

Museums as Centers for Education and Research in Teaching History: A Case Study of the Buea Public Museum, Cameroon, 1975–2023

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of the Buea Public Museum as a center for education and research in teaching history in Cameroon. Created to bridge the past, present, and future, the museum preserves regional and national artefacts. This includes wooden statuettes, clay pots, calabashes, baskets, and smelting tools that embody the memories and histories of Cameroonian societies. This paper argues that the museum functions similarly to educational institutions such as schools and universities by offering teachers, students, and researchers' opportunities to engage with tangible heritage and deepen their understanding of local and national history. A qualitative approach was employed, using both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data included observations and interviews with museum curators and personnel, students, educators, and researchers, while secondary sources were complemented by primary evidence to address information gaps. Data were analysed thematically and descriptively. Findings reveal that educators and researchers rarely utilize the Buea Public Museum for teaching and learning purposes, despite its rich didactic potential. This article fills the research gap by examining how museum functions intersect with history education and research within the timeframe of this study. The paper concludes that integrating museum resources into formal education could enhance historical understanding and recommends that teachers and researchers prioritize museums as essential centers for history education and research in Cameroon.

Keyword: Museum; Education Center; Research Center; Teaching of History; Formal Education.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas peran Museum Publik Buea sebagai pusat pendidikan dan penelitian dalam pengajaran sejarah di Kamerun. Dibentuk untuk menjembatani masa lalu, sekarang, dan masa depan, museum ini menyimpan artefak regional dan nasional. Artefak tersebut meliputi patung kayu, pot tanah liat, kalabash, keranjang, dan alat peleburan yang mewakili kenangan dan sejarah masyarakat Kamerun. Makalah ini berargumen bahwa museum berfungsi serupa dengan lembaga pendidikan seperti sekolah dan universitas dengan memberikan kesempatan kepada guru, siswa, dan peneliti untuk berinteraksi dengan warisan benda dan memperdalam pemahaman mereka tentang sejarah lokal dan nasional. Pendekatan kualitatif digunakan dengan memanfaatkan sumber data primer dan sekunder. Data primer

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meliputi observasi dan wawancara dengan kurator dan staf museum, siswa, pendidik, dan peneliti, sementara sumber sekunder dilengkapi dengan bukti primer untuk mengatasi kesenjangan informasi. Data dianalisis secara tematis dan deskriptif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pendidik dan peneliti jarang memanfaatkan Museum Umum Buea untuk tujuan pengajaran dan pembelajaran, meskipun museum tersebut memiliki potensi didaktis yang kaya. Artikel ini mengisi kesenjangan penelitian dengan mengeksplorasi bagaimana fungsi museum beririsan dengan pendidikan sejarah dan penelitian dalam kerangka waktu studi ini. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi sumber daya museum ke dalam pendidikan formal dapat meningkatkan pemahaman sejarah dan merekomendasikan agar guru dan peneliti memprioritaskan museum sebagai pusat penting untuk pendidikan sejarah dan penelitian di Kamerun.

Keyword: Museum; Pusat Pendidikan; Pusat Penelitian; Pembelajaran Sejarah; Pendidikan Formal.

1. Introduction

Museums are widely regarded as custodians of cultural heritage, particularly in Africa, as they preserve cultural treasures embedded with narratives about the ways of life of diverse communities while also attracting tourists for leisure and education. According to the International Council of Museums (2022), a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution that serves society by researching, collecting, conserving, interpreting, and exhibiting tangible and intangible heritage in an accessible and inclusive manner. Similarly, Monin and Okpoko (1990) describe museums as institutions (publicly or privately owned) that collect, preserve, and display natural and cultural objects for education, entertainment, and research on human heritage and development. Museums serve as spaces for cultural exchange, entertainment, and education, in addition to their primary role of preserving cultural artefacts and ecofacts (Wihbongale, 2024). Museums function as repositories of collective memory, displaying objects that support learning and research for pupils, students, teachers, and scholars through structured educational and research programmes. This paper examines the relationship between museums and historical study. History encompasses human beliefs, practices, institutions, and the changes that occur over time (Rampolla, 2004). It encompasses political, economic, social, scientific, technological, medical, cultural, intellectual, and military developments (Pande, 2025).

In recent years, museums in Africa have shifted beyond entertainment and leisure to promote research and public engagement through outreach activities, such as exhibitions in schools and community spaces. This shift has strengthened museum education, understood as the purposeful use of museum resources and environments to support learning through formal and informal, inquiry-based practices (Todino & Campitiello, 2025). Momin and Okpoko (1990) attest that museum education helps individuals locate themselves within the past and understand their roles in the present. Accordingly, museums enable students and researchers to engage directly with primary objects as historical evidence, offering insights into pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial experiences. Empirical observations support the view that museums are effective centres for education and research, enhancing historical reflection (Ukaegbu, 2011) and strengthening pedagogical skills (Ramsaroop, 2011). Consequently, museums function as didactic spaces for constructing historical narratives and fostering critical thinking among learners and researchers.

An informant explains that the growing interest in promoting museum education in some African countries has been welcomed by museum staff and professionals, as it strengthens advocacy for effective management, programme development, and sustainable community engagement, particularly with schools, researchers, and cultural institutions. In South Africa, for example, museums play a key role in preserving collective memory, especially for communities displaced during Apartheid (a system of racial segregation). The Apartheid Museum educates the public about this history and contributes to the restoration of dignity through structured educational programmes accessible online to learners and researchers (Abungu, 2005; Mlambo, 2020). Similarly, in Burkina Faso's Gaoua Province, the 2001 exhibition Pottery of Burkina Faso: Women's Skilled Hands at the Museum of Civilisations involved teachers, school competitions, and the development of educational resource packs to encourage replication in other contexts (Abungu, 2005). Sithole (2012) emphasizes that community engagement is essential for fostering identification with museums and contributing

to inclusive historical narratives. In this regard, museums are increasingly recognised as authentic spaces for transmitting indigenous knowledge to schools and universities (Jause, Thambe, & Beer, 2025).

In Cameroon, museum-related research has largely focused on cultural tourism, symbolism, object preservation, and interpretive challenges (Ndambi, 2004; Ngitir, 2011; Wihbongale, 2024), rather than on the museum's educational and research functions. Although these roles are occasionally acknowledged in the literature, they are often discussed only indirectly. Ngitir & Monteh (2021) argue that museums should function not merely as collections but also as centres for documentation and education of local culture. Similarly, Abam (2019) notes that local communities perceive museums as cultural and heritage educators, despite the limited empirical research assessing their pedagogical impact. For instance, the National Museum of Yaoundé was established in 2002 to enhance and preserve cultural objects, develop creativity, and stimulate students' research abilities as they collaborate with museum professionals (Ndambi, 2004). The literature acknowledges that museums can support history education, research, and documentation, yet it also reveals limited practical implementation in Cameroon. Consequently, the systematic use of museum holdings for scholarship in teaching history and research remains understudied and underdeveloped among learners and researchers.

2. Theoretical Review

The reviewed literature collectively positions museums as dynamic educational and research institutions rather than passive repositories of artefacts. Scholars consistently emphasize that museums play a critical role in learning, interpretation, identity formation, and the construction of historical knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Hein, 2006). Through object-based learning, museums provide tangible links to abstract historical concepts, thereby complementing formal education and supporting inquiry-based historical research. The literature further highlights a paradigm shift from object-centred museology to visitor-oriented, socially engaged models that foreground critical thinking, cultural negotiation, and community participation (Smith, 1989; Bennett, 1995). Museums are shown to be shaped by political, cultural, and economic contexts, functioning as sites where power, memory, and identity are negotiated, an insight particularly relevant to postcolonial settings such as Cameroon. Studies on museum learning stress that knowledge construction in museums is open-ended, experiential, and influenced by social interaction, emotion, and personal relevance (Falk & Dierking, 2000). Effective interpretation through exhibition design, labelling, and communication strategies enhances visitor engagement and historical understanding while balancing accessibility with scholarly rigour (Serrell, 2015). Recent scholarship also demonstrates that museums foster historical thinking, source-based inquiry, and critical reflection when supported by appropriate pedagogical scaffolding (Geerts, Depaepe, & Nieuwenhuyse, 2024). Taken together, this literature provides a strong conceptual foundation for examining museums as centres of education and research in teaching history. However, while these perspectives are well developed in global scholarship, their empirical application within Cameroonian museums, particularly the Buea Public Museum, remains underexplored, thereby justifying the present study.

The theory of constructivism, propounded by John Dewey, describes a teaching approach that empowers students through self-directed learning and enables them to "construct" their knowledge and abilities through meaningful interactions. It suggests that learning is expressed when people put what they have learnt into practice. Thus, people create their meaning through experience. The paradigm further posits that students bring past knowledge into the learning process when they assess and re-evaluate their understanding of the concepts (Suhendi & Purwano, 2018). Aljohani (2017) aligns with the theory that it encourages learners to be active and familiarize themselves with the working schemes to assimilate or ultimately accommodate everything they learn. The theory suggests that museum institutions foster open-ended discussion to allow educators and researchers to express their ideas through the inquiry-based approach. In this light, they are free to interact and appreciate the objects through visual thinking strategies (Yenawaine, 1998). Over the decades, museums have been a testament to educational institutions that allow students, researchers, custodians, and interns to visit and equally immerse themselves in historical knowledge.

However, the constructivist theory is used in this paper to articulate its priorities for transferring knowledge using an inquiry-based approach. This idea raises awareness of the

way museums are perceived as a point of reference for education, such as colleges, universities, and other institutions, to enhance and develop critical research skills for academic writing. For example, the use of object-based learning (artefacts) such as hunting tools, war caps, stools, and ritual objects enables learners to construct historical meaning by observing, questioning, and interpreting tangible evidence. This reflects the constructivist view that learners build understanding by connecting new experiences to prior knowledge. Museum visitors' use of artefacts as didactic materials supports Dewey's argument that learning is most effective when grounded in real-life experiences. The inquiry-based engagement will help to foster learning at the Buea Public Museum as students and researchers formulate questions, interpret provenance, and negotiate meanings through dialogue with museum staff and peers. This corresponds with constructivist principles that promote learner autonomy, critical thinking, and reflective interpretation (Aljohani, 2017).

3. Method

This research employs a qualitative methodology grounded in purposive sampling to explore the educational and research functions of the museum. Primary data were collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews with museum curators, staff, teachers, researchers, and students, specifically 22 informants, complemented by secondary sources. This includes scholarly articles, books, and dissertations. Two inclusion criteria were used for the participant selection: one at the respondent level and one at the institutional (museum) level. The first criterion involved selecting individuals with demonstrable knowledge and experience in museum management, including curators and museum personnel actively engaged in exhibition, education, or administration. The second criterion targeted respondents who hold educational or research responsibilities related to the museum, such as teachers, academic researchers, and students who utilize the museum for teaching, learning, or scholarly inquiry. Interviews were conducted in English and French, depending on the participant's preference. A few selected museum objects were photographed and used to enhance the analytical part of the paper. This methodological rigor ensures both reliability and depth, while offering replicable models for museum inquiry in African contexts. This selection strategy ensured that the perspectives gathered reflect both the operational and educational dimensions of the museum, thereby providing a holistic understanding of its role as a center for history teaching, research, and public education.

This article employs descriptive and thematic research approaches to enable researchers to examine how museums operate as educational and research centers, and to capture insights and experiences of interviewees. Therefore, descriptive analysis centers on interviews, observations, and documents to provide a contextual and factual account of the research setting. Thematic analysis enables the researchers to organise and interpret key aspects of the research themes. In this article, the descriptive and thematic analyses are suited to explore museums as a center for teaching history and knowledge production. The validity and reliability are enhanced by integrating multiple sources (triangulation), such as interviews, observation, and museum records, to confirm findings.

4. Results

4.1. Genesis of the Buea Public Museum: A Historical Appraisal

The city of Buea is a historical landmark in the minds of Cameroonians because it was one of the former German capitals (1902-1916). Evidence of German relics is the Prime Minister's Lodge, the Old Bismarck Fountain, the Old Native Scholl, and the Old German Burial Ground (Ardener, 1996). When Cameroon gained independence in 1960, President Ahmadou Ahidjo issued a decree protecting cultural objects by reorganizing and opening new museums in Cameroon. For example, the Federal Law No. 63-22 of 19th June 1963. According to Akoko, cited by Ndambi (2004), this law was proclaimed to emphasize and regulate the organization and protection of monuments, art objects, and sites of historic, artistic, archaeological, and cultural significance to the indigenes. This law embodies aspects of preserving movable and immovable property and prohibits the exportation of tangible cultural resources (Ndambi, 2004). An interview with the Chief of Service for Cultural Heritage and Museum showed that another Federal Decree No. 72-DF-216n of 22 April 1972 was approved by President Ahmadou Ahidjo of the United Republic of Cameroon in an effort to safeguard and conserve the country's cultural heritage patrimony. This decree reorganizes the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Vocational Training and authorizes the establishment of museums in all ten Provincial headquarters in Cameroon (Njie, Personal Communication, December 10, 2024).

According to the Regional Delegate of Arts and Culture for the South West Region, during the early 1970s and 1980s, some museums encountered structural issues that necessitated aesthetic upgrades, especially within the acquisitions department. These embryonic museums inspired the birth of new small-scale public and private museums in the country. Following the federal decree in 1972, the Ministry of Information and Culture established the Buea Public Museum in 1975 and the Yaoundé Museum in 1976. Similarly, Law No. 91/008 of 31st July 1991 on the protection of national, cultural, and natural patrimony was passed by Paul Biya. This law emphasizes the preservation of material remains threatened by destruction and diverse exploitation. It also promotes museum activities, secures antiquities, and protects our national patrimony by boosting cultural heritage in Cameroon (Bie, Personal Communication, December 10, 2024). These newly created public museums played a significant role in shaping museum narratives in Cameroon. Public museums are institutionalized museums directly established, authored, owned, controlled, financed, and managed by the State (Ndambi, 2004). For instance, the Buea Public Museum was among the newly created museums in the ten provinces, aligning with the standards of museum functionality set by the International Council of Museums (ICOM). A former museum attendant explains that the broad objective of the Buea Public Museum was to collect and conserve cultural artefacts from the Southwest jurisdiction, present-day Southwest region. For future generations, these artefacts represented the language, religion, and customs of the various ethnic groups and, consequently, the remainder of the nation (Achimbi, Personal Communication, January 15, 2025).

The Regional Museum is located at the Regional Delegation of Arts and Culture, around the Court Junction entrance. It is located in a small room of about 8m by 5m in the delegation building (see figure 1). The objects were obtained through donation, confiscation, buying, and around the chiefdoms within the region. It offers a unique vantage point for understanding the construction of regional and national narratives and representations of the shared past amongst some indigenous communities in Cameroon. According to Nanda (2004), museums are key actors for sustainable development and nation-building. Ndambi (2004) justifies that Kome Epule, formerly the Provincial Delegate of Information and Culture in the Southwest Province, initiated the museum's growth and development when it was officially inaugurated on May 20, 1993, by the then Governor of the Southwest Province, Oben Peter Ashu. According to the former museum attendant of the Buea Public Museum (Njualement, Personal Communication, January 20, 2025), on Tuesday, October 12, 1993, the Provincial Delegation of Culture relocated the museum to its present location (shown in figure 1). Upon the creation of the museum, the following persons have served as curator and attendant: Ngole Peter (1975-2002), Achimbi Grace (2003-2007), Ekwoke Margaret (2007-2011), Njualement Quinta Lekeaka (2012-2023), and Njie Esongo Josephine (2023-present).

Figure 1. Buea Public Museum Building



Source: Regional Delegation of Arts and Culture, 2025

The objects or holdings of this museum are divided into two groups: antiquities and ethnographic objects. The antiquities include household utensils such as containers, wooden bowls, spoons, mortars, stools, baskets, and dance equipment (a mask, rattles, drums, a hat, and broomsticks). Hunting and fishing equipment includes traps, nets, spearheads, crossbows, dog bells, and dane guns. Ritual objects include statues of the “Dakat Society” from Fontem

and clothing such as the 17th-century waist beads known as “jigija”. The second group of objects is ethnographic, made by contemporary artists. These include clay pots, wood carvings of human and animal statues, stools, drums, masks, chairs, straw hats, and house utensils (Njie, Personal Communication, December 10, 2024). The majority of carved items, including statues, stools, and masks, are from the Northwest Region of Cameroon, the attendant said. This is due to the area's well-known reputation for creating sculptures and paintings of zoological and geological creatures (Ekwoke, Personal Communication, March 24, 2025). These objects are exhibited on the shelves (illustrated in Figure 2).

Figure 2. Partial Exhibition of Objects



Sources: Buea Public Museum, 2025

An interview with a former museum curator emphasized the importance of the Visitors' Book, which contains comments from guests. He quotes comments made by museum visitors, such as Lange Nga Joseph, who stated that the exhibit was "beautiful, but more artefacts should be added, and the room enlarged." "It is really exciting to have an idea of what our hands can produce locally," says Hans Njoh of Synod Office Buea. To preserve our skills, crafts should be encouraged even in elementary schools. The Buea Public Museum is a hub of remembrance for students, researchers, and museum professionals, thanks to the kind remarks left by visitors (Ngole, Personal Communication, December 20, 2024). He continues with the adage that the government's ongoing commitment to safeguarding Cameroon's cultural values led to the enactment of Decree No. 2004/003 on April 21, 2004, which mandates advancing cultural values via research. This ties in with the paper's contention that museums, like the Buea Public Museum, are an essential resource for researchers and educators who teach history.

4.2. From Preservation to Pedagogy: The Role of Museums in Education and Research in Cameroon

The steadfast choices made by museum experts, as well as the rules and regulations enacted by the Cameroonian government, ensure that museums reach a new standard in the administration, preservation, and protection of cultural artefacts and resources. This elevation helps museum administrators to address challenges related to education and research findings in Cameroon. Consequently, it deviates from the goal that museums serve as a leisure amusement site by introducing new educational values among managers. In Cameroon today, museum objects are used to reshape stories across disciplines. This section examines the reasons the Buea Public Museum could be considered a learning institution in Cameroon.

4.2.1. Museum as a Source of Didactic Material

The Buea Public Museum can be an essential institution for promoting the learning process in Cameroon. It exhibits objects for public viewing, ranging from antiquities to ethnographic artefacts. The museum was often visited by tourists for leisure, relaxation, entertainment, and amusement. In an interview with Lita (Personal Communication, December 20, 2024), the Buea Public Museum offers educational opportunities. This includes didactic materials that can assist teachers and researchers from academic disciplines in imparting knowledge. These didactic materials include carved stools, dog rattles, war caps, and calabashes, among others. For example, institutions offering history and tourism programs can benefit from the services of this museum, including researchers, secondary school teachers, university lecturers, and students. Weaponry items used in some of the German resistance in Cameroon can be found in the Buea Public Museum (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Kumdem (war cap)

Source: Buea Public Museum, 2025.

Museum objects, such as war-related artefacts, transform museums from spaces of leisure into active learning environments by providing tangible materials for understanding historical periods of resistance (Dzelamonyuy, personal communication, 2025). Their effective pedagogical use, however, requires targeted training for museum staff and teachers in the application of educational tools (Ateba, 2018). Interviews with museum interns further indicate that museums function as inquiry-based learning spaces where students and researchers engage critically with objects through questioning and interpretation (Takor, personal communication, 2025). In this context, museum collections serve as didactic resources that enhance visual learning and historical understanding. It aligns with Abungu's (2018) assertion that African museums play a central role in children's and students' education through lectures and hands-on activities, reinforcing the relevance of museums for teaching and research.

4.2.2. Museum and Research Collaboration: A Call for Interdisciplinary Approaches

The establishment of museums in Cameroon positions them as key repositories for research and an innovative way to preserve knowledge. Conceived as institutions for documenting and safeguarding knowledge for public use, museums such as the Buea Public Museum enhance teaching through historically significant objects that stimulate inquiry among students and researchers (Ndille, personal communication, 2025). In this sense, museums function as centres for education and research, aligning with the definition of research as systematic scientific inquiry (Tanah & Encho, 2017).

Figure 4. Dog Hunting Rattles

Source: Buea Public Museum, 2025.

The visitor records indicate that the museum supports interdisciplinary research, attracting scholars from various disciplines. This includes fields such as history, geography, anthropology,

political science, sociology, and archaeology (Peter, personal communication, 2024). Researchers engage with collections to examine object provenance and to use artefacts as visual evidence, fostering critical reflection and the recovery of indigenous histories and narratives (Nseke, personal communication, 2025). As Lange and Teer-Tomaselli (2025) observe, museums serve as spaces of memory where historical narratives are preserved and reinterpreted.

Furthermore, museum collections support pedagogical practice by linking disciplinary knowledge with effective teaching strategies, consistent with Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge (Jautse et al., 2022). Artefacts such as hunting tools (see figure 4), for example, illustrate key aspects of pre-colonial economic life in Cameroon. Interviews with museum interns confirm that objects at the Buea Public Museum embody powerful historical narratives, reinforcing museums as interdisciplinary spaces that promote inquiry-based learning, collaboration, and historical interpretation through material culture (Enow, personal communication, 2025).

4.2.3. Museum: Repository of Primary Evidence

Primary sources are central to the development of research and teaching in higher education, as they form the foundation of historical inquiry and narrative construction (Dondolo, personal communication, 2025). They consist of first-hand data collected directly by researchers to address gaps in secondary literature. Ajayi (2023) defines primary sources as original data obtained through methods such as interviews. Dondolo further identifies oral testimonies, focus group discussions, questionnaires, photographs, artifacts, and archival materials as key examples. Historians rely on these sources to analyse the causes, processes, and consequences of historical events, despite inherent limitations such as memory bias. Nevertheless, primary sources remain essential for producing nuanced and contextually grounded historical interpretations (Marovah & Ncube, 2023).

The study also employed indigenous research methodologies that integrate storytelling, art-making, introspection, and engagement with local cultural values and belief systems. Such approaches enhance inclusivity and provide culturally grounded evidence within academic inquiry (Dondolo, personal communication, 2025). In this context, museums function as rich repositories of primary sources, supporting students and researchers in academic writing and research (Ngule, personal communication, 2025). Museum objects, supported by documented provenance and oral recollections, serve as corroborative material evidence that strengthens historical interpretation.

At the Buea Public Museum, ethnographic and antiquarian collections, including artefacts related to fishing practices and masquerade societies (see figure 5a-b), illustrate indigenous histories and lived experiences. These collections support object-based learning across educational levels, enabling students to visualise historical change and continuity through direct engagement with material culture (Anyitabong, personal communication, 2025). Consequently, museums provide credible spaces that enhance inquiry, critical thinking, and creativity in both teaching and historical research (Mayuka, personal communication, 2025).

Figure 5. Fishing Net (a) and Head Mask (b)



Source: Buea Public Museum, 2025.

4.2.4. Museums: A Reflection of Artefactual Memories

Naudé (2008) attests that remembrance of the past often evokes narratives of hope and pain, as memories can be captured from songs, photographs, or material objects. In this sense, artefacts function as carriers of memory, preserving stories of people's ways of life. Supporting this view, Itoe (personal communication, 2024) notes that works of art were among the most effective means of representing information in African kingdoms, as artists embedded social meanings and collective memories within objects. Similarly, Lita (personal communication, 2024) explains that museum exhibits reflect specific historical eras, revealing socio-cultural, economic, spiritual, and political experiences marked by grief, hope, and joy. At the Buea Public Museum, such objects remain visual stimuli for recalling past events and serve as valuable resources for history teaching and educational programmes.

Museums also function as educational models that enhance visitors' visual literacy and historical understanding (Nsom, personal communication, 2025). For example, carved stools decorated with motifs of lions, elephants, tigers, and leopards' symbols, traditionally associated with royalty (see figure 6), convey social stratification in many Cameroonian societies (Ndeh & Ngeh, 2015). Similar artefacts displayed at the Buea Public Museum help students and researchers interpret social hierarchy and political authority. As Zam (personal communication, 2025) argues, museum artworks serve as authoritative sources for teaching and writing history, as artefactual memories embedded in objects support cognitive understanding and interpretation of past social orders.

Figure 6. Royal Stool in the Buea Public Museum



Source: Buea Public Museum 2025.

4.2.5. Museum as an Intersection of Oral Tradition and Oral History

African museums offer researchers, students, and educators access to diverse sources of knowledge that enrich teaching, learning, and scholarly publications. Museum collections integrate material culture with oral tradition and oral history, enabling the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in historical inquiry (Marovah & Ncube, 2023). In this regard, museums serve as essential educational tools for teaching and studying history, and as bridges between oral tradition and oral history.

Oral tradition refers to knowledge transmitted orally across generations through stories, myths, legends, songs, and other expressive forms, particularly in preliterate societies (VijayaKumari, 2018; Moss & Mazikana, 1986). Oral history, by contrast, involves the systematic recording and interpretation of first-hand memories and lived experiences of the recent past (Nkala & David, 2015). Although oral history raises questions of validity due to its non-written nature (Shuman, 2003), it remains a valuable source of historical evidence.

Interviews with museum practitioners confirm that oral traditions and oral histories are integral to museum education, as archived audio recordings and testimonies enable students and researchers to actively engage with the past rather than passively consume information (Agbor, personal communication, 2025). At the Buea Public Museum, artefacts alongside objects like lava waste (see figure 7) from Mount Cameroon eruptions support the teaching of environmental and cultural history. While artefacts and records preserve memory, museum

attendants play a crucial role in interpreting and shaping narratives for visitors. Consequently, the Buea Public Museum exemplifies how oral tradition and oral history intersect to enhance museum education and research in Cameroon.

Figure 7. Lava Waste in the Buea Public Museum

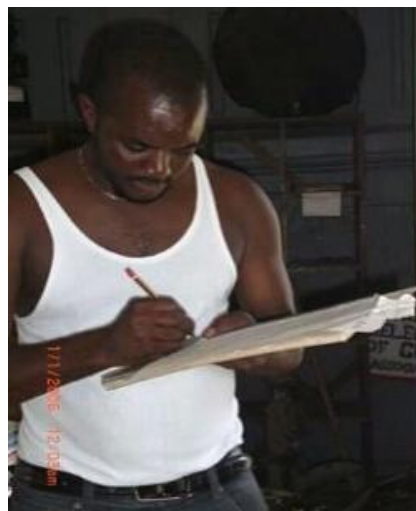


Source: Buea Public Museum 2025.

4.2.6. Museum and Inclusive Initiatives/Efforts

Outreach programmes and institutional partnerships have significantly enhanced the use of museum artefacts as teaching tools in Cameroonian educational institutions (Lamnyuy, personal communication, 2024). Through inclusive initiatives led by museum attendants, awareness has been raised regarding the education, conservation, and research roles of museums. Outreach activities are often conducted in schools and through open-door exhibitions supporting learning across disciplines such as art, social studies, literature, history, anthropology, and archaeology. Globally, museums are increasingly recognised as platforms for innovation that advance research and education across the sciences and humanities (Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, South Africa). At the Buea Public Museum, workshops and outreach initiatives targeting primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and universities reinforce this role. Events such as International Museum Day, observed annually on May 18th, have included radio programmes, roundtable discussions, school tours, lectures, film screenings, exhibitions, and art competitions. These activities have helped to highlight the relevance of museums to public education and research (Lamnyuy, personal communication, 2024).

Figure 8. Inventory and Documentation Collection



Source: Wihbongale's Family Album, 20th April 2025.

Partnerships with organisations such as Cameroon Museum Fans (CAMUFA), established in 2016, have further strengthened museum outreach. CAMUFA's activities extend from school sensitisation programmes to object inventory and documentation (see Figure 8), then public lectures, which have promoted heritage preservation and museum education. Its participation in events such as the 2018 Southwest Cultural Festival of Arts and Culture underscores the value of collaborative engagement in expanding museum services (Funjea, Personal Communication, June 20, 2025). In this light, these initiatives demonstrate how outreach and partnerships position museums as vital teaching institutions incorporating didactic materials for learning, particularly for students and researchers in history.

5. Discussion

The findings align with broader museological scholarship that views museums as potential educational spaces whose effectiveness depends on institutional orientation and policy support (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Hein, 2006). While international literature emphasizes museums as active learning environments, the Buea Public Museum reflects a common African and Cameroonian reality where educational and research functions remain secondary to preservation and exhibition.

The limited integration of the museum into formal history teaching supports earlier studies in Cameroon that highlight a dominance of cultural tourism, symbolism, and conservation over pedagogical engagement (Ndambi, 2004; Ngitir, 2011; Wihbongale, 2024). This confirms a structural gap between museum practice and educational policy implementation. Although museum stakeholders recognise the educational value of collections, the absence of systematic object-based teaching strategies limits historical interpretation and critical engagement.

Furthermore, the findings resonate with Falk and Dierking's (2000) contextual model of learning, which stresses that museum learning requires intentional design before, during, and after visits. At Buea, learning largely depends on individual initiative rather than structured interpretive frameworks. This undermines the museum's potential to foster historical thinking, source analysis, and research skills among learners.

Therefore, the discussion underscores the need to reposition the Buea Public Museum and similar institutions in Cameroon as active partners in history education and research. Fostering and strengthening collaborations with educational institutions, professionalising museum education, and systematising documentation practices would enable museums to move beyond passive display toward meaningful scholarly and pedagogical engagement.

This study is subject to limitations that should be well-thought-out when interpreting the findings. First, the research focuses exclusively on the Buea Public Museum. While this allows for in-depth contextual analysis, it limits the generalisability of the findings to other public or private museums in Cameroon with different institutional capacities and mandates. Second, the article relies primarily on qualitative data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentary sources. Although triangulation was used to enhance credibility, the findings remain interpretive, which can be influenced by the perspectives, experiences, and views of participants, who might be affected by memory bias and subjectivity. Third, the research reveals constraints related to insufficient documentation and preservation of systematic records within the museum. This affects educational programmes and research outputs within the scope of the study. Consequently, some historical interpretations depended on oral testimonies rather than comprehensive written records.

Moreover, the study did not quantitatively assess learning outcomes or visitor impact, but instead focused on institutional roles and perceptions. In this light, researchers could address these limitations by adopting comparative, mixed-methods approaches across multiple museums in Cameroon and by empirically measuring educational and research impacts.

6. Conclusions

This study has demonstrated that the Buea Public Museum holds significant but largely underutilised potential as a centre for education and research in teaching history in Cameroon. By examining the museum within the historical timeframe of 1975–2023, the article shows how the institution has evolved from a post-independence heritage repository primarily focused on preservation and display into a space increasingly recognised for its pedagogical and research relevance. The year 1975 marks a foundational moment of state-driven cultural policy and museum establishment, while 2023 reflects contemporary efforts to reposition museums as active learning environments despite persistent structural and institutional challenges.

Drawing on constructivist learning theory, the findings reveal that meaningful learning in museums occurs through direct engagement with artefacts, oral histories, and indigenous knowledge systems. The Buea Public Museum enables students, educators, and researchers to construct historical understanding through inquiry-based, object-centred, and experiential learning practices. Its collections serve as primary sources that support interdisciplinary research, enhance historical thinking, and bridge oral tradition, oral history, and material culture. However, the study also highlights critical limitations, including weak institutional collaboration with schools and universities, inadequate documentation systems, limited professional training in museum education, and insufficient policy integration. These constraints continue to restrict the systematic use of museums in formal education and academic research.

The article concludes that repositioning museums as recognised educational institutions requires deliberate policy support, sustained partnerships with academic institutions, capacity building for museum professionals and teachers, and the integration of museum-based learning into national curricula. Strengthening such frameworks would not only enhance history teaching and research in Cameroon but also reaffirm museums as dynamic spaces for knowledge production, cultural memory, and sustainable development.

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9. Conflicts of Interest

The author (s) declare no conflict of interest.

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