



CLEAN SCHOOL POLICY IN ACTION: A FOCUS ON  
MORAL CLEANLINESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
THE SOUTHWEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the effects of moral cleanliness on school effectiveness in secondary schools within the South West Region of Cameroon. Guided by B.F. Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory (1953), the research examined stakeholder perceptions of school effectiveness, the predictive impact of moral cleanliness, and leadership strategies for managing behavioral misconduct. Employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, quantitative and qualitative data were simultaneously collected from a multistage sample of exactly 1,024 participants across Fako, Kupe-Manenguba, Manyu, and Meme divisions. The target sample comprised 24 principals, 500 teachers, and 500 terminal-class (Form Five and Upper Sixth) students. Data collection instruments included structured Likert-scale questionnaires for teachers and students, semi-structured interview guides for principals, and field observation checklists. Quantitative data were processed using EpiData 3.1 (EpiData Association, Odense, Denmark) and analyzed via SPSS 25.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, New York) using descriptive statistics and Simple Linear Regression, while qualitative strands underwent thematic analysis. Descriptive findings revealed a critical moral crisis, with 81.4% of teachers and 76.6% of students identifying their institutions as morally unclean due to pervasive issues such as student fighting (83.8%), substance abuse (83.1%), and gang-related sexual activity (82.7%). Regression analysis confirmed that moral cleanliness is a significant predictor of school effectiveness ( $R=0.386$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), explaining 14.9% of the variance ( $R^2=0.149$ ) in institutional success, with morally clean schools demonstrating a 70% effectiveness rate compared to 57% in unclean environments. Despite existing policies, a significant "responsibility gap" persists, leaving 53.9% of teachers dissatisfied with institutional performance. Based on these findings, it is recommended that MINESEC and school principals apply Skinnerian behavior modification principles to reward positive student conduct through campus integrity awards and proactive morning assembly mentoring. Secondly, principals must reform Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) networks into active family-school partnerships that draw parents directly into the disciplinary loop to support struggling students. Finally, institutional counselors should systematically incorporate moral cleanliness frameworks and reinforcement schedules into their guidance sessions.

**Keywords:**

*Moral Cleanliness, School Effectiveness, Unethical Issues, Restorative Justice, Cameroon Education, Operant Conditioning.*



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## Introduction

Increasing unethical practice (such as bull, violence, drug abuse) in society challenges the effectiveness of school. School effectiveness is a multifaceted concept defining an institution's capacity to maximise student learning and holistic development regardless of socio-economic backgrounds, thereby serving as a critical engine for societal progress and economic stability. However, while historical research on school effectiveness has dominantly focused on academic performance in abstraction to moral cleanliness (Javornik & Klemenčič, 2023), recent evidence suggests that ethical climates and moral cleanliness are critical, yet overlooked, predictors of long-term institutional success (Utagah & Ngwa, 2024). Moral cleanliness is fundamentally a holistic ethical doctrine that combats violence, drug abuse and sexual exploitation to ensure schools remain safe, productive environments for societal growth. At the international and continental level, frameworks like the organisation for economic cooperation and development, (OECD) education policy outlook 2025 and the African Union 's continental education strategy for Africa (CESA) 2026-2035 prioritize universal moral values and inclusive safe environments as prerequisites for quality secondary education. At the national level, various policies such as the clean school concept, have been put in place to enhance school effectiveness through the provision of a conducive environment.

The concept was instated in 2018 by the Ministry of Secondary Education, spearheaded by the Minister of Secondary Education prof. Nalova Lyonga. According to The Guardian Post (2024), moral cleanliness is spearheading the fight against corruption and unethical conduct as the starting point of any success in secondary education. The "clean school" concept is a global educational priority that extends beyond basic sanitation to include the cultivation of moral, intellectual, and physical values. Internationally, this philosophy is applied through diverse cultural and institutional frameworks; for instance, Japan integrates the Gakko Soji (cleaning tradition) into the daily curriculum specifically to instill communal responsibility, discipline, and moral character in students (Starr, 2022). In the Philippines, research underscores that student satisfaction with the school's physical and organizational cleanliness directly impacts their academic motivation and overall learning experience (Delfin et al., 2024). Similarly, studies in Indonesia regarding the "Clean and Healthy Living Behavior" (PHBS) emphasize that the school environment is a primary site for modeling ethical behavior and healthy lifestyles, which significantly influences student discipline (Wati et al., 2021). These global applications demonstrate that a holistic "clean school" one that balances a hygienic physical environment with a strong ethical climate is an essential, worldwide driver of institutional effectiveness.

## Review of Related Literature

School effectiveness is defined by an institution's ability to maximize holistic student outcomes through five core pillars: proper leadership, a safe environment, clear goals, continuous evaluation, and high expectations (Lynch, 2016). Recent research underscores that proper leadership acts as the primary driver of an "organizational ethical climate," where leaders' behavioral styles directly influence teacher commitment and the collective enforcement of moral standards (Sheokand & Dhola, 2025; Siahaan et al., 2023). This effectiveness is perceived as a multi-dimensional construct where the roles of students, teachers, and leaders intersect; students prioritize instructional clarity

and physical safety, while teachers associate success with institutional support and collective efficacy, and leaders focus on strategic vision and relational trust (Javornik & Klemenčič, 2023; Raniti et al., 2025). Leadership is therefore essential for maintaining a conducive environment, as empirical evidence suggests that a positive school climate is a prerequisite for academic sustainability and the prevention of deviant behaviors like bullying and substance abuse (Javornik & Klemenčič, 2023). Furthermore, when schools set high expectations and a shared vision for ethical conduct, they foster a sense of "school connectedness" that protects students against external stressors, while continuous evaluation of behavioral metrics ensures that institutional goals remain functional benchmarks for success rather than mere "paper goals" (Taylor & Francis, 2024; Idris et al., 2025). Collectively, while students focus on the quality of direct interaction, teachers and leaders emphasize the structural and relational frameworks such as moral leadership and professional integrity that enable that learning to occur.

In Cameroon, secondary schools are ideally formal institutions for discipline and character formation, yet the "current state" of moral cleanliness in the Southwest Region is severely strained by a breakdown in ethical conduct and institutional governance. According to the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC, 2024), while the "Clean School" philosophy mandates that internal leadership combat corruption and violence, many administrators struggle with inconsistent disciplinary enforcement and a lack of specialized "moral leadership" training (Mekolle, 2024). To address these gaps, for the 2024/2025 academic year, MINESEC has specifically mandated the use of textbooks like Clean School by Arrey Etta to institutionalize these ethical standards in classrooms (MINESEC, 2024). This internal weakness is exacerbated by external sociopolitical stressors; the ongoing Anglophone crisis has normalized fear-based behaviors and trauma, with 73.6% of students in the region facing mental health challenges that manifest as "maladaptive operants" like gambling, smoking, and fighting (The Guardian Post, 2025; RePEc, 2025). Evidence suggests that this conflict-affected environment marked by displacement and reduced adult supervision cripples the school's "discipline capacity," making it nearly impossible to maintain a stable culture of moral conduct (Project House, 2025; ReliefWeb, 2024). Consequently, school effectiveness in the Southwest is shaped by a dual failure: (a) internal governance gaps that fail to reinforce ethical standards, and (b) external pressures that disrupt school routines and student character development.

Moral cleanliness in schools is conceptualized as the degree to which learners and staff practice integrity, fairness, and adherence to institutional norms (MINESEC, 2024). However, this ideal is being systematically dismantled by a surge of predatory unethical behaviors most notably organized gang-related activities, substance abuse, and sexual violence which have moved from the periphery to the very heart of the school environment. These are not merely isolated disciplinary infractions; they represent a profound crisis of institutional integrity and a direct breach of the 1998 Education Orientation Law (Law No. 98/004). While Article 35 mandates the absolute protection of a student's moral and physical integrity, the reality of "gang sex," open gambling, and violent confrontations suggests a breakdown of this statutory protection. Where such practices occur openly or are inadequately controlled, students may become fearful to participate in learning activities, often avoiding certain school spaces or times due to the

constant threat of humiliation and coercion. Furthermore, the harassment of staff violates Article 37(2), which guarantees the dignity and safety of teachers. When schools become sites of predatory behavior, the climate shifts from being instructionally focused to survival-based, as administrators are forced to divert critical resources toward conflict management rather than pedagogy (Idris et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2024). Ultimately, this pervasive moral decay transforms the school from a sanctuary of learning into a high-risk zone, creating a significant drain on educational resources and directly sabotaging the national mandate for character formation.

Although students view moral cleanliness as a prerequisite for their safety and academic persistence, they often develop a "culture of silence" if they perceive disciplinary measures as inconsistent or hypocritical (UNESCO, 2024). Ultimately, if principals, teachers, and students lack a shared belief that ethical solutions are workable, the school's "discipline capacity" remains compromised, shifting the climate from teaching-focused to survival-focused and undermining the institutional trust required for true effectiveness (Dernowska, 2017; Raffee et al., 2021). Consequently, stakeholders increasingly recognize that addressing unethical practices requires a transition from isolated punitive measures toward collaborative governance and value-driven cultures that prioritize shared ownership and restorative accountability.

Drawing from some empirical studies, it is evident that moral cleanliness influences schools' institutional success by shaping three core dimensions of the educational climate. For instance, regarding the prevalence of unethical issues, Nkouonlack et al. (2023) and the CDHC (2023) conducted a descriptive survey tracking over 500 stakeholders across urban and semi-urban secondary schools in Cameroon. Using structured interview guides and observational checklists, their qualitative and quantitative analysis confirmed that drug abuse and risky sexual behaviors are the primary catalysts for institutional unrest. Their findings revealed that substance-induced "gang-like" behaviors account for a significant percentage of school dropouts and violent incidents. Second, concerning stakeholder perceptions, Zinkeng and Etta (2024) conducted a cross-sectional study in the South West Region with a sample of 412 teachers and 500 students. Utilizing a Likert-scale questionnaire and a convergent parallel analysis, they found a moderate positive correlation between ethical environments and teacher productivity. Their results highlight that environments characterized by harassment and ethical erosion fundamentally diminish student engagement and institutional trust.

This is further supported by Ramberg et al. (2019), who employed a large-scale longitudinal design involving 15,000 students and 2,000 teachers in Stockholm. Through multilevel structural equation modeling (SEM), they found that school effectiveness is inextricably linked to organizational ethos and leadership cooperation. Furthermore, Eneng and Ngwa (2024) explored the systemic challenges of moral cleanliness in Cameroon's Manyu Division using a purposive sample of 30 principals and 100 discipline masters. By applying thematic analysis to data collected via semi-structured interviews, they argued that while moral cleanliness is essential for institutional "honor," its implementation is crippled by a lack of specialized training and standardized evaluative tools. Finally, Idris et al. (2025) and RePEc (2025) utilized a correlational research design with a sample of 600 participants from conflict-affected regions. Using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to perform regression analysis, they framed leaders as

vital moral motivators. Their findings suggest that preventive leadership strategies directly determine institutional health, noting that schools with strong moral leadership are 1.5 times more likely to maintain academic competence during sociopolitical crises than those relying purely on punitive measures.

Collectively, these studies suggest that moral cleanliness is the foundational infrastructure upon which all other pillars of school effectiveness are built. Based on this empirical consensus, the present study seeks to statistically validate this relationship by testing a specific proposition derived from the research questions. Consequently, the study tests the operational hypothesis that moral cleanliness has a significant impact on school effectiveness in secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon (Ha), as opposed to the null premise that no such relationship exists (H<sub>0</sub>). By focusing on this targeted hypothesis, the research moves beyond general observations to quantify how a lack of integrity specifically disrupts the educational mandate and institutional productivity.

### **Theoretical framework**

Under the framework of Operant Conditioning (Skinner, 1953), moral cleanliness and school effectiveness are linked through the systematic reinforcement of behaviour. In this study, a morally clean environment acts as a positive stimulus that triggers desired academic and social responses. When an institution maintains high ethical standards, it provides a stable schedule of reinforcement where teacher productivity and student engagement are rewarded with safety and institutional Honor. This creates a self-sustaining cycle where school effectiveness becomes the conditioned response to a consistently ethical environment. Conversely, the high prevalence of issues like "gang sex" and substance abuse represents maladaptive operants that persist because they have been inadvertently reinforced by a "consequence vacuum." According to Alonso (2025), when negative behaviors are met with administrative silence or inconsistent punishment, the environment provides negative reinforcement, allowing deviance to proliferate as a means of seeking social status or escaping academic pressure.

In this behavioural model, stakeholders specifically principals and teachers act as the primary agents of reinforcement who determine the "contingencies" that shape the school's moral climate. As agents, their perceptions of "discipline capacity" dictate which behaviors are rewarded and which are extinguished. If stakeholders lack a shared belief that ethical solutions are workable, the reinforcement schedule breaks down, shifting the climate from instructionally focused to survival-focused. Ultimately, school effectiveness is the desired response that occurs only when the school environment provides consistent positive reinforcement for discipline and hard work. Achieving this requires a deliberate redesign of the school's behavioral architecture, moving away from isolated punitive measures toward restorative reinforcements that prioritize shared ownership and institutional trust.

### **Statement of the problem**

Ideally, secondary schools should be safe havens that promote academic excellence, character development, and mutual respect among students and staff. Under the Ministry of Secondary Education's (MINESEC) guidelines, schools are meant to be healthy learning

environments where clear rules, proper facilities, and strong moral values protect student dignity and support effective teaching. In this ideal setting, administrators, teachers, and parents work hand-in-hand to maintain discipline, secure academic honesty, and build an atmosphere where learners can focus entirely on their education. In reality, secondary schools across the South West Region face a deeply unsettling crisis that compromises this educational baseline. Reports from the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms (CDHC) reveal that roughly 21% of school-age children experiment with drugs, while localized research in Buea shows that 15.3% of students misuse prescription drugs like Tramadol (Nkouonlack et al., 2023). This behavioral decline extends to severe issues like gang-related sexual activity, peer harassment, and physical violence. Compounding this distress, ReliefWeb (2025) notes that 34% of schools in the region lack the basic infrastructure, such as separate latrines, needed to shield students from harassment.

While MINESEC has pushed "zero-tolerance" directives and the "Clean School" philosophy from the top down, these policies often fail because they ignore the heavy psychological burden on these students, given that Zinkeng and Etta (2024) report a staggering 73.6% prevalence of mental health disorders due to ongoing conflict in the region. The gap in our current knowledge is that while we know our schools are struggling physically and behaviorally, we do not fully understand how this lack of "moral cleanliness" actively damages the internal effectiveness of the school as a whole. Most administrative solutions look only at sweeping classrooms or issuing punishments, leaving a major disconnect between what policies demand and what students or teachers actually experience on the ground.

This study moves past simple paperwork and rhetoric to look directly at the human side of the problem. It brings together the voices of principals, teachers, and students to investigate how ethical decay compromises school safety and productivity. To bridge this gap, the study is guided by three main objectives: first, to examine how stakeholders perceive the current state of school effectiveness in the region; second, to measure the direct impact that moral cleanliness has on this effectiveness; and finally, to identify the practical strategies school leaders use to manage misconduct and restore integrity. Consequently, this inquiry seeks to answer the following research questions: How do stakeholders perceive the current state of school effectiveness in secondary schools in the Southwest Region of Cameroon? What impact does moral cleanliness have on school effectiveness in secondary schools in the Southwest Region of Cameroon? What are the strategies school leaders employ to manage unethical conduct in secondary schools of the Southwest Region of Cameroon?

## **Methodology**

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between moral cleanliness and school effectiveness. The sample size consisted of exactly 1,024 participants across four divisions of the South West Region (Fako, Kupe-Manenguba, Manyu, and Meme). This included 24 principals, 500 teachers, and 500 terminal-class students (Form Five and Upper Sixth) drawn from operational public high schools. While the 24 principals provided qualitative data through semi-structured interviews, the 500 teachers and 500 students responded to structured Likert-scale questionnaires alongside administrative observations. Quantitative data were managed

using EpiData and analyzed via SPSS 25.0 using descriptive statistics and Linear Regression tests, while qualitative insights were processed using thematic analysis to capture the authentic experiences of school leaders.

### **Research Design**

This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design to investigate the relationship between moral cleanliness and school effectiveness. This descriptive approach is most suitable for this research as it allows for the collection of data from a diverse sample of stakeholders including principals, teachers, and students at a specific point in time to describe current conditions and identify patterns of ethical conduct within the South West Region. By utilizing this design, the study can efficiently measure the prevalence of unethical issues and assess perceptions of institutional effectiveness across multiple divisions simultaneously. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of the survey provides the empirical basis necessary to test the research hypothesis regarding the impact of moral cleanliness on school outcomes, offering a comprehensive overview of the educational climate without the need for long-term longitudinal observation.

### **Population of the Study**

The target population for this study comprised all educational stakeholders within public secondary and high schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. Geographically, the population was accessible across four administrative divisions: Fako, Kupe-Manenguba, Manyu, and Meme. Structurally, the target population was composed of three distinct subsets: principals, professional teaching staff, and students enrolled in Form Five and Upper Sixth. These student cohorts were specifically targeted because their extended presence in the school system provides an informed, firsthand perspective on institutional effectiveness and the operational moral climate. From this broader target population, a representative sample of exactly 1,024 participants was drawn using a multistage sampling technique. This accessible research sample included 24 school principals, 500 active teachers, and 500 terminal-class students. To ensure geographical representation, stratified random sampling was first used to categorize institutions across the four divisions. Purposive sampling was then applied to select the 24 principals based on their specific administrative insight and leadership experience. Finally, due to the unique logistical challenges and safety constraints of the conflict-affected period in the region, convenience and snowball sampling techniques were carefully utilized to reach and secure the final sample of 500 teachers and 500 students.

### **Instruments for Data Collection**

To ensure comprehensive data collection and triangulation of findings, three distinct instruments were utilized in this study. The primary tools for quantitative data collection were two Likert-scale questionnaires specifically designed for teachers and students to measure perceptions of school effectiveness and the various dimensions of cleanliness. To capture in-depth qualitative insights, a semi-structured interview guide was employed with principals, focusing on the leadership strategies and administrative challenges involved in managing unethical issues. Prior to the main study, a pilot study was conducted to ensure the instruments were clear and relevant; the resulting Cronbach's

Alpha reliability index of 0.7 confirmed that the tools possessed the necessary internal consistency and validity for rigorous academic inquiry.

## Findings

Quantitative data from the field was entered into Epidata version 3.1 and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Analysis included descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and Linear Regression tests to measure the impact of cleanliness dimensions on effectiveness. Simultaneously, qualitative data from interviews were processed using Thematic Analysis. This involved transcribing responses, coding data into recurring patterns, and selecting direct quotations to provide an "authentic voice" to the stakeholders' experiences.

To address the first research question regarding stakeholder perceptions, the study first examined the perspectives of teachers on the current state of school effectiveness. As the primary implementers of the curriculum and the individuals most consistently present in the school environment, teachers provide a critical front line assessment of institutional performance. Table [1] presents the descriptive statistics of their responses, categorized across the core pillars of school effectiveness.

**Table 1**

### *Teachers' Opinion on School Effectiveness*

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	Std. Dev
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD		
In my school, teachers don't feel safe and respected.**	100 (21.6%)	205 (44.4%)	87 (18.8%)	70 (15.2%)	305 (66.0%)	157 (34.0%)	2.19	.692
There is a culture of continuous evaluation for improvement in our school.	102 (22.1%)	209 (45.2%)	87 (18.8%)	64 (13.9%)	311 (67.3%)	151 (32.7%)	2.82	.711
Our school has clearly defined goals communicated to all staff.	103 (22.3%)	200 (43.3%)	94 (20.3%)	65 (14.1%)	303 (65.6%)	159 (34.4%)	2.73	.721
I am not adequately satisfied with collaboration to improve instructional strategies.**	98 (21.2%)	210 (45.5%)	79 (17.1%)	75 (16.2%)	308 (66.7%)	154 (33.3%)	2.16	.710
In our school, parents do not actively participate in school activities.**	100 (21.6%)	180 (38.9%)	76 (16.5%)	106 (22.9%)	280 (60.6%)	182 (39.4%)	2.32	.685
Few students achieve passing	97 (21.0%)	204 (44.2%)	66 (14.3%)	95 (20.6%)	301 (65.2%)	161 (34.8%)	2.21	.640

grades in core subjects.**								
There is a lack of support services for students who are struggling academically or personally.**	95 (20.6%)	200 (43.3%)	73 (15.8%)	94 (20.3%)	295 (63.9%)	167 (36.1%)	2.23	.667
There is effective communication between administration and teaching staff.	94 (20.3%)	207 (44.8%)	81 (17.5%)	80 (17.3%)	301 (65.2%)	161 (34.8%)	2.64	.714
The school regularly assesses its programs and practices to ensure effectiveness.	100 (21.6%)	203 (43.9%)	76 (16.5%)	83 (18.0%)	303 (65.6%)	159 (34.4%)	2.61	.732
<b>Overall MRS/Mean</b>	<b>632 (15.2%)</b>	<b>1286 (30.9%)</b>	<b>1514 (36.4%)</b>	<b>726 (17.5%)</b>	<b>1918 (46.1%)</b>	<b>2240 (53.9%)</b>	<b>2.43</b>	<b>.697</b>

Teachers perceive a significant deficit in school effectiveness, with a majority (53.9%) rating their institutions as ineffective compared to 46.1% who view them as effective with an Overall mean score of 2.43 falling below the 2.5 benchmark. Critical indicators of this ineffectiveness include a marked lack of safety and mutual respect, alongside a 66.7% dissatisfaction rate regarding collaboration on instructional strategies, which stifles innovation and professional growth. Furthermore, the school environment is weakened by a 60.6% lack of parental engagement and a 63.9% deficit in essential support services for struggling students. These systemic gaps are directly reflected in poor academic outcomes, with 65.2% of teachers reporting that most students fail to achieve passing grades in core subjects. While some positive communication exists, these individual efforts are overshadowed by the absence of a cohesive, supportive infrastructure, ultimately shifting the school climate from a center of learning to an under-performing environment in urgent need of intervention. This perspective is further reinforced by the data collected from the learners themselves, whose daily experiences provide a first-hand account of the school's operational climate. To determine the level of consensus across the institution, the study examined students' opinions on these same indicators of effectiveness. The results, as presented in table [2] reflect a stakeholder viewpoint that closely aligns with the observations made by teachers.

Table 2

*Students' Opinion on School Effectiveness*

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	Std. Dev
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD		
I don't understand the goals of our school.**	120 (24.4%)	160 (32.6%)	159 (32.4%)	52 (10.6%)	280 (57.0%)	211 (43.0%)	2.57	.765
My parents are involved in my education	116 (23.6%)	150 (30.5%)	166 (33.8%)	59 (12.0%)	266 (54.2%)	225 (45.8%)	2.57	.785

Teachers are qualified and knowledgeable in their subject areas.	115 (23.4%)	196 (39.9%)	151 (30.8%)	29 (0.6%)	311 (63.0%)	180 (37.0%)	2.71	.748
School leaders respond to students' concerns effectively.	121 (24.6%)	150 (30.5%)	158 (32.2%)	62 (12.6%)	271 (55.2%)	220 (44.8%)	2.55	.766
The environment at my school feels negative or unwelcoming**	107 (21.8%)	178 (36.3%)	148 (30.1%)	58 (11.8%)	285 (58.0%)	206 (42.0%)	2.41	.722
My classes are too large for teachers to provide individual attention.**	102 (20.8%)	201 (40.9%)	136 (27.7%)	52 (10.6%)	303 (61.7%)	188 (38.3%)	2.52	.704
I receive guidance on how to achieve my academic goals.	128 (26.1%)	175 (39.7%)	147 (29.9%)	40 (8.1%)	304 (61.9%)	187 (38.1%)	2.64	.769
Our school recognise and celebrate students' achievements.	115 (23.4%)	170 (34.6%)	163 (33.2%)	43 (8.7%)	285 (58.0%)	206 (42.0%)	2.59	.761
My school lacks enough resources (like books, technology, etc.) for effective learning.**	148 (30.1%)	100 (20.4%)	140 (28.5%)	103 (21.0%)	248 (50.5%)	243 (49.5%)	2.41	.788
<b>Overall MRS/Mean</b>	<b>605 (13.7%)</b>	<b>1637 (37.1%)</b>	<b>1679 (38.0%)</b>	<b>497 (11.2%)</b>	<b>2242 (50.8%)</b>	<b>2176 (49.2%)</b>	<b>2.55</b>	<b>.756</b>

Students provide a slightly more optimistic but deeply divided view of school effectiveness, with 50.8% perceiving their schools as effective compared to 49.2% who note ineffectiveness, resulting in a marginal mean score of 2.55. Critical indicators of this deficiency include a 57.0% failure in the communication of school goals and a concerning 58.0% of students reporting that the environment is negative or unwelcoming. Furthermore, the data reveals a significant disconnect in administrative responsiveness and support, with nearly 45.0% of students feeling their concerns are ignored and 50.5% reporting a critical lack of essential learning resources. These environmental stressors are compounded by overcrowded classrooms, which 61.7% of students believe hinder the individual attention necessary for academic growth. While 63.0% of students maintain confidence in teacher qualifications and 61.9% acknowledge receiving some academic guidance, these positive sentiments are undermined by a fragmented support system and an inconsistent sense of safety. Ultimately, these findings suggest that the "current state" of effectiveness is severely hindered by environmental and structural gaps, leaving students to navigate a high-risk climate that fails to fully prioritize their holistic development. Addressing these areas will be crucial for enhancing the overall effectiveness of the school and ensuring that all students feel valued and supported in their educational journey.

The preceding findings establish a clear baseline of institutional performance; however, these outcomes cannot be fully understood without examining the underlying ethical disruptions. To address the second research question, the study investigates the extent to which moral cleanliness or the lack thereof influences these institutional outcomes. Table

[3] presents the responses from teachers, whose front-line observations provide a detailed assessment of the pervasive unethical issues currently straining school effectiveness across the South West Region.

**Table 3**  
*Teachers' Opinion on Moral Cleanliness*

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	Std. Dev
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD		
Fighting among students is a frequent issue in our school.	77 (16.7%)	310 (67.1%)	75 (16.2%)	0 (0.0%)	387 (83.8%)	75 (16.2%)	2.00	.574
Smoking on school grounds is a common problem among students.	73 (15.8%)	311 (67.3%)	78 (16.9%)	0 (0.0%)	384 (83.1%)	78 (16.9%)	2.01	.578
Gang - related sexual activity occurs among students at our school.	82 (17.7%)	300 (64.9%)	80 (17.3%)	0 (0.0%)	382 (82.7%)	80 (17.3%)	2.00	.593
Harassment of students by their peers occurs regularly at our school.	75 (16.2%)	291 (63.0%)	94 (20.3%)	2 (0.4%)	366 (79.2%)	96 (20.8%)	2.05	.618
Bullying is a significant problem within our school.	97 (21.0%)	274 (59.3%)	91 (19.7%)	0 (0.0%)	371 (80.3%)	91 (19.7%)	1.99	.638
Students frequently engage in physical fights with their teachers.	104 (22.5%)	276 (59.7%)	80 (17.3%)	2 (0.4%)	380 (82.3%)	82 (17.7%)	1.96	.644
Gambling is a prevalent issue among students in our school.	102 (22.1%)	261 (56.5%)	99 (21.4%)	0 (0.0%)	363 (78.6%)	99 (21.4%)	1.99	.660
Measures are taken to combat corruption and unethical practices within our institution. **	120 (26.0%)	250 (54.1%)	92 (19.9%)	0 (0.0%)	370 (80.1%)	92 (19.9%)	1.94	.675
Our school regularly reviews its ethical policies to ensure they remain relevant and effective. **	199 (25.8%)	249 (53.9%)	94 (20.3%)	0 (0.0%)	368 (79.7%)	94 (20.3%)	1.95	.678
<b>Overall MRS/Mean</b>	<b>610 (18.9%)</b>	<b>2023 (62.6%)</b>	<b>596 (18.4%)</b>	<b>5 (0.2%)</b>	<b>2633 (81.4%)</b>	<b>601 (18.6%)</b>	<b>2.43</b>	<b>.615</b>

Teachers perceive a profound crisis in moral cleanliness, reporting an environment where pervasive unethical behaviors systematically dismantle the school's ethical climate. Critical indicators of this decay include a striking 83.8% of teachers witnessing

frequent physical violence among students and an alarming 82.3% reporting that students engage in physical fights with faculty, signaling a severe breakdown in institutional authority. This atmosphere of fear is further exacerbated by the high prevalence of gang-related sexual activity (82.7%), peer harassment (79.2%), and chronic bullying (80.3%), which collectively transform the school into a high-risk zone for both staff and learners. Furthermore, 83.1% of teachers identify widespread substance abuse and 78.6% report gambling on school grounds, highlighting a moral landscape dominated by predatory habits. While some ethical policies exist, a low mean score of 1.94 regarding their implementation reveals deep skepticism about their efficacy. Ultimately, with an overall mean score of 2.43, these findings suggest that the school's "discipline capacity" is severely compromised. Summarily, the data paints a concerning picture of moral cleanliness in the school, with teachers highlighting numerous behavioral issues that hinder a positive educational environment. To determine if this perspective is shared by those most directly impacted by this environment, the study further examined the responses of students, whose feedback on these same moral indicators as presented in table [4] provides a critical internal view of the school's ethical state.

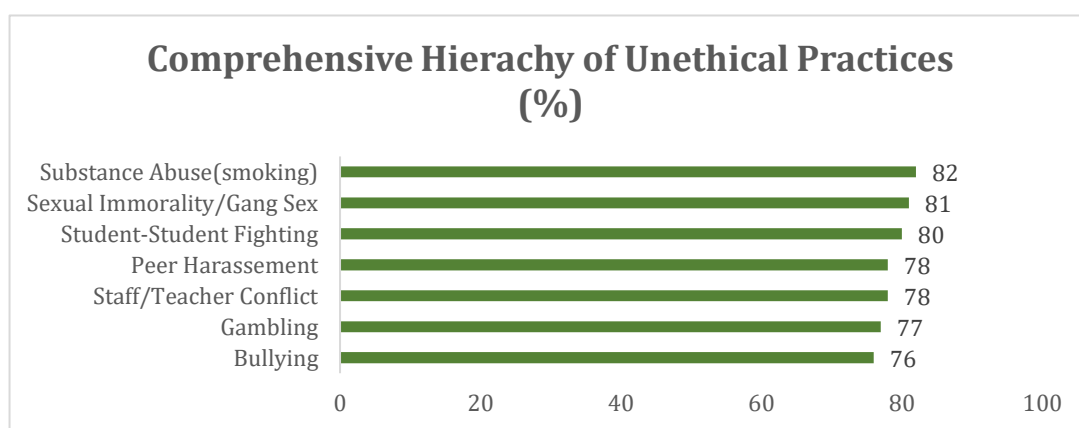
**Table 4**  
*Students' Opinion on Moral Cleanliness*

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	Std. Dev
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD		
Students in our school frequently fight with each other.	44 (9.0%)	329 (67.0%)	117 (23.8%)	1 (0.2%)	373 (76.0%)	118 (24.0%)	2.15	.560
In our school, students engage in examination malpractice.	63 (12.8%)	326 (66.4%)	101 (20.6%)	1 (0.2%)	389 (79.2%)	102 (20.8%)	2.08	.580
Students are often caught smoking in our school.	47 (9.6%)	345 (70.3%)	98 (20.0%)	1 (0.2%)	392 (79.8%)	99 (20.2%)	2.11	.541
Students are selected for school activities based on their backgrounds in our school.	56 (11.4%)	332 (67.6%)	101 (20.6%)	2 (0.4%)	388 (79.0%)	103 (21.0%)	2.10	.572
Sexual immorality is common among peers at school.	65 (13.2%)	322 (65.6%)	102 (20.8%)	2 (0.4%)	387 (78.8%)	104 (21.2%)	2.08	.592
Students in our school experience harassment regularly from peers.	68 (13.8%)	308 (62.7%)	113 (23.0%)	2 (0.4%)	376 (76.6%)	115 (23.4%)	2.10	.613
Gambling is a common activity among students at our school.	83 (16.9%)	286 (58.2%)	118 (24.0%)	4 (0.8%)	369 (75.2%)	122 (24.8%)	2.09	.660
Sometimes, teachers in our school get into fight with each other.	89 (18.1%)	273 (55.6%)	125 (25.5%)	4 (0.8%)	362 (73.7%)	129 (26.3%)	2.09	.679

The school does not take bullying seriously when it is reported.	91 (18.5%)	258 (52.5%)	137 (27.9%)	5 (1.0%)	349 (71.1%)	142 (28.9%)	2.11	.702
<b>Overall MRS/Mean</b>	<b>606 (13.7%)</b>	<b>2779 (62.9%)</b>	<b>1012 (22.9%)</b>	<b>22 (0.5%)</b>	<b>3385 (76.6%)</b>	<b>1034 (23.4%)</b>	<b>2.10</b>	<b>.611</b>

Students perceive a severely degraded ethical climate, with an overall mean score of 2.10 reflecting a pervasive lack of moral cleanliness across the school environment. Critical indicators of this decay include a 79.2% prevalence of academic malpractice, which directly undermines institutional integrity, and a 79.8% rate of substance abuse among peers. The sense of social equity is further compromised by a 79.0% perception that school opportunities are based on background rather than merit, fostering deep-seated exclusion. Safety remains a primary concern, as 76.0% of students report frequent fighting and 76.6% experience regular peer harassment, yet 71.1% feel the administration fails to take bullying reports seriously. Alarming, this culture of conflict extends to the staff, with 73.7% of students witnessing physical altercations between teachers. Collectively, these findings suggest that students are navigating a survival-based environment marked by sexual immorality, gambling, and a perceived lack of administrative accountability, all of which sabotage the school's mandate for character formation and academic safety. While the shared perceptions of both teachers and students confirm a pervasive moral crisis that compromises the educational environment, it is necessary to identify which specific behaviors most frequently disrupt institutional order. Consequently, Figure [1] provides a comparative visualization of these unethical practices, ranking their recurrence to illustrate the primary drivers of moral decay before transitioning to a statistical analysis of their overall impact.

**Figure 1**  
*Comprehensive visualization of unethical practices*



The chart provides a comprehensive hierarchy of behavioural unethical practices, illustrating a high-frequency crisis across the South West Region. By aggregating data from both teachers and students, the visual demonstrates that Substance Abuse (82%) and Sexual Immorality/Gang Sex (81%) are the most recurrent disruptions, followed closely by Student-Student Fighting (80%). These top-tier behaviors indicate a dominant culture of risky habits and aggression that moves beyond isolated incidents. The clustering of all listed behaviours above 75% highlights that no single issue exists in

isolation; rather, they form a cohesive "survival-based" climate. This visual evidence suggests that the school environment is currently saturated with ethical disruptions that directly threaten the institutional stability required for effective teaching and learning. While the visual data confirms that these behavioural disruptions are highly frequent, the existence of these issues alone does not definitively prove their statistical influence on overall institutional performance. To move beyond descriptive observation and establish a causal link, it is necessary to test the research hypothesis regarding the predictive power of moral cleanliness. To test these propositions, a Simple Linear Regression analysis was conducted, the results of which are presented in table [5] to determine if moral conduct serves as a significant predictor of school effectiveness.

### Testing and verification of Hypothesis 1

**Ho:** The practice of moral cleanliness has no significant impact on the effectiveness of secondary schools within the South West Region of Cameroon.

**Ha:** The practice of moral cleanliness has a significant impact on the effectiveness of secondary schools within the South West Region of Cameroon.

**Table 5**

*Linear Regression Test Predicting the Impact of Moral Cleanliness on Effectiveness of Secondary Schools*

Model	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	p-value
(Constant)	.724	16.748 (12.126)	.000
Moral cleanliness	.038	9.247 (.386)	.000
<b>Model Summary</b>			
R-value	.386		
R-Square	.149		
Std. Error of the Estimate	2.649		
<b>ANOVA</b>			
F-test	85.514		
p-value	.000		
n	953		

Dependent Variable: Secondary school effectiveness

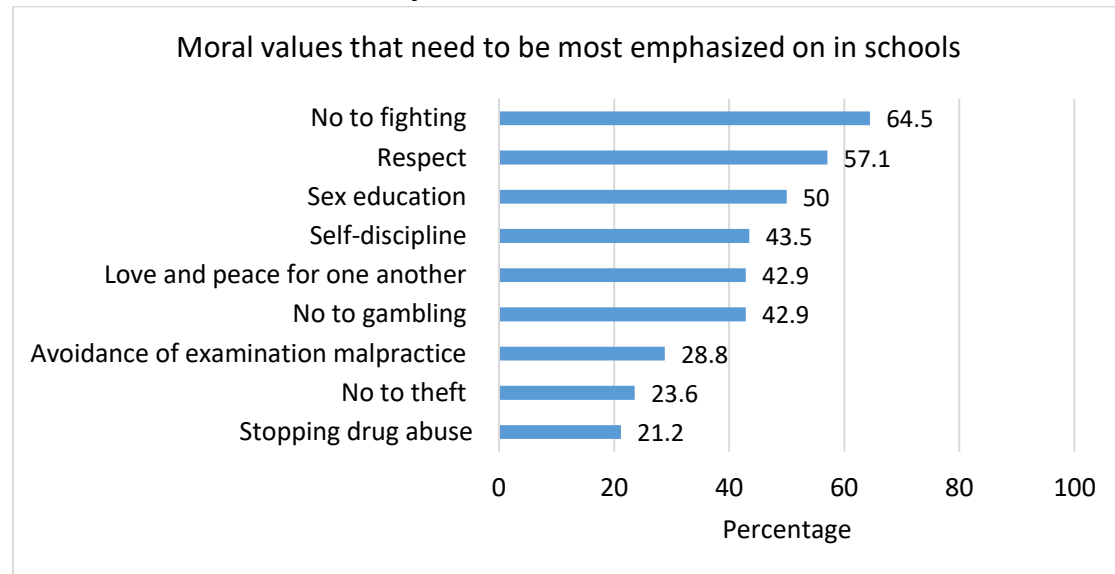
Predictor: Moral cleanliness

The linear regression results provide statistical confirmation that moral cleanliness is a significant predictor of secondary school effectiveness. With an R-value of 0.386 and an R-Square of 0.149, the model indicates that the ethical state of the school environment accounts for approximately 14.9% of the variance in institutional success. The analysis reveals that for every unit improvement in moral cleanliness, school effectiveness increases by a factor of 9.247 demonstrating that reducing unethical behaviors is a fundamental prerequisite for improving overall performance. While the standard error of the estimate (2.649) suggests that other external variables also influence outcomes, these findings validate that addressing the pervasive "unclean" moral climate is a statistically vital step toward achieving the national goals of the education system. The regression model provides statistical proof that moral cleanliness is a vital predictor of school success.

While the statistical have established the magnitude of the moral crisis, the focus must now shift toward the strategies and values required for institutional renewal. In addressing Research Question 3, Figure [2] presents the insights of school principals, providing a qualitative layer to the identified unethical issues and highlighting the specific moral values they believe are essential for restoring institutional integrity.

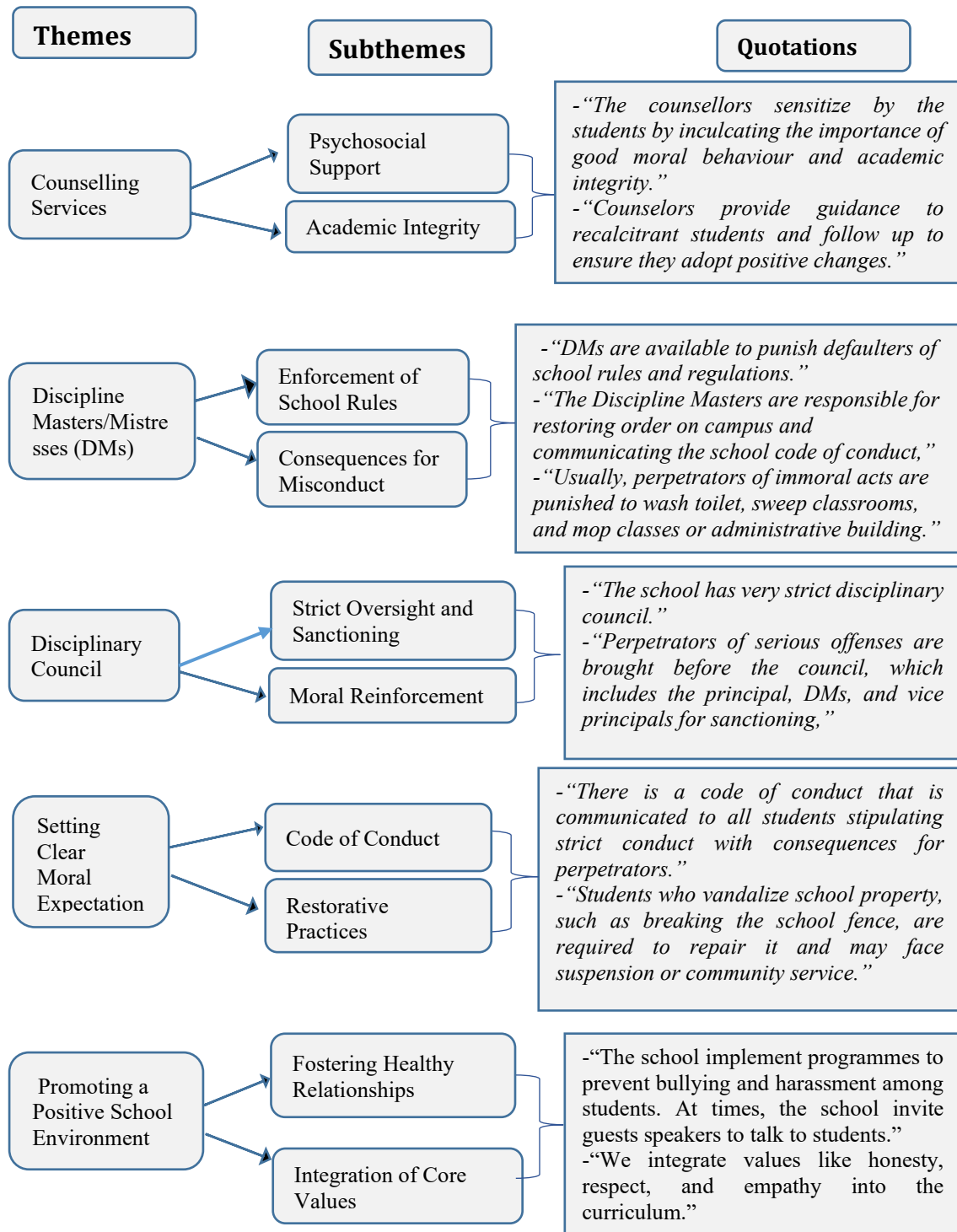
### Figure I

*Moral Values that Need to be Emphasized in Schools*



The insights from school principals provide a qualitative layer to the identified unethical issues, revealing the specific moral values they believe are essential to restoring institutional integrity. To address the pervasive conflict noted in the quantitative data, a significant 64.5% of principals prioritize the need to curb student fighting, while 57.1% advocate for promoting mutual respect as a foundational interpersonal value. Furthermore, principals emphasize the necessity of proactive guidance, with 50.0% calling for comprehensive sex education to address sexual immorality and 43.5% stressing self-discipline as a tool for behavioral management. Additional concerns include discouraging gambling and promoting peace (42.9% each), alongside a commitment to upholding academic integrity by avoiding examination malpractice (28.8%) and prohibiting theft and drug abuse (21.2% each). These findings suggest that leadership views the restoration of moral cleanliness as a multifaceted effort that requires transitioning from simple punishment to targeted character-building programs. While identifying core values is a critical first step toward institutional renewal, the effectiveness of these ideals depends on their practical application through school-wide interventions. Consequently, figure [5] details the Principals' Opinions on how their schools address unacceptable moral behaviors, providing insight into the specific disciplinary mechanisms and corrective strategies currently employed to mitigate the moral crisis."

Figure 3  
How School leaders Address Unacceptable Moral Behaviours



Beyond reactive punishment, leadership emphasizes institutionalized moral expectations and collective responsibility. This includes the implementation of strict moral policies, the integration of teachers into the daily disciplinary timetable, and the use of restorative practices, such as requiring students to repair vandalized property. Furthermore, some principals adopt proactive environmental strategies, such as fostering mutual respect among stakeholders, teaching core moral values, and inviting guest speakers to address

students. Despite these comprehensive efforts ranging from counseling to community service principals acknowledge that rampant issues like drug use and gambling continue to hinder academic performance, suggesting that existing management strategies face significant challenges in fully curbing the prevailing ethical crisis.

This reveal that school leaders utilize a hybrid management approach that balances rehabilitative support with punitive sanctions. Principals primarily address unethical conduct by referring students to guidance counselors for psychosocial ethics and integrity lessons; however, for persistent or severe offenses like drug use and violence, they rely on discipline masters to enforce strict penalties, including manual labor, suspension, and dismissal through disciplinary councils. Beyond reactive measures, leadership emphasizes institutionalized moral expectations, requiring teachers to serve as "moral agents" who act as role models, disciplinarians, and parental figures to foster a culture of integrity. Despite these multi-layered strategies ranging from restorative practices like property repair to inviting guest speakers' principals acknowledge that rampant issues such as gambling and substance abuse continue to challenge the school's "discipline capacity," suggesting that while the framework for moral leadership exists, its practical effectiveness remains constrained by the prevailing ethical crisis.

Principals perceive the addressing of unethical issues as a multifaceted responsibility centered on conflict resolution, character formation, and preventative education. Their primary focus is on restoring a safe environment, with a significant majority (64.5%) prioritizing the curbing of student fighting and the promotion of mutual respect (57.1%) as essential for institutional harmony. They view moral cleanliness not just through punishment, but through the proactive teaching of self-discipline (43.5%) and comprehensive sex education (50.0%) to help students navigate peer pressures responsibly. Additionally, their perceptions reflect a commitment to academic and personal integrity, specifically targeting the discouragement of gambling, examination malpractice, and drug abuse as vital measures to protect students and ensure long-term school effectiveness.

## **Discussions**

The findings suggest that secondary institutions in the Southwest Region are currently operating in a state of "functional ineffectiveness." When a majority of teachers and nearly half of students perceive the school as ineffective, it implies that the institutional ethos has shifted from a proactive center of excellence to a reactive site of crisis management. As noted by Ramberg et al. (2019), school effectiveness is about the "organizational health" of the environment; thus, the negative climate reported indicates a psychological barrier to engagement. Operant Conditioning explains this as an environment lacking "discriminative stimuli" for success. To reverse this, it is recommended that educational authorities develop and enforce clear policies mandating standards for cleanliness and integrity, supported by regular inspections. Furthermore, the government must allocate funding for maintaining facilities and cleaning services to ensure the physical environment supports institutional goals, while administrators must implement strategic daily cleaning routines and staff training to integrate waste management and hygiene as holistic benchmarks for success.

Furthermore, the results indicate that "moral uncleanness" has transitioned from isolated cases of misconduct into a normalized peer culture. The high prevalence of fighting and substance abuse suggests that these "maladaptive operants" have become survival strategies in a conflict-affected region, signifying a breakdown of the "Clean School" philosophy. According to Alonso (2025) and Nkouonlack et al. (2023), this ethical erosion mirrors external societal stressors within school walls. The predictive link found in the regression analysis proves that as long as these behaviors remain high, effectiveness is statistically impossible. Consequently, it is recommended that schools move beyond "posters on walls" by integrating lessons on personal responsibility and ethical behavior directly into the curriculum. Administrators should implement formal character education programs, while teachers must model positive values and hygiene practices to set a visible standard. Authorities should also fund targeted prevention programs that encourage academic honesty and discourage identified deviant behaviors through peer-led accountability.

Also, the findings reveal that school leaders utilize a hybrid management approach that balances rehabilitative support with punitive sanctions to address the prevailing ethical crisis. Principals perceive moral cleanliness as a multifaceted responsibility, prioritizing conflict resolution, self-discipline, and character formation over mere reactive punishment. This aligns with the "moral leadership" framework discussed by Mekolle (2024), which suggests that restoring institutional integrity requires a transition toward proactive pedagogical interventions. However, the persistent prevalence of gambling and substance abuse confirms that the school's "discipline capacity" remains constrained, reinforcing Whang's (2023) assertion that leaders must act as moral motivators to bridge the gap between administrative policy and classroom conduct. While teachers are utilized as "moral agents" through diverse strategies ranging from restorative property repair to psychosocial counseling the ongoing moral erosion suggests that these internal mechanisms are often overwhelmed. As Idris et al. (2025) and UNESCO (2024) suggest, resolving such systemic issues requires moving beyond isolated disciplinary acts toward a collaborative, value-driven culture that prioritizes restorative accountability and shared institutional ownership.

## **Recommendations**

First, to stop the heavy issues like campus fighting, smoking, and bullying, the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) and school principals must move away from just handing out suspensions and instead focus on rewarding good behavior. Following Skinner's ideas on behavioral modification, schools across the South West Region should set up active "Discipline and Integrity Awards." Instead of only punishing bad behavior, school counselors and teachers should be trained to actively praise and reward classes or student groups that show respect, clear up conflicts peacefully, and keep their spaces clean. We need to move away from making our schools feel like high-risk zones run on fear. By teaching practical moral lessons during morning assemblies and labor periods, and by celebrating students who act with integrity, administrators can change the school climate from a place of survival back to a place of true learning.

Secondly, since the data shows that most parents in divisions like Fako, Meme, Manyu, and Kupe-Manenguba are rarely involved, principals must actively revive and reform the

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) networks. Instead of using the PTA just to collect money, principals should hold regular "Family-School Dialogue Days" where school rules and moral expectations are clearly explained to parents and students. Parents need to be brought directly into the loop the moment a child starts drifting into bad habits, rather than waiting until things get out of hand. By working together to break the student "culture of silence" and creating small, internal support groups for struggling children, our secondary schools can make sure their educational goals become a reality rather than just unachieved plans written on paper.

## Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the role of the "Clean School" concept and its overall impact on school effectiveness within secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. The study emerged from growing concerns regarding the increasing prevalence of anti-social behaviors among secondary school adolescents, including physical violence against peers and faculty, drug abuse (such as the misuse of Tramadol), gambling, and severe forms of behavioral deviance that continue to threaten the moral fabric of Cameroonian secondary education. Against the backdrop of weakening school disciplinary systems, high psychological stress from the ongoing Anglophone crisis, and the limited presence of supportive school services, the study sought to determine whether the systematic implementation of physical, administrative, and moral standards still possesses the capacity to shape a safe, highly functional environment and promote institutional success.

The findings of the study revealed that moral cleanliness remains a highly relevant, critical, and foundational pillar for school effectiveness and adolescent character formation within South West secondary schools. Evidence from principals' interviews, observation checklists, and questionnaire responses from teachers and students demonstrated that a clean moral climate contributes significantly to the minimization of behavioral infractions, the preservation of academic integrity, and the maintenance of institutional order. Participants strongly affirmed that schools maintaining high standards of moral cleanliness experience better teacher productivity, higher student engagement, and more functional learning conditions. Through clean and orderly spaces, students are shielded from the destructive consequences of peer harassment and intimidation, allowing academic focus to thrive. Ultimately, the data validates that a school cannot fulfill its national mandate for character formation as outlined in the 1998 Education Law without a safe, orderly, and morally clean environment. To restore institutional honor, secondary schools must transition from purely punitive discipline toward collaborative, restorative governance that fosters a shared culture of integrity among principals, teachers, and students alike.

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