards highlights the significance of incorporating local legal requirements into global educational standards, which is a crucial element of ensuring quality assurance in international schools. The

management structure of AISN, as delineated in the agreement, is noteworthy due to its strong focus on principles of governance and integrity. The operations of AISN are overseen by a School Board, consisting of members chosen by the U.S. Ambassador and other members elected by the community. AISN functions as a non-profit organisation, as stated in Article 2. The implementation of this governance model plays a crucial role in upholding the educational standards and ensuring operational transparency inside the school. The personnel policies implemented by AISN are crucial in safeguarding the standard of education. The recruitment of teaching and administrative personnel at the school encompasses both foreign and local candidates, and their pay and benefits are funded by the school's budget, as stated in Article 4. The implementation of this staffing strategy is of utmost importance in order to effectively recruit and retain a highly skilled workforce, which plays a pivotal role in maintaining the educational superiority of the institution. The agreement further confers upon AISN a range of exemptions and advantages pertaining to taxes, customs charges, and imports, hence enhancing its operational efficiency and financial sustainability (Article 5). The aforementioned requirements are crucial for ensuring the continuous operation of the educational institution. Ultimately, the agreement has provisions pertaining to the cessation and perpetuation of benefits. According to Article 7, it is specified that AISN will retain the agreed exemptions until its full liquidation upon termination. This provision serves to guarantee a certain level of operational stability and continuity for the educational institution.

Gabon

The 1991 Gabonese Constitution, with amendments in 2011, has a range of provisions addressing higher education, including matters such as authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance (Constitute 2011). The system exhibits notable features stemming from its French colonial heritage, including extensive government participation, considerable financial investment, well-defined educational trajectories and a willingness to engage in global academic collaboration. The increasing emphasis on specialised disciplines may be seen as a reaction to the changing global and national demands, therefore establishing the higher education sector in Gabon as a dynamic and flexible entity. Gabon hosts a variety of higher education institutions, including Omar Bongo University, the University of Sciences and Technologies of Masuku, the Health Sciences Medical School, the International Centre of Medical Research of Franceville, the Forestry National School in Libreville, the National School of Law, the Higher School of Education, the Secretary Learning National School, the Polytechnic Engineering School of Masuku, the African Institute of Computer Science, the Business National Institute, the Institute of Economics and Finance, and the National Administration School.

According to the Harmonisation, Quality Assurance and Accreditation) initiative (HAQAA 2023), Gabon is actively participating in initiatives to synchronise accreditation and quality assurance procedures. The HAQAA Initiative, financed by the European Union and the African Union, aims to establish a unified system for ensuring quality and accreditation at various levels, including institutional, national, regional, and Pan-African levels. This initiative has involved numerous African regional and national organisations operating in the sector. The primary objective is to establish a unique, appealing, and internationally competitive African higher education sphere through strengthened intra-African cooperation. The Bologna Process has influenced efforts to ensure quality and accreditation in Europe. Stakeholders have identified challenges and pathways for quality and accreditation during conferences and workshops, including one in Libreville, Gabon. The African Union Commission has collaborated with UNESCO to streamline the process of endorsing the Addis Ababa Convention, which aims to acknowledge and validate academic credentials within the higher education sector in Africa. The African Union Commission has also supported the development of a continental Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF). Nevertheless, absence of information on the precise procedures for accrediting higher education institutions and the systems in place to ensure their quality in Gabon and even within the wider CEMAC stresses the importance of this study.

CAR

Article 9 of the constitution of CAR discusses the topics of higher education authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance (Constitute 2017). The principle affirms that every person possesses the entitlement to avail themselves of knowledge resources, and the government ensures access to education, cultural experiences, and vocational training. Education and teaching can be offered by both public and private institutions. Private businesses are permitted to operate with state licence and must adhere to legally specified requirements. These enterprises are likewise subject to state oversight. Additionally, the document states that the state and other public institutions have a duty to establish and guarantee the effective operation of public institutions for the education and instruction of young people. It also specifies that education in these public institutions is provided free of charge at different educational levels. According to the text, Article 9 of the special statute states as shown below.

- Every person possesses the entitlement to avail themselves of sources of information.
- Every person is ensured by the state to have access to education, cultural experiences, and vocational training.
- Education and teaching can be offered by both public and private institutions.
- Private institutions can function with the state's authorisation, according to requirements specified by law, and are subject to official oversight.
- Parents have a legal obligation to ensure that their children get education and guidance until they reach the age of sixteen, at minimum.
- The state and other public institutions are responsible for establishing and ensuring the effective operation of public educational institutions for the teaching and development of young individuals.
- Public educational institutions offer tuition-free education at several levels.

In general, the aforementioned laws demonstrate a holistic perspective towards education in the Central African Republic, placing importance on factors such as accessibility, quality assurance and the collaborative functions of both public and private educational institutions. Lack of a birth certificate significantly limits access to higher education. For secondary education and beyond, a birth certificate is essential for enrolment, sitting public exams, and obtaining diplomas and certificates, which are crucial for higher education, training, and employment opportunities.

Equatorial Guinea

The higher education system in Equatorial Guinea is relatively recent and primarily focuses on programmes offered by the UNGE. The national government and the Ministry of Education and Culture tend to prioritise higher education, with significant funding allocated to the sector. UNGE is the sole public institution of higher education in the country, with university autonomy and a defined organisational structure. The academic framework of UNGE consists of faculties offering four-year bachelor's degree programs and university schools offering three-year technical education certifications (Bassett et al. 2017). Equatorial Guinea's education system is organised according to the LMD system (*Licenciado, Master, and Doctorado*), which was implemented in 2007. Despite a five-fold increase in student enrolment from 2006 to 2015, there has been a decrease in enrolment in the education school. Interviews have revealed concerns about the disparity between the country's higher education objectives and the available resources. The university system faces obstacles such as insufficient educational resources, poor facilities and restricted scholarship funding, potentially leading to a bias towards students from more affluent backgrounds.

Table 7. Equatorial Guinea's higher education authorisation, accreditation, and quality assurance

Aspect of higher education policy	Description
Right to establish HEIs	Private entities and religious institutions are authorised to establish higher education institutions, provided they adhere to the official pedagogical plan.

Aspect of higher education policy	Description
Accreditation and quality Assurance	While specific details on accreditation and quality assurance are not explicitly mentioned in Item 23, the requirement for alignment with the official pedagogical plan implies a level of quality assurance and standardisation for higher education institutions.
Prohibition of Ideological or Partisan Bias in Education	Higher education institutions must ensure that their programs do not promote ideological or partisan tendencies, indicating a focus on educational neutrality and integrity.

Source: 2023 constitution

The authorization process generally entails the evaluation and authorisation of educational institutions by governmental entities, such as the Ministry of Education, to function as providers of higher education. This may include the evaluation of several aspects such as the institutional infrastructure, credentials of the academic members, curriculum design and financial viability.

In the specific context of Equatorial Guinea, the process of certification might potentially be associated with the ProFad project, namely within the realm of teacher training programmes. Quality assurance in higher education comprises a diverse array of actions and policies with the objective of guaranteeing the provision of education that meets rigorous standards. This encompasses periodic evaluations, comprehensive programme analyses, and ongoing enhancement procedures. In the context of technical and vocational education, quality assurance encompasses the implementation of measures aimed at ensuring the adherence to established training programme standards and conformity with the guidelines set out by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), as seen in the figure.

Republic of the Congo

The higher education sector in Congo has seen substantial transformation over the course of many decades, boasting “only a single public university since 1962 and the private sector dates back to only 1991” with the Marien Ngouabi University leading the way (Lekouka, Iphigénie, and Mokombi 2018, 18). Initially, the educational system after gaining independence primarily depended on France, but there has been a steady transition towards improving indigenous institutions. In order for educational institutions to function, it is quite probable that they need to get state authorisation, in accordance with the French educational framework, to guarantee compliance with national educational goals and criteria. The authorisation methods in Congo, which are not elaborated upon in the text, presumably include assessments based on academic and operational criteria and may be inspired by the French model, which places a strong emphasis on academic rigour. Ensuring quality in the educational system is crucial, as it entails evaluating educational material, techniques, faculty, and resources. These evaluations are essential for expanding the efficiency of education and elevating worldwide reputation. These policies are components of more extensive educational reforms in Congo. The education sector encounters obstacles in securing funds, developing infrastructure, and ensuring teacher credentials. Current initiatives are being implemented to enhance these areas via government policies and international collaborations, including partnerships with the World Bank (2004).

Subregional level

Authorisation, certification and quality assurance in higher education reforms within CEMAC has emerged as a significant subject of discussion within the last decade. The primary aim of CEMAC is to implement a comprehensive course credit transfer and accumulation system throughout its network of member educational institutions. The implementation of licencing and accreditation procedures is important in order to facilitate the smooth transfer of academic credits across institutions operating inside the member states. The ministries overseeing higher education and scientific research have achieved an agreement to adopt the Comprehensive Computerised Tracking and Assessment System (CCTAS), indicating official government support for its implementation. The significance of certified organisations in maintaining and enforcing quality

standards inside institutions is highlighted by the implementation of a community quality assurance unit and an excellence label, managed by FERDI. The establishment of a community quality assurance unit exemplifies a dedication to ensuring and maintaining the quality of higher education within the CEMAC subregion. There is a growing recognition of the need to develop coherence in educational standards, align curriculum and set criteria for quality assessments across a range of countries. This is done to provide a consistent and uniform level of quality education. The primary aim of the modifications is to efficiently integrate resources and knowledge to provide superior higher education and vocational training that is in line with labour market demands and adheres to global standards. The overall focus on authorisation, accreditation, and quality assurance underscores a collaborative effort within CEMAC to ensure the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of higher education reforms at a noteworthy standard throughout member countries (Ngalame 2023). These advancements are components of the primary integration initiatives of CEMAC and are in accordance with the Libreville Declaration of February 11, 2005. The objective of these initiatives is to pool resources and expertise in order to provide high-quality higher education and vocational training that aligns with the demands of the job market and meets international standards. The resolutions implemented at the August 2021 meeting are to be conveyed to higher authorities, such as the meeting of Heads of State and Government, for endorsement (Atangana 2021). Looking at how other systems such as the American system works at this early stage in the harmonisation process is crucial for the accreditation processes, quality assurance frameworks and the present degree of implementation of these measures across the CEMAC subregion.

Challenges in authorisation, accreditation, and quality assurance

Legal frameworks

Most countries in the CEMAC subregion lack adequate legal frameworks that regulate higher education institutions, resulting in irregularities in the procedures for granting authorisation. Bureaucratic delays may occur due to long and bureaucratic authorisation procedures, which can hinder the development or extension of institutions. The American System refers to the economic policies and practises that were implemented in the United States during the early 19th century. These policies aimed to promote economic growth and development by supporting domestic industries, implementing protective tariffs. The United States has well established legal frameworks and regulations that provide clear and consistent authorisation processes. Authorisation procedures in the U.S. are often more efficient and uniform, notwithstanding their complexity.

Obstacles in obtaining accreditation

In the CEMAC subregion, accreditation standards exhibit substantial variation across nations, resulting in disparate quality levels within the region. Resource limitations may impede the ability to undertake comprehensive accreditation reviews due to insufficient financial and human resources. Accreditation standards in the United States are consistently applied, assuring a minimum level of quality. Accrediting organisations often possess ample resources and are proficient in performing thorough evaluations.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance challenges refer to the difficulties or obstacles faced in ensuring the quality of a product or service. These challenges may arise due to several factors such as inadequate testing procedures, lack of skilled personnel, or insufficient resources. Overcoming these challenges requires the implementation of effective strategies and the In the CEMAC subregion, the credibility of quality assurance methods may be undermined due to a lack of transparency. Inadequate supervision: A lack of continuous quality assurance and monitoring might result in a gradual deterioration of educational standards. Transparency is a prominent feature of quality assurance methods in the United States, since they are generally open and accessible to public examination. Continuous improvement is highly emphasised, with a focus on regularly reassessing and revising

standards. The table below presents a comparison of the challenges faced in the CEMAC and American system.

Table 8. Comparison of challenges in CEMAC and US systems

Challenge type	CEMAC subregion	American system
Authorisation	Insufficient legal frameworks, bureaucratic delays	Well-established legal structures, streamlined processes
Accreditation	Varied standards, resource limitations	Consistent standards, robust resources
Quality Assurance	Lack of transparency, insufficient oversight	High transparency, emphasis on continuous improvement

Source: author's contribution

The CEMAC subregion, in summary, is still work in progress as it suffers from limited resources, uneven standards and a lack of openness at both the subregional and individual country levels. In contrast, the American system generally exhibits more robust, uniform and transparent procedures. The disparities highlight the significance of implementing optimal methods and gaining insights from well-established systems to improve the calibre of higher education in the CEMAC subregion.

Lessons from the U.S system

The American system of higher education is distinguished by well-defined legislative frameworks that regulate its operations. These frameworks provide lucidity and uniformity, guaranteeing that institutions comprehend the prerequisites for permission and accreditation. CEMAC countries have the potential to gain advantages by creating and executing thorough legislative frameworks that precisely define the procedures and criteria for higher education institutions. The authorisation and accreditation procedures in the United States are often efficient and easily understood. This method reduces bureaucratic delays and promotes trust among stakeholders. CEMAC countries may achieve consistency by implementing uniform practises such as streamlining processes, enhancing accessibility of information and establishing effective communication channels between institutions and regulatory bodies.

Table 9. Comparative analysis of higher education strategies: US and CEMAC countries

Key point	Description in the U.S. context	Suggested implementation in CEMAC countries
Consistent and thorough assessment	Periodic, thorough examinations of higher education institutions to maintain accreditation and adherence to quality standards.	Implement consistent assessment periods and rigorous evaluation methodologies.
Financial stability and reporting	Requirement for institutions to demonstrate financial stability through detailed revenue and expenditure forecasts and financial operations reporting.	Introduce measures for financial stability and stability to enhance trustworthiness and long-term viability of higher education institutions.
Elaborate programmatic details	Obligation for universities to provide detailed information about their programs and staff qualifications, ensuring adherence to educational standards.	Implement consistent regulations to ensure high standards in programs and sufficiently trained personnel.
Focus on mission and governance	Emphasis on aligning institutional missions with educational needs and establishing efficient governance frameworks.	Prioritize harmonization of institutional objectives with educational requirements and establish efficient governance frameworks.
Execution and modification	Considering unique circumstances for implementing practices, adapting American methods to local contexts, and collaborating among governments, institutions, and stakeholders.	Adapt American models to local contexts, evaluate current state of higher education, and address deficiencies. Collaborate among governments, educational institutions, and stakeholders. Fund capacity institutions, and stakeholders. Fund

Key point	Description in the U.S. context	Suggested implementation in CEMAC countries
	development, infrastructure, and capacity resources.	development and resources.

Source: author's contribution

The American higher education system provides useful insights for CEMAC member states in improving their authorisation, accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms. CEMAC countries can enhance the quality and credibility of their higher education systems by implementing measures such as robust legal frameworks, efficient processes, frequent evaluations, transparent financial practises, detailed programmatic information and a strong emphasis on mission and governance. The effectiveness of these modifications depends on their meticulous execution, taking into account the particular requirements and difficulties of the CEMAC subregion.

Policy recommendations

In order to guarantee the establishment of thorough and robust legislative frameworks for higher education in the CEMAC subregion, it is imperative to implement a number of essential methods.

- To govern educational practices and policies, CEMAC countries would have to implement robust legal frameworks similar to the Pennsylvania Education Code. These frameworks should include detailed guidelines for institution establishment, program approval, and student rights protection, thereby creating a solid legal foundation for higher education operations.
- Streamline authorisation processes by adopting simplified procedures modelled after U.S. federal regulatory standards for higher education. This approach should focus on transparency, efficiency, and accessibility, reducing administrative burdens.
- Create standardised accreditation guidelines inspired by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, ensuring consistent quality standards across CEMAC countries. This includes the use of periodic review reports, as practiced in Pennsylvania, to maintain high academic and institutional effectiveness standards.
- Develop robust quality assurance mechanisms, including both internal and external periodic assessments of academic programmes and institutional effectiveness, conducted every five years, similar to Pennsylvania's requirements.
- Invest in training programs and resources to improve accreditation bodies' capabilities, ensuring they are well-equipped to perform their duties effectively. This includes professional development initiatives similar to those available in the United States.
- Adopt financial stability criteria modelled after US federal standards, requiring institutions to provide regular, comprehensive financial reports to ensure economic sustainability and transparency in financial operations.
- Foster a culture of continuous improvement, drawing inspiration from the initiatives of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. These programs emphasise innovation and improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Implement public reporting requirements similar to US federal regulations, ensuring transparency regarding accreditation status, student outcomes, and quality assurance practices.
- Promote regional cooperation among CEMAC countries through interstate agreements, harmonising policies, comparing standards, and exchanging best practices in higher education.
- Embrace technology and data-driven approaches, such as the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), to improve the efficiency of certification and quality assurance processes. These systems enable informed decision-making and policy development.

Conclusion

The study compares higher education policies in the CEMAC subregion with the American system, emphasizing the need for robust legislative frameworks, clear authorization procedures, uniform accreditation requirements, and quality assurance mechanisms. To improve CEMAC's higher education, explicit policies must be developed, including implementing uniform accrediting standards, allocating resources, and incorporating technology for data-based decision-making. Fiscal transparency, ongoing enhancement, and interregional cooperation are crucial. The research suggests that the American system can be modified to address CEMAC's unique challenges, aiming to create a high-quality educational setting that stimulates innovation and contributes to the region's development.

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