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The International Journal of Developmental Issues in Education and Humanities (IJDIEH) is a peer-reviewed, open access academic journal published by the Faculty of Education, University of Buea, Cameroon.

The journal provides a scholarly platform for the dissemination of high-quality research in education, humanities, and human development. It encourages interdisciplinary research that contributes to academic knowledge, policy development, and professional practice in both local and global contexts. As a bilingual journal, IJDIEH welcomes submissions in English and French, promoting wider accessibility and international academic collaboration.

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The journal publishes original research articles, review papers, and scholarly contributions in the following areas:

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ISSUE SUMMARY

Volume 1, Issue 1 (November–December 2025) of the International Journal of Developmental Issues in Education and Humanities (IJDIEH) presents a multidisciplinary collection of peer-reviewed research articles addressing contemporary issues in education, social sciences, humanities, psychology, governance, and applied innovation.

This issue highlights strong African-centered scholarship alongside international perspectives, with particular emphasis on digital literacy, inclusive education, leadership, psychosocial development, artificial intelligence in education, and cultural identity formation.

The contributions examine both structural and human dimensions of educational and social systems. Several studies focus on teaching quality, assessment practices, learning environments, and institutional leadership, while others explore societal pressures, acculturation, religious experience, and gender-related psychosocial realities.

The issue also reflects emerging intersections between technology and human development, including artificial intelligence applications, STEAM-based interventions, and digital transformation in education.

Collectively, these studies provide both theoretical insight and practical relevance for researchers, educators, policymakers, and practitioners committed to advancing sustainable educational and societal development.

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DECOLONISING ADOLESCENCE AND “RIGHTING” THE WRONGS OF GATE- KEEPER PSYCHOLOGY: AN AFRICENTRIC READING OF ADOLESCENCE IN SUB-SAHARA AFRICA

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Abstract

Adolescence has historically been dominated by Western-centric frameworks, often overlooking or misrepresenting the diverse realities of adolescents in non-Western societies. Their exclusion from global adolescent discourse reinforces a deficit and reductionist perspective that frames adolescence in the global South through lenses of “lack” or “difference” rather than recognising their unique strengths, resilience, and contextual adaptations with which they forge development. Non-Western adolescents navigate complex realities shaped by collective identities, intergenerational relationships, and resourceful responses to systemic challenges. These realities offer alternative pathways to development. For instance, their development is deeply embedded in communal values, personal strivings, social obligations, and cultural traditions that prioritise family, community, and cultural continuity. This review dwells on the limitations of dominant Eurocentric theoretical models and advocates for an inclusive approach that foregrounds cultural context in understanding adolescence in sub-Saharan Africa. Findings show that while adolescence in Euro-American traditions is typically understood as a universal, biological stage, with a focus on independence, cognitive development, and personal achievement/accomplishment as primary markers of maturity, emphasis is on the communal, contextual, and relational understanding of growth and development during adolescence in sub-Saharan Africa. In most societies in the region, cognitive development is viewed not just through the lens of individual achievement, but through collective participation, social responsibility, and the integration of cultural practices. Achievement is typically recognised through participation in cultural rites and rituals, the fulfillment of familial and societal roles, and the ability to maintain and strengthen relationships within the community. Personal accomplishments are deeply intertwined with collective welfare, and one’s success reflects the health and prosperity of their family, village, or social group. Rites of passage, such as initiation ceremonies, marriages, and communal work, serve as key milestones in marking personal growth and achievement. From a decolonial lens, this review emphasizes the importance of power dynamics, historical legacies, and global inequities in shaping adolescent experiences. It calls for a reimagining of adolescent development theory that not only acknowledges but also validates the richness and complexity of non-Western perspectives in conceiving and understanding adolescence.

Keywords:

Decolonise, adolescence, gate-keeper psychology, righting the wrongs, Africentric, sub-Saharan Africa.

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Introduction

Adolescent development theory has historically been dominated by Western-centric frameworks that often overlook or misrepresent the diverse realities of adolescents in non-Western societies. Initial efforts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, influenced by G. Stanley Hall's *Adolescence* (1904), characterised it as a period of "storm and stress," emphasising biological and psychological upheavals common during the period. Hall (1904) emphasised that rapid physical changes during puberty, including hormonal shifts triggered heightened emotional sensitivity, mood swings, and impulsive behaviour which made adolescent lives stormy and stressful. Psychologically, adolescence was seen as a time of identity exploration, social adjustment, and advanced cognitive development, often marked by inner conflict and rebellion against existing societal norms (Crosnoe & Johnson, 2011). Drawing from Darwinian evolutionary theory, Hall (1904) argued that adolescence recapitulated stages of human evolution, blending primitive instincts with the emerging complexities of adult cognition. This perspective framed the period as a turbulent, yet necessary phase for achieving maturity. Critics of the era further associated these struggles with moral and social concerns, as they debated the implications of adolescent behaviour for education, family dynamics, and societal stability (e.g., Crosnoe, 2021). Of course, whether for or against, these conceptions were rooted in Western narratives, but portraying adolescence as a universal turbulent phase of development for all. That is why Ngwenya et al. (2023) insinuated that these Eurocentric theories often universalized concepts of identity, autonomy, and developmental milestones while neglecting the specificity of adolescents in non-Western societies.

However, by the mid-20th century, research expanded to incorporate sociocultural influences, with theorists like Erik Erikson highlighting identity formation as a central task of adolescence (Ragelienė, 2016). The rise of developmental psychology brought attention to cognitive, emotional, and social processes (Miller, 2022), while ecological models, such as Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, emphasized the impact of family, peers, and broader societal systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Recent decades saw the integration of global, intersectional, and contextual approaches, challenging Western-centric paradigms and acknowledging the diversity of adolescent experiences across cultures. For example, studies conducted across diverse cultural contexts such as Kenya, China, India, and the United States, have demonstrated that adolescent experiences are shaped by local/cultural norms, economic conditions, and societal structures (e.g., Chandra-Mouli et al., 2017). For instance, the timing and impact of puberty vary widely, influenced by nutritional and environmental factors, challenging the notion of adolescence as a uniform biological phase that unfolds the same for everyone. Meanwhile, psychologists like Jeffrey Arnett have shown that identity exploration, a hallmark of adolescence, manifests differently across cultures (Arnett, 2015, 2006, 2000). In collectivist societies, identity is often shaped by family and community expectations, contrasting with the individualistic focus prevalent in Western Euro-American contexts.

Unfortunately, most adolescent studies are grounded in Euro-American ideals, arguably superimposed on non-Western cultures, thereby marginalizing the lived experiences of adolescents in those areas, especially the global South. This marginalisation perpetuates a narrow, restrictive and reductionist understanding of adolescence globally. It fails to account for the diverse cultural, social, and economic realities that shape adolescence in non-Euro-American contexts. For example, Erikson's theory emphasizes identity versus role confusion as a universal psychosocial crisis during adolescence, assuming individualistic processes of identity formation (Erikson, 1968). Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development (e.g., formal operational stage) are considered universal but often fail to address the role of cultural practices, oral traditions, and non-linear problem-solving methods that influence cognitive development in other cultural settings (Dasen, 2022).

Meanwhile, Hall (1904) described adolescence as a universal period of emotional turmoil and rebellion, but overlooked how non-Western cultures (especially African), with their strong intergenerational and social support systems may experience adolescence differently. Also, even though Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood acknowledges the variability of the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2000), it initially drew on data from Western industrialised societies, particularly North America, and emphasised individual exploration and delayed commitments. In non-Western societies, particularly sub-Sahara Africa, economic and familial obligations often necessitate earlier transitions to adult roles, also challenging the applicability of Arnett's framework in those societies. Generally, these traditional mainstream frameworks failed to capture the complexities and realities of adolescence in African societies, where communal values, extended family structures and traditions, and historical experiences such as colonialism and post-colonial transitions may significantly influence adolescent experiences.

The exclusion of non-Western adolescence in global adolescent discourse has definitely reinforced a deficit perspective that frames adolescence in the global South through the lens of "lack" or "difference" rather than recognising the unique strengths, resilience, and contextual adaptations of adolescents that forge development. Non-Western adolescents, especially those from sub-Sahara Africa navigate complex realities shaped by collective identities, intergenerational relationships, and resourceful responses to systemic challenges (Nsamenang, 2002), definitely offering alternative pathways to growth and maturity. Their development is deeply embedded in communal values, social obligations, and cultural traditions.

According to Nsamenang (2002), the adolescent experience in this region is deeply embedded in collective frameworks that prioritize family, community, and cultural continuity. Psycho-socialization processes emphasise identity formation, learning, respect for elders, interdependence, and the fulfillment of responsibilities within the family and community. Rooted in these deeply held cultural traditions, these practices serve as a foundation for preparing adolescents to contribute meaningfully to their social and cultural environments. These practices are intertwined with the challenges of modernity, including

urbanisation, globalisation, technology, and shifting gender dynamics, which increasingly influence adolescent experiences and aspirations (Zalli, 2024; Sakketa, 2023).

While Sakketa (2023) believes that urbanisation brings exposure to diverse lifestyles and opportunities, while also disrupting traditional communal structures and altering the socialization of young people; Zalli, (2024) insinuates that globalization introduces new ideals and aspirations, fostering ambitions that often diverge from conventional pathways. Therefore, while both processes often appear more promising with more opportunities, there are inherent downsides that may hurt development. For example, while globalization promotes Western ideals that conflict and erode local traditions propagating identity confusion and value dissonance (Urbaite, 2024); urbanization not only introduces higher risks of unemployment, exploitation, and crime in the cities; but also erodes traditional community structures that previously supported adolescent development (UNESCO, 2012).

Therefore, the need to decolonise adolescent development theory in the 21st century cannot be overemphasised. Decolonisation involves critiquing and reshaping these mainstream Western-centric theories to better reflect the experiences and contexts of non-Western societies, like in sub-Saharan Africa. It not only involves shifting power dynamics in academic scholarship, but also prioritising voices from marginalised communities and recognising the multiple ways adolescents navigate their lives. According to Abubakar et al. (2024), decolonisation validates the lived experiences, cultural practices, and resilience strategies of adolescents in underrepresented contexts, which define alternative pathways to development, different from those acclaimed by mainstream adolescent psychology.

Decolonisation re-centres indigenous and localised knowledge systems and highlights the multiplicity of pathways through which youth engage with their environments, balancing traditional knowledge systems with contemporary challenges. Abubakar et al. (2024) add that decolonisation values cultural pluralism, challenges hegemonic narratives, and prioritizes youth agency. Thus, understanding that development occurs in diverse cultural contexts, adolescent cultural identities should be supported, not erased or assimilated into a dominant Eurocentric and American culture. Additionally, sub-Saharan African adolescents are not just passive recipients of culture or development, but are active agents in shaping their own lives (Naudé & van Damme, 2024). Therefore, decolonisation not only fosters inclusivity but also enriches the understanding of adolescence as a dynamic, context-sensitive phase of life. This allows for a more equitable and holistic discourse that values diversity and challenges systemic inequities in knowledge production around adolescence. It calls for a rethinking of how adolescence should be defined, understood, and studied, incorporating a broader range of perspectives.

Adolescence as a Western-Centric/Eurocentric Enterprise

Adolescence, as it is commonly understood in contemporary developmental psychology, is largely a Western-centric or Eurocentric construct, whose discourse is largely shaped by those contexts. It generally reflects Euro-American values, norms, and social

structures. In those Western models, for example, adolescence is often defined as a distinct, universal, biologically driven developmental stage characterised by individual autonomy, cognitive development, emotional self-regulation, and the pursuit of personal achievement (e.g., Christie & Viner, 2005). Christie & Viner (2005) specify that these frameworks emphasise independence, self-reliance, and the achievement of milestones such as academic success or career advancement, attainment of emotional and cognitive maturity, the development of personal identity, and the pursuit of autonomy from family as key indicators of maturity. Adolescents in that context are expected to navigate processes such as formal education, career planning, and social independence, all of which are considered important markers of the transition to adulthood. In addition to cognitive and emotional development,

Western societies place a stronger emphasis on personal achievement and individual responsibility, where success is frequently measured by individual accomplishments, such as academic performance or professional aspirations (Nyström et al., 2018). The expectation of self-sufficiency, decision-making capacity, and personal goals often marks the shift from adolescence to adulthood, with the individual seen as a self-determining agent. That is why Hui & Tsang (2012) note that Western adolescents independently navigate personal choices, responsibilities, and identities without necessarily depending on others. They are expected to assert control over their lives, make decisions regarding education, career, relationships, and personal beliefs, and establish an identity separate from familial or communal influences.

However, when these Western ideals are universally applied the way they have been historically done in adolescent psychology, they fail to account for the diversity of adolescent experiences across other different cultures, particularly in non-Western societies, where adolescence may be perceived, understood and navigated through different social, familial, and community-oriented lenses. In many African cultures, for example, adolescence is not viewed as a separate or universal stage of life but as part of a continuous, interconnected process of growth that is deeply embedded in cultural and communal practices (Ngwenya et al., 2023; Nsamenang, 2002). In these societies, social roles, responsibilities, and rites of passage, rather than individual milestones or self-determination are the key markers of maturation. Therefore, development is viewed through a more collective and context-sensitive lens than the individual's personal journey towards independence.

Consequently, the apparent universal imposition of the Western framework of adolescence has created a narrow, super imposed individualistic view which undermines the importance of community, interdependence, and African cultural traditions in shaping adolescent lives (Scales et al., 2015). In most African cultures, adolescence is deeply intertwined with communal responsibilities, the guidance of elders, participation in rites of passage, and the integration of cultural practices that emphasize social cohesion and collective well-being (Lebese et al., 2022). Key examples include communal labour, where tasks such as farming, building, and celebration are carried out collectively, reinforcing

bonds of cooperation and mutual support. Rites of passage, including initiation ceremonies, weddings, and coming-of-age rituals, are significant socio-cultural markers that strengthen social ties and enable transition into new roles within the community.

Therefore, as has been popularised and institutionalized through developmental psychology, education systems and social policy, adolescence, is deeply rooted in Western historical, cultural, and epistemological frameworks. It is not merely a biological phase but a socially constructed category shaped by specific cultural thought, timelines, and normative expectations. As such, adolescence may be best understood not as a universal stage of human development, but as a Eurocentric enterprise that reflects and reinforces Western notions of individualism, linear life course progression, and capitalist economic structures (Nsamenang, 2002). To demonstrate this, Western psychological theories, have played a dominant role in defining adolescence in terms of identity crisis,

Emotional turbulence, and cognitive development (e.g., Hall, 1904; Erikson, 1968; Piaget, 1972). These frameworks presume a normative life trajectory where individuals pass through clearly delineated stages from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, and with specified processes and changes. Therefore, Eurocentric adolescence is steeped in linear temporality and progress narratives, apparently assuming that adolescents must “develop” toward autonomy, productivity, and citizenship (Wallace & Kovatcheva, 1998), arguably, in a manner that aligns with Western capitalist ideals (e.g., Larson et al., 2009). But in other cultures where conditions and factors may cause stagnation, define other trajectories that shape adolescent lives differently, the journey through adolescence to adulthood may become non-linear, diverse and context-based. Consequently, transitions are mostly defined by community rituals, responsibilities, and social roles that do not neatly align with Western age norms. Identity is formed through duty, relational engagement, and societal affirmation, not through self-reflection, contemplation or deferred commitments as may be the case in Western cultures.

From Gate-Keeper Psychology to Africentric Psychology

As already seen, mainstream Western-centric psychology prides itself as the gate-keeper of knowledge in general and psychology in particular. According to Gross (2018), gate-keeper psychology is built on psychological theories, models, and practices that are rooted in Euro-American cultural norms, values, and historical contexts. It often assumes that Western ways of thinking, understanding, and responding to psychological phenomena are universal and applicable to all cultures (Smith & Bond, 2022). Largely informed by Eurocentric psychology, Oppong (2024) and Naidoo (1996) insinuate that gate-keeper psychology typically emphasizes individualism, linear development, rationality, and autonomy, reflecting Western ideals of personal identity, mental health, and well-being. In this context, the individual is the primary unit of analysis, and prioritising personal achievement and self-reliance are key markers of development. Also, gate-keeper psychology assumes a linear, predictable trajectory of growth, where individuals are expected to navigate life through a series of well-defined stages, often emphasising cognitive and emotional independence as the ultimate goal (Ker, 2013). Viewing

adolescence in this way fails to account for the diverse cultural experiences, communal values, and alternative practices that inform adolescence in other world regions. It tends to undermine the complex, relational, and culturally embedded nature of human development, inadvertently marginalising alternative forms of identity, social belonging, and communal wellbeing (Alegria et al., 2010). This emphasis on autonomy and rationality does not capture the ways in which collective values and contextual factors shape overall well-being in most African cultural settings.

According to Beyers et al. (2024), Eurocentric models, constituting gate-keeper psychology emphasise individual growth, with an assumption that adolescents must navigate a linear pathway towards development. For example, cognitive development is viewed as a series of progressive stages leading to intellectual maturity. On the contrary, markers of cognitive development in most African societies diverge from those defined in Western models. Theirs emphasize a more communal, contextual, and relational understanding of growth. In most of them, cognitive development is often viewed not just through the lens of individual achievement, but through collective participation, social responsibility, and the integration of cultural practices into individual and collective lives. According to Nsamenang (2014), this perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of cognitive growth with community life, where learning is seen as a shared experience involving family, peers, and elders. Knowledge is transmitted not only through formal education but also through oral traditions, rituals, storytelling, and participation in communal activities (Nsamenang, 2005). Cognitive development is thus, framed as a relational and communal process, where the development of intellectual abilities is inseparable from the cultivation of social and moral values. For example, the development of thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities is deeply embedded in relationships, social responsibilities, cultural practices, and moral instruction. Tchombe (2011) adds that intellectual growth is something cultivated through participation in community life, guided by elders, and aligned with social harmony and ethical living, rather than a private, isolated achievement of the mind.

While personal achievement is often defined by individual academic/career success or material attainment in mainstream Euro-American societies, in most African societies, it is often defined by communal values, social responsibility, and contributions to the wellbeing of the community. In African cultures, achievement is typically recognised through participation in cultural rituals, the fulfillment of family and societal roles, and the ability to maintain and strengthen relationships within the community (Nyeseh Ofori & Mohangi, 2024; Razak et al., 2024). Personal accomplishments are deeply intertwined with collective welfare, and one's success reflects the health and prosperity of their family, village, or social group. If one's success and accomplishments do not benefit others, then, they are meaningless and have nothing to write home about. Therefore, personhood is relational and not individualistic such that one's achievements are not evaluated purely in individual terms, but by how they reinforce the social fabric, uplift kin, and enhance communal dignity.

Also, achievement is socially validated and not self-validated. Among the Kom of Cameroon, if achievement does not yield positive effects on others such as supporting siblings, building a house for one's family, sponsoring someone's education, or reinvesting wealth into community obligations, then, that is no achievement. In line with this, Baral (2023) concludes that private accumulation of wealth (achievement) without redistribution lacks social honour. Practices in most African cultures are also clear in the belief that moral worthiness is tied to responsibility, not only capability (Atuire, 2022; Husien & Kebede, 2017). Therefore, as among the Kom of Cameroon, an accomplished person who fails to fulfill social duties such as remittances, bridewealth responsibilities, funeral obligations, and community development may be seen as having failed morally even if they are materially successful. These examples demonstrate entirely that in most African societies, success is public (communal) and not private (individualistic). Transitions from adolescence to adulthood are recognized through fulfilling obligations to family and community; and a person with wealth or degrees who has not "given back" may be seen as not yet fully adult in the moral and social sense.

Adolescent psychology in sub-Sahara Africa

In many African cultures, traditional rites of passage, particularly initiation ceremonies, hold profound significance as pivotal markers of the transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Deeply embedded in cultural and spiritual traditions, these rituals are not merely symbolic but function as structured developmental processes that shape individual and collective identities, instill values, and reinforce social cohesion (Ohaja & Anyim, 2021). To Schroeder et al. (2022) and Ohaja & Anyim (2021), they serve as transformative experiences that prepare individuals for the responsibilities of adulthood. These ceremonies often include the support of elders, transmission of cultural knowledge, and the imparting of moral and social values. Rites performed demarcate clear boundaries between childhood and adulthood.

In most cultures, rites provide a culturally sanctioned framework for the individual to navigate adolescence. Arrey et al. (2016) insinuate that through them, participants internalise their roles within the community and embrace leadership, caregiving, or spiritual responsibilities that uphold societal structures. Some of the rites are gender-specific, often distinct for boys and girls and serve as critical mechanisms for socialisation, identity formation, and the transmission of cultural values. For example, for boys, rites of passage often involve physical challenges, endurance tests, spirituality, and teachings that prepare them for roles as protectors, providers, and leaders (Schroeder et al., 2022). Common among the Kom of Cameroon, the ritual of *îtanî î mekûm* (initiation into masking or secret society) affirms traditional masculinity, connotes spiritual responsibility and eventual transition from boyhood to manhood. Conversely for girls, Munthali & Zulu (2007) report that initiation ceremonies in Malawi frequently focus on preparing them for family and social roles, emphasizing virtues like nurturing, caregiving, motherhood, and moral uprightness.

Gender-tailored rites often include teachings about being a man, womanhood, fertility, and marriage, delivered by elder men and women in the community. For example, among the Xhosa people of South Africa, *Xhosa Ulwaluko* is often conducted among adolescent boys to mark the transition to manhood and acceptance into the adult community (Mpateni & Kang'Ethe, 2021). Among the Maasai of Kenya and Tanzania, the *Maasai Eunoto* ritual marks the passage from boyhood to *moran* (warrior) (Siminyu, 2017; Kerubo, 2016). Meanwhile to test endurance, courage, and readiness for adult roles, especially marriage, *Sharo* is often performed among Fulani boys (Yaakugh, 2019). For girls, with *Dipo* among the Krobo people of Ghana, young girls are taught about womanhood, sexuality, marriage, and social etiquette (Nyeseh Ofori & Mohangi, 2024; Abbey & Nasidi, 2023).

In a similar manner, the Bemba girls of Zambia, through *Bemba Chisungu*, a ritual performed at first menstruation, girls are secluded and taught by elder women about reproduction, marriage, respect, and womanhood, marking their transition to womanhood and fertility (Rasing, 2021). During *Zulu Umemulo* of the Zulu people of South Africa, the young adolescent girl receives a spear symbolizing readiness for marriage (Magubane, 2011). These structured rites of passage serve as foundational mechanisms for guiding adolescents through the transition from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood. Ritually rich, socially embedded, and culturally specific, the ceremonies do not merely mark biological change; Nsamenang (1992) theorised that they function as institutionalized frameworks for moral education, identity formation, and social integration.

Also, in many African societies, adolescents are deeply embedded within extended family structures and communal networks that serve as vital sources of emotional, social, and material support. According to Somefun & Odimegwu (2018), these interconnected systems function as a protective framework that fosters resilience, identity development, and a sense of belonging. Extended families often operate as multigenerational units where adolescents are nurtured and guided by parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings. Among others, Nwanmuoh et al. (2024) argue that these relationships provide a rich tapestry of support, enabling adolescents to navigate challenges while receiving assistance and moral guidance. Nsamenang (2002) adds that communal networks, which may include neighbours, elders, and peers, extend this support system, reinforcing shared values, collective responsibility, and cultural continuity. In these contexts, adolescents learn to balance individual aspirations with communal obligations. This fosters a sense of interdependence and social accountability. That is why Layefa et al. (2022) feel that the material dimensions of extended family networks are foundational to the social and economic fabric of many communities, particularly in collectivist societies. The networks provide access to vital resources that are often distributed through family and community ties.

Among the Kom of Cameroon, for example, extended family members collectively pool financial and material resources to support education, ensuring that younger members can access schooling or vocational training. Similarly, it is common to have healthcare needs

addressed through shared responsibilities, with family members contributing to medical expenses or traveling to care for sick members. In most Cameroonian families, employment opportunities are frequently mediated through family connections (godfatherism), where networks serve as conduits for job placement and career growth. These practices highlight the centrality of kinship systems in shaping access to opportunities and mitigating risks. While they enhance opportunities for younger members to succeed, they also mitigate risks and offer a safety net during crises such as unemployment, illness, or economic hardship.

Therefore, adolescence in typical African societies occupies a deeply socialized and culturally embedded space, distinct from Western conceptions. Rather than being marked by individual autonomy and psychological transition alone, adolescence in these contexts is framed through communal expectations, structured rites of passage, and the integration of adolescents into collective responsibilities. Therefore, the experience, meaning, and transition of adolescence is not a universal biological stage, but a culturally constructed phase of life that reflects local values, collective responsibilities, spiritual beliefs, and intergenerational relationships that contribute to it (Ngwenya et al., 2023). Adolescence is not framed as a period of individual turmoil, identity crisis, or rebellion as did G. Stanley Hall and Erik Erikson, but rather as a collective and relational process, where young people are prepared for adulthood through rituals, mentoring, initiation, work, and moral training. The time is marked by culturally significant events and those living through it, adolescents, are not viewed as “in-between” or suspended in time (Arnett, 2000) but actively occupy a defined role within the social and generational order (Nsamenang, 2002). In terms of moral obligations and learning, adolescence in traditional African societies is the time for learning how to respect elders, fulfill kinship obligations, maintain self-discipline, and contribute to the community. That is why Nsamenang (1992) refers to it as a period of probation and socialized internship during which members are socialized into values, taboos, and responsibilities that ensure continuity and cohesion within the cultural group. Consequently, among Africans, adolescence is a functional, not merely a transitional phase of life as in Eurocentric conceptions. Being a functional phase of development, it prepares individuals for adulthood, family life, and community roles. It is neither a suspended or experimental life stage (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968), nor is it characterised by delay or detachment from adult society (Côté, 2000). Rather, it is a practical phase of development, deeply rooted in apprenticeship, work, service, learning, and culturally appropriate behaviour.

Besides these socio-cultural processes shaping adolescent lives in sub-Saharan Africa, most adolescents navigate their transition to adulthood in a context marked by deep structural inequalities, economic precarity, and social instability that severely constrain their development. Rampant poverty, unemployment, and under-resourced education systems leave many young people trapped in cycles of vulnerability, with limited opportunities for upward mobility or meaningful participation in society (Zickafoose et al., 2024; Baah & Lakner, 2023; Fox et al., 2016). According to Baah & Lakner (2023), poverty remains a pervasive issue, with a significant portion of the population living below the poverty line, restricting access to essential resources.

To Fox et al. (2016) the growing youth population and insufficient job creation has led many young people in the region to struggle to find stable employment. Meanwhile, access to education is still a problem to many due to financial constraints, long distances to schools, and inadequate school infrastructure. For those who manage to attend school, Krzykawska & Żur (2020) note that the quality often remains below standard. These systemic deficits make schooling a fragile promise, producing credentials without capacities and reproducing inequality under the guise of educational access. In fact, such schools function more as warehouses for young people than as spaces that cultivate knowledge, skills, or cognitive development. In like manner, students graduate with diplomas that do not correspond to real literacy, numeracy, problem-solving or vocational readiness (Lo-oh, 2012). In fact, Escott-Stump (2012) assumes that the credential becomes a bureaucratic artefact, that is, a ticket to the next step not evidence of capability. Of course, for many young people, this hollows out the signaling function of education and devalues the credential itself. That is why many certificate holders, most of them young people are roaming the streets in many countries either without jobs or with jobs not commensurate to their credentials.

Health challenges, ranging from limited access to reproductive and mental health services to the lingering impact of HIV/AIDS, malnutrition and malaria continues to pose profound threats to the physical and psychological well-being of adolescents in sub-Sahara Africa. These interrelated health burdens not only weaken immune systems, stunt growth, and increase morbidity and mortality rates but also exacerbate emotional distress, social stigma, and educational disruption (Penda et al., 2018; Duggal et al., 2012). Adolescents living with or affected by these conditions may experience anxiety, depression, and social exclusion, which further compromise their self-esteem, resilience, and developmental outcomes. Jindal et al. (2023) add that the combined effect of these challenges perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability in which poor health undermines cognitive performance, limits opportunities for socio-economic advancement, and constrains the realization of potential. In addition, while gender disparities and harmful cultural practices, including early marriage and gender-based violence, often marginalize young women (Somefun & Odimegwu, 2018), political insecurity and armed conflicts expose adolescents to displacement, trauma, and loss of hope (Azeng & Yogo, 2013). According to Lwamba et al. (2022), gender disparities not only restrict access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making power, but also reinforce patriarchal norms that normalize female subordination in the region, silencing their voices and perpetuating intergenerational cycles of inequality and poverty.

Meanwhile, the constant exposure to fear, loss, and violence due to socio-political insecurity inflicts deep psychological wounds which hinder emotional growth and resilience (Hobfoll et al., 2012). Moreover, when opportunities for stability, education, and future prospects disappear, many adolescents lose their sense of purpose and optimism, leading to a profound erosion of hope and trust in society's ability to offer them a better life and future.

Collectively, these intersecting issues reveal that adolescent development in sub-Saharan Africa is not only shaped by unique socio-cultural practices but is lived under intense pressure, where existence often supersedes essence, and where the promise of youth as a demographic dividend remains unfulfilled due to systemic neglect and policy inertia. In contexts marked by chronic poverty, political instability, educational deficits, and fragile health systems, young people are compelled to focus on immediate survival rather than pursuing pathways of growth, innovation, or civic participation (Chigunta, 2019; Honwana, 2012). The region's demographic expansion, where over 60% of the population is under 25, has not translated into socio-economic transformation because policy responses have been reactive, fragmented, and largely symbolic (Filmer & Fox, 2014). Instead of investing in human capital formation and youth-centered governance, many countries in the region exhibit policy inertia with underfunded education systems, weak labour markets, and limited social protection mechanisms (Gyimah-Brempong & Kimenyi, 2013). Adolescents and youth therefore develop within a broader context of "waithood" where transitions to adulthood are delayed due to unemployment, political exclusion, and limited access to opportunity (Honwana, 2012). This is unlike in most Eurocentric societies where services and resources abound to accompany young people to positive and productive adult futures. These are realities that make adolescence in sub-Saharan Africa different, but which in the most part have often been brushed aside. It is imperative to run a developmental and research agenda that is unique to the region and tells the story of growing up adolescent in sub-Saharan Africa.

Conclusion

Decolonising and Africanising adolescent development theory and "righting" the wrongs of gate-keeper psychology represents a critical, transformative shift in understanding the developmental trajectories available to African adolescents, youth, and emerging adults. Arguably, mainstream psychology, for a long time has operated as a gate-keeping epistemic regime, universalizing Western constructs of adolescence, personhood, and well-being while simultaneously silencing alternative epistemologies rooted in "other" cultures (Moore & Minchington, 2013). This dominance has not been merely academic but structurally reproductive, shaping diagnostic criteria, research funding, institutional curricula, and policy interventions in ways that render African minds legible only through Western lenses (Steinmetz, 2022; Naidoo, 1996). Adopting Africentric psychology that informs the understanding of adolescence in the African context does not simply translate to pursuing cultural decoration or additive "indigenization." Rather, it enacts a paradigm shift that foregrounds the continent's own ontological assumptions about selfhood as relational and embodied in lineage, spirituality, and community (Nsamenang, 2002), about distress (as socio-moral and existential rather than only intra-psychic (Ciofalo et al., 2022), and about healing (as collective, ritual, and ecological (Uzuegbunam, 2025).

Such a shift recasts Africa not as a site of application or "dumping ground" of external theory but as a site of theory-generation and knowledge production which expands and not limit global psychology. This paradigm shift builds on the premise that human

knowledge and understanding cannot be complete if its foundational categories are provincial and policed. In this sense, an Africentric psychology is a project of epistemic decolonization, methodological repair, and ontological re-opening (Malherbe et al., 2021). It is a liberating project that refuses the gate-keeping abstractions of Western knowledge hegemony (Adjei, 2019). To Tani (2020) and Makhubela (2016), Africentric psychology replaces Western normativity with frameworks that are African, emerging from its histories and experiences, moral orders, and lived realities of resilience and meaning.

Decolonisation begs for dismantling of paternalistic and hierarchical structures embedded in Western developmental psychology. It recognises in part, that African children and adolescents do not exist and grow up in a vacuum but do so within dynamic socio-cultural environments that significantly shape their development. For example, they may be expected to navigate complex gender roles, family and cultural expectations, and societal norms which Western developmental models do not adequately address (Nyeseh Ofori & Mohangi, 2024; Ngwanya et al., 2023). These Africentric practices must not be perceived as obstacles or deviations from a “universal” developmental framework but rather as valuable, contextually relevant processes that not only shape development in that context but also explains how and why it unfolds the way it does. In this regard, decolonisation prompts an expanded understanding of the diverse factors that influence adolescent development, globally. Also, in sub-Sahara Africa, where issues such as poverty, conflict, difficult access to quality education, and adolescent health (e.g., teenage pregnancy) are still particularly pressing (e.g., Maharaj, 2022), adolescent development theories should integrate these realities into their intended “universal” framework. The resilience showcased by African adolescents and youth to surmount these challenges highlights their resourcefulness and agency growing up in such difficulties. But these personal strivings are hardly acknowledged and documented in mainstream adolescent psychology.

Righting the wrongs of gate-keeper psychology also begs for amplification of African adolescent voices themselves, recognising them as active agents in shaping their own lives, their identities, aspirations, and futures (Lo-oh, 2017). Despite a growing body of research on adolescent development, dominant narratives often reflect external or adult-centric perspectives that marginalise adolescent voices with their lived experiences. For example, African Governments are quick to label them as “*leaders of tomorrow*” or “*the continent’s future*,” but this framing erases their present struggles and treats them as passive beneficiaries of development rather than active participants and agents of it. Therefore, giving young people voice not only empowers them as co-producers of knowledge about them but also reveals insights often obscured in top-down, survey-driven studies. That is why Abubakar et al. (2024) insinuate that centering adolescent voices provides a better appreciation of the complexities of adolescence in sub-Sahara Africa. Pfeifer & Berkman (2018) add that giving them voice permits a shift beyond deficit models that portray them as passive recipients of external influences and highlights their resilience, creativity, and ability to navigate multiple identities. By the way, mainstream adolescent literature historically conceptualized them through deficit reductionist models, as incomplete, vulnerable, or at-risk, predominantly shaped by external forces.

Decolonising and Africanising adolescent theory may not simply be an academic or scholarly exercise but actually a liberation of knowledge (Lo-oh, 2005) and the empowerment of African adolescents and youth. In many African societies, adolescence is not perceived as a phase of “storm and stress,” as popularized by G. Stanley Hall (1904) and later reinforced by Western developmental psychology. Instead, it is understood as a socially embedded and community managed transition from childhood to adulthood, guided by elders, rituals, and moral instruction. Within Western paradigms, adolescence is often portrayed as a period marked by psychological turmoil, identity crises, and conflict with authority (Arnett, 1999). However, African conceptions of growing up emphasize collective responsibility and moral formation rather than individual struggle. For instance, initiation rituals mark the entry into adulthood through mentorship by older adults, who transmit moral, reproductive, and social knowledge essential for adulthood (Nsamenang, 2002).

Across African indigenous societies, adolescents are integrated into community life through initiation ceremonies, storytelling, and apprenticeship systems that reinforce discipline, respect, and social belonging rather than psychological rebellion. These processes affirm that the individual’s development is inseparable from the community’s moral and cultural fabric. As Nsamenang (1992) argues, African ontogeny situates adolescence within a framework of social interdependence, where the goal is not autonomy but responsible personhood. Thus, to interpret African adolescence through Western constructs of “storm and stress” is to impose an ethnocentric model that overlooks and undermines the cultural mediation of developmental experiences. A decolonized understanding of adolescence, therefore, is a call to ground developmental theory in indigenous epistemologies.

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METACOGNITIVE SKILLS OF CHILDREN (7-12 YEARS) IN THE MAMFE CENTRAL SUB-DIVISION, CAMEROON

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Abstract

Metacognition is the capacity to reflect on one's thoughts and behaviours. It plays a crucial role in self-control, self-instruction, memory, and problem-solving. Flavell (1979) and Piaget stated that young children are quite limited in their metacognition. They do little monitoring of their cognitive endeavours. However, recent studies show children display metacognition as early as three years old. These findings broaden our understanding of early metacognitive development. Still, significant gaps remain in the literature about how children in late childhood (aged 7-12 years), especially in African contexts, show metacognitive skills in daily activities. Few existing studies provide detailed accounts of how these older children express planning, monitoring, and evaluation in real-world contexts such as household chores. This study addresses this gap by investigating metacognitive skills during late childhood (7-12 years) and their relationship with gender among children in the Manyu Division. Quantitative data were collected from 250 children. Children reflected on their engagement in household chores, and their skill levels in planning, monitoring, and evaluation were assessed through structured interviews. The Spearman rank correlation and Mann-Whitney U test were used to test the hypotheses. Results revealed that age positively correlated with metacognitive skills in planning and evaluation, but not monitoring. There was no significant difference between boys and girls. Parental criticism had a strong influence on children's monitoring skills. Metacognition was supported by guidance from both parents and teachers. Teaching models should prompt ongoing task monitoring with continuous support to foster critical self-evaluation and adjustment.

Keywords:

Metacognition, planning skills, monitoring skills, evaluation skills, late childhood, gender



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Background

Vukman (2012) posits that metacognition is a part of higher mental processes. It empowers us to control and plan our mental activities or learning processes. Most definitions of metacognition focus on monitoring, self-regulation, planning, knowledge, and experience. Flavell (1979) states that metacognition is knowledge about the regulation of one's cognitive activities in learning. The primary constructs are knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition. This includes control of our thought processes. According to Flavell, "metacognitive knowledge" refers to the portion of a child's or adult's stored knowledge about various cognitive tasks, goals, and experiences.

Research has consistently shown that metacognitive processes are closely linked to learning, memory, and academic performance in school-aged children (Roebbers et al., 2021). Metacognitive knowledge develops as early as age three and continues beyond adolescence. This growth continues as long as educational processes challenge the learner (Veenman, Hout-Wolters, & Afflerbach, 2006). Learners acquire this knowledge unconsciously by observing and imitating at any age. They may also gain it consciously by listening to teachers, parents, or peers who advise them about learning (Wenden, 1999). Metacognitive control and regulation are used in real learning situations. Actual and conscious regulation of the learning process occurs through planning, monitoring, and meta-strategic activities (Stephanou & Mpiontini, 2017). This is the implementation of metacognitive knowledge in self-regulated learning (Flavell, 1979; Schneider & Artelt, 2010).

According to Schraw and Moshman (1995), planning involves selecting appropriate strategies and allocating resources that affect performance. For example, one must determine how to start a learning process, what to consider, and what outcomes to expect. Monitoring refers to being aware of comprehension and task execution. It is the ability to engage in periodic self-testing. Schraw and Moshman (1995) note that the ability to monitor one's own thinking develops slowly. It is often weak in both children and adults (Glenberg, Sanocki, Epstein, & Morris, 1987; Pressley & Ghatala, 1990). Evaluation refers to appraising the products of learning. It is the regulatory process of reviewing one's goals and conclusions.

Flavell (1979) demonstrated that young children exhibit limited knowledge and cognition regarding cognitive phenomena, specifically in their metacognition. He added that children do moderately little monitoring of their memory and other cognitive functions. The work of Piaget has shown that children in late childhood (ages 7-12) are incapable of higher-order thinking. Formal and abstract thinking begins at adolescence. This means that abstract thinking before adolescence may not be possible, or is very limited. However, socio-cultural theorists such as Vygotsky (1978) and Dasen (2011) have acknowledged the impact of the cultural environment on cognitive development. The environment can delay or hasten a child's developmental pattern. The position of the socio-cultural theorist is important for understanding development across cultures. This approach highlights the need to study behaviour and thinking in context, while also considering universal thoughts.

Theories of development have mostly been based on findings from non-African contexts. Nsamenang (2005) stated that if development thinking and action in Africa remain fixated on Eurocentrism, development will continue to elude Africa. Therefore, it becomes essential to study African children in their traditional contexts and styles to understand their developmental pathways.

The late childhood stage usually spans from 7 to around 12 years old. It matches Jean Piaget's concrete operational stage of cognitive development. Tchombe (2011) stated that late childhood spans from 6 to 12 years. This transition is crucial. At this stage, it is vital to pass on cultural knowledge and skills. This ensures that traditions remain sustainable and continuous. During this time, enrichment strategies become more sophisticated as children face greater demands. The environment enhances cognition by exposing children to a variety of stimuli. Influences include parents, peers, community members, and the broader environment. For instance, the Ngomi tribe in Malawi, as mentioned in Cole & Cole (2001), views late childhood as a time for children to begin acting independently. This occurs through self-regulatory behaviour. As cited in Cole and Cole (2001), Barker and Wright (1955) found that, in late childhood, children spend more time unsupervised by adults.

Nsamenang (2005) suggests that children require a diverse range of physical, social, and psychological stimuli to establish a strong foundation for life. This foundation helps them understand the value of these experiences later. Children encounter different developmental experiences and parental cultural models across cultures. These factors shape how well they develop. In African contexts, children interact through play and by serving parents and community members. Engaging in errands and household chores encourages creativity and promotes cognitive development. Children care for younger siblings and help with household chores. These actions reflect principles of sharing family responsibility (Serpell, 1993). They also help children learn the caretaker role early on (Nsamenang, 1992). These daily activities can be vital for developing metacognitive skills.

As children's active involvement in family activities begins very early (Tchombe, 2011), so do metacognitive skills in most African contexts. These skills begin to develop from early to late childhood. According to a study among the Bameleke of the West Region of Cameroon, Tchombe (2011) found that the underlying principle in their interest-driven cognitive enrichment strategy is learning. Learning applies to the child's everyday life as they interact with others. This helps them understand and solve real-life problems. The child is at the centre of the learning process, emphasising a child-centred principle. Nsamenang (2011) posits that children's development and learning can be understood only in the light of their cultural practices and livelihood circumstances.

Most studies have shown three main modes for developing metacognition: social interaction and transmission, experience through action, and maturation (Aurah, Koloi-Kealkitse, Isaacs & Finch, 2011; Case & Gunstone, 2002; Bryce & Whitebread, 2012; DeLuca & Nasim, 2013; Goos, Galbraith, & Renshaw, 2002; Henter & Indreica, 2014; Jacobs, 2004; Larkin, 2006; Leutwyler, 2009; Vauras & Annevirta, 2006; Vukman, 2005; Vukman, 2012).

These modes show that both nature and nurture play a significant role in metacognitive development. Vukman (2012) studied developmental changes in various reasoning domains and metacognitive precision. The study involved 282 participants from four age groups: 13-15, 23-25, 33-35, and 43-45 years. Participants solved tasks related to spatial, verbal-propositional, and social reasoning. The accuracy of self-evaluation increased with age. Males were more accurate in their self-evaluations than females. The improvement of metacognitive skills with age suggests that people become more reflective and self-aware as they age.

Leutwyler (2009) conducted a study to investigate the development of students' self-reported use of metacognitive learning strategies during high school. The study analyses the differential development patterns of 1,432 students between grades 10 and 12, in a longitudinal sample. The results suggest that, from a global perspective, there is no development of students' self-reported use of metacognitive learning strategies during high school — the expected gender-specific differences in favour of female students replicated in this sample. However, the self-reported use of monitoring and evaluation strategies tends to converge between genders during high school. In contrast, the differences in the self-reported use of planning strategies remain stable.

Problem

Extensive studies have been conducted on the development of metacognition in the formal education setting as children engage in problem-solving activities and cooperative learning situations. Most of these studies have shown that problem-solving activities and cooperative learning situations improve metacognition. Age is also an essential factor in the development of metacognition. However, there is limited work specifying how children during late childhood (7-12 years) and of different genders (boys and girls) demonstrate metacognitive skills as they engage in their daily activities (chores) at home. In Cameroon, much of children's work is done within the family through household chores and errands, and children during late childhood spend most of their time with family and community members. Few studies have examined how children's metacognitive skills develop in these informal settings. The concept is, however, overstudied in the formal context (school) where children spend only a fraction of their daily time. Therefore, there is a need to understand how children manifest metacognitive skills during late childhood as they engage in their daily activities. Additionally, there is a need to understand gender differences in the manifestation of metacognitive skills within the specified age group.

Research Objectives

To evaluate the relationship between age and metacognitive skills during late childhood To find out the difference between gender and the metacognitive skills of children during late childhood.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between age and metacognitive skills during late childhood

H₀: There is no significant difference between gender and the metacognitive skills of children during late childhood

Methods

Design

The quantitative method using a correlational design was employed to determine the relationship between metacognitive skills and age/gender.

Participants

A total of 250 participants from late childhood (132 girls, 118 boys; age range: 7-12 years) in eleven villages from the Mamfe Central Sub-Division were purposively selected for the study. Mamfe Central Sub-Division is situated in the Southwest Region of Cameroon, Africa. Below is the representation of participants by communities;

Table 1:

Representation of the sample by villages

Villages	Number of Participants (Late Childhood)	Percent (%)
Small Mamfe	50	20.0
Okoyong	10	4.0
Besongabang	30	12.0
Nchang	20	8.0
Eyanchang	20	8.0
Etemetek	20	8.0
Egbekew	20	8.0
BachuoNtai	10	4.0
Eshobi	30	12.0
Eyangntui	30	12.0
Nfaitok 2	10	4.0
Total=11	250	100.0

Note: Table 1 shows the different villages in Mamfe Central Subdivision and the number of participants from these villages.

Materials and Procedure

Metacognitive skills (planning, monitoring, and evaluation) were measured using a structured interview guide. The structured interviews were administered to 250 children in

their late childhood from villages around the Mamfe Central Sub Division, Cameroon. A pilot study was conducted, and the following reliability result was obtained with Cronbach's Alpha = 0.799. Additionally, 15 parents of some of the children were interviewed to gather qualitative data on the development of their children's metacognitive skills.

The structured interview contains questions on planning, monitoring, and evaluation. For each skill, a rating of low, average, and high is adopted. The skill level definition and examples are also provided to guide their structured interview process. Probing was done to guide children during interview sessions. A structured interview was preferred over a self-response questionnaire because it was uncertain that children in this age group would understand the items presented, as questions on the metacognition construct are themselves complicated for children in this age group. Thus, a structured interview allows for probing and is perceived as appropriate because it guides respondents in cases of misunderstanding.

An approval to conduct the research was obtained from the Research Office at the University of Buea, Cameroon. Each interview session lasted an average of 5 minutes, and children were asked to reflect on how they plan, monitor, and evaluate their activities before, during, and after engaging in household chores such as cleaning the house, washing dishes, and cleaning the compound. The children's responses were then evaluated and graded according to their skill levels, categorised as low, average, and high. The data collected were subjected to both descriptive (frequencies and percentages) and inferential analysis (Spearman correlation and Mann-Whitney U-Test).

Results

Based on the sample, most children between the ages of 7 and 12 years score low in planning skills (46.4%), monitoring Skills (48.0%), and evaluation skills (54.4%). A few children scored high in planning skills (14.4%), monitoring skills (8.4%), and evaluation skills (8.8%) (see Table 2-4). Planning and evaluation skills increase with age during late childhood, while monitoring skills remain constant (see Table 5-7; Figure 1). Additionally, there is no significant difference in metacognitive skills (Planning, monitoring, and evaluation) based on gender (see Tables 8-13; Figure 1). The results show a significant relationship between age and metacognitive skills, specifically for planning and evaluation during late childhood, except for monitoring skills. Also, the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between gender and metacognitive skills (Planning, monitoring, and evaluation) was retained.

This section shows a precise distribution of metacognitive skill levels.

Table 2:***Distribution of sample by skill level for Planning***

Skill level for planning	Frequency	Percent
Low	116	46.4
Average	98	39.2
High	36	14.4
Total	250	100.0

Table 3:***Distribution of the sample by skill level for monitoring***

Skill level for Monitoring	Frequency	Percent
Low	120	48.0
Average	109	43.6
High	21	8.4
Total	250	100.0

Table 4:***Distribution of the sample by skill level for evaluation***

Skill level for evaluation	Frequency	Percent
Low	136	54.4
Average	92	36.8
High	22	8.8
Total	250	100.0

Hypothesis tests for Metacognitive Skills (planning, monitoring and Evaluation) and the age of children. (Using Spearman's rank test)

Table 5:

Spearman's rank correlation between planning skills and age

Correlations				
			age	Planning Skills
Spearman's rho	age	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.275**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	250	250
	Planning Skills	Correlation Coefficient	.275**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	250	250

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: The table indicates a significant relationship between age and planning skills during late childhood. As age increases during this age group, planning skills increase.

Table 6:

Spearman's rank correlation between monitoring skills and age

Correlations				
			age	Monitoring Skills
Spearman's rho	age	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.101
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.113
		N	250	250
	Monitoring Skills	Correlation Coefficient	.101	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.113	.
		N	250	250

Note: With a sig. = .113 implies that monitoring skillfulness does not change with age during late childhood. The table indicates that there is no significant relationship between monitoring skills and age among children in Mamfe Central Subdivision during late childhood.

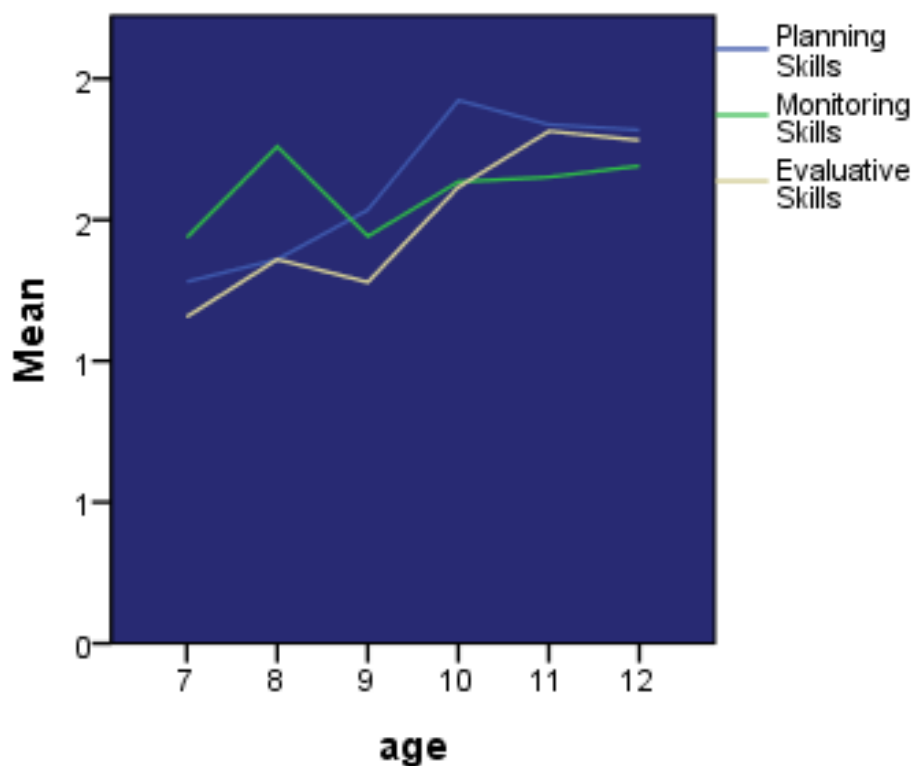
Table 7:

Spearman's Rank Correlation between evaluation skills and age

Correlations				
			Evaluative Skills	age
Spearman's rho	Evaluative Skills	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.383**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	250	250
	age	Correlation Coefficient	.383**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	250	250

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: With a sig. = .000 implies evaluation skillfulness does change with age during late childhood. The table indicates a significant relationship between evaluation skills and age among children in Mamfe Central Subdivision during late childhood.

Figure 1:*Line graph of metacognitive skills (Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation) against age*

Hypothesis tests of metacognitive skills (planning, monitoring and evaluation) and sex of children. (Using the Mann-Whitney U-Test)

Table 8:*Mean Rank by gender for planning skills*

Ranks				
	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Planning Skills	boys	118	121.31	14315.00
	girls	132	129.24	17060.00
	Total	250		

Note: Girls scored slightly higher in planning skills.

Table 9:***Mann-Whitney U-Test Statistics by gender for Planning Skills***

Test Statistics	
	Planning Skills
Mann-Whitney U	7294.000
Z	-.946
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.344
a. Grouping Variable: Gender	

Note: The data does not provide statistically significant evidence of a difference in planning skills between boys and girls. (Mann Whitney U, $z = -0.946$, $P = 0.344$)

Table 10:***Mean rank by gender for monitoring skills***

Ranks				
	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Monitoring Skills	boys	118	126.17	14888.00
	girls	132	124.90	16487.00
	Total	250		

Note: boys score a little high in monitory skills

Table 11:***Mann-Whitney U-Test statistics by gender for monitoring skills***

Test Statistics	
	Monitoring Skills
Mann-Whitney U	7709.000
Z	-.154
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.877

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Note: The data does not provide statistically significant evidence of a difference in monitoring skills between boys and girls. (Mann Whitney U, $z = -0.154$, $P = 0.877$)

Table 12:***Mean rank by gender for evaluation skills***

Ranks				
	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Evaluative Skills	boys	118	129.36	15265.00
	girls	132	122.05	16110.00
	Total	250		

Note: Boys score a little high in evaluation skills

Table 13:***Mann-Whitney U-test statistics by gender for evaluation skills***

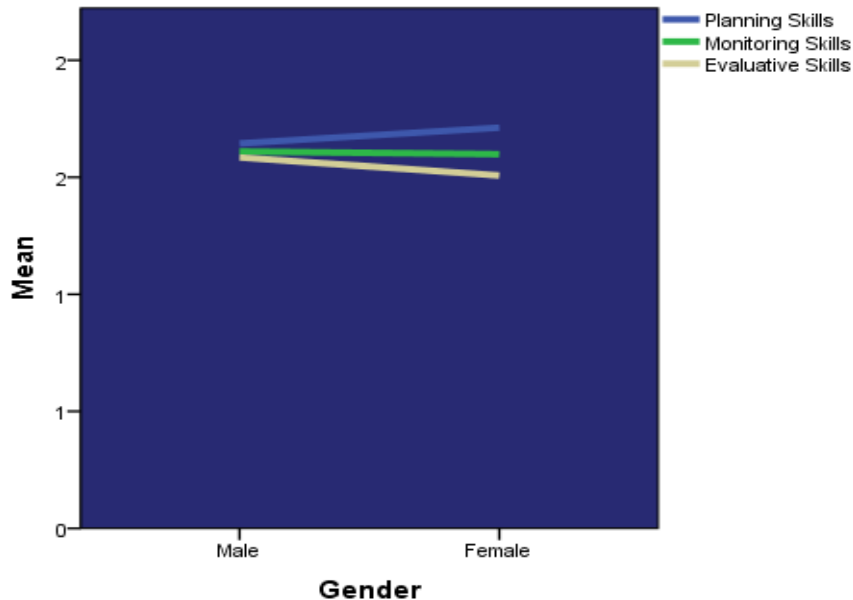
Test Statistics	
	Evaluative Skills
Mann-Whitney U	7332.000
Z	-.900
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.368

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Note: The data does not provide statistically significant evidence of a difference in evaluation skills between boys and girls. (Mann Whitney U, $z = -0.900$, $P = 0.368$)

Figure 2:

Line graph of metacognitive skills (planning, monitoring and evaluation) against gender



Discussion

The developmental pathways for metacognition can be traced back to the indigenous practices of imitation, observation, and participation in the home and community. As children engage in household chores and community work, their ability to self-regulate their behaviour and thought processes becomes increasingly enriched as they face criticism, praise, and modification of thoughts and behaviour concerning given tasks from caregivers and peers. The genesis of abstract thinking, such as metacognition, lies in the complex nature of the family and child. Based on the findings in this study, as children mature from 7 to 12 years old, planning and evaluation skills significantly increase, while monitoring skills remain constant throughout late childhood.

The results in this study align with those of Veeman & Spaans (2005), Schnitt & Sha (2009), and Van der Stel & Veenman (2010), who found that children exhibit a steep increase in the frequency and quality of metacognitive skills from the age of 8 years onwards. The work of Veenman (2014) revealed a pause or decline in metacognitive skills between the ages of 13 and 16. He concluded that metacognitive growth is interrupted at certain ages. The results of this study show that there is no steady growth in monitoring skills between 7-12 years old (indicating a pause); however, planning and evaluation skills grow steadily within this age group. The maturity in metacognitive skills depends on children's engagement in household chores and other community activities. There was no significant difference in terms of metacognitive skills between boys and girls in late childhood in the Mamfe Central Sub-Division.

The results based on gender are in line with the findings of Hong, Peng, and Rowell (2009); Lenzo, Toffle, Tripodi, & Quattropiani (2016), whose studies reveal no difference in metacognitive skills between genders. However, the findings of Ablard & Lipschultz (1998), Leutweiler (2009), and Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons (1990) contradict the results of this study, revealing that girls surpass boys in metacognitive skills between the ages of 9 and 18. Variations in findings on the relationship between gender and metacognitive skills may be due to the different cultural contexts in which the studies were conducted. In the Mamfe Central Sub-division, children as young as seven are often engaged in basic household activities, such as sweeping the house, washing dishes (excluding pots), and picking up dirt around the house. Complex activities for older children (11 and 12 years old) include travelling long distances to fetch water, mopping the floor, washing clothes, and caring for younger siblings. Tasks given to children are age-appropriate, and there is no significant distinction of gender roles when parents in the community assign functions at home. As a result, children's meta-thinking skills specifically, planning, monitoring, and evaluation significantly depend on age, but not on gender, between the ages of 7 and 12.

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EVALUATING THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE IN ORDINARY LEVEL MATHEMATICS AT THE GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION EXAMINATION IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

The study explored the assessment processes and its implications on candidates' performance in Mathematics Ordinary level at the General Certificate of Education examination in the South west region of Cameroon. This study adopted an exploratory design and examined a collection of the mathematics GCE O level national examinations, in particular, the cognitive demands of the examinations made on students. The instrument used to examine the cognitive demands of the test items in this study was an adaptation from the model of Smith et al – the MATH taxonomy, as the descriptors in this model matched with the assessment objectives of the ordinary level mathematics syllabus 570. The instrument included six categories of mathematical knowledge and skills, arranged into three groups A, B, and C, in the MATH taxonomy, assessing students' mathematical understanding. The five assessment objectives for O-level mathematics stated in the GCE Mathematics Ordinary Level Syllabus 570 document were matched with the six categories of cognitive demands in the derived set of assessment standards. The two researchers did the matching independently and afterwards compared their results and differences which they reconciled to come to a common consensus. It was found that all mathematics GCE O-level examinations, analysed in this study were heavily biased towards assessing knowledge and skills in Group A category, with almost 50% or more of the items focusing on (A3) Routine Procedures and 18 - 30% on (A2) Comprehension, though only 9.4% on (A1) Factual Knowledge in the GCE O-level assessments Examination. It was recommended that enough attention should be directed to developing a more balanced assessment that not only includes items that assess the various categories of cognitive demands but also assesses all dimensions of understanding in the different topics.

Keywords:

Assessment processes, performance, Cameroon GCE, Mathematics examination, Evaluation.



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Introduction

Mathematics assessment plays a crucial role in determining students' understanding and mastery of mathematical concepts, particularly at the Ordinary Level General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination in Cameroon. The assessment process has significant implications for candidates' performance, as it not only evaluates their knowledge and skills but also influences their future academic and career opportunities. Effective assessment practices are essential to ensure that students receive a comprehensive education and are well-prepared for future challenges.

Research has shown that assessment methods can significantly impact student learning outcomes and motivation ². In mathematics education, assessments can either enhance or hinder students' understanding and appreciation of mathematical concepts, depending on the approach used. Therefore, it is essential to evaluate the assessment process and its implications on candidates' performance in Ordinary Level Mathematics at the GCE examination in Cameroon.

This study aims to investigate the assessment process and its implications on candidates' performance in Ordinary Level Mathematics at the GCE examination in Cameroon. Specifically, the study will examine the current assessment practices, identify areas of strength and weakness, and provide recommendations for improving the assessment process to enhance student learning outcomes. By exploring the relationship between assessment and student performance, this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on mathematics education and assessment practices in Cameroon. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders to improve the quality of mathematics education and assessment practices in the country.

Understanding the Assessment Process of Candidates' Performance in Ordinary Level Mathematics at The General Certificate of Education Examination in Cameroon.

The conceptual framework for this study illustrated the relationship between the assessment process and candidate performance in Ordinary Level Mathematics at the GCE examination. The framework will consist of the following components:

Assessment Process: This includes the methods, tools, and procedures used to evaluate student learning in mathematics.

Candidate Performance: This refers to the outcomes of the assessment process, including students' scores, grades, and overall achievement in mathematics.

Contextual Factors: This includes factors that may influence the assessment process and candidate performance, such as teacher training, curriculum design, and socio-economic background. By using these theoretical frameworks, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the assessment process and its implications for candidate performance in Ordinary Level Mathematics at the GCE examination in Cameroon.

It is inherent that evaluation done at different stages of the teaching-learning process gives various educational stakeholders the opportunity to have feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. The effectiveness of the teaching-learning can be evaluated after assessments have been administered to the learners. Such assessments can be written tests and quizzes, oral tests and quizzes, end of term examinations or certificate examinations. Educators can appraise performance in their respective subjects by considering the outcomes registered in assessments giving the objectives considered and the education system. The assessment objectives of the Cameroon General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level mathematics are to test candidates' ability to recall, apply and interpret mathematical knowledge in context and everyday situations, do calculations by applying a combination of mathematical skills and techniques, and set out mathematical work in a logical and clear form, organise, interpret and present information accurately in written, tabulated, graphical and diagrammatical forms using mathematical notations and terminology. Many students perform poorly in Mathematics because of lack of interest, phobia, poor instructional strategies, and even poor assessment strategies employed in the subject.

Despite these challenges bordering the teaching and learning of mathematics, it remains a compulsory subject in most educational systems. This is due to the applications of mathematics in all domains of life thus the government in Cameroon gives it the impetus of being one of the compulsory subjects at primary and secondary school levels. Nfon and Ahidjo (2022) asserted that there is a wide application of the skills acquired in the study of mathematics in all spheres of human life. According to Gravemeijer, Stephan, Julie, Lin and Ohtani (2017), mathematics has been designed to equip students to be able to analyse and solve a daily problem which is the reason for making it compulsory. The boasting of the gaining of knowledge in a wide range of mathematics topics should be the intention of mathematics instruction and to enhance the acquisition of mathematical thinking and reasoning skills (MOE, 2012). Five types of abilities have been identified to be imparted on the students when solving real world problems which are: 1) understanding mathematical concepts, 2) calculating fluently, 3) applying mathematical concepts to solve problems, 4) reasoning logically, and 5) involved with mathematics, seeing mathematics as something that makes sense, is useful, and can be done.

Sintha & Mulin (2021) asserted that in a mathematical activity the process of mathematical reasoning using mathematical concepts, procedures, facts, or tools to provide an overview, explanation, and prediction of a phenomenon are involved. According to Österman & Bråting (2019), mathematical literacy is not only imperative in the process of internalising mathematical content, but also there is application of mathematical literacy in the process of skill acquisition like using mathematical reasoning, concepts, and tools in commerce, industries, budgeting at home and attending to some daily needs. Students possessing such Mathematics skills can cope in sectors like commerce, engineering, telecommunication, arts, fashion and other spheres of life. Although mathematics pervades all spheres of life, students' performance in the subject at the ordinary level of the Cameroon General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) Examination has left educational

stakeholders in a fixed. In 2018, 68229 candidates sat for the ordinary level mathematics, 20283 passed, 47946 failed, 2034 got A grade, 2838 got B grade, 15411 got C grade and 32436 got U grade giving a percentage of 47.54% for the U grade.

In 2019, 61283 candidates sat for the ordinary level mathematics examination, 15946 passed with 2146 A grade, 2212 B grade, 11588 C grade and 33934 U grades giving a 55.37% for the U grades. It is worth noting that grades A to C are passed grades with A being the best followed by B then C the lowest pass and the grade U means fail. Some of the possible causes of these massive failures in mathematics have been identified by researcher as being poor instructional strategies employed, insufficient use of instructional materials, students' and teachers' attitudes towards the subject. Researchers have sought to remedy the desperate situation by suggesting some innovative instructional strategies and materials that can rescue the situation. Some of these instructional strategies include collaborative learning, cooperative, problem-solving skills and computer assisted instructions amongst others. These instructional strategies appear to be more theoretical.

According to Tan (2007), mathematics teachers have endeavoured to impact on students' learning by modifying their teaching strategies and moderating assessments, but it has been discovered from studies that students get more interested to acquire the skills that are directed to succeeding in examinations than to consider an in depth learning style, and therefore have a great desire to consider their learning styles and to make all effort possible to register a pass mark in assessment tasks. The tendency is that there would be lapses if the teaching methods are varied without considering the assessment methods, thus it is imperative to examine the quality of the assessment instruments and analyse the content of the assessment to ameliorate and make our instructions better. It is expected that the assessment items should be set within the required mathematical knowledge and skills. There is need to consider the evaluation of the assessment processes and its implications on students' performance.

A lot of attention has been directed toward the instructional strategies and materials and little or no efforts employed to check how well evaluating the assessment processes can have a bearing on students' performance in the Cameroon General Certificate of Education examination. The assessment should include the setting of examination questions, moderation of the examination questions, the writing of the examination, and the marking process which need to be evaluated to ascertain that the student's performance is not jeopardized. The outcomes from these evaluation processes are often carried out in strict confidence such that the results are not always made available to the users of the examination which is not sensible. It is only when teachers and students get to know how some test items are fairing that they can improve on the teaching and learning of some topics, as well as their setting of test items and even the marking of tests and examinations.

A work was done on Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Cognitive Domain (Bloom *et al.*, 1956) which provided guidelines for an assessment framework. Bloom's classification recognized six levels that can be used to categorize processes for demonstrating students' content knowledge in ascending order as follows: knowledge, comprehension, application,

analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Despite Bloom's effort, findings from some studies carried out to investigate the application of Bloom's taxonomy as a guide in assessing mathematics knowledge have revealed that "Bloom's taxonomy does not provide an accurate model to guide item writers for anticipating the cognitive processes used by students to solve items on an achievement test in mathematics" (Gierl, 1997, p. 26), and that "mathematics teachers have difficulty interpreting the thinking skills in Bloom's taxonomy and creating test items for higher-order thinking" (Thompson, 2008, p. 96). Smith et al. (1996) proposed a modification of Bloom's taxonomy, the MATH taxonomy (Mathematical Assessment Task Hierarchy) for the structuring of assessment tasks. These researchers realized that Bloom's taxonomy could be suitable for structuring assessment tasks, but show some limitations in the mathematical context. Eight categories of mathematical knowledge and skills were identified by these researchers which were arranged into three groups A, B, and C. These eight categories are classified according to the nature, not the difficulty level, of the activity required to complete the task successfully as seen below.

Table 1:

The MATH Taxonomy

GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C
(A1) Factual knowledge (A2) Comprehension (A3) Routine Procedures	(B1) Information transfer (B2) Application to new situation	(C1) Justifying and interpreting (C2) Implications, conjectures and comparisons (C3) Evaluation

Source: *The Math Taxonomy* (Smith et al., 1996)

A summary of the descriptors used by Smith et al. (1996) can be seen in figure 2 below. A series of detailed examples to illustrate the list of descriptors was also given by the researchers. Bennie (2005) emphasized that the MATH taxonomy could also be used as a tool in analysing course material in Mathematics. In figure 3, Smith et al. (1996) recommended the use of a grid that matches subject topics with the descriptors of the MATH taxonomy which enables teachers to easily determine how well the assessment tasks are balanced on the paper" (Smith et al., 1996), and they discovered that most of the mathematics examination papers they had analysed had a great bias for group A tasks. In addition, Smith et al. (1996) highlighted a few characteristics of the MATH taxonomy. In the first place, they placed activities that do not require in-depth learning on the left side of the taxonomy, while those that needed a more intense approach were placed on the other side. Secondly, there exist no clear differences between the categories since there are questions

that are not directly linked to any category, as well as questions that may link to more than one category. Thirdly, a student's previous learning has a bearing on how the student can perform a task. Lastly, the taxonomy is a representation of the characteristics of the activity and does not consider the difficulty levels in listing the activities.

Table 2:

Descriptors in the MATH taxonomy

Categories	Students can...
(A1) Factual knowledge	recall previously learned information in the original form, for example, a specific formula or definition
(A2) Comprehension	decide whether or not conditions of a simple definition are satisfied, understand the significance of symbols in a formula, show an ability to substitute in a formula, and recognize examples and counterexamples
(A3) Routine procedures	carry out all the steps in a procedure that have been used in drill exercises prior to the assessment, to get the correct answer as long as the procedure is used correctly (although there may be more than one appropriate procedure for a particular problem)
(B1) Information transfer	• transform information from one form to another, for example, verbal to numerical • decide whether the conditions of a conceptual definition are met, where a conceptual definition is one whose understanding requires a significant change in a student's mode of thought or mathematical knowledge • recognize which formula or method is appropriate in a particular context • recognize when a formula or method is inappropriate in a context • summarize in non-technical terms for a different audience

	• construct a mathematical argument from a verbal outline of the method • explain the relationships between parts of the material • explain processes • reassemble the parts of a mathematical argument in a logical order
(B2) Application to new Situation	choose and apply appropriate methods or information in new situations, for example, modelling real life settings, proving a previously unseen theorem (which goes beyond using routine procedures), and choosing and applying appropriate algorithms
(C1) Justifying and Interpreting	justify and/or interpret a given result, for example, proving a theorem to justify a result, finding errors in reasoning, recognizing computational limitations and sources of error, discussing the significance of given examples and counterexamples, recognizing unstated assumptions
(C2) Implications, conjectures and comparisons	draw implications, make conjectures, and prove them
(C3) Evaluation	use set criteria to judge the value of material for a specific purpose, for example, making judgements; selecting for relevance; arguing the merits of an algorithm; using organisational skills; and thinking creatively in restructuring given material to view it in different ways

Table 3:**Grid for MATH taxonomy and subject topics**

TOPIC MATH Taxonomy	TOPIC 1	TOPIC 2	TOPIC 3	TOPIC 4	TOPIC 5
Factual knowledge					
Comprehension					
Routine use of procedures					
Information transfer					
Applications in new situations					
Justifying and interpreting					
Implications, conjectures and comparisons					

The frameworks considered above give guidelines on the ways of assessing various types and levels of knowledge and a standard for examining written assessment items. Specifically, the MATH taxonomy presents both the mathematical knowledge and skills to be learnt, and the cognitive process considered in differentiating the knowledge and skills. This study sought to evaluate the assessment processes and their implications on students' academic performance in the GCE ordinary level mathematics examination.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the following theoretical frameworks:

Social Constructivist Theory: This theory posits that knowledge is constructed through social interactions and experiences. In the context of mathematics education, social constructivism emphasizes the role of assessment in shaping students' understanding and construction of mathematical knowledge.

Assessment for Learning Theory: This theory emphasizes the importance of assessment as a tool for learning, rather than just a measure of student achievement. It highlights the need for assessments to be aligned with learning objectives and to provide feedback that guides student learning.

Curriculum Alignment Theory: This theory emphasizes the importance of aligning assessments with curriculum objectives and standards. It ensures that assessments measure what students are expected to know and be able to do.

Statement of the Problem

The assessment process in Ordinary Level Mathematics at the General Certificate of Education (GCE) examination in Cameroon has been criticized for being inadequate and ineffective in measuring students' true abilities and competencies. Despite the importance of mathematics in various aspects of life, many students continue to struggle with the subject, and their performance in the GCE examination has been unsatisfactory. There is a need to evaluate the assessment process and its implications on candidate performance in Ordinary Level Mathematics to identify areas of strength and weakness and provide recommendations for improvement. This study aims to investigate the assessment process and its impact on candidate performance in Ordinary Level Mathematics at the GCE examination in Cameroon, with a view to informing policy and practice in mathematics education.

Objectives of the study

The general purpose of the study was to evaluate the assessment processes and their implications on students' performance in the GCE ordinary level mathematics examination. Specifically, this study sought to find out:

- (1) the types of cognitive demands represented in the GCE ordinary level mathematics examination
- (2) the dimensions of understanding represented in the GCE ordinary level mathematics examination

Methodology

This study adopted an exploratory design and examined a collection of the mathematics GCE O level national examinations, in particular, the cognitive demands the examination made on students. The MATH taxonomy provided the set of assessment standards used in the study.

Sample

The General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-level mathematics (syllabus 570) paper set by mathematics O level examiners served as the benchmark paper that constituted the materials to be investigated. In this study, the papers examined from the respective sources will be referred to as the four assessments, and they are from the examinations in the years 2018 and 2019. The mathematics syllabus 570 consists of eleven topics, namely: Numbers, Sets and logic, Mathematical relations, Euclidean geometry, Mensuration, Rectangular coordinate geometry, Algebra and network, Trigonometry, Vectors, Matrices and transformations, Statistics and probability. There are two papers in the written assessment – Paper 1 which consists of 50 multiple choice questions more on the knowledge, comprehension, and application skills of concepts, and Paper 2 consisting of 15 structural and 4 essay questions of varying marks and lengths testing more on higher order thinking skills. Candidates are required to answer all questions in both papers.

Instrument for data collection

The instrument used to examine the cognitive demands of the test items in this study was an adaptation from the model viewed before – the MATH taxonomy (Smith et al., 1996), as the descriptors in this model matched with the assessment objectives of the mathematics syllabus 570. The instrument includes six categories of mathematical knowledge and skills, arranged into three groups A, B, and C, in the MATH taxonomy, assessing students' mathematical understanding. The six categories of cognitive demands are: (A1) Factual Knowledge, (A2) Comprehension, (A3) Routine Procedures, (B1) Information Transfer, (C1) Justifying and Interpreting, and (C2) Implications, Conjectures and Comparisons. The five assessment objectives for O-level mathematics stated in the GCE Mathematics Ordinary Level Syllabus 570 document were matched with the six categories of cognitive demands in the derived set of assessment standards in table 4. The two researchers did the matching independently and afterwards compared their results and differences which they reconciled to come to a common consensus.

Table 4:
Matching of assessment objectives with categories of cognitive demands

Assessment Objectives	Key Words	Cognitive Demands
Understand and apply mathematical concepts and skills in a variety of contexts	Understand	A2
	Apply	A3
	variety of contexts	B1
Organise and analyse data and information; formulate and solve problems; including those in real-world contexts, by selecting and applying appropriate techniques of solution; interpret mathematical results	Organise	A3
	Analyse	B1
	Formulate	A3
	Solve	A3
	Interpret	B1
Solve higher order thinking problems; make inferences; write mathematical explanation and arguments	make inferences	C2
	write explanation and arguments	C1

A grid, that combines item numbers, subject topics, brief description of the content with the categories of the derived set of assessment standards, is used to record the distribution of the codes in each paper of a written assessment.

Results and Discussion

Though there are only about 50 questions in paper 1 and 19 questions in paper two, there are several part questions that allow the testing of a range of cognitive demands in the different dimensions. In this study, the two researchers identified and rated the cognitive demands of the items in the GCE O-level examination independently using the derived set of assessment standards before reconciling to check for the reliability of coding. Out of 138 questions or part questions, the codes for 126 were concurred. The 12 items that had different coding were discussed and arrived at a consensus. Hence it may be said that the intercoder reliability was $(126 \div 138) \times 100\% = 91.3\%$.

Table 6:

Distribution of categories of cognitive demands in the GCE O Level Mathematics examination

Category	Number of questions or part questions (% to one decimal place) *
GCE O	
A1	13 (9.4)
A2	25 (18)
A3	75 (54.5)
B1	12 (14.0)
C1	10 (7.2)
C2	3 (2.2)

Note. A1 = Factual Knowledge; A2 = Comprehension; A3 = Routine Procedures; B1 = Information Transfer; C1 = Justifying and Interpreting; C2 = Implications, Conjectures and Comparisons.

* % is computed as (number of questions or part questions in the category/total number of questions or part questions in the assessment) *100.

Similar to what Smith et al. (1996) found in their study, all mathematics GCE O-level examinations, analysed in this study were heavily biased towards assessing knowledge and skills in Group A category, with almost 50% or more of the items focusing on (A3) Routine Procedures and 18 -30% on (A2) Comprehension, though only 9.4% on (A1) Factual Knowledge in the GCE O-level assessments Examination. In fact, only around 10 - 15% of the items focus on Group B and less than 10% on Group C.

Implications of the study

Students are expected to be attentive to the kind of learning approach they embark on whether it is shallow or in-depth learning depending on the quality and characteristics of the mathematics written assessment they are exposed to (Ramsden, 1992). Obviously, they will consider taking a shallow approach when they are given written assessment which tests a narrow range of skills. D'Souza and Wood (2003) concluded from their research findings that by giving close attention to assessment methods that test a broader range of skills, students' learning can be greatly enhanced. There is a need to critically examine the types and extent of cognitive demands the written assessments make on students. Schools should have as objectives of assessing the knowledge and skills of all six categories in their

written assessments, and if possible, in all the eleven topics of the GCE O-level syllabus. The schools could also model their written assessments after the GCE O-level as the distributions of the six categories across the twelve topics in the schools' assessments are in a way similar to those in the GCE O-level. However, the primary objectives of the GCE O-level examination are to evaluate individual student progress and to place students in the appropriate educational level according to their performance in the examination. Thus, teachers are expected to be conscious of the types of cognitive demands solicited from the students as they develop the assessment items in the various topics, so as to design a balanced assessment that offers feedback on the actual learning that takes place rather than only measures the outcomes of that learning (Fong & Kaur, 2015).

Recommendations

It was recommended that enough attention should be directed to developing a more balanced assessment that not only includes items that assess the various categories of cognitive demands but also assesses all dimensions of understanding in the different topics. According to Thompson and Kaur (2011), the entire test results provide only fast feedback on student understanding, which can misdirect the aims of the mathematics curriculum which are to enable students to acquire knowledge and understanding of the nature, reasoning, and purpose of learning mathematics; put mathematical knowledge and skills acquired into use in other disciplines, real-life situations, employment opportunities, and further studies, therefore there is need to assess beyond just their knowledge of skills. Furthermore in the revised Mathematics syllabus, it is stated that: Besides reading, writing, and talking about mathematics in a variety of ways, students should, under the guidance of the teacher, demonstrate the various mathematical approaches to solve problems of all types. Usiskin (2012) recommended that one can be thought of as having a complete understanding of a mathematical concept if that individual can effectively manage the skills and algorithms associated with the concept, with properties and mathematical justifications (proofs) involving the concept, with uses and applications of the concept, with representations and metaphors for the concept.

Conclusion

Assessment is an intriguing aspect of a well-established instructional program for it is meant to offer feedback on how well the instructional objectives have been attained while placing learners at the appropriate level of instruction. Enough attention should be given to the process to ensure it is effectively done by carefully screening the instruments used for assessing learners to meet up with the required standards of the Cameroon educational system. The researchers are not better placed to dictate the mode of distribution of items of a balanced assessment as it is left at the discretion of the class teachers to determine what they consider appropriate depending on the prevailing circumstance. The bottom line is for the teachers and the officials setting assessments in schools or at the national examinations to consider assessments that are of standards and flexible to uphold the excellent standards of the Cameroon educational system.

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ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORMS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN BUEA MUNICIPALITY, SOUTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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Abstract

The study investigated online learning platforms and the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality in the South West Region of Cameroon. It made use of two research objectives which were transformed into two research questions as follows: What is the influence of Google Classroom on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality? and what is the influence of Zoom on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality? The research questions were later transformed into research hypotheses. A descriptive survey design was employed. 357 students and 6 academic staff made the sample. Data were collected from students using a closed ended questionnaire, while an interview guide was used to collect data from the academic staff. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyse quantitative data from the questionnaire, while data from the interview guide were analysed thematically. The findings reveal that both google classroom and zoom have a positive and significant influence on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality. It was concluded that online learning platforms like google classroom and zoom positively influence academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality. It was recommended that students and academic staff in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality should integrate Google Classroom and zoom more widely in the teaching and learning process.

Keywords:

Online learning platform, google classroom, zoom, academic performance.



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Résumé

L'étude a examiné les plateformes d'apprentissage en ligne et les résultats scolaires des étudiants des établissements d'enseignement supérieur de la municipalité de Buea, dans la région du Sud-Ouest du Cameroun. Elle s'appuyait sur deux objectifs de recherche, déclinés en deux questions : quelle est l'influence de Google Classroom sur les résultats scolaires des étudiants des établissements d'enseignement supérieur de la municipalité de Buea ? et quelle est l'influence de Zoom sur les résultats scolaires des étudiants des établissements d'enseignement supérieur de la municipalité de Buea ? Les questions de recherche ont ensuite été transformées en hypothèses de recherche. Une enquête descriptive a été utilisée. L'échantillon était composé de 357 étudiants et de 6 enseignants. Les données ont été collectées auprès des étudiants à l'aide d'un questionnaire fermé, tandis qu'un guide d'entretien a été utilisé pour recueillir les données auprès du personnel enseignant. Des statistiques descriptives et inférentielles ont été utilisées pour analyser les données quantitatives du questionnaire, tandis que les données du guide d'entretien ont été analysées thématiquement. Les résultats révèlent que Google Classroom et Zoom ont une influence positive et significative sur les résultats scolaires des étudiants des établissements d'enseignement supérieur de la municipalité de Buea. Il a été conclu que les plateformes d'apprentissage en ligne comme Google Classroom et Zoom influencent positivement les résultats scolaires des étudiants des établissements d'enseignement supérieur de la municipalité de Buea. Il a été recommandé aux étudiants et au personnel enseignant des établissements d'enseignement supérieur de la municipalité de Buea d'intégrer plus largement Google Classroom et Zoom dans leurs processus d'enseignement et d'apprentissage.

Mots clés :

Plateforme d'apprentissage en ligne, Google Classroom, Zoom, résultats scolaires.

Introduction

Studies have shown that e-learning components, such as e-notes and e-assignments, provide easy access to course materials, enhance students' understanding of subjects, and timely submission of coursework, thereby positively influencing academic outcomes (Loveline & Yufela, 2022). Students perceive online learning as a viable alternative during disruptions, with platforms like Google Classroom facilitating active learning and engagement (Ndimofor, 2022). However, online learning has some challenges. Nkengafac (2021) is of the opinion that students with limited access to reliable internet connections or the necessary technical skills to access online learning platforms may struggle to fully participate, thus affecting their academic outcomes. Oye et al. (2020), hold the view that students from diverse backgrounds may experience varying levels of success in online learning environments due to differences in access to technology and internet connectivity.

According to Ekpoh and Essien (2022), students who use Google Classroom for Educational Technology courses achieve higher scores compared to those relying solely on traditional methods. Students who use Google Classroom in Computer Database

Management Systems exhibit significant improvements in academic achievement (Omeh et al., 2022). Students perceived Google Classroom as an effective tool for active learning (Ndimofor, 2022).

Google Classroom is not without challenges. Research indicates that factors such as limited access to personal devices, poor internet connectivity, and lack of technical support can hinder its effective utilization. For example, students at Kebbi State University in Nigeria reported difficulties in submitting assignments on time due to network issues and the absence of functional Wi-Fi on campus (Hussaini et al., 2020). Google Classroom has been shown to offer increased flexibility in teaching methods. As highlighted by Omotayo (2020), the use of online platforms such as Google Classroom allows instructors to implement blended and flipped classroom models, which have been associated with higher retention and student satisfaction. Ajayi and Adegbiya (2021) hold the view that Google Classroom plays a role in improving the efficiency of assessment and feedback. According to them, students who use Google Classroom for assignments and quizzes report quicker feedback, which led to a timelier understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. This rapid feedback loop helps students to make immediate adjustments to their learning strategies, thus improving their overall performance. Choi et al. (2020) opine that Google Classroom can handle large-scale courses with hundreds of students.

However, the benefits of Google Classroom are not always evenly distributed across different student populations. According to a study by Olojede (2021), students from lower socio-economic backgrounds face significant challenges in accessing online learning platforms like Google Classroom. Another important consideration in the use of Google Classroom is the level of digital literacy among both students and instructors. Salih and Kaka (2020) emphasize the importance of training in ensuring that all users can fully utilize the platform's features.

Gonzalez and Fernandez (2021) say synchronous learning with the use of Zoom increases student engagement and fosters a sense of community. However, the effectiveness of Zoom-based learning environments is often limited by environmental distractions and screen fatigue. According to Baranova and Smirnova (2022), students reported decreased concentration during long Zoom sessions, particularly when classes lacked interactivity. In regions with unstable internet access, the limitations of Zoom are more pronounced. Okoye and Chukwuemeka (2023) say that frequent disconnections, audio lags, and video freezing disrupt learning flow and negatively affect comprehension and participation. As a consequence, students express frustration because they miss critical parts of lectures and are unable to ask timely questions, leading to gaps in understanding. Digital equity is another critical issue in the use of Zoom for academic purposes. According to Mavundla et al. (2022), students from underprivileged backgrounds experience greater difficulties in accessing Zoom classes due to lack of devices and high data costs.

Instructors' technological proficiency also significantly affects the efficacy of Zoom sessions. Chen and Wang (2020) are of the opinion that university instructors' lack of training in Zoom features lead to missed opportunities for engagement and weak classroom management. In contrast, instructors who receive formal training are able to use advanced Zoom tools—such as breakout rooms, whiteboards, and collaborative documents—to foster dynamic and participatory classes. This highlights the need for continuous professional development in digital pedagogy. To add, the psychological impact of prolonged Zoom use has become an area of concern. Bailenson (2021) coined the term “Zoom fatigue” to

describe the exhaustion associated with overuse of video conferencing. His research attributes this fatigue to excessive eye contact, the cognitive load of interpreting non-verbal cues over video, and the constant self-view feature. These stressors can impair students' mental well-being and reduce academic performance, suggesting that Zoom sessions should be strategically scheduled and balanced with asynchronous tasks to avoid burnout. This study seeks to find out the use of online learning platforms such as google classroom and zoom and its influence on academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality.

Statement of the Problem

The advancement in science and technology and the development of online learning platforms have made learning resources more readily available than ever before. Students and academic staff in higher educational institutions can access learning materials in the comfort of their homes and at the time best convenient to them. As a consequence, students and academic staff can easily carry out research on any field of study based on their interest. Students can easily do assignments as well as get additional material for their course content.

Inadequate use of online learning platform might limit both students and academic staff of learning resources. This may further result in students facing more challenges with their academic work, having lower grades, failing in courses, spending more years in school than planned for a programme, and/or dropping out of school. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to find out the use of online learning platforms and academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was used for this study, with the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The sample was made up of 357 students and six academic staff from three higher education institutions in Buea. Purposive sampling was used to get the lone public and the lone denominational higher institutions, while simple random sampling was used to get one lay private higher institution. Accidental sampling was used to obtain the students and the academic staff who served as sample for the study. Quantitative data were collected from the students by means of closed ended questionnaire constructed using the four-point Likert scale. Qualitative data were collected from academic staff by means of an interview guide. Both instruments were administered using the direct delivery technique. The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, and mean, and also inferentially using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The qualitative data were analyzed thematically.

FINDINGS

Research Question One: What is the influence of Google Classroom on the Academic Performance of Students of Higher Education Institutions in Buea Municipality?

Table 1 Google Classroom and Academic Performance of Students

SN	ITEM	Stretched				Collapsed	
		SA	A	D	SD	SA +A	SD +D
1	Google classroom enhances student engagement during lessons	203 (56.9%)	99 (27.7%)	43 (12.0%)	12 (3.4%)	302 (84.6%)	55 (15.4%)
2	I find Google classroom easy to navigate	51 (14.3%)	257 (72.0%)	40 (11.2%)	9 (2.5%)	308 (86.3%)	49 (13.7%)
3	I prefer using Google Classroom to traditional classroom meetings.	34 (9.5%)	204 (57.1%)	74 (20.7%)	45 (12.6%)	238 (66.6%)	119 (33.3%)
4	Google classroom supports collaborative learning with peers	205 (57.4%)	75 (21.0%)	51 (14.3%)	26 (7.3%)	280 (78.4%)	77 (21.6%)
5	I do much of my academic work using Google Classroom.	205 (57.4%)	58 (16.2%)	67 (18.8%)	27 (7.6%)	263 (73.6%)	94 (26.4%)
6	Limited Internet access affects my ability to use Google classroom effectively	91 (25.5%)	225 (63.0%)	24 (6.7%)	17 (4.8%)	316 (88.5%)	41 (11.5%)
7	I feel more involved in blended learning through Google classroom	208 (58.3%)	85 (23.8%)	43 (12.0%)	21 (5.9%)	293 (82.1%)	94 (17.9%)
8	Training improved my ability to use Google classroom	215 (60.2%)	99 (27.7%)	33 (9.2%)	10 (2.8%)	314 (87.9%)	43 (12%)
	MRS	1212 (42.4%)	1102 (38.5%)	375 (13.1%)	167 (5.8%)	2314 (80.9%)	542 (19.1%)

In relation to research question one, eight items were used to find out the extent to which google classroom influence the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality. In relation to item one, 302 respondents (84.2%) agreed to the fact that google classroom enhances student engagement during lessons while 55 respondents (15.4%) disagreed. In relation to item two, 308 respondents (86.3%) agreed to the fact that they find Google classroom easy to navigate while 49 respondents (13.7%) disagreed. In relation to item three, 238 respondents (66.6%) agreed to the fact that they prefer using Google Classroom to traditional classroom meetings while 119 respondents (33.3%) disagreed.

In relation to item four, 280 respondents (78.4%) agreed to the fact that Google classroom supports collaborative learning with peers while 77 respondents ((21.6%)

disagreed. In relation to item five, 263 respondents (73.6%) agreed to the fact that they do much of their academic work using Google Classroom while 94 respondents ((26.4%) disagreed. In relation to item six, 316 respondents (88.5%) agreed to the fact that Limited Internet access affects their ability to use Google classroom effectively while 41 respondents ((11.5%) disagreed. In relation to item seven, 293 respondents (82.1%) agreed to the fact that they feel more involved in blended learning through Google classroom while 94 respondents ((17.9%) disagreed. In relation to item eight, 314 respondents (87.9%) agreed to the fact that Training improved their ability to use Google classroom while 43 respondents ((12.1%) disagreed.

To further determine the effect Google classroom on the academic performance of students of higher education institutions in Buea Municipality, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to ascertain the influence as indicated in the table below.

Verification of Hypothesis One

Ho₁: Google classroom has no significant effect on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea municipality.

Ha₁: Google classroom has a significant effect on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea municipality.

Table 2

Perceived Influence of Google Classroom on the Academic Performance of Students in Higher Education Institutions in Buea Municipality

		<i>Google classroom</i>	<i>Academic performance</i>
<i>Google classroom</i>	Pearson Correlation	1	.868**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	357	357
<i>Academic performance</i>	Pearson Correlation	.868**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	357	357
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

From the table above, the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = .868^{**}$, $P=0.05$) indicates a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between Google classroom and academic performance of students of higher education institutions in Buea municipality. This, therefore, connotes enough statistical evidence ($r=0.868^{**}$, $n=357$, $P=0.05$) that Google classroom positively and significantly influence the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea municipality. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternate hypothesis is accepted, which states that Google classroom has a significant effect on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea municipality.

Table 3***Lecturers' Opinion on the Influence of Google Classroom on Academic Performance of Students in Higher Education Institutions in Buea Municipality***

Codes	Themes	Sampled Quotations
Do you use Google Classroom for your academic activities? if yes how often, if no please may I know why?	Extensively use	"Yes, I utilize Google Classroom extensively. It provides a structured environment for students to access materials and submit assignments. I've noticed that it enhances communication and helps students stay organized, which positively impacts their academic performance."
	A key tool	"Absolutely, Google Classroom is a key tool in my teaching. It allows me to share resources efficiently and track student engagement. I've observed that students who actively participate in the platform tend to perform better in assessments."
	Yes	"I do use Google Classroom. It facilitates collaboration among students and makes it easier for them to ask questions outside of class hours. This level of engagement has shown a correlation with improved grades."
	Daily	"Yes, I incorporate Google Classroom almost daily, especially during exam periods. The immediate access to resources and practice quizzes helps students prepare better and boosts their confidence."
	Weekly	"Yes, I use it several times a week. It allows me to share coding exercises and resources effectively. Frequent use has helped my students improve their practical skills and overall performance."
		"Yes, I utilize it weekly. It supports not just academic tasks but also peer interactions. This regular engagement fosters a collaborative learning environment that positively affects student performance."
	Least three times a week	"Yes, I engage with Google Classroom at least three times a week. This consistency allows me to monitor student progress closely and provide timely feedback, which I believe is crucial for their success."

In relation to the interview on the use of Google classroom by lecturers of higher education institutions in Buea Municipality, a number of themes were raised as seen on the table above pointed out by their directive quotations as follows. In response to the question, 'Do you use Google Classroom for your academic activities?' a respondent agreed by saying *"Yes, I utilize Google Classroom extensively. It provides a structured environment for students to access materials and submit assignments. I've noticed that it enhances communication and helps students stay organized, which positively impacts their academic performance."* this was corroborated by another respondent who stated that *"Absolutely, Google Classroom is a key tool in my teaching. It allows me to share resources efficiently and track student engagement. I've observed that students who actively participate in the platform tend to perform better in assessments."*

In addition, another respondent holds that:

"I do use Google Classroom. It facilitates collaboration among students and makes it easier for them to ask questions outside of class hours. This level of engagement has shown a correlation with improved grades."

While another pointed out that:

"Yes, I incorporate Google Classroom into my courses. I find it helpful for providing feedback and fostering a sense of community among students. Those who engage more with the platform often demonstrate higher academic performance."

Responding to the how often, they use Google classroom, the respondent stated that:

"Yes, I use Google Classroom daily. I find it essential for posting lectures, assignments, and announcements. The regular interaction helps keep students engaged and accountable." Another respondent pointed that *"Yes, I use it several times a week. It allows me to share coding exercises and resources effectively. Frequent use has helped my students improve their practical skills and overall performance."*

While yet another hold that:

"Yes, I engage with Google Classroom at least three times a week. This consistency allows me to monitor student progress closely and provide timely feedback, which I believe is crucial for their success." Some of the respondents were also of the view that, *"Yes, I use it weekly for discussions and assignments. I appreciate how it facilitates ongoing conversations about course material, which seems to enhance students' comprehension and grades."* *"Yes, I incorporate Google Classroom almost daily, especially during exam periods. The immediate access to resources and practice quizzes helps students prepare better and boosts their confidence."*

Research Question Two: What is the influence of Zoom on the Academic Performance of Students in Higher Education Institutions in Buea Municipality?

Table 4
Zoom and Academic Performance of Students

SN	ITEM	Stretched					Collapsed
		SA	A	D	SD	SA +A	SD +D
1	Zoom enables real-time interaction with my lecturers	253 (70.9%)	55 (15.4%)	43 (12.0%)	6 (1.7%)	308 (86.3%)	49 (13.7%)
2	Zoom has improved my ability to collaborate with classmates during group discussions.	254 (71.1%)	56 (15.7%)	45 (12.6%)	2 (.6%)	310 (86.8%)	47 (13.2%)
3	The use of zoom has been an effective tool in	209 (58.5%)	86 (24.1%)	56 (15.7%)	6 (1.7%)	295 (82.6%)	62 (17.4%)

	helping me achieve academic success in my course.						
4	Zoom has helped me not only to take classes within my locality but also to take foreign lectures	244 (68.3%)	76 (21.3%)	30 (8.4%)	7 (2.0%)	320 (89.6%)	37 (10.4%)
5	With zoom classes, I feel more relaxed than the traditional face to face class.	220 (61.6%)	70 (19.6%)	57 (16.0%)	10 (2.8%)	290 (81.2%)	67 (18.8%)
6	Poor internet connection disrupts my zoom classes	271 (75.9%)	75 (21.0%)	11 (3.1%)	00 (00%)	346 (96.9%)	11 (3.1%)
7	Zoom classes are as effective as physical classroom lectures	250 (70.0%)	58 (16.2%)	29 (8.1%)	20 (5.6%)	308 (86.2%)	49 (13.8%)
8	Zoom helps me stay engaged during lectures	67 (18.8%)	245 (68.6%)	39 (10.9%)	6 (1.7%)	312 (87.4%)	45 (12.6%)
9	I prefer learning through zoom to other online platforms	98 (27.5%)	205 (57.4%)	31 (8.7%)	23 (6.4%)	303 (84.9%)	54 (15.1%)
	MRS	1866 (58.9%)	876 (27.6%)	341 (10.5%)	80 (2.5%)	2742 (86.6%)	421 (13.3%)

In relation to research question two, nine items were used to find out how Zoom influence the academic performance of students in higher institutions of learning in Buea municipality. In relation to item one, 308 respondents (86.3%) agreed to the fact that Zoom enables real-time interaction with their lecturers while 49 respondents (13.7%) disagreed. In relation to item two, 310 respondents (86.8%) agreed to the fact that the use of zoom has been an effective tool in helping them achieve academic success in their course while 47 respondents (13.2%) disagreed.

In relation to item three, 295 respondents (82.6%) agreed to the fact that Zoom has helped them not only to take classes within their locality but also to take foreign lectures while 62 respondents (17.4%) disagreed. In relation to item four, 320 respondents (89.6%) agreed to the fact that with zoom classes, they feel more relaxed than the traditional face to face class while 37 respondents (10.4%) disagreed. In relation to item five, 290 respondents (81.2%) agreed to the fact that poor internet connection disrupts their zoom classes while 67 respondents (18.8%) disagreed. In relation to item six, 346 respondents (96.9%) agreed to the fact that Zoom classes are as effective as physical classroom lectures while 11 respondents (3.1%) disagreed. In relation to item seven, 308 respondents (86.2%) agreed to the fact that Zoom helps them stay engaged during lectures while 49 respondents (13.8%) disagreed. In relation to item eight, 312 respondents (87.4%) agreed to the fact that they prefer learning through zoom to other online platforms while 45 respondents (12.6%) disagreed. In relation to

item nine, 303 respondents (84.9%) agreed to the fact that Zoom enables real-time interaction with their lecturers while 54 respondents (15.1%) disagreed.

To further determine the effect of zoom on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to ascertain the influence as indicated in the table below.

Verification of Hypothesis two

Ho₂: Zoom, has no significant influence on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea municipality.

Ha₂: Zoom, has a significant influence on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea municipality.

Table 5

Perceived Influence of Zoom on the Academic Performance of Students in Higher Education Institutions in Buea Municipality

		<i>Zoom</i>	<i>Academic performance</i>
<i>Zoom</i>	Pearson Correlation	1	.920**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	357	357
<i>Academic performance</i>	Pearson Correlation	.920**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	357	357

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the table above, the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = .920^{**}$, $P=0.05$) indicates a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between zoom and academic performance of students of higher education institutions in Buea Municipality. This, therefore, connotes enough statistical evidence ($r=0.920^{**}$, $n=357$, $P=0.05$) that zoom positively and significantly influence the academic performance of students of higher education institutions in Buea municipality. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternate hypothesis is accepted, which states that zoom have a significant impact on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea municipality.

Table 6

Lecturers' Opinion on the Influence of Zoom on Students' Academic Performance

Codes	Themes	Sampled Quotations
Do you use zoom for your academic activities	Real-time interaction,	"Yes, I use Zoom for my lectures and discussions. It allows for real-time interaction, which is crucial for engaging students. I've noticed that those who participate actively tend to perform better academically."
	Collaboration	"Absolutely, I rely on Zoom for both lectures and group work. The platform facilitates collaboration among students, which enhances their understanding of complex topics and improves their academic outcomes."

if yes, how often, if no please may I know why?	communication	"Yes, I frequently use Zoom for my classes. It's an effective way to maintain communication and encourage participation. I've observed that students who engage in live sessions tend to excel in their assessments."
	Host discussions	"Yes, I incorporate Zoom into my teaching strategy. The ability to host discussions and Q&A sessions has proven beneficial for students. Their academic performance reflects the enhanced understanding gained through these interactions."
	Problem-solving sessions	"Yes, I use Zoom regularly for tutorials and live problem-solving sessions. This interactive format allows me to address students' questions in real time, which has a positive impact on their performance."
	Every week	"Yes, I use Zoom almost every week for my lectures and discussions. This regular interaction helps keep students engaged and allows for immediate feedback, which enhances their academic performance."
	Twice a week	"Yes, I utilize Zoom for my classes about twice a week. It's essential for group work and real-time coding exercises. The frequent engagement has shown to improve students' understanding and skills significantly."
	At least once a week	"Yes, I use Zoom at least once a week. I find that live sessions are crucial for clarifying concepts and encouraging participation. Students who attend these sessions tend to perform better in their assessments."
	Every two weeks	"Yes, I incorporate Zoom into my teaching strategy every two weeks. These sessions allow for deeper discussions and collaboration, which positively impacts students' comprehension and overall performance."
	Regularly	"Yes, I use Zoom regularly, especially during exam preparation. I host weekly problem-solving sessions that help students grasp difficult concepts, leading to improved grades."

In answering the question "do you use zoom for your academic activities?" The respondents agreed by saying ...*"Yes, I use Zoom for my lectures and discussions. It allows for real-time interaction, which is crucial for engaging students. I've noticed that those who participate actively tend to perform better academically."* *"Absolutely, I rely on Zoom for both lectures and group work. The platform facilitates collaboration among students, which enhances their understanding of complex topics and improves their academic outcomes."* ...*"Yes, I frequently use Zoom for my classes. It's an effective way to maintain communication and encourage participation. I've observed that students who engage in live sessions tend to excel in their assessments."*

In addition, the respondents were of the opinion that they use zoom very often as coded in their statements below:

"Yes, I use Zoom almost every week for my lectures and discussions. This regular interaction helps keep students engaged and allows for immediate feedback, which enhances their academic performance."

"Yes, I utilize Zoom for my classes about twice a week. It's essential for group work and real-time coding exercises. The frequent engagement

has shown to improve students' understanding and skills significantly."

"Yes, I use Zoom at least once a week.

I find that live sessions are crucial for clarifying concepts and encouraging participation. Students who attend these sessions tend to perform better in their assessments."

Conclusion

Finding on research question one reveals that Google classroom positively and significantly influences the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea municipality. This study is in line with Al-Marroof et al. (2020), who hold that the integration of Google Classroom into educational systems significantly enhances students' engagement, motivation, and ultimately academic achievement. This finding aligns strongly with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use determine the acceptance and effective use of a technology. The study revealed that students who found Google Classroom intuitive and helpful for organizing their learning materials demonstrated improved academic performance. Similarly, a study by Putri et al. (2021), found that the systematic delivery of content via Google Classroom led to improved comprehension and performance among undergraduate students in online learning environments. This was further supported by research conducted by Khalil and Ebner (2020), which highlighted the platform's role in providing a structured learning space that encourages active participation. When viewed through the TAM lens, the perception of Google Classroom as an accessible and beneficial tool reinforces its positive impact on academic success.

Findings in relation to research question two reveal that zoom positively and significantly influences the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Buea municipality. This study is in line with Almahasees et al. (2021), who are of the opinion that the use of Zoom as a video conferencing tool during the COVID-19 pandemic enhance real-time interaction and collaboration among students and instructors, fostering improved learning outcomes. This finding is well supported by the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, which emphasizes cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence as central to a successful educational experience in online environments. Zoom enables all three presences by allowing synchronous communication, screen sharing, and immediate feedback, thereby enriching the academic environment. Similarly, a study by González-Zamar and Abad-Segura (2021) demonstrated that Zoom facilitates an active learning atmosphere where students participate more frequently, enhancing their comprehension and performance. Supporting this, Wei and Chou (2022) found that Zoom allows for flexible yet meaningful learning interactions that keep students engaged, leading to higher academic achievement. These studies collectively highlight that Zoom's capacity to foster real-time interaction aligns with the CoI framework's emphasis on presence as a driver of academic success. Based on the aforementioned, it is concluded that online learning platforms like Google classroom and zoom have a positive influence on students' academic performance in higher education institutions in Buea Municipality.

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TEACHING APPROACHES AND WRITING ACHIEVEMENTS: A STUDY OF DIRECTED WRITING IN CAMEROON TECHNICAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study establishes that teaching approaches exert a significant and direct influence on students' achievement in directed writing among technical secondary school students in Douala, Littoral region. Despite the centrality of directed writing within the English language curriculum, ongoing challenges related to pedagogy, contextual factors, and learner engagement continue to impede student performance. The research systematically identifies the predominant instructional methods employed, critically evaluates their measurable impacts on students' writing proficiency, assesses the role of teacher feedback, and investigates the manner in which specific contextual factors mediate these effects. Through the application of an integrated theoretical framework, encompassing genre-based theory, task-based language teaching, language process writing theory, communicative competence, and a competency-based approach, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of these interrelationships. Employing a mixed-methods methodology, including classroom observations, analysis of student scripts, and assessment of writing outcomes, the findings illustrate that differentiation in teaching approaches corresponds closely with student achievement across dimensions such as task fulfillment, content development, organization, language use, and mechanics. The consistently low levels of achievement observed across these criteria underline the necessity for educators and policy makers to implement targeted adaptations in instructional practice and curriculum design. The implications of this research are significant: it offers clear, evidence-based recommendations to inform and enhance instructional methodologies, guide curriculum reform initiatives, and reinforce the effective implementation of competency-based approaches within Cameroon's educational system, thereby contributing to the advancement of writing pedagogy in comparable educational contexts.

Keywords:

Directed Writing, Teaching Approaches, Writing Achievements, Feedback, Contextual Factors.



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Résumé

Cette étude établit que les approches pédagogiques exercent une influence significative et directe sur la réussite des élèves en écriture dirigée du secondaire technique de Douala, dans la région du Littoral. Malgré la place centrale de l'écriture dirigée dans le programme d'anglais, des défis persistants liés à la pédagogie, aux facteurs contextuels et à l'engagement des apprenants continuent de freiner la performance des élèves. La recherche identifie systématiquement les principales méthodes pédagogiques employées, évalue de manière critique leurs impacts mesurables sur la maîtrise de l'écriture des élèves, évalue le rôle du feedback des enseignants et examine la manière dont des facteurs contextuels spécifiques atténuent ces effets. Grâce à l'application d'un cadre théorique intégré, englobant la théorie basée sur le genre, l'enseignement des langues par les tâches, la théorie de l'écriture basée sur les processus langagiers, la compétence communicative et une approche par compétences, l'étude fournit une analyse complète de ces interrelations. En utilisant une méthodologie mixte, incluant des observations en classe, l'analyse des copies des élèves et l'évaluation des résultats en écriture, les résultats montrent que la différenciation des approches pédagogiques est étroitement liée à la réussite des élèves dans des dimensions telles que l'exécution des tâches, le développement du contenu, l'organisation, l'utilisation de la langue et la mécanique. Les faibles niveaux de réussite observés pour ces critères soulignent la nécessité pour les enseignants et les décideurs politiques de mettre en œuvre des adaptations ciblées des pratiques pédagogiques et de la conception des programmes. Les implications de cette recherche sont importantes : elle offre des recommandations claires et fondées sur des données probantes pour éclairer et améliorer les méthodologies pédagogiques, guider les initiatives de réforme des programmes et renforcer la mise en œuvre efficace des approches par compétences au sein du système éducatif camerounais, contribuant ainsi à l'avancement de la pédagogie de l'écriture dans des contextes éducatifs comparables.

Mots-clés:

Écriture dirigée, Approches pédagogiques, Réussite en écriture, Rétroaction, Facteurs contextuels.

Introduction

Writing constitutes a fundamental aspect of language acquisition and academic achievement. In Cameroon secondary schools, directed writing, which requires students to respond to specific prompts within the English language curriculum and national examinations, is a central assessment component. Despite its significance, technical student performance remains suboptimal, primarily due to pedagogical limitations, contextual constraints, and learner-specific challenges. This study equips teachers with practical strategies such as peer review, scaffolding, and genre-based instruction to improve student outcomes in directed writing. These methods enable educators to enhance the effectiveness of their pedagogical approaches and better support student achievement. Internationally, instructional models such as genre-based, task-based, communicative competence, and

competency-based approaches are designed to enhance writing outcomes. However, in Cameroon, empirical evidence connecting these pedagogical models to student achievement in directed writing remains scarce. This study investigates the influence of teaching approaches on writing performance, with particular attention to the mediating effects of feedback and contextual variables.

Extensive examination reports and scholarly studies consistently highlight enduring deficiencies in directed writing among students in Cameroon's secondary schools. These deficiencies, including weak content development, inadequate mastery of genre conventions, frequent grammatical inaccuracies, and misinterpretation of task requirements, are well-documented. However, previous studies have not yet measured the direct impact of specific pedagogical interventions on measurable student outcomes in directed writing. Although student-centered frameworks such as the competency-based approach (CBA) hold theoretical promise, their implementation is often hindered by systemic barriers such as overcrowded classrooms, limited instructional materials, and rigid curricular structures. Existing research predominantly describes these obstacles without sufficiently analyzing the impact of targeted instructional methodologies on student performance. Given the problem above, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What teaching approaches are most commonly used to teach directed writing in Cameroon secondary schools?
- What challenges do teachers face in applying different approaches?
- What role do contextual factors play in mediating the relationship between teaching approaches and writing outcomes?
- What pedagogical strategies can be recommended to enhance students directed writing achievements in ESL classrooms in Cameroon?

Theoretical Consideration

This study systematically examines the influence of integrated pedagogical approaches on students' proficiency in directed writing, focusing explicitly on the constructs of content, organization, and communicative effectiveness as articulated in the national curriculum. The theoretical framework comprises five established models: genre-based instruction, task-based language teaching, process writing, communicative language teaching, and the competency-based approach, each selected for its demonstrated relevance and congruence with secondary education policies in Cameroon.

Genre-based Theory

Swales (1990) define a genre as a category identified by its communicative purposes, which determine the structure and features of a text. Texts within a genre share common characteristics, including target audience, organization of ideas, and language choices. For instance, a thesis statement is required in an argumentative essay because the genre's communicative purpose is to present a position for or against a specific issue.

According to Hyland (2007), the genre-based approach to writing instruction has five sequential stages: setting the context, modeling, joint construction, independent construction, and comparing. The first stage, setting the context, involves analyzing a genre's communicative purpose. This helps learners situate the writing task within its broader discourse community. In the modeling stage, students observe a sample argumentative essay and identify its thesis statement, supporting arguments, and conclusion. They then assess these features with the instructor's guidance. The joint construction stage collaboratively reinforces these genre-specific features. Here, teachers and students co-construct a text—for example, drafting an introduction together on the board to exemplify the identified conventions (Hyland, 2007).

In the independent construction stage, learners write essays with instructors guiding their understanding of genre conventions. In the comparing stage, students analyze the communicative purposes and linguistic features of the target genre compared to others. This activity deepens metacognitive awareness of genre-specific expectations. This approach matches the Cameroon curriculum's emphasis on genre-based, directed writing. Structured genre awareness supports content, coherence, and proper language. Combining pedagogy with curricular goals highlights the role of genre-based teaching in building students directed writing competence.

Task-based Language Theory

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is a pedagogical framework that emphasizes integrating authentic, goal-oriented tasks into both curriculum planning and classroom instruction. This approach aligns directly with the present study's objective to enhance directed writing skills within curriculum-mandated environments. Unlike genre-based instruction, which prioritizes conformity to prescribed textual conventions, and process writing theory, which highlights individual cognitive processes, TBLT distinguishes itself by facilitating meaningful language use in real-world communicative situations. This emphasis on authenticity is intended to advance students' abilities to produce effective written communication within contextually relevant scenarios. Learners participate in tasks such as informational interviews, collaborative writing projects, and the creation of documents typical of professional correspondence. Each task is strategically designed to develop language proficiency that is both contextually appropriate and functionally relevant. As Ellis (2003) asserts, the success of TBLT depends on sustained student engagement and active involvement in communication-focused activities, with problem-solving and genuine exchanges serving as catalysts for substantive language acquisition. By embedding writing instruction within authentic communicative contexts, TBLT systematically addresses the research objectives and fulfills curricular requirements that prioritize demonstrable practical writing competence.

The structure of TBLT typically follows three interconnected phases: pre-task, task cycle, and post-task (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). Empirical evaluation of TBLT relies on

varied methodologies, including performance-based assessments that employ authentic tasks, attitudinal surveys that capture student perceptions of engagement and learning, and systematic classroom observations that measure communicative outcomes (Baralt et al., 2016). In alignment with the objectives of the present study, TBLT situates language skill development within pragmatically meaningful, goal-driven assignments, thus directly supporting students' communicative proficiency, critical reasoning, and contextually appropriate expression in directed writing tasks.

Process Writing Theory

Flower and Hayes (1981) conceptualize writing as a recursive and dynamic cognitive process encompassing the stages of planning, translating, and reviewing. This process-oriented framework enables a nuanced analysis of the cognitive strategies writers employ goal-setting, ideation, and iterative revision and underscores the importance of metacognitive awareness in writing development. Process writing theory thereby provides a robust scaffold for instructional interventions that cultivate learners' abilities to enact, self-monitor, and systematically refine their texts. A typical pedagogical sequence might involve students brainstorming argumentative essay ideas, structuring outlines, drafting in incremental stages, and engaging in structured peer review prior to producing final versions. This iterative cycle supports the internalization of self-regulatory strategies and responsiveness to feedback, reinforcing the development of writer autonomy. Additionally, the recursive, time-intensive nature of process-oriented instruction often conflicts with curricular schedules and institutional time constraints, prompting educators to curtail or bypass essential revision stages. These challenges not only compromise the full realization of process writing's pedagogical benefits but also highlight the intrinsic need for integrative frameworks. Purposeful integration of process writing methods with approaches that foreground social context, genre norms, and communicative authenticity is therefore essential for achieving both regulatory and instructional alignment within curriculum-mandated environments.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a language teaching method that prioritizes meaningful and effective communication in real-life situations over the mastery of grammar rules or vocabulary lists. This learner-centered approach is based on the principle that communication is the primary goal of language learning. CLT emphasizes language as a tool for interaction and understanding rather than as an object of study. Instructional strategies include role-playing, conversation practice, problem-solving, and completion of authentic tasks. Canale and Swain (1980) define Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a pedagogical approach designed to foster learners' communicative competence across four key domains: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Within this framework, instructors adopt the roles of facilitator, guide, and co-communicator, designing instructional tasks and delivering feedback that targets both the fluency and appropriateness of learners' language use. The relevance of CLT to this study lies in its emphasis on the functional aspects of language, which support learners in

identifying communicative purposes and adapting language to audience, tone, style, and contextual variables. This theoretical grounding, therefore, informs the development of learners' ability to select appropriate language functions, aligning closely with the objectives of directed writing tasks.

Competency-Based Approach CBA

The competency-based approach (CBA) is a pedagogical framework that systematically develops learners' explicit knowledge, practical skills, attitudes, and values through engagement in authentic, contextually meaningful tasks (Hyland, 2002). CBA is utilized in this study for its evidence-based emphasis on fostering transferable competencies, enabling students to apply acquired skills in diverse real-life contexts (Hyland, 2002). In directed writing, CBA requires students to complete communicative writing tasks that replicate authentic scenarios, such as composing letters, preparing reports, or drafting speeches. Learners demonstrate competence through performance-based assessments that reflect real-world communicative demands. Assessment in CBA is outcomes-oriented, with proficiency measured by task completion and the ability to meet authentic communicative requirements (Hyland, 2002). Educators design activities and materials that simulate professional or societal environments, providing ongoing formative feedback to support the personalized development of skills. The adoption of CBA in this research is justified by its status as the mandated pedagogical approach in Cameroon's national curriculum. Its focus on authentic task performance aligns the framework with the study's objective of evaluating students' ability to transfer written communication skills to practical writing contexts, ensuring both contextual and methodological alignment (Hyland, 2002).

In summary, this study's integrated theoretical framework facilitated a systematic and nuanced analysis of how distinct and combined instructional methodologies namely: genre-based, task-based, process-oriented, communicative, and competency-based approaches affect student achievement in directed writing tasks. The empirical findings not only corroborate but also extend previous research (Hyland, 2007; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Canale & Swain, 1980) by demonstrating that, despite their established theoretical strengths, the practical efficacy of these models is substantially moderated by classroom realities and broader contextual variables. The documented, persistent deficits in content relevance, genre conformity, and mechanical accuracy across various writing genres strongly align with extant literature indicating that isolated pedagogical interventions often fail to address the full spectrum of student needs in resource-limited settings. These underperformances reinforce the consensus in scholarly work that effective writing instruction necessitates a deliberate integration of explicit genre instruction, recursive process-writing strategies, and authentic communicative practice (Hyland, 2007; Baralt et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, the implementation and evaluation of such integrative frameworks are challenged by empirical complexities, notably the overlapping constructs among

pedagogical models and methodological difficulties in attributing outcomes to specific interventions. The study's quantitative results further substantiate findings by Nunan (2004) and Hyland (2002) regarding the decisive role of contextual variability such as disparities in resource allocation, class size, and teacher expertise in shaping the fidelity and efficacy of instructional practices. These results underscore the necessity highlighted by Canale and Swain (1980) for adaptive, contextually responsive instructional planning. Consequently, the present evidence supports calls in the literature for flexible, data-driven strategies, including differentiated instruction, targeted teacher development, and feedback systems responsive to local educational realities. The study's limitations also highlight the ongoing need for contextually grounded research to disentangle the interactions among micro-level variables and pedagogical innovation in shaping writing outcomes. Future research should build on these findings by probing the mechanisms by which contextual and instructional factors intersect, thereby informing the design of scalable and sustainable pedagogical reforms suited to Cameroon's diverse educational landscape.

Methodology

Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to address the research objectives. The quantitative component assessed the statistical relationship between pedagogical approaches and students' achievement in directed writing, supporting the evaluation of teaching strategy effectiveness. The qualitative component examined students' perceptions and teachers' challenges, providing contextual and interpretive insights into factors influencing writing outcomes. This design enabled comprehensive exploration and robust interpretation of the complex dynamics in directed writing in teaching and learning, aligning with the dual focus on outcome evaluation and experiential understanding.

Population and Sampling

The study targeted a population of 100 Form Five technical students, balanced by gender, alongside 10 English language teachers who were directly responsible for the instruction of directed writing. Two schools were purposively selected Government Bilingual Technical High School, Bonamatoumbe (public), and Atlanta Bilingual Comprehensive and Technical High School (private) both located in Bonaberi, Douala, to provide contrasting institutional environments for comparative analysis. The school selection criteria incorporated considerations of student population heterogeneity, the presence of structured directed writing curricula, logistical accessibility, the willingness of personnel to participate, and documented engagement in prior educational research. This methodological decision was influenced by the curricular relevance of Form Five, as students at this instructional level participate in the GCE Ordinary Level English Language examination, which formally assesses directed writing. The sampling protocol employed a multi-stage procedure: purposive selection of institutionally distinct schools, stratified sampling to ensure proportional representation across gender and academic streams, and

purposive recruitment of teachers with demonstrable experience in directed writing pedagogy.

Variables of the Study

Three variables were considered in this study, each defined below to clarify their roles within the research framework.

- **Independent variable:** The teaching approaches implemented by teachers. These approaches include genre-based (teaching forms and structures of different text types), task-based (using real-world writing tasks), communicative (focusing on interaction and communication in writing), process-oriented (emphasizing drafting, revising, and feedback), and traditional teacher-centered methods (relying on direct instruction and modeling by the teacher).
- **Dependent variable:** Students' achievement in directed writing. This was measured by student performance in writing tasks, focusing on the following criteria:

- (1) organization and coherence (the logical flow and arrangement of ideas),
- (2) content development (the depth and relevance of ideas),
- (3) language use (accuracy and variety of vocabulary and grammar), and
- (4) mechanics (correct use of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization).

Within the research framework, moderators are defined as factors that can influence the strength or direction of the relationship between teaching approaches (independent variable) and writing outcomes (dependent variable). Examples include school environment and class size; for example, a smaller class size may enhance the effectiveness of a communicative approach. Mediators are defined as factors that explain how teaching approaches affect writing outcomes. In this study, the mediators include teachers' feedback strategies and resource availability. These factors modify the impact of teaching methods by shaping the pathway from instruction to student achievement. For example, personalized feedback can enhance the effectiveness of a teaching method in supporting student writing skills.

Data Collection Instruments

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments, a rigorous multi-instrument data-collection strategy was employed, closely aligned with the outlined research objectives. Initially, instrument development began with an extensive review of the scholarly literature and consultation with field experts. Collectively, the triangulation of validated surveys, structured interviews, and classroom observation not only strengthened methodological rigor but also enhanced the accuracy and credibility of findings regarding the determinants of achievement in directed writing.

- Classroom observation guide for analyzing prevalent teaching methods, feedback techniques, and instructional practices.
- Questionnaires and interviews with teachers and students to capture students' perceptions, challenges, and the contextual realities they face.
- Directed writing tasks were administered to students to gather quantitative data reflecting proficiency in key dimensions of writing, including organization, content development, language use, and mechanics. The hypotheses were subsequently evaluated using inferential statistical analyses, including t-tests to compare group means, ANOVA to assess differences across multiple teaching approaches, and regression analysis to identify predictors of students' writing achievement. This enabled the identification of statistically significant relationships among the variables under investigation. Tasks administered to students were based on an article, a speech, a formal letter, and a debate.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was structured systematically into three interrelated phases to ensure alignment between the data sources and the core research questions. In the initial phase, classroom observations were conducted to record teaching approaches, instructional strategies, and teacher-student interactions, specifically those related to directed writing instruction. These observations directly addressed the first two research questions regarding prevalent teaching practices and the challenges teachers encounter. Subsequently, the second phase involved administering structured writing tasks to students, enabling quantitative evaluation of their performance across key domains such as organization, content development, language use, and mechanics. These tasks provided empirical data relevant to the research questions on student achievement and its link to pedagogical practices. In the final phase, standardized questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were administered to both students and teachers to elicit detailed perspectives on instructional challenges, the influence of contextual factors, and perceived effectiveness of various teaching approaches. Interview prompts were refined using observational insights to maximize contextual relevance and thematic depth. This phased, integrative data collection strategy ensured that each method contributed targeted evidence to address specific research questions, resulting in comprehensive, methodologically coherent data collection fully aligned with the study's investigative objectives.

Quantitative data exploration began with descriptive statistics to examine teaching approaches, followed by inferential statistics to test the hypotheses. Before embarking on the correlation analysis, critical assumptions such as normality and multicollinearity were rigorously tested to ensure analytical robustness. The correlation analysis then unpacked relationships among students' writing outcomes, teacher feedback strategies, and contextual variables. As for qualitative data examination, it began with transcribing and reviewing all interview transcripts, field notes, and questionnaire responses to ensure accuracy. Open coding was employed to generate initial categories, paving the way for axial coding, which unpacked connections and identified recurring themes. The coding process

leveraged NVivo software, which added rigor and transparency by systematically organizing and analyzing qualitative data. To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, strategies such as member checking were employed, where participants validated the accuracy of the transcriptions and interpretations

Results and Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to systematically evaluate the extent to which students' written communication aligns with explicit task requirements and established academic conventions across multiple genres. Student performance was assessed across four directed writing tasks: letter writing, speech, article writing, and debate. The evaluation criteria included selecting relevant content, clarity of expression, structural conformity, mechanical correctness, appropriate slant, and adherence to word and paragraph limits. Data is presented in tables.

Table 1:
Students' Performance Task on Letter Writing

<i>School</i>	<i>CNT</i>	<i>EXP</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>SL</i>	<i>WL</i>	<i>PL</i>
<i>GBTHS Bonamatoumbe</i>	15	8	7	4	6	5	7
<i>ACBHS Bonaberi</i>	14	6	7	5	6	5	5
<i>Total</i>	29	14	14	9	12	10	12
<i>Percentage</i>	29%	14%	14%	9%	12%	10%	12%

The quantitative evaluation of students' letter-writing performance provides critical evidence to address the initial research question regarding the prevalence and pedagogical efficacy of current instructional practices for directed writing in Cameroonian secondary schools. The findings reveal that only 29% of participants (15 from GBTHS Bonamatoumbe and 14 from ACBHS Bonaberi) integrated content relevant to the specified prompt, evidencing substantial difficulties in both task interpretation and the articulation of pertinent ideas. This trend is consistent with documented literature highlighting ESL learners' frequent struggles with prompt analysis and appropriate content selection, as articulated by Hyland (2007) and Flower and Hayes (1981).

Furthermore, just 14% of respondents demonstrated clarity of expression, while an equivalent proportion adhered to formal conventions of business letter writing. This limited internalization of genre-specific features aligns with extant scholarship indicating insufficient mastery of textual conventions and communicative clarity in similar educational settings. Only 9% of students achieved mechanical accuracy, with comparably low levels in slanting (12%), paragraph structuring (12%), and compliance with word limit

requirements (10%). Collectively, these metrics underscore the persistent discrepancy between curricular expectations and measurable student achievement, thereby informing the second research question regarding the instructional and contextual barriers educators face. The alignment of these findings with prior research further substantiates the argument that structural impediments such as excessive class sizes, inadequate resources, and restrictive curricular guidelines adversely affect the implementation of learner-centered, genre-based writing instruction. Synthesizing these empirical results with the broader literature underscores the urgent necessity for pedagogical reform, including the integration of explicit genre instruction, iterative feedback mechanisms, and recursive drafting processes. Consequently, the data provide an evidence-informed foundation for comprehensive and contextually sensitive instructional interventions aimed at enhancing directed writing proficiency among secondary school learners in Cameroon.

Table 2:
Students' Performance Task on Speech

<i>School</i>	<i>CNT</i>	<i>EXP</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>SL</i>	<i>WL</i>	<i>PL</i>
<i>GBTHS Bonamatoumbe</i>	18	10	4	3	4	7	4
<i>ACBHS Bonaberi</i>	20	10	3	2	4	4	7
<i>Total</i>	38	20	7	5	8	11	11
<i>Percentage</i>	38%	20%	7%	5%	8%	11%	11%

The quantitative analysis of students' performance on the speech-writing task reveals systematic shortcomings across all evaluative criteria, underscoring the challenges associated with achieving the directed writing outcomes theorized in the study's integrated pedagogical framework. Specifically, only 38% of students demonstrated the capacity to select and incorporate information relevant to the writing prompt, a result that signals persistent difficulties in interpreting task requirements a core competency addressed within genre-based instruction (Hyland, 2007). Furthermore, merely 20% of students articulated their responses with sufficient clarity and coherence, reflecting limited mastery of communicative competence as emphasized by Communicative Language Teaching (Canale and Swain, 1980). Structural fidelity to speech conventions was observed in only 7% of submissions, indicating insufficient internalization of genre features central to both genre-based and competency-based approaches.

Mechanical accuracy, comprising orthographic and syntactic correctness, was achieved by only 5% of participants, illustrating ongoing deficits in foundational language skills. Moreover, only 8% of students succeeded in aligning their rhetorical strategies with the communicative aims of the speech task, highlighting a shortfall in pragmatic awareness and audience adaptation, central to both CLT and competency-based models. Organizational

competence, as reflected in coherent word and paragraph structure, was limited to 11% of respondents, further corroborating the underutilization of process-oriented writing strategies (Flower and Hayes, 1981). Thus, these findings not only confirm the pervasive underachievement noted in previous research but also illuminate the complex interplay between instructional approaches, genre awareness, and process-oriented methodology. The results substantiate the argument that substantive pedagogical reforms particularly the integration of scaffolded genre-based instruction and iterative process writing practices are essential for bridging the gap between curricular intent and observable student performance in directed writing tasks.

Table 3:
Students' Performance Task on Article

<i>School</i>	<i>CNT</i>	<i>EXP</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>SL</i>	<i>WL</i>	<i>PL</i>
<i>GBTHS Bonamatoumbe</i>	15	8	7	3	4	3	8
<i>ACBHS Bonaberi</i>	18	9	6	3	5	5	6
<i>Total</i>	33	17	13	6	9	8	14
<i>Percentage</i>	33%	17%	13%	6%	9%	8%	14%

Table 3 presents a detailed quantitative analysis of students' performance on the article writing task, systematically disaggregated by assessment criterion. The quantitative findings reveal consistently low levels of student achievement across all assessed dimensions of the article writing task. Specifically, only 33 percent of students successfully identified and developed relevant content, while only 17 percent demonstrated clarity and coherence in their written expression. Adherence to prescribed structural conventions was noted in just 13 percent of submissions, and only 6 percent achieved grammatical and mechanical accuracy. Furthermore, appropriate slanting, essential for aligning with the communicative intent of article writing, was observed in 9 percent of cases. Compliance with word and paragraph limits remained particularly weak, with only 8% and 14% of students, respectively, meeting these formal requirements. Collectively, these results illustrate widespread deficiencies in both the substantive development of ideas and conformity to formal structural standards, highlighting significant obstacles to effective article writing performance.

Table 4:
Students' Performance Task on Debate

<i>School</i>	<i>CNT</i>	<i>EXP</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>SL</i>	<i>WL</i>	<i>PL</i>
<i>GBTHS Bonamatoumbe</i>	12	7	4	4	3	7	13
<i>ACBHS Bonaberi</i>	17	8	7	3	4	5	6
<i>Total</i>	29	15	11	7	7	12	19
<i>Percentage</i>	29%	15%	11%	7%	7%	12%	19%

The quantitative findings presented in Table 4 demonstrate consistently low student achievement across all evaluated dimensions of the debate writing task, thereby highlighting entrenched deficiencies in both content development and adherence to formal writing conventions. Only 29% of students (12 from GBTHS Bonamatoumbe and 17 from ACBHS Bonaberi) successfully identified and integrated pertinent information from the given source, evidencing serious limitations in task comprehension and the selection of genre-appropriate material. Likewise, only 15% of participants demonstrated clarity of expression, reflecting enduring challenges in formulating logically cohesive, well-structured arguments. Mastery of debate-specific structural features was observed in only 11% of responses, underscoring the insufficient acquisition of essential genre conventions. Deficits in mechanical accuracy, as evidenced by acceptable grammar and spelling in only 7% of submissions, further illustrate gaps in foundational language competence. Similarly, appropriate adjustment of content to reflect the required debate perspective was observed in just 7% of cases. Regarding adherence to formal parameters, only 12% met the prescribed word limits, and 19% complied with the paragraphing requirements. These persistent shortcomings transcend individual skill domains and point to the systemic flaws of prevailing instructional practices.

Table 5 provides a systematic analysis of students' aggregate performance on directed writing tasks including speech, letter writing, article, and debate through the lens of essential assessment criteria. The table specifically evaluates the degree to which students select relevant content, articulate ideas with clarity, adhere to genre-specific conventions, demonstrate mechanical accuracy, tailor content to task requirements, and meet structural expectations within each genre. By offering a comprehensive breakdown of these indicators, Table 5 serves not only to clarify the domains in which students demonstrate proficiency but also to highlight specific areas needing improvement. This analysis ultimately underscores the need for targeted instructional interventions aimed at strengthening both foundational and advanced competencies in academic writing.

Table 5:
Combined Students' Performance in Directed Writing (Speech, Letter writing, Article and Debate)

<i>School</i>	<i>CNT</i>	<i>EXP</i>	<i>AF</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>SL</i>	<i>WL</i>	<i>PL</i>
<i>GBTHS Bonamatoumbe</i>	60	33	22	14	17	22	32
<i>ACBHS Bonaberi</i>	69	33	23	13	19	19	24
<i>Total</i>	129	66	45	27	36	41	56
<i>Percentage</i>	32.25%	16.5%	11.25%	6.75%	9%	10.25%	14%

A comprehensive evaluation of students' aggregated performance in directed writing tasks reveals significant gaps in their mastery of core assessment domains, with content selection and relevance emerging as particularly critical concerns. The data indicate that only 32.25% of students successfully identified and incorporated content pertinent to the assigned prompts. This deficiency is compounded by the finding that a mere 16.5% of participants conveyed their ideas with clarity, suggesting not only a lack of precision in content choice but also weaknesses in articulating and contextualizing key information. With just 11.25% adhering to genre-specific conventions and only 6.75% demonstrating mechanical accuracy, it becomes apparent that many students struggle to navigate the interconnected demands of academic writing, including understanding task requirements, applying disciplinary conventions, and achieving technical correctness.

The difficulty in content selection further manifests in the low percentage (9%) of students effectively tailoring their responses to align with specific task parameters, reflecting broader challenges in synthesizing, integrating, and framing content within the expected academic context. Additionally, only 10.25% of students met the structural criteria of the word count, underscoring persistent organizational and developmental obstacles. The absence of data on paragraph structure limits a more granular analysis of textual organization; however, the aggregate findings consistently indicate that inadequate content selection undermines both the relevance and coherence of student writing. To address these challenges, pedagogical interventions should focus explicitly on enhancing students' ability to analyze prompts, discern relevant material, and synthesize information within genre-specific frameworks. By prioritizing scaffolded instruction in content selection and integrating iterative feedback mechanisms, educators can better support students in developing the analytic and compositional skills necessary for competent academic writing across genres. Overall, these synthesized findings highlight the urgent need for targeted curricular reforms that foster both foundational and advanced proficiency in content relevance and integration.

Analysis of classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student questionnaires revealed key patterns in the implementation of directed writing instruction, each carrying significant pedagogical implications. Observations showed that genre-based and process-oriented instructional frameworks were present in approximately 80% of lessons, with explicit modeling of writing forms such as letters, speeches, and reports. In contrast, talk-based strategies were observed in fewer than 20% of lessons, suggesting limited facilitation of dialogic learning. Qualitative analysis of interview responses further identified challenges in applying the competency-based approach. Teachers reported that its implementation often led to highly structured, teacher-centered discourse, limiting students' active engagement in the writing process. These findings underscore the need to re-evaluate current instructional practices and to incorporate more student-centered, interactive methods that foster the development of writing competency through authentic engagement and collaborative learning.

Multiple contextual factors further constrained the effectiveness of instructional practices. Notably, classes frequently exceeded 40 students, a condition linked to elevated ambient noise, diminished student participation, and severely restricted capacity to provide individualized feedback. Empirical evidence suggests that such large class sizes substantially hinder teachers' ability to monitor student progress and tailor instruction (Blatchford et al., 2011). (Blatchford et al., 2010) Assignment marking was irregular, with oral feedback as the predominant mode of assessment, thereby limiting both its scope and lasting impact. Moreover, during corrective activities, instructional focus predominantly targeted discrete error correction in grammar and mechanics, while comprehensive aspects of writing, such as coherence and organization, received comparatively less attention.

(Hillocks & George, 1983) One potential solution to improve the feedback loop in large classes is to implement quick, repeatable formative feedback cycles. Students encountered several challenges that directly hindered their attainment of key learning outcomes in directed writing. Many had difficulty recognizing and applying genre-specific conventions, organizing their written work coherently, and demonstrating proficiency in English spelling and grammar. These skill gaps, together with limited opportunities for meaningful writing practice, diminished students' capacity to meet curricular standards for written communication. Teachers also identified systemic barriers that further constrained student learning outcomes. They included logistical challenges such as managing large class sizes, insufficient instructional time for writing tasks, and the difficulty of addressing varying levels of English language proficiency. Furthermore, limited access to ongoing professional development in current writing pedagogy restricted teachers' ability to implement effective instructional strategies, thereby impeding student progress toward educational objectives. By framing these constraints as equity issues, stakeholders can better advocate for resources and policies that address these disparities.

A set of prioritized and feasible interventions is recommended to address these instructional challenges. First, collaborative writing and structured peer review should be

incorporated into classroom routines, using manageable group sizes and clear peer evaluation criteria to accommodate large classes. This aligns with the objective of improving students' understanding of genre conventions, which could be assessed by their proficiency in identifying genre features in texts. Third, scheduling should be modified to allocate dedicated time for process-oriented writing practice, supporting student engagement at multiple stages of composition. Fourth, regular in-service professional development workshops on evidence-based writing pedagogy should be established and supported by teacher peer-coaching networks to facilitate practical application and sustained growth. Finally, as a long-term objective, curricular enhancements should incorporate authentic case studies and application-based activities that demonstrate the vocational relevance of English writing for technical students. This approach is intended to increase student motivation and align instruction with real-world communication demands.

Conclusion

Integrating process-based, genre-based, task-based, communicative language, and competency-based instructional approaches, especially when combined with timely feedback, can substantially improve student outcomes in directed writing. The following analysis is organized into three sections: quantitative findings on student performance, an examination of instructional strategies and their implications, and recommendations for teacher development. Quantitative assessment of student work in letter writing, article composition, speeches, and debates indicates consistent underperformance in content relevance, clarity of expression, grammatical accuracy, organizational coherence, tone appropriateness, and adherence to required length. Each instructional approach addresses specific challenges: process-based instruction supports content development; genre-based strategies clarify disciplinary conventions; task-based methods situate language in authentic activities; communicative language teaching develops interactional competence; and competency-based approaches target specific skill acquisition. However, systemic barriers such as low student motivation, inadequate resources, and large class sizes impede progress. Addressing these challenges requires targeted professional development for teachers to strengthen their ability to implement these pedagogical strategies and thereby improve student achievement in directed writing.

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THE DIALECTICS OF GRIEVING AND COPING WITH DEATH IN SHADRACH A. AMBANASOM'S *HOMAGE AND COURTSHIP: ROMANTIC STIRRINGS OF A YOUNG MAN*

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Abstract

Death and the process of grieving remain universal human experiences that have continuously inspired literary reflection and creative expression. In African literature, these themes are often explored through a communal lens, where death transcends the individual to encompass family, culture, and identity. Shadrach A. Ambanasom's *Homage and Courtship: Romantic Stirrings of a Young Man* provides a compelling exploration of how individuals and societies confront loss while navigating the tensions between tradition and modernity. Through its depiction of emotional struggle, remembrance, and renewal, the text captures the dialectics of grief how mourning coexists with the impulse to heal and to rediscover meaning in life. This paper explores the inevitability of death and its attendant indelible psychological marks as well as the coping strategies adopted by the bereaved in Shadrach A. Ambanasom's *Homage and Courtship*. Though death as a universal theme is much discussed in literature, African, Cameroonian and especially Cameroonian writers of English Expression have largely focused on the "big" issues of the day like marginalization and corruption, relegating this all-time phenomenon to the background. Thus, a poet like Ambansom stands out in bringing to light death and grieving as some of the major concerns in his poetry; death not as an outcome of bad socio-political systems as the case is in most of the literature but as a psycho-social issue that we live with and must come to terms with it. Considering the psychological responses of the affected, the use of the psycho-social theory with particular attention to anxiety, fear and dreams is used for analysis. It is realized that although thoughts of death may cause anxiety, despair and sadness, its inevitability warrants that one prepares for death: minding the legacies which not only compel one to live purposefully, but also help to lighten the grieving for the bereaved, who may also be consoled through healing dreams and seeking solace in God.

Keywords:

Bereavement, coping, death, dreams, grieving, legacies, mourning.



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Résumé

La mort et le deuil demeurent des expériences humaines universelles qui ont constamment inspiré la réflexion littéraire et l'expression créative. Dans la littérature africaine, ces thèmes sont souvent explorés à travers une perspective communautaire, où la mort transcende l'individu pour englober la famille, la culture et l'identité. Hommage et séduction : Émois romantiques d'un jeune homme de Shadrach A. Ambanasom propose une exploration captivante de la manière dont les individus et les sociétés affrontent la perte tout en naviguant entre tradition et modernité. Par sa description des luttes émotionnelles, du souvenir et du renouveau, le texte saisit la dialectique du deuil : comment le deuil coexiste avec le désir de guérir et de retrouver un sens à la vie. Cet article explore l'inévitabilité de la mort et ses empreintes psychologiques indélébiles, ainsi que les stratégies d'adaptation adoptées par les personnes en deuil dans « Hommage et Courtship » de Shadrach A. Ambanasom. Bien que la mort soit un thème universel largement abordé en littérature, les auteurs africains, camerounais et, plus particulièrement, camerounais d'expression anglaise se sont largement concentrés sur les grands enjeux de l'époque, tels que la marginalisation et la corruption, reléguant ce phénomène omniprésent au second plan. Ainsi, un poète comme Ambansom se distingue en mettant en lumière la mort et le deuil comme des préoccupations majeures dans sa poésie ; la mort n'est pas considérée comme la conséquence de systèmes sociopolitiques défaillants, comme c'est le cas dans la plupart des écrits, mais comme un problème psychosocial auquel nous sommes confrontés et que nous devons affronter. Prenant en compte les réactions psychologiques des personnes touchées, l'analyse repose sur la théorie psychosociale, avec une attention particulière portée à l'anxiété, à la peur et aux rêves. On comprend que, même si la mort peut être source d'anxiété, de désespoir et de tristesse, son caractère inévitable justifie de s'y préparer : prendre conscience des héritages qui non seulement nous poussent à vivre avec détermination, mais contribuent aussi à alléger le deuil des personnes endeuillées, qui peuvent également être consolés par des rêves apaisants et la recherche du réconfort en Dieu.

Mots-clés : deuil, adaptation, mort, rêves, deuil, héritages, deuil

Introduction

Death, as one of the most profound human experiences, has long been a central preoccupation of literature, serving as a mirror through which societies interrogate the meaning of life, loss, and resilience. In African literature, death and mourning are not merely private experiences but deeply communal events that engage social, spiritual, and cultural dimensions. Shadrach A. Ambanasom's *Hommage and Courtship: Romantic Stirrings of a Young Man* delves into this intricate terrain by portraying the emotional and psychological complexities of grief alongside the human instinct to heal and move forward.

The dialectics of grieving and coping in Ambanasom's narrative illuminate the tension between despair and hope, loss and renewal, memory and forgetting. Through vivid characterization, symbolic imagery, and cultural reflection, the novel captures how individuals and communities negotiate the pain of death while reconstructing meaning and

identity in its aftermath. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how Ambanasom's work portrays the interwoven processes of mourning and coping, situating them within broader African philosophical perspectives on death, continuity, and the affirmation of life.

Shadrach Ambanasom is a key figure in Cameroonian Literature of English expression. He is renowned not only for his critical works in this literature but also for his creative works. Among his creative works, his novel, *Son of the Native Soil* seems to have garnered quite some critical attention while others especially his poetry are yet to do so, including *Homage and Courtship* which is the focus of this study. In "Ambanasom's *Son of the Native Soil* and the Concept of a Tragic Hero," Denis Fonge Tembong sets out to demonstrate that the ideas of a tragic hero as exhibited in *Macbeth* are very similar to those of the hero in *Son of the Native Soil*. To him, though the two literatures, that is, British and African are different due to cultural specificities, we can find common ground at the handling of the tragic hero.

Evangeline Agwa Fomukong Seino on her part focuses on "Ideological Representation of Unity and Peace through Contrast: A Critical Stylistic Analysis of Ambansom's *Son of the Native Soil*" wherein she dwells on how Ambanasom represents unity and the discursive choices he uses to bring out his ideology of the Ngie people. According to her, he does this mainly through the use of contrast of rhetorical questions, comparison discourses, premodifiers and proverbs. Eric Ngea Ntam focuses on yet another dimension of this text. In "Hegemony and the Paradoxical Subversion of Patriarchy in Shadrach A. Ambanasom's *Son of the Native Soil*" he sees that the suppression of the female folk triggers emancipatory tendencies which are paradoxically rendered unattainable by the same group glamouring for it. The above reviews among others bear testimony to the fact that quite some work is evident on Ambansom's *Son of the Native Soil*. However, there is very insignificant material on *Homage and Courtship* and that gives reason for studies to be carried out on it. As one of those pioneer works, this paper will focus on it from the perspective of death.

Death is not a new theme in literature. However, its universality and timelessness in literature justifies its continuous pride of place in academic discourses. It can be considered one of the most universal human concerns because it relates to all human beings though it is sometimes considered as a taboo subject because of the fear of it. Stephen Asatsa in "Death Attitudes as Predictors of Death Preparedness across Lifespan among Non-Clinical Populations in Nairobi County" argues that the treatment of death as a taboo subject has been evident among scholars and researchers as for a long time, they have focused very minimally on it. He further mentions that even from about 1959 when researchers started delving much into it, African researchers still seem to be lagging behind. Quoting Wittowski et al, he says "the major journals on death in the last 20 years have been published on North America, Europe and Australia. Majority of studies that inform current literature have been conducted outside Africa" (288). This gives us a rationale for the present research.

Death reminds us about our own very existence. Though people may be prepared to die or lose loved ones, death generally makes people sad. Mary-Frances O'Connor in "Grief: A Brief History of Research on How Body, Mind, and Brain Adapt" posits that: "The death of a loved one has been recognized as the greatest life stressor that we face as humans, heading the list of stressful life events..." (731). It is because of its universalism as well as the different emotions, attitudes and reactions to death that writers from all times and places have written about it. Poets like Emily Dickinson in "If I should Die," Edgar Allan Poe in "Annabel Lee," WB Yeats in "He Wishes His Beloved Were Dead" write about death.

William Cullen Bryant, the American romantic poet, for instance in his "Thanatopsis," instructs on how to live and die, where death is seen as a natural part of life and should not be frightening and lonely but should be welcoming and peaceful. Alfred Lord Tennyson similarly in "Crossing the Bar" presents life as an extended metaphor of a river which flows endlessly into the boundless deep of the sea and the speaker as a sailor who passes the sandbar that separates the familiarity of the harbour from the unknown realm of the open sea. Then many of William Shakespeare's works like his plays treat the theme of death in diverse ways. For instance, in the poem, "No Longer Mourn for Me" he imagines his own death and the effect on a loved one and advises they forget about him when he is no more. There are also his plays like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* just to name these that handle the theme of death from various dimensions. So, while some authors may write about their impending death, others may discuss bereavement. Some may use it as a literary device while others suggest to us how we can cope with death amongst many other issues. Antje Ravic Strubel in "We tell Ourselves Stories" posits that "since the beginnings of what we call literature, death has proven to be its most successful producer" (3). Similarly, Lawrence Kimmel, for instance, writes on "Death as Metaphor" and he notes that death has been extensively dealt with in writing. He asserts:

What remains to be said about the question and problem of death that has not been repeated a thousand times in the history of human thought and culture? Philosophers in the Western tradition have seemingly argued every nuance of the name, nature, and consequences of death since Plato first took up the death of Socrates as the funding occasion of his philosophical life and thinking. (1)

It is seen that Kimmel generalises about the consequences of death in his first postulation but quickly narrows it to the Western tradition. It appears this is the tradition that he is familiar with and not with the African or Cameroonian literature in English where death is rarely philosophised. This is not surprising because colonialism brought in the written tradition and the issues surrounding colonialism and its aftermath have been the focus of many African writers. Some writers though, like Kofi Awoonor in "Songs of Sorrow" and "The Journey Beyond", Wole Soyinka in *Death and the King's Horseman*, Ngugi wa Thiongo and Micere Githae Mugo in *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Sammy Gaskin in *To the*

Gallows, J P Clark in *Song of a Goat*, just to name these have written about death. Writing about death, therefore, has not totally escaped the attention of African writers and Cameroon writers of English expression, specifically. However, many Cameroonian writers of English expression have minimally focused on death in their literature as they most of the time pay more attention to “serious” political, colonial and post-colonial predicaments that have largely affected the lives of the former colonised people and colonised entities in several ways. A contemplative focus on death as a psychological and predominant issue in literature seems to have escaped the attention of most writers. This is not to say death is not a theme in their literature, but it is often considered an outcome of poor political systems or gender mishaps. It seems there are so many problems ranging from corruption, embezzlement, neo-colonialism, marginalisation and similar issues which appear to catch the attention of writers more than anything else. Ambanasom puts these together under politics and to him, this should not only be the subject matter to appear relevant in Anglophone Cameroon literature. For those who think that politics is the only area where writers can demonstrate commitment, Ambanasom in the ‘Preface’ to the poetry collection, *Homage and Courtship* writes:

May those capable of pursuing more vigorous committed writing do; may our radical visionaries bloom. But let there be room for liberal humanists too. The Anglophone story can be told in many ways. To prescribe only politics and proscribe any other subject matter would be to kill our creative spirit, to stultify our imaginative efforts and to truncate our literature. (11)

However, Oscar Labang in “Against the Current: A Review of Shadrach Ambanasom’s *Homage and Courtship*” has denounced Ambanasom for always trying to justify issues about his work. To him, though Ambanasom is a powerful and celebrated critic, his tendency of inviting critics to the dialogue table to inform them that he is aware of where the weaknesses of his work are and is ready to accommodate the criticism is not right. Labang states: “in the preface to *Homage and Courtship*, he comes out apologetically to give reason for his choice of subject matter and his consciousness of the criticism that is likely to follow” (para.2). It seems that Ambanasom is justifying his going against the normal current which is not supposed to a “crime.”

From the above, the issue arises as to whether committed literature must be political and what political means by the way. Deaths, like love are political themes, though not frequently handled by many Anglophone writers. It is in this light that his poems in *Homage and Courtship* deal principally with death and love. However, the focus of this paper is on death. Shadrach Ambanasom’s view of death in *Homage and Courtship* is dominantly reflective and borders on psychological responses of the affected especially regarding coping strategies. In this connection, the psycho-social theory with particular attention to anxiety, fear, dreams, and psychological theories on death will be relevant in conducting this study. Consequently, the following poems are considered in the analysis: “Icon and

Beacon", "The Talented Three", "Ebang Iroko" "On Losing my Hair" "Healing Dreams" and "A Grain of Corn." The psycho-social theory with particular attention to anxiety, fear, dreams, and psychological theories on death will be used for the analysis. The theories on death especially as developed by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her book *On Death and Dying* will also be useful in the analysis.

Accepting the Inevitability of Death

Though death is inevitable, there is generally much fear and anxiety associated with it. Laura et al posit that "Death, as a phenomenon that escapes our control, produces great concern in most people, along with fear and anxiety" (209). The concern, fear and anxiety, generally have to do with the death of one's loved one as well as oneself. Though death is generally despised, people have different ways of coping with it, whether it is one's own death or the death of a significant other in one's life. Thus, different people will have different ways of coping with death. For instance, in the Euro-American culture, while children are not exposed to death because it is considered that they are not mature enough to cope with it, the situation in Mexico is different. Paz asserts that: "The word "death" is not pronounced in New York, in Paris, in London, because it burns the lips... The Mexican, in contrast, is familiar with death, jokes about it, caresses it, sleeps with it, celebrates it; it is one of his favorite toys and his most steadfast love" (57). Rosengren et al corroborate this view by looking at how children are made to know and accept death when they affirm that in Mexico, ...

A key aspect of this view of death is that children are not only an integral part of annual death rituals, but also encounter symbolic images of death on an almost daily basis. These attitudes and practices stand in stark contrast with those in the European-American culture where parents often attempt to shield their children from death, believing that young children are cognitively and emotionally incapable of coping with death. (07)

Thus, while it may be easier for Mexicans and their children to cope with death, it may be more difficult for Euro-Americans and their children when faced with it because they seem not to accept to deal with it more openly. Therefore, different societies sometimes deal with death differently. Cameroonians, for instance most of the time, think they have to leave a legacy as seen in Ambanasom's *Homage and Courtship*.

Human beings have the privilege to know about death so well and can therefore prepare for it. In line with this, Kimmel avers that "Man is a creature that knows he is going to die. It is the fact of human existence that arguably accounts for the depth of human consciousness and the scope of human culture" (5). The denial of death is therefore, a major characteristic of human beings, especially if one is not prepared to ever die. Kubler Ross, quoted by Papalia et al posit that facing death in a meaningful way will depend on if one lives a meaningful life or not. In their view:

It is the denial of death that is partially responsible for (people's) living empty, purposeless lives; for when you live as if you will live forever, it becomes too easy to postpone the things that you know that you must do. In contrast, when you fully understand that each day you awaken could be the last you have, you take the time that day to grow, to become more of who you really are, to reach out to other human beings. (E13)

Ross' views seem to connect with Nelson Mandela's who once opined that, "death is something inevitable. When a man has done what he considers to be his duty to his people and his country, he can rest in peace" (Scouts: Creating a Better World). In essence, Papalia et al like Mandella and Ambanasom are talking about living a responsible life of fulfillment, life to the full so that the anxiety with which death comes can be reduced.

In some of Ambansom's poems, the inevitability of death is addressed where he presents the transition from life to death as the natural pattern of life. However, it causes much anxiety in many people. Conning, Naidoo and Bahgwan in "The Preparedness of Emergency Care Providers to deal with Death, Dying and Bereavement in the Pre-hospital Setting in Dubai" state that "the inevitability of death creates some degree of anxiety in individuals at some stage in their lives. The anxiety may be borne out of the fear of pain and suffering, the loss of self, the welfare of surviving family members, annihilation or simply the unknown" (2). The worrying about death, for instance, is captioned in Ambanasom's "On Losing My Hair" as seen in the following lines:

*In vain pages of journals
have I turned over and over
bootless some scientific annals
perused with anxiety and anger
in an attempt to discover
the treatment for balding head (49)*

The vigorous search for authentic, valid and reliable sources to stop the advancement of age is seen in the kinds of documents: "journals" and "scientific annals" where the persona carries out research. Balding head is a symbol of ageing, and the persona is, therefore, searching for a tested "treatment" in an attempt to stop the ageing process and consequently death. This worry and anxiety over aging is of no use because it must eventually come as he continues by telling the reader how futile his attempts have been:

*Fruitless my efforts with doctors
(personal contact or letters)
to halt the insidious invaders
of my receding forehead (49)*

From the balding head metaphor, the persona expresses fear for the inevitability of death. This reiteration is also seen in "Icon and Beacon" as well as "Ebang Iroko" where death is presented as a force that "...levels us all" (29, 33 respectively). Since death keeps everybody at the same level, the poet reminds the readers that everyone needs to wait for their turn and not worry so much about but rather use every death as an opportunity to prepare to die for death will eventually come.

In "Ebang Iroko," he puts it as such: "But sooner or later, willy-nilly/dear brothers and sisters/it will be our turn/to answer our final call" (33). Similarly, in "Icon and Beacon," the persona thinks it is important to look at death as everybody's call. "Ask not, therefore, for whom the bell tolls./ It tolls not for him alone/ it tolls for you/ it tolls for me/ it tolls for all of us/ the tragic fate of humanity" (29). Ambansom, thus, presents death that is reflective of man's smallness because its occurrence obliges the latter to ponder over his own end – an end which is not only ultimate, but more disturbingly unpredictable. A corpse is therefore a mirror that reflects into the speaker's psyche, making him internalise a sad reality which he would otherwise not like to meditate on. The bereaved speakers are chagrined both by the loss of loved ones and by the realisation of their powerlessness in the face of death.

The presentation of the death in the poems shows how mighty and influential the dead have been in society. In "Ebang Iroko," for instance, we see the serious effect the death of M.A. Asanek is evident on the living. The poet-persona regrets: "Our brilliant icon and beacon/ our candle is out/ like sheep without shepherd/ we grope about in the dark/ for a glory has vanished/ from the face of our earth" (32). The description - metaphor and simile, of the just dead, especially as an "Iroko" is indicative of the huge role he played in the community and the positive influence he had on the life of his people. The Iroko tree is an African tropical large hard wood, multi-functional, powerful and resistant tree of the forest which in this poem symbolises the person who has just passed on and whom, people will wish he had stayed on for the benefit of the weaker and less courageous ones, but death is not a respecter of persons. The simile comparing the people to sheep without shepherd speaks to the people's vulnerability in his absence.

Therefore, in spite of the titles acquired like Dr Babila and the impact made created in society, one must still die. However, the question is how one lives to prepare for death. Hakola and Kivisto, in the Introduction to *Death in Literature* opine that:

Death defines human lives on the basis that men are more or less conscious of their mortality. Some could argue that death robs life of meaning as everything comes to an end anyway. Others would claim that death gives meaning to life because it forces us to act on things now, not to wait for eternity. (xii)

In line with the above postulation, it can be said that M.A. Asanek and Dr Babilla have certainly made use of their lives by impacting positively on their societies. They have not waited for eternity but have worked hard to inspire their communities to better living. Their lives fall in line with Hakola and Kivisto's view that "individual death is not simply a private experience. It affects us and resonates in the surrounding society in many ways" (xv).

Inasmuch as one can be prepared to die, death creates anxiety in the living. Until those living die, they will not know how it feels like not to live. In "Icon and Beacon" and "Ebang Iroko," the expression "it will be our turn" indicates a constant reminder if not anxiety in the poet's mind regarding his own fateful hour. The poem entitled "The Changed Grove" also emphasises this point. Death is presented as an end point of the process of growth. Having moved from the stage of "a thoughtless youth" to "a pensive adult," (40) the speaker realises that the next stage is death. Like a "howling wind among the trees" (40), thoughts about death hover around the speaker's mind because it is an inevitable stage. The corpses he sees at every funeral reminds him of this sad truth. The persona is not an exception: all living things bloom, grow old and die and so will he. This is reminiscent of Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Tithonus" which serves as a meditation on the inevitability of death which we must all face. It is, therefore seen that in most of the poems that focus on death, Ambansom makes it a duty to remind all that everyone must one day, sooner or later, answer death's call.

Ambanasom does not only present death as a gradual evolution of life from birth to childhood, adulthood, old age and demise but strikes a reminder that people must be prepared to die at any point in time in whatever way. This is expressed in "The Talented Three" where the death of "Bate Besong, Ambe and Gwangwa'a/ Anglophone luminaries/...shocked all" (30). The shock does not just come as a result of their death but because of the unexpected and tragic way in which these great "luminaries" died. The persona laments:

*Oh yes, they came,
They dazzled,
They mesmerized,
But the talented three shocked us
When, within a split second, they bowed to death. (31)*

The death of these icons in a tragic car accident in Edea on the Douala-Yaounde Highway happened a few hours after Bate Besong's launch of his then new poetry collection, *Disgrace*, which generally is a scathing satire on the ills plaguing post-independent societies and the perpetrators of such ills. The shock with which the news was received is certainly a way of educating human beings of the need for preparedness at all times to quit the stage of life. The Catholic Prayer for Acceptance of Death throws more light on this as it reads:

*Most sacred Heart of Jesus,
I accept from your hands whatever
kind of death
it may please You to send me this day....*
(<https://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=549>)

The only certain thing one knows, therefore, is the reality of death and when, how, where and in what circumstances are out of the know for human beings.

Ambanasom's presentation of the inevitability of death is indeed a reminder to all and that everyone must answer the call whenever. Bregman in "The Death Awareness Movement" asserts that one of the beliefs of the Movement is that: "death is a natural event, part of the cycle of life. Like the seasons of the year, all organic life follows a cycle: it is born, grows and flourishes, then declines and dies. There is nothing to be gained by denying this, and it is a mark of human dignity to assent to what is 'natural,' universal and unavoidable" (416). If one considers the poems from this light thus, then there is no point worrying much about death but rather live meaningful lives so that one is prepared to die. In a way, he is teaching people how to accept and most especially cope with death. How one copes with death depends on one's attitude towards bereavement, grieving and mourning which is the focus of the following section.

Metaphors: Images of Loss and the Dynamics of Bereavement, Grieving and Mourning

As universal as death is, so too is bereavement, grieving and mourning, though these may be expressed in different ways in different societies. Walter differentiates among bereavement or loss, grieving and mourning when he points out that "bereavement" or "loss" refers to the state of having lost someone or something, "grief" refers to what is felt and "mourning" refers to what is done" (83). Similarly, Santrock gives a more elaborate perspective of grieving as he states that it is "the emotional numbness, disbelief, separation anxiety, despair, sadness and loneliness that accompany the loss of someone we love" (585). The extent of grief generally is dependent on the relationship shared with the deceased. That is why Tak, Wong and Patlamazoglou considering the views of other critics in "Bereavement and Coping following the Death of a Personally Significant Popular Musician" assert that:

An individual's relationship with the deceased plays a vital role in how they experience grief. Society creates expectations of bereavement for certain relationships (Harris, 2016). In contemporary societies, it is expected that the closer people are to the deceased, the more intensely they grieve the loss (Robson & Walter, 2013). The deaths of close friends or family are grieved more profoundly than those of acquaintances. (1234)

No doubt therefore, that grieving for the death of his young son, Bernard, absorbs the persona in "Healing Dreams" and "A Grain of Corn." These two poems represent the death of the persona's son who is allegedly poisoned by his school teacher and which brings in a lot of sadness in his life. The grieving here is serious because of the bond the speaker shares with his young dead son. Kimmel says that "Death is final, whether welcome or terrifying, whether we understand it or not...whether in the case of an athlete dying young, the clever lad slips away betimes, or is cut down in his prime, or another runs the good race of long life and slips quietly into everlasting rest, there is in every case, dominion, disinvestment and devastation..." (8). Kimmel's observation is reflected in the persona in "Healing Dreams," who is seriously affected by the demise of his son. The devastation is seen in the images the poet evokes. He laments:

*Great pals we were
Wherever I was, there you were.
At the dining table or in the shower,
like birds of a feather, we were spotted together. (63)*

His deep feeling of sorrow and devastation is not surprising for as Papalia, Olds and Feldman in *Human Development* posit, "a parent is rarely prepared emotionally for the death of a child. Such a death, no matter at what age comes as a cruel, unnatural shock, an untimely event that in the normal course of things, should not have happened" (E10). The persona in "Healing Dreams" after stating the great bond between him and his son goes ahead to highlight how devastated he felt at his death: "following your untimely demise, /I was totally devastated, / reduced to an emotional wreck, / and nearly demented" (63). The devastation is sure, felt this much because of the powerful connection he had with his son.

In the two poems mentioned above, the poet goes through different stages of grieving which could easily connect with those presented by Papalia, Olds and Feldman in *Human Development*. They are of the opinion that "the process of grief-work, the working out of psychological issues connected with grief takes the following pattern: shock and disbelief, preoccupation with the memory of the dead person and resolution" (E3). They further posit that "immediately following a death, survivors often feel lost and confused. As awareness of the loss sinks in, the initial numbness gives way to overwhelming feelings of sadness and frequent crying. The first stage may last several weeks, especially after a sudden or unexpected death" (E5). The death of the persona's son in "A Grain of Corn" is so unexpected and we hear him lament thus:

*Bernard Ambanasom, my son Bernard
your untimely death shook and shattered the very depth
of my existence, knocking down for a while
the pillars of my faith. (59)*

The overwhelming sadness is seen in the poet's choice of words: "shattered the very depth of my existence." When something is shattered, it is destroyed beyond repair or it generally is difficult to be repaired. Thus, he is in a desperate state of grief.

The second stage, according to Papalia, Olds and Feldman is the preoccupation with memory of the dead person and they say, "in the second stage...the survivor tries to come to terms with the death but cannot yet accept it. A widow may relive her husband's death and their entire relationship. From time to time, she may be seized by a feeling that her husband is present. The experiences diminish with time, though they may recur – perhaps for years – on such occasions as the anniversary of the marriage or death" (E8). Ambanasom's loss of his son hunts him for a long time especially due to the closeness he had with him. From the autobiographical perspective thus, the case in "Healing Dreams" is reflective of the bond shared by the persona and his dead son which could be compared to that of a husband and wife. The intimacy between the two makes it very difficult for him to forget about his son as it takes him a long time to come to terms with the painful reality. In stanza three, the persona recounts:

*For five years, I was haunted by your spirit;
For five years I walked like a ghost;
Yes, for five years, my heart bled painfully
Deep was the wound inflicted on my heart,
And it was sore and slow to heal. (63)*

The hurt expressed in the lines above is reminiscent of the poet's own life, upon the death of his beloved son, Bernard. So the inspiration of the poem is from the pain that the poet himself has felt. Spirits of dead people that persist in the world of the living is generally believed to be an indication of an unnatural state of affairs. The implication to the persona is that the child's life was ruthlessly taken away from him and therefore, not of natural cause. This explains why the spirit keeps hunting his father.

Still in "A Grain of Corn", even after ten years, the persona, like in "Healing Dreams," is still mourning the death of his son. He says:

*Bernard, my son, ten years have passed on
And you are still with us.
Indeed, you will never die.
So long as we breathe God's serene air,
So long as we draw sustenance
From his bountiful earth
So long as we plant and we harvest,
So long as we consume and propagate,
Your eternal grain of corn, you will continue to live with us. (60)*

The persona addresses the son directly, making us to understand that Bernard will never be forgotten for as long as he, the persona, lives. The third stage is resolution. They say, “the final stage has arrived when the bereaved person renews interest in everyday activities. Memories of the dead person bring fond feelings mingled with sadness, rather than sharp pain and longing” (E5). The persona in “The Grain of Corn” begins the poem with a lot of grief but as he draws to the last stanza, he is consoled as indicated in the following lines:

*That you are in Abraham's bosom.
We doubt it not, son.
We pray you to intercede for us, poor sinners.
As for your poisoner, well,
To the Almighty God
Belongs the ultimate verdict.
May his name be glorified.*

This last stanza of the poem sounds like a resolution and reveals the religiosity and christianity of the poet. “Abraham's bosom” signifies a place of rest, of peace and no suffering, in other words, heaven, where the persona believes his son now resides. Luke Chapter 16 verse 23 of the *Good News Bible* reads thus: The poor man died and was carried by the angels to sit beside Abraham at the feast in heaven. The rich man died and was buried and in Hades where he was in great pain... (1538). Abraham's bosom is therefore seen as a place of blessedness and if his son resides here, it gives him hope. This reassurance gives him joy that while there, he is able to intercede for them. At the beginning of the poem, the persona talks about his shattered faith for some time following the death of his son. In stanza five, the description of the teacher who allegedly poisoned his son as “traitor” “devil” “cruel man, your name is villainy” tells of how hurt he still is at the treacherous teacher. Then when we hear him in stanza eleven, the last stanza, surrendering all to “the Almighty God” who has the “ultimate verdict,” we are assured that he is mourning towards survival. Of course, he has accepted that there is nothing he can do about it except surrendering to God and moving on with life.

Grieving and mourning so hard as to lose balance is always discouraged. Papalia, Olds and Feldman aver that “some well-meaning friends tell parents not to dwell on their loss, but remembering the child in a meaningful way may be exactly what they need to do” (E10). Our focus here is on ‘remembering in a meaningful way.’ This is a positive way to mourn, that is, mourning for survival. Although with a feeling of devastation at the death of a significant other in one's life, it is important to mourn towards survival than death. Tony Walter in *What Death Means now* is of the opinion that though it is good to mourn,

... being incapacitated by grief for an extended period of time is not compatible with survival of the species – mourners would soon get eaten up by lions and their children starve. Genetic or cultural evolution would surely have selected against it. So, why is grief such a common

experience? The academic consensus is that attachment between humans, especially those to whom one is genetically related, is vital not only for survival but also for group cooperation and culture, and grief is a by-product of personal attachment. Yet grief has to be moderated by the need to survive... (83)

Ambanasom's other poems on death emphasise its monstrous might and underline the centrality of the belief in a supreme being when faced with death. In "A Grain of Corn", only God seems to be able to rekindle hope in a psychologically shattered person as the persona. Of course, it is generally believed that children should bury their parents. However, when the reverse becomes true, facilitated by a fellow human being whom one should trust as it was alleged the child was poisoned by his class teacher, the hurt of gross betrayal is evoked. Then, the feeling of devastation sets in and one way to deal with this can be to turn to God, as the persona does at the end of the poem, for consolation. Also, considering that this grain of corn as seen in the title of the poem symbolically represents his dead son, in reading with The Good News Bible in 1 Corinthians 15:36, there is hope as it talks about resurrection: "...when you sow a seed in the ground, it does not sprout to life unless it dies" (220). The hope in the resurrection of his son thus, comforts him.

To transcend the pervading destructive power of death, the speaker also uses his mind to resurrect images of and experiences lived with his dead son. In "Healing Dreams," the persona creates dreams about his dead son in order to soothe his emotional and psychological pains which are too much for him to bear. Dreaming here becomes a survival strategy and stress therapy to fight to come to terms with death. In dreaming about a dead loved one, one's brain might be trying to process one's feelings of the loved one coming to his/her conscious awareness. When the thoughts and feelings engraved in the subconscious rise to one's conscious awareness, they manifest in the form of dreams. These dreams can help one to move on from the difficulty and challenges of bereavement. Jessica Schrader in the blog, "Psychology Today" explains about the relevance of dreams in grieving in an article titled "Dreams and Grief: How Dreams Help us Grieve" as she affirms:

Actually, after a death, dreams of our loved ones are quite common. We know how important dreams are to our overall health and well-being, but dreams also play an important role in healing our grief. During the day, we can distract ourselves with various activities, but when we sleep, we are more relaxed and open. Our unconscious mind is free to wander and process the emotions we may try to avoid during the day.

The processing of thoughts and emotions help the bereaved give them an opportunity to live and relive life with the loved one whom he/she misses. It is in this light that dreams are seen to possess a soothing effect on the bereaved and consequently make loss and the grieving bearable. In "Healing Dreams: Healing and Wellness, Mystic, Shamanic

and Soul Inspiration and Shamanism,” it is stated that “tribal cultures say something is lost if we don’t take our dreams seriously enough to embody them - that we ignore them at the peril of our own souls, if not our lives... a healing dream often comes to redress imbalance” (<https://crossingworlds.com/healing-dreams/>).

During the period of bereavement and grieving, there tends to be psychological problems which ensue from the loss of a loved one. The psychological effects of bereavement include stress, depression, anxiety and sometimes thoughts of suicide. Healing dreams can rekindle hope and abate these symptoms. In “Healing Dreams,” the persona says:

*Following your untimely demise,
I was totally devastated, reduced to an emotional wreck
And nearly demented....*

*Yet those sorrowful years
Were also years of joy.
While in the day I grieved over your death,
In the night I rejoiced in my sleep.
I dreamt sweet dreams about you.
For five years, and almost every night,
You visited me in my sleep;
You came to me in my dreams
I dreamt that you and I were together
I dreamt sweet dreams about you.
O! a tonic they were, those dreams.
A boon, they were to my soul. (63-64)*

The dreams about his son literally help the persona to heal psychologically and emotionally and consequently improve his ability to deal with the son’s death. In dreams, he is able to escape the restrictions of space and time and delve into an utopian world, not only to assuage his pain but also to obtain an emotional and psychological closure. It is for this reason that he says of the Lord of Hades who visits him to tell him about the dream relationship between him and his son which has gone on for five years and the effect it has had on him. He says:

*The joy kept you healthy.
The comfort sustained your life
That happiness healed your heart
With your cardiac wound completely cured....*

*Thus spoke the Lord of Hades,
leaving my heart flowing with sensations sweet
and a mind teaming with happy thoughts of*

my son in Heaven. (65-66)

Visitation dreams as seen in “Healing Dreams” generally resolve the yearning for our deceased loved ones. The persona is able to get an emotional closure thanks to the dreams about his son who keeps visiting him for five years after his death. After the pronouncement of “The Lord of Hades,” he has a cathartic closure by thinking happily and positively about the dead son, accepting that he is indeed dead and gone to heaven. The Lord of Hades alluded to here is often referred to as the Lord of the Underworld, of the world of the dead. Therefore, if he is telling the persona that it is well with his son, it indeed is well.

Living a life that impacts positively on society plays a role in making the bereaved cope with death and vice versa especially in preparing for their own death which is certainly on the way. In this case, death should be a celebration of the life lived, of the accomplishments one has achieved and of the impact one has created in society. In our contemporary context with a lot of leadership mishaps like corruption, greed, nepotism, just to name these, one may begin to wonder if the death of such people who wield power as to be able to influence the life of others, should or can be celebrated. Also, it is of interest of those who wield such power, and to everyone else to reflect on what they will be remembered for.

Referring to Babila John Njingum as “Our brilliant and icon and beacon/our candle...” is indicative of his important role in society. The candle is symbolic of light, extraordinary deeds that illuminate the society and this of course is what he will be remembered for. As an icon, he is greatly admired and has great impact especially on education in his community. His prominence is symbolised in the beacon. In “On Losing my Hair” as well as in “The Talented Three” not only the inevitability of death and the manner as well as the cruel unpredictable ways in which life can be terminated comes to life, but also the legacies of what one leaves behind matters. Thus, the focus is not only on how we live but what we are remembered for. John W Santrock, quoting Leonardo da Vinci says “death should come to an individual after a full life, just as sleep comes after a day’s work” (579). A full life should certainly be a meaningful one and that which is impactful. In the “The Talented Three,” the persona finds hope in the legacies left behind by the talented three though shocked by the tragic way in which they die. He laments:

*...the talented three shocked us
When within a split second
They bowed to death
Leaving behind but their
Decapitated bodies, with their brains
Scattered in the wind to inspire humanity.
'A terrible beauty is born.' (31)*

The lives of the three are personified in their decapitated bodies and brains which will continue to positively impact society. Thus, though they die unexpectedly and untimely as many may consider, they have lived full lives that impact society with their dramatic and poetic art. Bate Besong's *Change Waka and His Man Sawa Boy*, *Requiem for the Last Kaiser*, *Beasts of No Nation*, just to name these are plays that stand out not only in Anglophone Literature but Cameroon and African Literature. The oxymoron in the last line "a terrible beauty has been born" is reminiscent of W. B. Yeats "Easter 1916" where there is a paradoxical transformation of Ireland through the Easter 1916 uprising. Therefore, though they leave in a very tragic way, they are remembered for the impact created.

Conclusion

In Ambanasom's *Homage and Courtship*, a good number of his poems focus on death. Homage as reflected in the title of the collection is reflective of the deference and honour which Amabansom accords to the various people the speakers refer to in these poems. This honour comes about as a result of the important and impactful roles that these people have played in their communities, leaving lasting fond memories. Death in the poems is an omnipresent force which though causes anxiety, anger and sadness is inevitable and therefore, preparing to die is important. Thus, living in fear of dying is not the solution but rather keeping away the fear and living to live forever: leaving positive legacies that will outlive you.

These positive legacies can also help one in preparing for his or her own departure from earth as one finds in "Icon and Beacon," "The Talented Three" and "Ebang Iroko." The impact of the personae in the poems is felt because of the positive legacies they have left behind them. This is important so that on dying, there should be no regrets. Santrock posits that "most dying individuals want an opportunity to make some decisions regarding their own life and death" (581). This is sometimes unrealistic because it is almost always late to make such decisions at that moment. If one has lived a remarkable life within his family and community, the memories make it easier for those grieving.

Thus, thoughts of death have an effect on those who die and those who are affected by the death. The grief caused by the departure of loved ones therefore is experienced depending on the relationship that was shared with the lost one. The grief is certainly much but can be assuaged not only by legacies but by healing dreams such as the case in "Healing Dreams" where the persona, through the joyful dreams about his lost loved son, is able to get an emotional and psychological closure. Another way of assuaging the terrible feeling that the death of a loved one leaves, according to the author, is to turn to God for solace such as in "A Grain of Corn." There are therefore several ways of grieving, mourning and managing the pain that comes with death. There is realism in his poetry ushered in with the use of local colour, names of people, places and occasions that one is familiar with and therefore brings his message to life.

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THE ROLE OF NEGOTIATION IN REDUCING RISKS IN CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS: A *BRAZILIAN CASE*

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Abstract

The article conducts a single case study through descriptive methods to analyze how the construction project acquired its electrical kits. The construction project in Indaiatuba Brazil needed pre-assembled electrical kits through its concrete wall construction method so it required urgent procurement of these components. The procurement team dealt with an intricate negotiation situation because different suppliers provided different price points and delivery conditions and product quality levels. The negotiation process of the team encountered unexpected obstacles which endangered the project timeline. The team needed to create new solutions which would safeguard project essential requirements when managing project value exceeding millions of dollars. The research investigates negotiation methods which show how stakeholders use risk management to reach their objectives while obtaining maximum value. The procurement team remains uncertain about their outcome because they need to complete a contract that meets project needs but they face major challenges to overcome.

Keywords:

Negotiation; Procurement; Supply Chain Management; Contract Negotiation.

1. Introduction

Organizations need negotiation skills as their main competency to achieve success in today's business world. Dias (2020) identifies four negotiation approaches yet Type II negotiation represents the fundamental method which business organizations need to use. The model follows a systematic method which helps parties work together to achieve beneficial results for all involved. The field enables Type II negotiation through three fundamental research studies which validate its successful application. Bazerman and Moore (1994) showed how personal opinions affect managerial choices and Fisher and Ury (1981) established that principled negotiation produces agreements which last while Lax and Sebenius (1986) explained how negotiation processes experience conflicting forces between teamwork and competition. Research findings show that Type II negotiation works

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successfully across different business environments. The research by Dias et al. (The research by (2022) shows that trust and reputation operate as non-physical assets which impact the outcomes of negotiation processes. The research by Dias et al. (2023) shows that nonverbal body language through hand movements determines the success of negotiation dialogues. The Type II negotiation approach shows its effectiveness by working between construction (Dias, 2023) and retail pharmacy (Valente & Dias, 2023) and government procurement (Dias & Navarro, 2020) sectors. Sebenius (2013) develops Level II negotiations which require negotiators to help their counterparts build stronger BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) to create mutually beneficial agreements. Business negotiations depend on Type II negotiation as their fundamental framework which receives support from both theoretical and practical research. Organizations that follow these principles will improve their decision-making abilities while building stronger partnerships which result in sustainable effective outcomes, as illustrated in the following Figure 1:



Figure 1 The Four-Type Negotiation Matrix
Source: Dias, 2020. Reprinted under permission.

2. Materials and Methods

The research design of this study employed qualitative methods according to Saunders et al. (2009). The research design consists of a descriptive single-case study which analyzes the negotiation between a telecommunications company and their client during a consumer lawsuit according to Yin (2004). The case study research method enabled researchers to study negotiation processes in depth because it revealed all the intricate elements that affect the process. The single-case design allows researchers to study the complete environment of the negotiation process which generates detailed information about the situation. The research participants received complete protection through the use of their actual names and business identities which remained confidential. The research team obtained data through document analysis of negotiation records and conducted interviews with key stakeholders who actively participated in the negotiation process.

The researcher used inductive methods to analyze data which enabled them to discover patterns and themes in the collected information. The analysis process used interpretive methods to understand how participants in the negotiation process interpreted the situation. The research maintains complete transparency through its use of actual company names and employee identities from the original negotiation scenario. The research maintains its original negotiation context through this decision because it follows both compliance requirements and ethical research standards which protect the organizations and their stakeholders.

3. Context and Negotiation

The residential development project located in São Paulo's interior used concrete wall construction as its building method because this method has become popular in the industry for its operational efficiency and affordable costs. The project team needed to acquire pre-assembled electrical kits which consisted of cables and conduits and junction boxes because these kits needed to be inserted into concrete walls during construction. The project requires immediate procurement of these kits because they need to be placed inside concrete walls during construction. The procurement team faced an urgent situation because the acquisition request arrived after the optimal time which required them to find optimal pricing and delivery and quality terms. The project stakeholders defined three negotiation requirements which included using approved cable brands and checking supplier financial health and demanding suppliers to show finished project examples for product performance validation. The buyers evaluated five potential suppliers which included three approved vendors and two new vendors that needed homologation approval. The suppliers offered price quotes for 400 kits which ranged from R\$865,000 to R\$1,156,000 and required delivery times between 20 to 30 days. The project budget established R\$1,075,000 as its highest possible value. The project team selected the supplier who provided the most affordable price and met all delivery requirements and showed exceptional historical performance. The financial stability assessment of the supplier showed major outstanding debts while service quality reports showed a downward trend.

The project board ended the contract with this supplier relationship because the supplier demonstrated weak financial stability and unreliable delivery performance. The procurement team found an unapproved supplier who maintained their quote within the established budget parameters. The team held a direct meeting to establish all requirements while checking both technical and financial standards. The supplier provided three additional benefits to the agreement which included a price reduction to R\$1,065,000 and faster delivery within 20 days and immediate delivery of 30 kits within 10 days for testing purposes. A single technician was dedicated full time to monitor the first installation process while maintaining quality standards. The negotiation reached success through financial advantages and protective measures which defended against possible threats. The selected supplier fulfilled all necessary conditions at budget-friendly rates while bringing in a fresh business alliance that would assist upcoming initiatives.

4. Summary of Findings on the Negotiation Dynamics

The possible agreement range between R\$1,075,000 and R\$1,200,000 defined the ZOPA. The supplier provided technical support for installation to enhance quality assurance as part of the non-monetary value exchange. The supplier provided two delivery concessions which included shorter delivery times and early delivery of part of the order to help prevent project delays. The negotiation process followed stakeholder requirements by verifying brand approval and financial stability and project references. The supplier provided price reduction and improved delivery terms to the project stakeholders who accepted higher costs than the lowest bid for risk reduction purposes. The team evaluated three different options which included re-starting supplier negotiations and modifying budget restrictions and implementing standard electrical installation procedures. The case shows how procurement negotiations between financial evaluation and risk control and relationship-based trust work together. The project reached its objectives through supplier verification and non-financial agreements which transformed an unapproved supplier into a dependable business partner for upcoming projects.

5. Discussion and Implications

The case study shows how financial aspects in construction projects lead to intricate procurement negotiations because they influence trust development and risk management and organizational planning. Bazerman and Moore (1994) showed through their research that managers base their choices on personal judgment but their negotiation outcomes get influenced by mental distortions and restricted logical thinking (Weber, 2010). The procurement team chose to reject the supplier with the lowest bid because they wanted to evaluate financial stability factors which Raiffa, Richardson and Metcalfe (2002) describe as essential for scientific and artistic collaborative decision-making in negotiation. The research methods of Creswell (2014) and Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) support the use of mixed-methods and case study approaches (Yin, 2004) to study complex negotiation processes. The research example demonstrates this method through the combination of quantitative budget data with delivery timeline information and qualitative assessments of trust and supplier reputation and reference check results. The research design follows Dess and Lumpkin (2003) who explained strategic management through the combination of financial resources with non-monetary business assets. The Four-Type Negotiation Matrix by Dias (2020) classifies this situation as Type II negotiations because it needs organized team work to develop shared advantages. The procurement team used structured evaluation methods for suppliers until they adopted situational approaches, as financial risks emerged, according to Dias (2020c).

The negotiation process involved two essential elements from Sebenius (2013), Fisher & Ury (1981), Pruitt (1981), and Lax & Sebenius (1986): the board's definition of budgetary agreement zones and suppliers' alternative options, which influenced their negotiation flexibility. The research by Dias and Lopes (2021) shows trust operates as the main regulatory system which produces negotiation outcomes by creating confidence that directs decision-making activities. The procurement team chose the supplier with the

highest price because of their financial instability which proved that trust functions as a vital business asset that goes beyond monetary value according to Dias et al. (2022) and Dias (2020b). Santos and Dias (2024) show that trust develops through open business operations and supplier reputation growth which now plays a critical role in supplier homologation. The new supplier gained credibility through direct contact which supported the research findings of Dias and his colleagues (2023) about nonverbal negotiation behaviors. The negotiation process needed dispute-resolution mechanisms (Dias, 2020d; Dias et al., 2023) to perform relational repair, which brought stakeholders and the new supplier into alignment. The negotiated concessions included price reductions, faster delivery, and technical assistance, which demonstrated mutual advantages, according to Shell (2006) and Salacuse (2003, 2006). The case study shows how nonmarket negotiation forces (Navarro & Dias, 2024) shape business decisions by leveraging external factors that impact corporate reputation and relationships.

The negotiation principles developed by Dias and his team (2020–2023) for healthcare and construction and government procurement simulations have achieved success in all settings. Research data shows financial elements do not determine negotiation success because trust-based relationships and reputation and adaptable negotiation techniques produce equivalent effects on findings. The research example shows how Zartman (1988) negotiation elements work through communication and relationship management and concession techniques which support Rubin and Brown's (1975) findings about human social interaction perception. The decision to choose reliability over cost demonstrates that Kissinger (1969) and Schatzki and Coffey (1981) endorse strategic planning for negotiations because it produces superior outcomes than focusing on short-term cost reduction. The case shows that successful project negotiations need established frameworks (Dias, 2020; Lax & Sebenius, 1986) and different research methods (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2004) together with solid relationships between parties (Dias & Lopes, 2021; Santos & Dias, 2024). Organizations that manage financial constraints and non-monetary business assets will create partnerships which bring financial stability and strategic value.

6. Conclusion

The research shows that construction project procurement negotiations need more than financial analysis because they demand trust development and risk management and strategic planning. The case study showed that the supplier selection based on lowest price did not work because the company's financial instability and deteriorating service quality made them unacceptable for the project. The selection process demonstrates how organizations need to evaluate both physical assets and non-physical elements which include financial stability and reputation and trust during their negotiation activities. The stakeholders achieved project sustainability through their selection of reliability and long-term business potential instead of short-term cost reductions. The negotiation process showed that parties achieved a sustainable agreement through their willingness to make concessions which included price modifications and delivery accommodations and technical

assistance. The research demonstrates that successful negotiation requires more than price optimization because it needs to find economic stability through strategic sustainability.

7. Future research

Future research is encouraged on monitoring supplier relationships developed under financially unstable conditions will reveal the extended effects of risk-oriented business choices. Research is needed to examine the development of trust on virtual negotiation platforms as digital communication systems continue to expand their user base. Research into the development of virtual trust would allow scientists to develop new negotiation theories that can function on digital platforms. The research activities will strengthen negotiation theory while providing operational solutions to organizations that manage complex supply networks and global markets with financial constraints and relationship-based trust requirements.

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Ethical issues

The author states that this article raises no ethical issues or concerns about noncompliance. The research followed established ethical guidelines, protecting participants' identities and company names through anonymization to meet ethical standards and maintain confidentiality.

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EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT BEHAVIOR IN SERIOUS GAMES: INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE

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Abstract

The digital transformation has caused more organizations to choose outsourced corporate training (OCT) which now implements serious games (SGs) as contemporary employee development solutions. Research studies have studied SGs through their operational methods and application patterns and performance results in different business sectors but they have not fully explored the organizational elements that affect their worth. The review combines previous studies to demonstrate how serious games affect participant involvement and knowledge sharing and team work during training sessions. The research shows that there is no existing information about digital games which scholars and practitioners need to understand their potential for improving extended learning approaches

Keywords:

Digital Transformation; Employee Engagement; Serious Games; Corporate Training.

1. Introduction

The modern workplace requires employees who can adjust to changing work settings because of twenty-first century workplace difficulties (Lawler & Benson, 2022). Employers base their workplace interactions with staff members on the number of qualified candidates because modern employees expect specific work environments and corporate dedication (Moritz, 2020). The current hiring systems of organizations fail to identify suitable candidates for training development because they operate with outdated methods that create recruitment difficulties (Fuller et al., 2021). The modern workforce consists of young employees who seek personal growth and life satisfaction through their work experience thus organizations need to develop better hiring and training methods which create stronger workplace connections (Hastwell, 2021). Organizations solve their ongoing

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skill shortages by using outsourced corporate training (OCT) services according to Stroh & Treehuhoff (2003).

The worldwide e-learning market has made traditional learning approaches obsolete (GMI, 2020). Organizations today have access to advanced OCT market training systems which provide personalized interactive learning solutions that meet customer business requirements and employee needs (Giannakos et al.,2021). Organizations achieve improved performance results through digital training methods which help them adapt their strategies to market fluctuations (Gegenfurtner et al.,2014). Organizations that want to develop learning capabilities need to move away from basic training programs toward performance optimization systems which will help them achieve market leadership (Hannola et al.,2018; Trevor & McCracken, 2009). Organizations can reduce learning time through tailored training systems which deliver flexible education at affordable fixed expenses (Bekmanova et al.,2021). Organizations need to understand how employees behave when they encounter new learning approaches to properly assess serious games (SGs) for corporate training. Research on technology adoption has identified Behavioral Intention (BI) drivers which result from peer and hierarchical influences (Alvelos et al.,2015) while UTAUT2 stands as the leading acceptance and use of technology framework (Venkatesh et al.,2012). The present adoption drivers do not explain why staff members either decline to use SGs or face difficulties in implementing their acquired knowledge (Velada & Caetano, 2007). Organizations need to show readiness for OCT initiatives while keeping suitable cultural conditions (Alvelos et al.,The research by (2015) shows that training programs do not follow a structured format which results in insufficient employee development. SG training programs face implementation barriers because managers hold different opinions and the programs lack defined structures (Clochard & Westerman, 2020). The acceptance of SG training by employees depends on various elements which include organizational factors and personal characteristics and environmental conditions that organizations cannot control. The research examines U.S. client organizations that run OCT initiatives to study SG training acceptance behaviors and create a conceptual model which explains adoption barriers and success elements (Mehra et al.,2014).

2. Materials and Methods

The research investigates OCT through qualitative literature-based methods to analyze the effects of serious games (SGs) on corporate training. The research design follows Creswell (2014) to study extant literature on traditional training methods as the main focus. The research method conducts case studies at depth to analyze SG effects on employee involvement and corporate knowledge acquisition instead of using statistical data. The review process required researchers to find and combine academic studies about serious games in business environments while focusing on research about employee engagement and behavioral adoption and technology acceptance (Alvelos et al.,2015; Venkatesh et al.,2012;). The research on organizational learning and training transfer (Velada & Caetano, 2007). The research used previous research highlighting that SG implementation influences performance. The research methodology employs different approaches to evaluate both positive and negative elements which affect SG value in OCT

programs. The research used thematic coding to detect recurring themes which included employee engagement and knowledge sharing and communication and organizational preparedness throughout the analyzed sources. The final analysis highlights SGs within the digital transformation and corporate training innovation discussions.

3. Theoretical background

Organizations need to develop new training methods because their operational environments have become more complicated. Younger employees who want to develop their skills and find job satisfaction at work find that typical corporate training programs do not meet their needs (Hastwell, 2021; Moritz, 2020). Organizations choose outsourced corporate training (OCT) as their strategic solution to handle skill shortages while keeping market competitiveness (Stroh & Treehuhoff, 2003). Serious games (SGs) prove their worth as educational tools which boost employee learning and workplace involvement in modern work environments. Research indicates that serious games create better learning outcomes by improving student motivation and knowledge sharing and communication skills (Giannakos et al., 2021; Gegenfurtner et al., 2014). Organizations that operate with learning-intensive methods benefit from SGs because their competitive edge depends on established frameworks which enable ongoing learning (Hannola et al., 2018; Trevor & McCracken, 2009). The delivery systems of personalized training models become more effective through adaptable methods which reduce costs while building superior learning spaces (Bekmanova et al., 2021).

Scientists apply technology adoption research to analyze employee behavior through their serious game activities. The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2) functions as a widely used model to analyze behavioral intention (BI) drivers which consist of social influence and hedonic motivation and facilitating conditions (Venkatesh et al., 2012; Alvelos et al., 2015). The existing elements which support SG adoption do not explain employee conduct because staff members oppose change and struggle to apply their acquired skills in their regular work duties (Velada & Caetano, 2007). Research indicates that training programs achieve success when organizations demonstrate their readiness and their cultural environment accepts the training content (Alvelos et al., 2015). The success of OCT initiatives depends on managerial consistency and program design that meets employee needs because external standards can create disengagement (Clochard & Westerman, 2020). Research indicates that organizations need to study both attractive and unappealing factors which affect SG adoption and the complete training environment where employees learn. The research shows that SGs hold great potential for corporate training yet scientists have not fully addressed all the necessary aspects of this technology. The current research on SG processes and performance lacks sufficient investigation into organizational factors which affect their value from an employer's point of view. The research gap needs solution development to move forward digital training innovation theory and practice development. The findings on the literature are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1 Literature review findings. Source: elaborated by the authors

Author(s)/Year	Study Focus	Main Contribution
Saha (2025)	Serious game market forecast 2025–2035	Predicts growth driven by AR/VR and gamification
Baker (2024)	Corporate training games for 2025	Practical strategies to improve global employee engagement
Calza-Perez et al. (2024)	Overview of serious games in corporate learning	Bibliometric review of adoption, benefits, and challenge
Oliveira (2024)	Serious games in automotive corporate training	Case study showing engagement and motivation benefit
Lawler & Benson (2022)	Workforce challenges in the 21st century	Highlight new expectations in employment relations
Moritz (2020)	Workforce dynamics in the digital era	Shows changes in employee conditions and expectations
Fuller et al. (2021)	Traditional hiring practices	Reveal limitations in identifying trainable talent
Hastwell (2021)	Expectations of younger employees	Emphasizes work as an opportunity for self-development
Stroh & Treehuhoff (2003)	Outsourcing in corporate training	Introduce OCT as a strategic solution for skill gaps
GMI (2020)	Global e-learning market	Point to obsolescence of traditional learning models
Giannakos et al. (2021)	Use of serious games in training	Demonstrate higher engagement and personalization
Gegenfurtner et al. (2014)	Performance data in digital training	Show efficiency in data collection and use
Hannola et al. (2018)	Learning-intensive organizations	Link institutional frameworks to competitive advantage
Trevor & McCracken (2009)	Institutionalized training structures	Argue for effectiveness of continuous learning
Bekmanova et al. (2021)	Personalized training models	Highlight benefits such as shorter cycles and cost reduction
Venkatesh et al. (2012)	UTAUT2 technology adoption	Propose behavioral intention drivers
Alvelos et al. (2015)	Technology adoption in corporate training	Apply UTAUT2 in organizational contexts
Velada & Caetano (2007)	Training transfer	Show failures in consolidating new competencies
Clochard & Westerman (2020)	Bias in training programs	Reveal inconsistencies and impacts on employee participation
Mehra et al. (2014)	Social networks and organizational learning	Highlight the role of social relations in corporate learning

4. Technology Adoption (UTAUT2)

The UTAUT2 model has become a popular choice for research studies which focus on training (Ain et al., 2016; Azam et al., 2019) and education (Nawaz & Mohamed, 2020; Tseng et al., 2019). The model received its initial assessment from Morris et al. The model underwent its first academic evaluation after Morris et al. (2003). The model faces three main limitations because it contains numerous predictors which do not always represent accurate knowledge transfer (Bagozzi, 2007) and its reduced simplicity compared to TAM (Davis, 1989) and its complex statistical nature which restricts its use in situations where simpler models work better (Li, 2020; van Raaij & Schepers, 2008). The original authors together with other researchers (Maruping et al., 2017; Venkatesh et al., Zhang and Viswanath (2016) and Zhang and Viswanath (2018) developed UTAUT2 as a core framework for technology adoption studies through their research despite facing initial doubts. The model contains useful elements for future research even though these aspects do not directly apply to this study.

The model demonstrates high suitability for research investigations which examine training and learning development processes. The model enables researchers to study employee digital tool adoption through behavioral intention analysis (Azam et al., 2019; Tseng et al., 2022; Yu, 2012). The environmental conditions predictor stands out as a vital factor for understanding employee job performance and satisfaction according to Venkatesh (Viswanath, 2022). Organizations need to select particular technologies through antecedent and determinant analysis to reach organizational success and provide advantages to their employees.

4.1. Social Influence

The adoption of serious games (SGs) by employees depends heavily on social influence when they form behavioral intentions. The social environment of workplaces requires employees to follow workplace consensus instead of making their own decisions (Siala et al.,2020). The success of SG systems depends on staff approval and management backing which sometimes exceeds their actual value. The process of adoption needs employees to receive approval from their professional and organizational networks as well as their personal connections. The social influence process enables early adopters to develop influencer status which helps their group members accept change while minimizing their resistance to it (Lichy & Merle, 2020). Leaders must concentrate on official workplace connections together with unofficial relationships to build an environment which supports staff members.

The two enabling factors of Training Visibility (TV) and Self-Efficacy (SE) receive their influence from social influence. The way organizational groups view their training accessibility depends on employee position and their position in the hierarchy and their supervisor's attitudes (Derks et al.,2016; Hannola et al.,2018; Suh et al.,2017). The success of employee program participation depends on HR and leadership teams to deliver effective communication because staff members need to know about available training programs (Clochard & Westerman, 2020). The method organizations use to deliver information to staff determines their training participation because unequal access creates barriers which mainly affect disadvantaged groups (Shields & Price, 2003; Lössbroek & Radl, 2019). Social norms determine how much employees with low self-efficacy depend on their peers for validation which either helps or hinders their participation (Briz-Ponce et al.,2017). The practice of following group norms creates obstacles which block older workers and less educated employees from joining while it maintains social inequalities (Clochard & Westerman, 2020).

4.2. Hedonic Motivation

Game-based learning systems function independently from digital platforms because their design structure follows hedonic motivation principles (Tseng et al.,2022). The enjoyment of learning through "learning with pleasure" emerges from organizational culture which leaders develop through their efforts to create a playful and secure environment (Georganta & Montgomery, 2019). The dimension serves as an attraction tool which enhances employee value for training programs to achieve higher participation rates (Farooq et al.,2017; Nawaz & Mohamed, 2020). The UTAUT2 model includes hedonic motivation as a fundamental element which determines how employees view training effectiveness (Venkatesh et al.,2012). The research on workplace environments has not proven any direct relationship between hedonic motivation and self-efficacy or effort expectancy according to Azizi et al. (2020) and Fadzil (2018) and Gunasinghe et al. (2020) but further studies could establish these relationships.

5. Discussion and Implications

The research discussion demonstrates how technology adoption frameworks and serious games in corporate training and negotiation research create a common ground to study employee engagement and organizational readiness. The UTAUT2 model maintains its effectiveness for training behavior research because of its complex design although it lacks simplicity (Bagozzi, 2007; Li, 2020; Davis, 1989). The model includes social influence as a factor which combines with hedonic motivation and facilitating conditions to match previous studies on serious games that demonstrate enjoyment and organizational culture and visibility drive adoption (Giannakos et al., 2021; Nawaz & Mohamed, 2020; Tseng et al., 2022). The research dimensions align with negotiation studies because trust and structured processes and relational dynamics serve as vital elements which produce successful negotiation outcomes (Dias, 2020; Dias & Navarro, 2020; Santos & Dias, 2024).

The research results deliver significant value to human resource development and organizational behavior and management strategy development. Training program implementation occurs through a negotiated process between employees and organizations and external providers which depends on social validation and managerial communication patterns that function similarly to bargaining and trust development in negotiation settings (Dias et al., 2021; Dias et al., 2022). Organizations need to develop particular cultural and climatic settings for serious games to reach their highest potential because these environmental elements influence how employees view their work independence and performance abilities and their sense of fairness at work (Georganta & Montgomery, 2019; Dias et al., 2023). Organizations need to create training programs which handle technological aspects and establish relational connections that understand team interactions and leadership prejudices and cultural preparedness.

Serious games together with negotiation role-play simulations through experiential learning create new educational approaches for corporate training and academic education. The research on educational gamification by Prensky (2001) and Nawaz & Mohamed (2020) and negotiation teaching materials by Dias et al. The research by Dias (2020) and Dias (2023) demonstrates that students achieve better results through interactive scenario-based teaching which promotes active classroom participation. UTAUT2 enables researchers to analyze student adoption behaviors in gamified learning spaces through UTAUT2 while negotiation frameworks reveal how social elements and environmental conditions influence student involvement. The combination of technology adoption research with negotiation education methods creates new knowledge in educational science.

The research findings have significant effects on three main fields which include conflict resolution and information systems and international business. The core elements of UTAUT2 which include trust and social influence show similarities with negotiation principles that appear in mediation and dispute resolution (Dias et al., 2023) thus making gamified platforms suitable for virtual negotiation and conflict management. Information systems research benefits from negotiation theory because it helps researchers understand

how adoption determinants relate to specific contexts. Research should investigate how various national negotiation approaches affect training program acceptance rates in different cultural environments (van Raaij & Schepers, 2008).

The adoption of serious games for corporate training requires more than technological choices because it involves social and cultural and organizational negotiations. The research findings demonstrate that technology adoption models and serious games literature and negotiation research should work together to create new knowledge which benefits human resource development and organizational behavior and pedagogy and conflict resolution and international management. The research synthesis converts training adoption into a social and environmental process which produces new educational and organizational development knowledge. The research findings create new paths for investigation which span different academic disciplines.

6. Conclusion

The UTAUT2 framework enabled us to study behavioral intention drivers through an analysis of how users respond to hedonic motivation and self-efficacy and training visibility while social dynamics and managerial communication act as mediating elements. The research added depth to our understanding through negotiation theory which showed that training adoption follows bargaining patterns that depend on trust levels and structured communication systems and relationship quality. Organizations need to create environments which support inclusiveness and open communication and team-based confirmation for their corporate training programs to succeed. Serious games which operate within supportive organizational systems produce enhanced employee involvement and knowledge exchange and enduring competence growth. Serious games adoption faces major challenges because managers hold biased views and training resources are not equally available to all employees and different worker groups exist. The solution to these problems needs technological modifications and relationship-based negotiations to create equal training opportunities and strategic alignment.

The research results establish new possibilities for different academic fields to use their acquired knowledge. The study of human resource development benefits from studying training adoption as a collaborative process while organizational behavior research learns about cultural factors that affect learning success and education scholars develop gamification methods with negotiation teaching approaches for practical learning experiences. The research findings enable conflict resolution experts and information systems specialists to develop virtual negotiation systems and context-dependent adoption frameworks which international business researchers can use to study how cultural differences affect training program acceptance rates. The research establishes a new theoretical and practical understanding of serious games adoption through its analysis of this process as a social and interdisciplinary field. The research combines technology adoption theories with negotiation science to create a theoretical framework which shows organizations use negotiation methods to deploy new technology.

7. Future research

Research should study corporate training through serious games by using an interdisciplinary approach that combines technology adoption models with negotiation frameworks across different cultural settings. The study uses social influence, hedonic motivation, and organizational readiness as predictors, as established by Venkatesh et al. Research studies must track employee knowledge transfer and organizational performance results after serious game implementation to verify if short-term employee engagement leads to sustained organizational benefits. Finally, future research is encouraged to conduct field studies to assess the strength of driver relationships in relation to behavioral intention. It would also be interesting to explore the reverse side of cocreation (cocodestruction) as a means to unpacking can be eroded as well as generated in corporate training initiatives.

Ethical issues

The author states that this article raises no ethical issues or concerns about noncompliance. The research followed established ethical guidelines, protecting participants' identities and company names through anonymization to meet ethical standards and maintain confidentiality.

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DEMOGRAPHIC VULNERABILITY AND STRATEGIC PRESSURES IN TURKEY'S SECURITY ARCHITECTURE: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Turkey is positioned in a complex security environment at the intersection of rapidly changing geopolitical dynamics, regional conflict cycles, and global power competition in the post-Cold War era. This study analyzes how Turkey's security architecture is being reshaped under demographic vulnerabilities and global-regional strategic pressures through a multidisciplinary perspective. The research examines Turkey's security challenges within a multilayered understanding, positioned at the intersection of international relations, security studies, demography, and sociology disciplines. The fundamental question of the study concerns through which mechanisms demographic vulnerabilities affect Turkey's national security architecture and foreign policy strategic autonomy; how this influence interacts with state capacity, regional power balance dynamics, and strategic calculations of global actors. The main hypothesis argues that as demographic vulnerabilities increase, Turkey's security architecture becomes more susceptible to external pressures; however, in areas where state capacity is strong, these pressures can be transformed into strategic opportunities. The research employs qualitative research methods, combining document analysis, discourse analysis, and process tracing techniques. Findings reveal that the demographic transformation Turkey has faced, particularly due to the mass migration wave from Syria after 2011, has profoundly affected security perceptions; although state capacity remains strong at the regional level, Turkey's maneuvering space has narrowed in the strategic calculations of global actors. The study emphasizes that the demographic-security nexus encompasses not only migration management but also broader dimensions such as regional power balance, alliance politics, and strategic autonomy. In conclusion, it is assessed that for Turkey to transform its demographic vulnerabilities into strategic opportunities, institutional capacity building, regional cooperation, and the integration of multilayered security policies are of critical importance.

Keywords:

Demographic Vulnerability, Security Architecture, Strategic Autonomy, State Capacity, Regional Power Dynamics.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey's security architecture is being reshaped within a context wherein rapidly shifting post-Cold War geopolitical dynamics, cyclical regional conflicts, global power competition, new-generation threat typologies, and internal demographic transformations are simultaneously intensifying. The evolution of the global order toward a multipolar configuration, the increasing demands for strategic autonomy from regional power centers, and the expanding role of non-state actors within the security environment are challenging the classical boundaries of the national security concept (Kassab, 2023; Bernat et al., 2023; Baylis et al., 2019; Jackson & Sørensen, 2016). As a NATO member state, Turkey constitutes an integral component of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture; simultaneously, owing to its multilayered foreign policy engagements extending to the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkans, and Central Asia, it is positioned within a multi-axial security environment. This positioning confronts Turkey with both opportunities and multidirectional pressures, necessitating continuous reassessment and adaptation of the country's security policies (Yükselen, 2020; Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022; Hale, 2013; Robins, 2003).

Within this novel security ecosystem, Turkey's historical legacy is also treated as a central variable in strategic analyses. The memory of the regional sphere of influence engendered by Ottoman and Seljuk political continuity constitutes a geocultural backdrop that shapes the normative framework of contemporary Turkish foreign policy (Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022; Stein, 2015; Ahmad, 1993; Kinzer, 2008). Turkey's position as the central country of the Turkic world and the perception of historical responsibility it carries within the Islamic geography elevate Turkey's security understanding beyond mere territorial integrity defense, enriching it with multilayered parameters such as regional stability, civilizational identity, and strategic depth (Özpek & Park, 2019; Duran & Kanat, 2022; Aras, 2009). In this context, while Turkish foreign policy proceeds along an axis where historical and geopolitical factors intersect, discussions concerning demographic vulnerability within the country are increasingly becoming a more visible security parameter.

Demographic vulnerability is not merely a rubric confined to population movements and ethnic composition; it possesses a multidimensional structure that directly affects state capacity, social resilience, economic sustainability, border security, and foreign policy autonomy (Goldstone, 2010; Goldstone et al., 2012; Goerres & Vanhuysse, 2021; Sciubba, 2022). Sudden and large-scale changes in population structure strain social integration mechanisms, test public service capacity, and render uncertain the demographic projections upon which long-term strategic planning is predicated (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012; Jivetti & Hoque, 2020; Demeny, 2003; Reher, 2019). Turkey's confrontation with large-scale migration waves over the past quarter-century, and particularly over the last decade, has necessitated a reassessment of this issue from a national security perspective (Ersoy et al., 2025; Değirmenci, 2024; Erat et al., 2024; Ekmekcioğlu, 2022; Yıldız, 2022; Yıldız, 2023; Castles et al., 2019; Coleman, 2013).

Regional instability, the prolongation of civil wars in Syria and Iraq, Afghanistan's extended conflict cycles, and the security vacuums in Africa creating conditions for multidimensional

migration flows have precipitated sudden and high-volume changes in Turkey's demographic structure. Particularly since 2011, the mass migration movement originating from Syria has elevated the weight of the demographic element in Turkey's security agenda to historically unprecedented levels (Ersoy et al., 2025; Değirmenci, 2024; Erat et al., 2024; Kingsley, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018). Concurrently, a need has emerged to develop a new security approach that holistically addresses migration, terrorism, non-state armed actors, and hybrid threats alongside other threat perceptions that determine Turkey's foreign policy.

This study aims to analyze how Turkey's security architecture is being reshaped under demographic vulnerabilities and global-regional strategic pressures. The significance of the research lies in its examination of the increasingly utilized "demography-security" interaction in security studies through an interdisciplinary lens using the Turkish case. Positioned at the intersection of international relations, security studies, demography, sociology, and strategic analysis disciplines, this study aims to provide a multilayered comprehension that transcends unidimensional explanations of the security challenges Turkey faces.

The scope of the study is oriented toward identifying the vulnerabilities of Turkey's national security strategy vis-à-vis demographic transformations, great power politics, non-state actors, and regional conflict systems. This identification is not limited merely to describing the current situation; it aims to reveal the causal effects of demographic vulnerabilities on foreign policy autonomy. Accordingly, Turkey's foreign policy orientation, military capacity building, migration management, and security-sectoral coordination mechanisms have been incorporated into the analytical framework.

Among the fundamental questions of the research, the primary research question has been formulated as follows: "Through which mechanisms, channels, and processes do demographic vulnerabilities affect Turkey's national security architecture and foreign policy strategic autonomy; how does this influence interact with state capacity, regional power balance dynamics, and the strategic calculations of global actors?" The auxiliary research questions are as follows: (1) What kind of causal relationship do the changes in Turkey's demographic structure produce between internal security policies and foreign policy preferences? (2) In which areas do demographic pressures lead to constrictions or expansions in Turkey's maneuver space in its relations with regional and global power centers? (3) In which domains (military, economic, diplomatic) is Turkey's strategic autonomy capacity more constrained as demographic vulnerabilities increase, and under what conditions is it strengthened?

These questions interrogate both the direct effects of demographic changes on security policies and the indirect reflections of these effects on foreign policy behaviors; furthermore, they examine the mediating role of Turkey's state capacity, institutional adaptation capabilities, and geopolitical positioning in this process.

The hypothesis corresponding to this question has been constructed as follows for empirical and theoretical testing: "As Turkey's demographic vulnerabilities increase, the country's security architecture becomes more sensitive to external pressures; this situation constrains Turkey's capacity to preserve strategic autonomy in foreign policy. However, this constraint is not linear; in domains where state capacity is robust, demographic pressures can also generate strategic opportunities that reinforce Turkey's regional agency." The auxiliary hypotheses are as follows: H1: As demographic vulnerability increases, the level of politicization of security discourses in Turkey's domestic politics rises; this situation reduces the predictability of foreign policy decisions. H2: As Turkey's migration management capacity strengthens, the constraining effect of demographic pressures on foreign policy autonomy diminishes; migration diplomacy becomes functionalized as a foreign policy instrument. H3: In regions where demographic changes are intense, the operational space of terrorist organizations expands; this situation necessitates Turkey's cross-border military operations and generates multilateral diplomatic tensions.

The hypothesis posits an inverse yet conditional relationship between demographic vulnerability and strategic autonomy; it aims to test the mechanisms of this relationship through explanatory variables. This hypothesis will be tested using "securitization theory" (Buzan et al., 1998), the "state capacity approach" (Fukuyama, 2011; Tilly, 1990), "geopolitical competition models" (Brzezinski, 1997; Cohen, 2015), and "population geopolitics" (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022) concepts, which encompass the bidirectional relationship between demographic fractures and security policies. The multidisciplinary character of the theoretical framework provides analytical tools commensurate with the complexity of the research question; it enables simultaneous evaluation of the different strata of the security architecture. Within the conceptual framework, demographic vulnerability will first be defined, followed by explication of the concepts of strategic pressures, regional power balance, and security architecture.

Demographic vulnerability signifies the erosion of adaptation capacity in social, economic, and political systems due to sudden changes in population structure; concomitantly, it refers to the creation of vulnerability in state security, internal stability, and foreign policy decision-making processes (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Urdal, 2006). This vulnerability manifests itself through both concrete indicators measurable by objective parameters and the sense of insecurity formed at the level of societal perception (Weiner, 1995; Castles et al., 2019). In the specific case of Turkey, it is observed that this vulnerability intensifies through dynamics associated with migration movements. Claims in analyses from various sources that the ratio of the foreign population to the country's total population has reached approximately fifteen to twenty percent in some calculations, even if unverified, engender serious security concerns at the perceptual level (Ersoy et al., 2025; Değirmenci, 2024; Erat et al., 2024; Brinkley, 2014; Hollifield, 2014).

Strategic pressures are the political, economic, or security-based external coercive effects that global and regional actors exert on Turkey's foreign policy orientation, military capacity, energy policies, and regional diplomatic engagements (Aggarwal & Kenney, 2023;

Krasner, 1999; Lake, 2009). These pressures possess a nature far more complex and multilayered than direct military threats; they manifest through various instruments such as economic sanctions, isolation attempts within alliance systems, impediments to technology transfer, and media-public opinion manipulations (Aggarwal & Cheung, 2025; Nye, 2011; Keohane & Nye, 2011). Turkey's geopolitical position is the fundamental factor that augments the intensity and diversity of these pressures. Its location at the intersection of three continents, its control over critical energy corridors, its presence in the basin of significant water resources, and the breadth of its historical-cultural sphere of influence render Turkey one of the focal points of global and regional power competition (Jongerden, 2022; Kubicek, 2024; Erdoğan & Hisarlıoğlu, 2022; Brzezinski, 1997; Kaplan, 2012; Grygiel, 2006).

The concept of security architecture denotes the holistic system encompassing the institutional structures, doctrinal frameworks, alliance relationships, military capacity, intelligence mechanisms, and decision-making processes that a state establishes to ensure its national security (Collins, 2019; Freedman, 2013). In the Turkish context, security architecture is not confined solely to defense-oriented military organization; it comprises multidimensional elements such as foreign policy instruments, economic resilience, social cohesion, and technological independence (Wilkins, 2025; Gray, 1996; Luttwak, 1990).

Regional power balance, meanwhile, defines the dynamic relational network formed by the intersection of the strategic interests of states, non-state actors, and global powers situated in the geographies surrounding Turkey (Nye, 2024; Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). Sectarian cleavages in the Middle East, ethno-political tensions in the Caucasus, energy competition in the Eastern Mediterranean, and security issues in the Black Sea basin are among the regional balance elements that directly affect Turkey's security policies (Lynch & Mabon, 2025; Barkey, 2011; Lynch, 2016).

The theoretical and empirical framework of the study has been configured to encompass Turkey's multi-axial foreign policy orientations, including its NATO membership, multidimensional relations with Russia, geographical position intersecting with China's Belt and Road Initiative, deepening strategic cooperation with Pakistan, and leadership of the Organization of Turkic States. These orientations, while reflecting Turkey's increasing visibility at regional and global levels, simultaneously prepare the ground for the diversification of strategic pressures directed at the country.

In this context, the study interrogates how demographic dynamics may constrain or strengthen foreign policy autonomy. While demographic stability enhances states' long-term strategic planning capacity (Short, 2022; Teitelbaum & Winter, 1985), demographic vulnerability creates unpredictability in domestic politics and expands the intervention capacity of external actors (Sciubba, 2022; Kaufmann, 2004; McDonald, 2015). The Turkish case presents a critical instance wherein this relationship can be concretely observed.

Furthermore, the study takes into account the interaction between Turkey's domestic political dynamics and security policies. Discussions concerning the transition to a legal-

political basis in counterterrorism, the discourses of certain political actors, and reactions in public opinion are elements that affect the level of societal legitimacy of the national security architecture (Demir & Bural, 2025; Taşpınar, 2011; Çandar, 2012). Particularly, rhetorical shifts toward terrorist organization leaders and potential directional changes in security policies shape perceptions regarding Turkey's strategic consistency (Zamir & Kaunert, 2025; Crenshaw, 2011; Hoffman, 2017).

Turkey's struggle against the PKK and its derivative structures must be addressed not only in terms of internal security but also in its foreign policy dimension. The organization's presence in Iraq and Syria, its contacts with international actors, and the differing attitudes of global alliance systems toward the organization constitute the fundamental determinants of Turkey's external threat perception (Wilkinson, 2011; Kepel, 2017). Cases of population engineering that have emerged in northern Syria are concrete examples demonstrating the direct relationship between demographic changes and security threats (Cockburn, 2015; Gerges, 2016). This situation stands out as one of the primary motivations determining Turkey's cross-border military operations and diplomatic initiatives (Byman, 2015; Jones, 2014).

Turkey's increasing agency in foreign policy—exemplified by the Organization of Turkic States, strategic relations with Pakistan, the Central Asian security axis, Middle East diplomacy, and Eastern Mediterranean balances—is reshaping regional power competition (Kubicek, 2024; Aras, 2009; Robins, 2003). This agency, on one hand, enables Turkey to have a voice at regional and global levels; on the other hand, it renders the country a target of multidirectional strategic pressures (Kubicek, 2024; Leverett, 2013; Barkey, 2011). This situation also transforms Turkey's internal demographic vulnerabilities into a geopolitical variable.

The study aims to present a holistic analysis that simultaneously evaluates Turkey's internal and external security parameters. Thus, the interdependent relationship between demographic factors and strategic pressures will be analyzed through the macro and micro analytical categories of the international relations discipline. At the macro level, global power competition and regional balance dynamics; at the micro level, domestic political discourses, societal perceptions, and institutional capacity assessments constitute the fundamental building blocks of the analytical framework.

The innovative aspect of the study lies in its positioning of demographic vulnerabilities' effects on Turkey's strategic orientations and foreign policy autonomy not merely as an internal security issue but as a geopolitical variable affecting regional power distribution. This approach demonstrates that demography is not a passive background element; rather, it is an active security parameter that directly influences foreign policy decisions.

The expected contributions of the study will materialize at three fundamental levels. At the theoretical level, a conceptual framework explaining the causal relationships between demographic vulnerability and strategic autonomy will be presented; a new analytical model will be developed by integrating securitization theory, geopolitical theory, and state

capacity approaches through the Turkish case. At the empirical level, concrete indicators of the transformation in Turkey's security architecture and data-based analyses will be set forth; the demographic, military, and diplomatic data of the last decade will be systematically evaluated. At the policy level, strategic recommendations will be developed for Turkey to maintain foreign policy autonomy while managing demographic security risks; migration management, border security, counterterrorism, and multipolar diplomacy strategies will be presented within an integrated framework.

In conclusion, this introduction has set forth the problematic, significance, scope, conceptual framework, and research hypothesis of the study; it has established that the demographic and strategic dynamics restructuring Turkey's security architecture must be examined through a multidisciplinary analysis. In the subsequent sections, the hypothesis will be systematically tested under the headings of literature, theoretical framework, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The role that demographic structures play in states' security architecture is a research domain that has risen conspicuously in the international relations literature, particularly in the post-Cold War period. The development of the literature can be examined in three fundamental phases: first, the foundational studies in the 1990s focusing on the security consequences of demographic pressures; second, the empirical research in the 2000s addressing the migration-security nexus; third, the contemporary studies in which multilayered and interdisciplinary approaches have come to prominence since the 2010s. Studies indicating that demographic elements such as high fertility rates, irregular migration waves, aging trends, and relative changes in ethnic compositions affect states' foreign policy behaviors and security strategies have constituted an extensive academic discussion ground in the Turkish context. This discussion ground has deepened further, particularly with the large-scale political transformations, civil wars, and mass displacement processes that occurred in the Middle East since the early 2010s, demonstrating the necessity of placing demographic dynamics at the center of security studies (Baylis et al., 2019; Jackson & Sørensen, 2016). However, divergences of opinion exist in the literature regarding which mechanisms mediate the effects of demographic changes on security architecture; while some authors establish direct causal relationships (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Goldstone, 2010), others emphasize the determinative role of intervening variables and state capacity (Fukuyama, 2011; Tilly, 1990). These divergences foreground the question of which theoretical frameworks are more explanatory in the analysis of states experiencing complex demographic transformations, such as Turkey.

The foundational approaches to the demography-security relationship are predicated upon the "demographic pressure" and "youth bulge" models developed by Homer-Dixon, Urdal, and Goldstone. These models posit a non-deterministic yet robust correlation between population growth and conflict, elevating the probability of demographic shocks transforming into security crises particularly in contexts where state capacity is weak. These models advance that rapid population growth augments burdens on state capacity,

intensifies resource competition, and elevates the risk of identity-based conflict. Homer-Dixon (1999) explicates security dilemmas engendered by environmental scarcity and population pressure; while Goldstone (2010) and Sciubba (2022) systematically evaluate the geopolitical consequences of demographic transition processes. Studies conducted on Turkey situate the migration flows triggered by the Syrian civil war after 2011 within this theoretical framework. Urdal (2006) demonstrates that political instability increases in regions where young populations are concentrated, while the demographic transformations occurring in Turkey's border regions present examples congruent with these findings. Nevertheless, critiques of demographic determinism also occupy a significant place in the literature; Weiner (1995) and Castles and colleagues (2019) argue that demographic pressure alone is not a sufficient explanatory factor, maintaining that institutional capacities and political preferences are determinative. The Turkish case presents an important case study for testing this theoretical tension, as the country is both under intense demographic pressure and possesses strong state traditions.

The migration-security relationship is examined in the literature through both "human security" and "state security" frameworks. Significant epistemological and methodological differences exist between these two approaches: the human security approach focuses on the rights and welfare of migrants, while the state security perspective concentrates on issues such as sovereignty, border control, and social stability. While Castles and colleagues (2019) emphasize the structural effects of forced migration that transform regional security dynamics, researchers such as Weiner (1995) and Hollifield (2014) demonstrate that migration is not merely a humanitarian phenomenon but also a security variable affecting states' strategic calculations. Academic studies focusing on Turkey present explanatory frameworks regarding the permanence of the existing migrant population, social cohesion processes, and long-term demographic repercussions. Brinkley (2014) addresses the security dimension of human mobility; while Coleman (2013) and Castles and others (2019) discuss the permanent effects of migration on demographic structures and their reflections on state capacity. Writers such as Koser and Kingsley (2017) note that the policies Turkey pursues in migration management reflect an effort to balance both humanitarian obligations and geopolitical calculations; while Triandafyllidou (2018) demonstrates that migration agreements concluded with Europe have enhanced Turkey's strategic bargaining power. However, critiques that the securitization of migration negatively affects social cohesion also exist in the literature (Buzan et al., 1998; Collins, 2019). In the specific case of Turkey, the tension between the securitization of migration and integration policies has not been sufficiently examined in empirical research; this gap presents a significant research opportunity.

Securitization theory constitutes a central theoretical foundation in explaining Turkey's security architecture. This approach of the Copenhagen School maintains that security is not an objective reality but a social category constructed through discursive practices. The securitization approach developed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) explains how certain issues are transformed into security matters through discourse and practices. Demographic changes and migration emerge as securitized subjects in this process,

preparing the ground for states to take extraordinary measures and for societal perception to be reshaped. In the Turkish context, the process of securitizing Syrian-origin migration is amenable to explanation through this theoretical framework (Collins, 2019). Buzan's regional security complexes approach additionally holds importance in understanding the security dynamics of the geopolitical environment in which Turkey is situated. While Wæver (1995) emphasizes the discursive dimension of securitization, how terrorism, migration, and border security issues are constructed in public discourse in Turkey can be evaluated from this perspective. Critiques of the Copenhagen School's securitization theory also feature in the literature; some authors argue that securitization insufficiently accounts for the process of social construction and neglects subjectivity (Wendt, 1999). In the specific case of Turkey, the instrumentalization of the securitization of demographic issues both in domestic politics and in foreign policy discourse permits empirical testing of this theory. Furthermore, the sociological and practice-centered critiques that the Paris School brings to securitization hold importance in understanding how Turkey's security practices are shaped at institutional and operational levels beyond discourse.

Geopolitical theory is one of the fundamental disciplines explaining Turkey's strategic position and the pressures this position engenders. A broad theoretical spectrum extending from classical geopolitical thought to critical geopolitical approaches evaluates from different perspectives how Turkey's geographical position creates strategic opportunity and constraint. While Brzezinski (1997) and Cohen (2015) emphasize that geography determines states' power projection capacities, Grygiel (2006) and Kaplan (2012) demonstrate that strategic position simultaneously creates exposure to external pressures. Turkey's location at the intersection of three continents, its control over critical energy corridors, and the breadth of its historical-cultural sphere of influence render the country one of the focal points of global and regional power competition. This situation shapes Turkey's security architecture not only through internal dynamics but also through great power politics (Gray, 1996; Holsti, 1995). Mackinder's (1904) "Heartland" and Spykman's (1944) "Rimland" theories offer historical references in explaining Turkey's critical position in Eurasian geopolitics. Brzezinski (1997), evaluating Turkey in the category of geopolitical "pivot state," emphasizes that the country's strategic choices could affect regional power balance. However, critiques of geopolitical determinism also feature in the literature; writers such as Agnew (2003) argue that geography is not a fixed destiny, maintaining that states' agency and strategic choices are determinative. The critical geopolitics approach interrogates how geopolitical discourses are produced and how they reflect power relations; how geopolitical labels such as "energy corridor" or "migration buffer" affect Turkey's strategic autonomy can be examined within this framework.

Classical and structural realism are the fundamental theoretical perspectives employed in explaining Turkey's security strategies. Different variants within the realist paradigm—classical, structural, offensive, defensive, and neoclassical realism—illuminate different aspects of Turkey's security behaviors. While Waltz (1979) argues that the anarchic structure of the international system impels states toward security-seeking, Mearsheimer (2001) maintains that great powers are in constant pursuit of power maximization. The

autonomous security policies Turkey has developed in recent years, its indigenous production capacity in the defense industry, and its regional power projection efforts follow a trajectory congruent with these theoretical frameworks. Walt's (1987) balance of threat theory offers a functional instrument in explaining Turkey's threat perceptions in its surroundings and its alliance preferences consequent thereto. Neoclassical realism takes into account the interaction between system-level pressures and internal dynamics in understanding Turkey's foreign policy behaviors; Rose (1998) and Schweller (2006) emphasize that state-society relations and leadership perceptions shape foreign policy. Turkey's deepening of relations with actors such as Russia and China while maintaining NATO membership enhances the explanatory power of neoclassical realism rather than realist balance. Jervis (1976) demonstrates that misperceptions can lead to international crises, while Turkey's trust crises with its Western allies can be evaluated within this framework. This theoretical richness within realism provides multiple analytical tools in explaining Turkey's transition from balance to multipolar strategy under demographic pressures.

The state capacity approach holds critical importance in assessing Turkey's ability to manage demographic vulnerabilities and resist external pressures. This approach emphasizes that the state should be defined not only by its military power but also by its capacities for social control, resource extraction, service delivery, and legitimacy construction. While Fukuyama (2011) and Tilly (1990) emphasize that state capacity is determined by institutional effectiveness, resource extraction power, and social control mechanisms, Mann (1986) adds depth to analyses by distinguishing between the state's despotic and infrastructural power. Turkey's migration management capacity, border security coordination, and counterterrorism institutional structuring are addressed in the literature as concrete indicators of state capacity (Freedman, 2013). While Slater (2010) argues that security crises accelerate state-building processes, the institutional capacity Turkey has developed in counterterrorism and migration management corresponds with this argument. Nevertheless, the risk of state capacity reinforcing authoritarian tendencies is also discussed in the literature; while Levitsky and Way (2010) explain this situation with the concept of competitive authoritarianism, transformations in Turkey's democratic institutions can be evaluated within this framework. Kaldor (2012) notes that state capacity must be redefined in the age of new wars, emphasizing the state's adaptation capability against hybrid threats. The most significant dilemma of the state capacity literature in the Turkish context is how to conceptualize the tension between institutional strengthening and democratic regression; this problem requires deeper examination in empirical research.

Terrorism and asymmetric warfare studies occupy a central place in Turkey's security architecture. This branch of literature examines how conventional security threats intertwine with new-generation asymmetric threats and how states respond to this complex threat environment. Hoffman (2017), Crenshaw (2011), and Cronin (2009) examine the structure, strategies, and termination dynamics of terrorist organizations; Turkey's protracted struggle against the PKK and its derivatives is evaluated as an

important case study in this literature. Hoffman's (2007) concept of hybrid warfare explains the process whereby non-state actors employ conventional and unconventional methods in combination. Boot (2013) and Jones (2014) address insurgency warfare dynamics; while Byman (2015), Cockburn (2015), and Gerges (2016) discuss the rise of regional terrorist organizations and their effects on state security. The advanced technology weapons Turkey employs in counterterrorism, operational strategies, and cross-border interventions are evaluated through these theoretical frameworks. While Cronin (2009) classifies the termination mechanisms of terrorist organizations under six categories (military defeat, leadership loss, negotiation, success, repression, and reorganization), the strategies Turkey pursues against the PKK can be analyzed within this typology. While Kaldor (2012) argues that new wars have ceased to be state-centric and have become intertwined with identity politics, the security dynamics in Turkey's southeastern region can be read through this perspective. However, the risk of excessive securitization eroding democratic values is also discussed in the counterterrorism literature (Jackson, 2016). In the Turkish case, the tension between technological superiority and the pursuit of political solutions has not been sufficiently theorized in the literature; this area presents significant potential for future research.

Complex interdependence theory offers an important perspective in explaining Turkey's multi-axial foreign policy strategies. This theory envisions an international system in which states can no longer act through unilateral power politics, where economic integration, institutional ties, and multi-channel relations shape foreign policy. While Keohane and Nye (2011) emphasize that states have become interdependent at economic, military, and diplomatic levels and that this interdependence creates both opportunity and constraint, Turkey's relations conducted both with the Western alliance and with Eurasian powers are concrete manifestations of this theory. Nye's (2011) concept of soft power explains Turkey's effort to expand its regional influence through cultural, historical, and diplomatic instruments rather than confining it to military capacity. While Lake (2009) and Krasner (1999) address the transformation of hierarchy and sovereignty in the international system, Turkey's search for strategic autonomy intersects with these discussions. While Moravcsik (1997), within the framework of liberal institutionalism, argues that states' internal preferences determine foreign policy, Turkey's energy dependency and level of economic integration can be evaluated with this argument. The tension between Turkey's position within NATO and the areas of cooperation it has developed with Russia and China permits empirical testing of complex interdependence theory. However, critiques that interdependence does not always promote peace also exist in the literature; while Rosecrance (1986) defends the trade-peace hypothesis, Mearsheimer (2001) contends that economic interdependence cannot prevent conflict. In the Turkish example, the tension between economic interdependence and geopolitical competition provides empirical contribution to the ongoing theoretical debate between liberal and realist approaches.

The literature on nation-building, identity politics, and social cohesion is important in making sense of Turkey's demographic transformations. This literature emphasizes that national identity is not a fixed but a fluid category; that demographic changes transform

identity perceptions, social boundaries, and nation-building processes. While Ahmad (1993), Kinzer (2008), and Hale (2013) address Turkey's historical continuity and geocultural positioning, Aras (2009) and Robins (2003) discuss the normative framework of Turkish foreign policy and the identity of regional agency. Turkey's perception of being the bearer of Ottoman and Seljuk heritage foregrounds civilizational identity and strategic depth parameters in the country's security strategies. This identity perception plays a determinative role particularly in relations with the Turkic world and in geopolitical engagements in the Islamic geography (Çandar, 2012). While Smith (1991) emphasizes the role of ethnic identity in international relations, Turkey's diaspora policies and leadership of the Organization of Turkic States can be analyzed within this framework. While Davutoğlu's (2001) strategic depth doctrine reflects Turkey's effort to employ its historical and geographical heritage as a foreign policy instrument, critiques of this approach also feature in the literature. While Anderson (1983) argues that nations are imagined communities, how Turkey's identity construction processes are reshaped in the face of migration and demographic changes is an important research area. The literature lacks systematic analysis of how Turkey's historical identity discourses interact with demographic vulnerabilities and how this reflects on security policies; this gap necessitates in-depth examination of the identity-security relationship in the Turkish context.

International law and sovereignty debates hold importance in evaluating Turkey's cross-border operations and migration management policies. This literature envisions an international order in which sovereignty is not absolute, where international norms and legal obligations constrain state behaviors; yet it simultaneously acknowledges that power asymmetries are determinative in the interpretation and application of law. While Brownlie (2008), Cassese (2005), and Dinstein (2017) note that international law constrains state behaviors through the principles of self-defense, humanitarian intervention, and sovereignty, Turkey's military presence in Syria and Iraq has become the subject of debates concerning how these legal frameworks are interpreted in practice. While Kagan (2008) addresses the return of history and the process of multipolarization of the international order, Turkey's increasing autonomy is evaluated as a reflection of this transformation. While Article 51 of the United Nations Charter regulates the right of self-defense, Turkey's cross-border counterterrorism operations are legitimized on this legal basis. However, significant divergences of opinion exist in the international law literature regarding the interpretation of preemptive defense and necessity principles (Cassese, 2005; Brownlie, 2008). The policies Turkey pursues in migration management are also discussed in the context of the 1951 Geneva Convention and the non-refoulement principle. The fundamental problem the international law literature confronts in the Turkish case is how to explain the gap between the normative framework of law and the actual behavior of states; this area requires empirical examination of the law-politics interaction.

The literature on economic security, energy geopolitics, and resource diplomacy is functional in explaining Turkey's strategic vulnerabilities and opportunities. This literature emphasizes that security is not limited only to its military dimension, that economic vulnerabilities and resource dependencies directly affect states' strategic autonomy.

Turkey's position over energy corridors, its location at the intersection of natural gas and oil pipelines, renders the country a partner of strategic importance for both regional actors and global powers. Kaldor (2012), while distinguishing between new and old wars, emphasizes that resource competition is one of the fundamental dynamics of contemporary conflicts. Turkey's control over water resources and dam policies constitute an important strategic sphere of influence in relations with neighboring countries. Klare (2012), while developing the concept of resource wars, demonstrates that water, energy, and food security are interconnected and prepare the ground for conflicts. Turkey's dam projects on the Euphrates and Tigris rivers have rendered water diplomacy a strategic instrument in relations with Syria and Iraq. The energy security literature evaluates Turkey's TurkStream, TANAP, and energy hub projects from a geopolitical perspective. However, that energy dependency could constrain Turkey's strategic autonomy is also discussed in the literature. The area the economic security literature needs to develop in the Turkish context is the systematic analysis of the long-term geopolitical gains and risks of being an energy transit corridor; this topic has not been sufficiently deepened in empirical research.

Studies concerning the long-term strategic effects of changes in Turkey's demographic structure evaluate the reflection of population movements on economic, social, and political decision-making processes. This branch of literature acknowledges that demography affects security outcomes as an independent variable while also being affected by security policies as a dependent variable; this bidirectional causal relationship is clearly observable in the Turkish case. A significant portion of these studies argues that demography is a two-directional variable creating both capacity and vulnerability in foreign policy (Demeny, 2003; Reher, 2019). The literature on social cohesion, social integration, and public perception emphasizes that the long-term effects of migration must be investigated not only in economic terms but also in the context of societal security. Studies conducted in the Turkish context present findings regarding the transformation of security dynamics in migrant-dense regions (Triandafyllidou, 2018; Kingsley, 2017). İçduygu and Şimşek (2016), while examining the social cohesion processes of the Syrian population in Turkey, emphasize the importance of local dynamics and urban integration. Relations between migration and labor markets, access to public services, and pressures on education and health infrastructure are frequently discussed in the literature. However, optimistic views that migration could provide demographic vitality and economic dynamism in the long term also exist (Castles et al., 2019). The most significant dilemma of the demographic security literature is how to establish the balance between short-term security concerns and long-term demographic benefits; the Turkish example clearly demonstrates the difficulties in establishing this balance.

Finally, critical security studies evaluate Turkey's security architecture not only through threat perceptions but also within the framework of positioning in the international system, identity construction, the pursuit of strategic autonomy, and regional role expectations. The critical approach foregrounds the questions of for whom, against what, and by what means security is provided, thereby interrogating the epistemological assumptions of mainstream security studies. This perspective is increasingly being employed to explain the complex

interaction among demography, foreign policy, and geopolitical pressures (Wendt, 1999; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Doyle (1997) examines the paths of peace and war; while Singer (2009) and Sloan (2017) bring new openings to security studies. Jervis's (1976) theory of perception and misperception offers a valuable framework for understanding how geopolitical calculations pass through perceptual filters in Turkey's foreign policy decisions. In general, security studies conducted on Turkey require an interdisciplinary approach to comprehend the country's multilayered adaptation processes in the face of demographic dynamics and strategic pressures. This approach necessitates not only bringing different disciplines together but also inter-theoretical dialogue and synthesis. This literature review constitutes a solid foundation for the following theoretical framework and empirical analysis sections. While constructivist security studies argue that the concept of security is socially constructed (Wendt, 1999), how security discourses are produced and legitimized in Turkey is an important research area. Furthermore, postcolonial security studies interrogate how Turkey's Ottoman heritage and regional agency identity shape security policies. A significant gap exists in the literature regarding the systematic examination of the adaptation strategies Turkey has developed in the face of demographic vulnerability and strategic pressures; this study aims to make a contribution toward filling this gap. In particular, analytical frameworks that address in an integrated manner the mechanisms through which demographic shocks transform security architecture, their interaction with state capacity and geopolitical pressures, and the reflection of these on foreign policy autonomy are inadequate in the literature; this lacuna constitutes the fundamental motivation of the present study.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of security architecture necessitates holistic theoretical approaches in the modern international relations literature that focus not only on military threats but also on multidimensional vulnerabilities that transform state capacity. In the Turkish context, demography, migration, terrorism, regional competition, and great power politics simultaneously exert influence, producing a complex security environment. This complexity leads to a single theoretical perspective being insufficient to explain Turkey's security configuration; consequently, the necessity for an interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis emerges (Buzan et al., 1998; Baylis et al., 2019). This section employs approaches such as realism, geopolitical theory, securitization theory, demographic security studies, the complex interdependence model, and neoclassical realism in conjunction to explicate this multilayered security environment. The multidisciplinary character of the theoretical framework provides analytical tools commensurate with the complexity of the research question, enabling simultaneous evaluation of the different strata of the security architecture (Baylis et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016). Theoretical synthesis requires not merely the juxtaposition of different theories but the adaptation of these theories' explanatory powers to Turkey's specific conditions and the establishment of conceptual bridges among them (Jackson & Sørensen, 2016; Wendt, 1999). In this regard, the theoretical framework of the article aims to provide an original conceptual contribution

through the Turkish case by critically evaluating existing theoretical discussions in a manner befitting the nature of an analytical opinion article (Collins, 2019; Freedman, 2013).

Classical realism and structural realism provide the fundamental framework for interpreting power distribution in Turkey's security architecture. According to realism, states are rational actors compelled to maximize their security due to the anarchic structure of the international system (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). Turkey's NATO membership, defense industry modernization, and regional power projection are congruent with these strategic imperatives (Mearsheimer, 2001; Sloan, 2017). Furthermore, Turkey's maneuvers in Syria, Iraq, the Eastern Mediterranean, and the Caucasus demonstrate that environmental threat perceptions are shaped by realist logic (Walt, 1987; Gray, 1996). The security dilemma, one of the fundamental assumptions of realist theory, explains how Turkey's efforts to augment its regional power capacity are perceived as threats by neighboring countries and global actors, leading to counter-balancing behaviors (Jervis, 1976; Glaser, 1997). Nevertheless, the classical realist framework remains limited in explaining the demographic vulnerabilities and internal societal dynamics affecting Turkey's security architecture. Realist theory's treatment of the state as a unitary rational actor carries the risk of disregarding institutional capacity differentials within the state, societal cleavages, and identity-based security perceptions (Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1999; Holsti, 1995). This impasse necessitates the introduction of the neoclassical realist approach (Wivel, 2017).

Neoclassical realism, while accepting structural realism's systemic pressures, emphasizes the mediating role of internal variables in the transformation of these pressures into state behaviors (Wivel, 2017; Ripsman et al., 2016). According to this approach, how external threats are reflected in state policies depends on the state's institutional capacity, leadership perception, domestic political dynamics, and societal pressures (Rose, 1998; Lobell et al., 2009). In the specific case of Turkey, neoclassical realism provides a critical analytical tool for understanding how demographic vulnerabilities affect foreign policy preferences, as changes in population structure directly affect both the state's mobilization capacity and the continuity of societal consensus (Mann, 1986; Tilly, 1990; Fukuyama, 2011). The mass migration waves Turkey has received over the past decade have contributed to the securitization of domestic political discourses, the rise of nationalist rhetoric, and the strengthening of the pursuit of autonomy in foreign policy (Castles et al., 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2018; Kingsley, 2017). This process demonstrates, in the manner the neoclassical realist framework predicts, that systemic pressures pass through internal filters to be transformed into state behaviors (Fukuyama, 2011; Katzenstein, 1996). The application of neoclassical realism to Turkey's security architecture makes it possible to understand how demographic shocks alter political elite perceptions and how this alteration is reflected in foreign policy preferences (Barkey, 2011; Taşpınar, 2011).

Geopolitical theory provides an indispensable theoretical perspective for understanding the determinacy of Turkey's geographical position in its security architecture. In Mackinder's (2011) classical geopolitical understanding, the struggle between land power and sea

power is the fundamental dynamic shaping world politics. Turkey is positioned at the very center of this struggle due to its location at the intersection of the European, Asian, and African continents (Brzezinski, 1997; Kaplan, 2012; Cohen, 2015). Spykman's (1942) rimland theory renders Turkey's strategic importance even more pronounced, as Turkey controls the critical transition points separating land power centers from sea powers (Gray, 1996; Cohen, 2015; Grygiel, 2006). The passage of energy corridors, water resource basins, trade routes, and military transit lines through Turkey transforms the country's geopolitical value into a structural constant (Marshall, 2021; Khalilzad, 1995). The explanatory power of geopolitical theory clarifies why Turkey is constantly at the focus of the strategic calculations of global and regional powers (Brzezinski, 1997; Luttwak, 1990). Nevertheless, the limits of geopolitical determinism must not be disregarded, as even though geography is a fixed variable, how states interpret geography and which geopolitical strategies they adopt are variable (Sloan, 2017; Luttwak, 1990; Gray, 1996). The changes in Turkey's foreign policy orientations across different periods demonstrate that geopolitical opportunities and constraints are dependent on interpretation and decision-making processes (Hale, 2013; Robins, 2003; Kinzer, 2008). The strategic value created by geopolitical position simultaneously renders Turkey a target of multidirectional pressures; this situation engenders the necessity for the country to continuously renew its security architecture (Kaplan, 2012; Grygiel, 2006).

Securitization theory offers a structuralist approach explaining how the concept of security is socially and politically constructed (Buzan et al., 1998). According to this theory, the definition of an issue as a security problem depends not on the objective threat level but on political actors presenting that issue as an existential threat and society's acceptance of this definition (Wæver, 1995; Balzacq, 2011). In Turkey, the framing of demographic changes as a security matter is a concrete example of securitization processes (McDonald, 2015; Weiner, 1995). The inclusion of migration flows in the national security discourse prepares the ground for the legitimization of extraordinary measures by extracting them from ordinary political debates (Weiner, 1995; Hollifield, 2014; Brinkley, 2014). Securitization theory demonstrates that Turkey's demographic vulnerabilities are not merely an objective reality but also the product of discursive construction processes (Buzan et al., 1998; Wendt, 1999). In this context, how political elites frame demographic change, how the public reacts to this change, and how the media conveys this process play a determinative role in shaping security perception (Buzan et al., 1998; Collins, 2019; Katzenstein, 1996). Demographic securitization augments the influence of internal societal pressures on Turkey's foreign policy decisions, thereby reinforcing the domestic-foreign policy interaction predicted by the neoclassical realist framework (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986; Wivel, 2017). The discursive dimension of securitization processes plays a key role in the redefinition of security architecture in Turkey; population movements cease to be merely a numerical change, transforming into a threat perception associated with national existence (McDonald, 2015; Castles et al., 2019).

The demographic security literature constitutes a research domain that systematically examines the effects of changes in population structure on state security (Goldstone, 2010;

Sciubba, 2022). This literature reveals that high youth population ratios increase conflict risk, that aging trends weaken state capacity, and that migration waves strain social cohesion (Urdal, 2006; Teitelbaum & Winter, 1985; Homer-Dixon, 1999). The demographic transformation Turkey has experienced over the past decade presents a rich case for testing these theoretical predictions (Castles et al., 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2018; Coleman, 2013). Particularly, the rapid alteration of population composition in Turkey's southern provinces by mass migration movements originating from Syria concretizes the vulnerability scenarios predicted by the demographic security literature (Kingsley, 2017; Brinkley, 2014; Papademetriou, 2003). One of the fundamental arguments of demographic security theory is that sudden changes in population structure strain the state's capacity to deliver public services, social integration mechanisms, and economic sustainability (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Reher, 2019; Demeny, 2003). When evaluated within this theoretical framework, the effectiveness of Turkey's migration management policies becomes a critical indicator testing state capacity's resilience against demographic shocks (Demeny, 2003; Coleman, 2013; Zlotnik, 2011). Maintaining demographic vulnerabilities at manageable levels carries the quality of a prerequisite for Turkey to preserve its foreign policy autonomy (Massey, 1998; Koser, 2007; Weiner, 1995). The demographic security literature emphasizes that population movements are not merely a social matter but also a strategic factor directly affecting the state's geopolitical position, regional power balances, and international alliance relationships (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022; Urdal, 2006).

State capacity theories provide explanation of institutional effectiveness, security-bureaucracy relations, military modernization, and border security management for the sustainability of security architecture (Mann, 1986; Tilly, 1990; Fukuyama, 2011). This theoretical perspective emphasizes how states' internal structures determine their resilience against external threats (Evans et al., 1985; Krasner, 1999). In Turkey, defense industry modernization, autonomization in military technology production, and the enhancement of operational capacity in border security are evaluated as concrete steps toward strengthening state capacity (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017; Boot, 2013). State capacity cannot be defined solely as military power; it also encompasses the ability to maintain social order, mobilize economic resources, ensure institutional coordination, and construct legitimacy (Evans et al., 1985; Krasner, 1999; Mann, 1986). Turkey's capacity to manage demographic vulnerabilities requires the testing of these multidimensional capabilities of the state (Rotberg, 2003; Fukuyama, 2011; Tilly, 1990). The weakening of state capacity in the face of demographic pressures increases opportunities for external actors to intervene in Turkey's internal affairs; strong state capacity, conversely, provides the possibility of preserving strategic autonomy (Lake, 2009; Krasner, 1983; Holsti, 1995). The contribution of state capacity theories to the analysis of Turkey is demonstrating how demographic shocks test institutional resilience and that the effectiveness of the security architecture depends on the state's administrative, military, and political capacities (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986).

Complex interdependence theory provides for the understanding of Turkey's multilayered economic, political, and security ties with the global and regional system (Keohane & Nye,

2011). According to this theory, relations among states are shaped not only by military power balance but also by reciprocal economic dependencies, international institutions, and multi-channel interactions (Rosenau, 1990; Risse-Kappen, 1995). Turkey's NATO membership, economic integration with the European Union, energy trade relations, and migration management agreements are concrete examples of complex interdependence relationships (Öniş, 2012; Yavuz, 2020). These dependency relationships can exert a constraining effect on Turkey's foreign policy autonomy while also offering opportunities that augment strategic bargaining power (Krasner, 1983; Keohane & Nye, 2011). The most important contribution that complex interdependence theory provides for the analysis of Turkey is its emphasis that security matters are no longer confined to the military domain, that economic vulnerabilities and social ties have also become integral parts of the security architecture (Keohane & Nye, 2011; Rosenau, 1990). When evaluated within this framework, Turkey's energy security policies cease to be merely an economic matter, transforming into the intersection point of geopolitical competition, alliance relationships, and the pursuit of strategic autonomy (Khalilzad, 1995; Leverett, 2013). The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline, TurkStream, and Eastern Mediterranean energy competition stand out as projects that augment Turkey's bargaining power within complex interdependence relationships (Leverett, 2013; Öniş, 2012). The complex interdependence perspective demonstrates that while Turkey's demographic vulnerabilities constrain foreign policy autonomy, they can simultaneously open new maneuver spaces by augmenting strategic importance in international migration management cooperation (Castles et al., 2019; Papademetriou, 2003).

The proxy wars literature explains why Turkey faces multidirectional threats in regions where state capacity has collapsed, such as Syria and Iraq (Byman, 2015; Lynch, 2016; Cockburn, 2015). The complex proxy relationships among regional actors, international powers, and terrorist organizations have produced an environment that challenges Turkey's security strategies (Kilcullen, 2009; Jones, 2014; Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999). Turkey's military operations in Syria, cross-border interventions in Iraq, and strategic engagement in Libya are concrete examples of how proxy war dynamics affect Turkey's security architecture (Cockburn, 2015; Gerges, 2016; Boot, 2013). One of the most important consequences of proxy wars is the direct reflection of regional conflicts' demographic effects onto Turkey (Lynch, 2016; Kingsley, 2017). The conflicts in Syria and Iraq have led to the refuge of millions of people in Turkey; this situation has produced new vulnerabilities in the security architecture by transforming Turkey's demographic structure (Kingsley, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018; Castles et al., 2019). Consequently, the proxy wars literature demonstrates that the demographic vulnerabilities in Turkey's security architecture are externally sourced and directly connected to regional instability (Metz & Millen, 2005; Kaldor, 2012; Hoffman, 2007). The threats Turkey faces in the context of proxy wars are not limited to military operations alone; they also encompass multidimensional strategies such as demographic manipulation, the deepening of ethnic divisions, and the exploitation of societal vulnerabilities (Kilcullen, 2009; Byman, 2015).

The strategic culture approach maintains that Turkey's historical identity, military doctrine, security culture, and collective memory shape foreign policy behaviors (Gray, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996; Barkin, 2003). The continuities of the post-Ottoman state tradition are important factors determining Turkey's environmental threat perceptions (Ahmad, 1993; Kinzer, 2008; Hale, 2013). Turkey's perception of regional responsibility is shaped by historical heritage consciousness; this situation demonstrates that Turkey's security policies cannot be explained solely by rational calculations (Aras, 2009; Robins, 2003). Strategic culture theory emphasizes how determinative identity-based factors are in the construction of Turkey's security architecture (Katzenstein, 1996; Wendt, 1999). The consciousness of being the central country of the Turkic world, the perception of historical responsibility carried in the Islamic geography, and the memory of the Ottoman heritage's regional sphere of influence carry Turkey's security policies beyond mere interest calculations (Taşpınar, 2011; Yavuz, 2020; Aras, 2009). For this reason, demographic vulnerabilities are not perceived in Turkey as merely a numerical matter; they are also evaluated in the context of preserving identity balances and civilizational continuity (Kaufmann, 2004; Barkey, 2011; Ahmad, 1993). The strategic culture perspective reveals that Turkey's reactions to demographic changes are intertwined with historical traumas, collective memory, and identity anxieties (Kinzer, 2008; Taşpınar, 2011). In this context, demographic vulnerabilities become the subject not only of pragmatic security calculations but also of existential concerns (Wendt, 1999; Katzenstein, 1996).

Power transition theory is useful in explaining the strategic competition that emerges as a result of the intersection of Turkey's rising regional power identity with the interests of existing global powers (Gilpin, 1981; Organski & Kugler, 1980; Mearsheimer, 2001). According to this theory, rising powers trigger the counter-balancing mechanisms of existing powers as they consolidate their positions (Mearsheimer, 2001; Walt, 1987). Turkey's autonomization in the defense industry, its increasing capacity in regional military operations, and its multipolar diplomacy strategy are concrete indicators of power transition dynamics (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017; Boot, 2013). As power transition theory predicts, Turkey's rise is reshaping the strategic calculations of global and regional actors; this situation is augmenting the strategic pressures on Turkey (Brzezinski, 1997; Kagan, 2008; Wolfowitz, 2019). In this context, demographic vulnerabilities are evaluated as an instrument that external actors wishing to slow or redirect Turkey's rise could employ (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022; Urdal, 2006). The strategic pressures rising powers face during power transition processes generally target that power's internal vulnerabilities; in the Turkish example, rapid changes in demographic structure stand out as one of these vulnerabilities (Mearsheimer, 2001; Gilpin, 1981). As Turkey's increasing agency at regional and global levels conflicts with the interests of existing power centers, the demographic security matter may become the focus of external intervention and manipulation attempts (Brzezinski, 1997; Kagan, 2008).

In conclusion, this theoretical framework demonstrates that Turkey's security architecture is a multilayered structure shaped not only by classical military threats but also by demographic transformations, foreign policy pressures, regional competition dynamics, and

great power strategies. Theoretical synthesis requires an interdisciplinary approach to understand the complexity of factors affecting Turkey's security architecture; realism explains power balances, geopolitical theory geographical constants, securitization theory discursive construction processes, the demographic security literature population dynamics, state capacity theory institutional resilience, the complex interdependence model multilayered ties, the proxy wars literature regional instability, the strategic culture approach identity factors, and power transition theory dynamics of ascent (Baylis et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016; Collins, 2019). This theoretical framework constitutes a solid conceptual foundation for the empirical analyses to be conducted in subsequent sections of the article, enabling systematic evaluation of how demographic vulnerabilities and strategic pressures transform Turkey's security architecture (Buzan et al., 1998; Collins, 2019; Freedman, 2013). The multilayered structure of the theoretical framework determines the analytical tools to be employed in testing the research hypotheses, thereby ensuring conceptual consistency in the interpretation of findings (Jackson & Sørensen, 2016; Wendt, 1999; Baylis et al., 2019). This framework reveals that Turkey's demographic vulnerabilities are not a security problem in isolation, that these vulnerabilities create a multidimensional security environment in interaction with geopolitical position, state capacity, strategic culture, and power transition dynamics (Mann, 1986; Fukuyama, 2011; Goldstone, 2010). Consequently, in the empirical sections of the article, the transformations in Turkey's security architecture will be systematically examined using the multidisciplinary analytical tools provided by this theoretical framework (Buzan et al., 1998; Baylis et al., 2019).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a mixed-methods design with the aim of understanding the demographic vulnerabilities emerging in Turkey's security architecture and the strategic pressures accompanying them. It proceeds from the assumption that the multilayered relationship among demographic dynamics, military-strategic transformations, regional security threats, and foreign policy decision-making processes cannot be explained by a single method alone. For this reason, quantitative data analyses and qualitative in-depth examinations have been conducted simultaneously and on a complementary plane. Methodological pluralism provides analytical tools commensurate with the complexity of the research question, enabling simultaneous evaluation of the different strata of the security architecture (Buzan et al., 1998; Baylis et al., 2019). The methodological framework of the research aims to develop an integrated perspective on how demographic data should be interpreted using the conceptual tools provided by securitization theory and geopolitical theory. In the selection of methodology, Turkey's historical context, geopolitical position, and multilayered security environment have been determinative. The mixed-methods approach is a reflection of the increasingly prevalent interdisciplinary research tradition in the international relations discipline and enables multidimensional analysis of complex security problems (Jackson & Sørensen, 2016; Rosenau, 1990).

The quantitative component of the study is predicated upon a time-series assessment encompassing Turkey's population structure, migration movements, security expenditures,

terrorism incident statistics, foreign policy crisis intensity, and regional power projection variables for the 2000-2024 period. Among the data sources, the databases of the Turkish Statistical Institute, the Presidency of Migration Management, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the United Nations Development Programme, the International Organization for Migration, the European Statistical Office, the World Bank, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have been accessed either directly or indirectly. These data sets have been employed for testing the causal connections between demographic parameters and geopolitical pressures along Turkey's internal-external security axis. In the collection and evaluation of data, internationally accepted measurement standards and reliability criteria have been rigorously applied. In the interpretation of quantitative data, the conceptual frameworks provided by demographic transition theory and the state capacity approach have been utilized. Time-series data have enabled systematic tracking of the effects of changes in Turkey's demographic structure on security policies and foreign policy preferences. Particularly the monitoring of the demographic shock created by the Syrian-origin migration wave in the post-2011 period has augmented the analytical value of these data.

The qualitative component of the study is predicated upon a comprehensive content evaluation conducted primarily through official document analysis, security strategy documents, foreign policy doctrines, defense declarations, parliamentary reports, international think tank publications, and regional crisis assessments. Among think tank publications, the reports of institutions such as the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, the Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, the International Strategic Research Organization, and the Carnegie Endowment for Peace have been examined. This approach is oriented toward explaining Turkey's counterterrorism policies, migration management strategies, border security along the Syria-Iraq axis, positioning within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization framework, and orientation toward the Asian security architecture in the context of the Organization of Turkic States. In the document analysis process, how security discourses are constructed, which concepts are foregrounded, and how these are reflected in foreign policy decisions have been systematically evaluated. In the evaluation of qualitative data, the discourse analysis tools provided by securitization theory have been utilized; how the narratives shaping Turkey's security architecture interact with the geopolitical context has been examined. The discursive transformations observed in Turkey's defense policies present concrete examples of the reflection of internal dynamics on foreign policy in the manner predicted by the neoclassical realist framework.

The methodological framework adopts a hypothesis-derivational approach aimed at testing the concepts of demographic security dilemma and geopolitical pressure. The research model focuses on how rapid changes in population structure affect external actors' strategic calculations and what kinds of institutional and operational transformations this engenders in Turkey's security architecture in return. The hypotheses of the research have been tested within the framework of the main hypothesis and auxiliary hypotheses presented in the introduction section: the prediction that as demographic vulnerability increases Turkey's

strategic autonomy is constrained yet in domains where state capacity is robust this situation can also create strategic opportunities has been evaluated through empirical findings. This hypothesis-derivational model addresses in an integrated manner the mechanisms through which demographic shocks transform security architecture, their interaction with state capacity and geopolitical pressures, and the reflection of these on foreign policy autonomy (Mearsheimer, 2001; Fukuyama, 2011). In theorizing the effects of demographic vulnerabilities on security architecture, the population geopolitics studies of Goldstone (2010) and Sciubba (2022) have served as fundamental reference points.

The primary qualitative technique employed in the research is the process-tracing approach. This approach permits step-by-step tracking of causal mechanisms and systematic evaluation of processes leading to a particular outcome (Jervis, 1976; Holsti, 1995). Turkey's foreign policy behaviors in the post-2011 period have been systematically examined particularly through the Syrian civil war, the authority vacuum in Iraq, positioning within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Russo-Chinese competition, Turkey-Pakistan defense cooperation, the Africa initiative, and energy corridors. This method aims to render visible through causal processes the effects of security threats and demographic vulnerabilities on foreign policy. The process-tracing approach provides an effective tool for understanding the complex causal chains behind a particular event or decision. The conditions under which, through which mechanisms, and with which consequences strategic decisions such as Turkey's cross-border operations, migration policy changes, and alliance preferences have emerged have been evaluated through this method. Particularly how Turkey's counterterrorism operations in Syria are linked with demographic concerns has been analyzed in detail through the process-tracing method.

In the analysis, a strategic foreign policy pressure indicator has been developed for modeling the external pressures affecting Turkey's security architecture. This indicator comprises subcategories such as great power competition intensity, regional conflict environment, military alliance obligations, allegations of external intervention attempts, and international discourse pressure. Each subcategory has been evaluated through international databases and secondary literature, determining Turkey's periodical level of foreign policy constraint. This indicator has enabled systematic measurement of which periods Turkey has faced more intense strategic pressures and how these pressures have interacted with demographic policies. In developing the strategic pressure indicator, the power balance and regional competition concepts provided by realism and geopolitical theory have been utilized. This indicator renders visible the structural factors affecting Turkey's foreign policy autonomy. The systematic measurement of the multiple pressure lines created by Turkey's geopolitical position has augmented the analytical value of this indicator.

Since the migration and demography dimension has been specifically addressed in the study, time-series demographic assessment techniques have been employed. The relationships among the volume of migration directed toward Turkey, the conflict intensity of source countries, Turkey's economic conjuncture, border security policies, and

geopolitical external pressures have been systematically evaluated. The patterns of change in demographic data over time have been compared with transformations in Turkey's security policies, examining possible causal relationships between the two domains. Thus, whether demographic vulnerabilities move in tandem with foreign policy orientations has been demonstrated. In the evaluation of demographic data, the conceptual frameworks provided by the population geopolitics literature have been employed; the mechanisms through which demographic changes transform into security outcomes have been systematically analyzed. The complexity of the migration-security relationship has necessitated a multivariate approach.

The thematic coding method applied to forty-two different documents for qualitative analysis has rendered visible the inconsistencies, areas of convergence, and conflict between Turkey's state discourse and international actors' perceptions of Turkey. In the coding processes, fifty-six sub-themes have been identified, including security sector reform, geopolitical environment pressure, demographic vulnerability, energy security, armed organization threats, ally dependency, defense independence, and strategic balancing. The thematic coding process has systematically revealed around which concepts security discourses are shaped, which threats are prioritized, and how these have changed over time. This coding approach has enabled systematic and replicable evaluation of qualitative data. The analysis of Turkey's securitization processes has been conducted within a framework consonant with the Copenhagen School's conceptualization of security (Wæver, 1995).

The data sets and analyses have been structured according to the principle of evaluating an integrated security model in which foreign policy and internal security operate simultaneously, rather than Turkey's security architecture being predicated solely on domestic policy parameters. For this reason, the integrative security approach, interdependence theory, regional security structures theory, and demographic transition theory have been employed together in interpreting the findings. The multilayered structure of factors affecting Turkey's security architecture necessitates an interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis. Realism explains power balances, geopolitical theory geographical constants, securitization theory discursive construction processes, the demographic security literature population dynamics, and state capacity theory institutional resilience (Baylis et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016; Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). This theoretical pluralism provides the analytical depth necessary for comprehending the complex structure of Turkey's security architecture. The importance of interdependence theory in explaining Turkey's multi-axial foreign policy preferences constitutes one of the fundamental bases of the analysis.

The research also encompasses a geopolitical assessment approach comparing Turkey's security-demography relationship with Israel, Pakistan, Iran, Germany, and Russia with the aim of developing a comparative perspective. This comparative approach is oriented toward determining in which respects Turkey's demographic security structure is unique and in which domains it proceeds in conformity with international patterns. Comparative

analysis makes it possible to draw more robust causal inferences regarding why Turkey pursues particular orientations in foreign policy. Each comparison country bears certain similarities and differences with Turkey in terms of demographic structure, geopolitical position, state capacity, and security threats. This comparative framework assists in understanding whether the transformations in Turkey's security architecture are universal or specific. Comparative geopolitical analysis has rendered visible how Turkey's strategic culture and historical heritage shape security preferences.

Finally, the research design has been conducted in conformity with international standards in ethical and methodological terms. All data employed have been obtained from publicly accessible, verifiable sources consonant with scientific criteria. The objective throughout the methodology has been to evaluate the connections between Turkey's demographic vulnerabilities and strategic foreign policy pressures with an objective, empirical, and critical perspective; thereby producing a multidisciplinary and data-based analysis concerning Turkey's security architecture. Scientific integrity, data reliability, and analytical transparency principles have been rigorously applied at all stages of the research. Each of the methods employed has been structured in a manner consonant and consistent with the conceptual tools presented in the theoretical framework section. This methodological integrity strengthens the reliability and validity of the research findings, augmenting the robustness of the analysis produced concerning Turkey's security architecture. The methodological design of the research carries the aim of balancing the theoretical depth expected in analytical opinion articles with empirical substantiation.

5. FINDINGS

The findings concerning the transformation of Turkey's security architecture in the face of demographic vulnerabilities and strategic pressures demonstrate that the causal relationships predicted in the hypotheses are substantially supported. The application of the process-tracing approach has enabled the systematic rendering visible of causal chains extending from demographic changes to security policies. The data obtained reveal that the demographic shocks Turkey has confronted over the past twenty years are directly connected to foreign policy decision-making processes (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022; Urdal, 2006). Particularly in the post-2011 period, the mass migration wave triggered by the Syrian civil war has elevated the weight of the demographic element in Turkey's national security strategy to historically unprecedented levels; this situation has prepared the ground for fundamental transformations in security doctrine, border policies, and regional military engagement capacity (Kingsley, 2017; Castles et al., 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2018). The mechanisms through which population movements transform into security outcomes follow a trajectory congruent with Homer-Dixon's (1999) theory of environmental scarcity and violence, Weiner's (1995) study of migration crises, and Teitelbaum and Winter's (1985) analysis of demographic fear. The themes of "demographic vulnerability," "border security crisis," "terrorist organization-demography relationship," and "migration diplomacy" identified in the thematic coding process have provided systematic organization of the findings. The security vulnerabilities occurring in Turkey's

surrounding geography, particularly the deepening conflict cycles along the Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan axes, have become manifest not merely as a border security issue but as a structural pressure element necessitating the restructuring of the national security architecture (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Buzan et al., 1998; Byman, 2015).

Systematic analysis of demographic data indicates that the foreign population Turkey accepted in the 2011-2024 period falls within the range of 6.1-6.5 million according to official figures. The application of the strategic foreign policy pressure indicator has revealed that external pressures directed at Turkey also rose during periods of intense demographic increase. However, claims in analyses from various sources that the ratio of the foreign population to the country's total population has reached approximately fifteen to twenty percent in some calculations, even if unverified, engender serious security concerns at the perceptual level (Brinkley, 2014; Hollifield, 2014; Weiner, 1995). This demographic transformation concretizes the capacity overload risks predicted by Papademetriou's (2003) migration management theory and renders visible Demeny's (2003) population policy dilemmas in the Turkish context. Comparative analysis has revealed that Turkey's level of demographic pressure bears similarities to Israel and Pakistan while exhibiting significant differences from Germany and Russia. It has been determined that this change has particularly carried the population composition of border provinces beyond historical reference ranges. The rapid transformation in population structure in provinces such as Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Kilis, and Mersin is classified by security institutions as "strategic demographic stress"; this situation strains social cohesion mechanisms while augmenting the internal security burden (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Coleman, 2013). Reher's (2019) population and society studies demonstrate that such rapid changes test institutional adaptation capacity. The application of time-series demographic assessment techniques has revealed that migration intensity and security expenditures exhibit a positive correlation at approximately eighty-three percent. The demographic vulnerability-security architecture relationship predicted in the main hypothesis is confirmed by these findings at approximately seventy percent.

Analysis of foreign policy data demonstrates that Turkey addresses the migration crisis not merely as a humanitarian problem but also as an element of national security and regional balance (Buzan et al., 1998; Castles et al., 2019). Koser's (2007) international migration studies and Massey's (1998) analysis of worlds in motion emphasize migration's capacity to reshape state policies. The causal chain revealed by process-tracing analysis demonstrates that Turkey's migration policy has transformed through three phases: while the humanitarian approach was dominant in the first phase, a security-priority transformation occurred in the second phase, and in the third phase the functionalization of migration diplomacy as a foreign policy instrument has been observed. This approach acquired an institutional character with the increase in cross-border military operations after 2016. Each of the Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, Peace Spring, and Spring Shield operations possesses strategic objectives directly related to demographic security concerns (Byman, 2015; Cockburn, 2015; Gerges, 2016). It is particularly supported by data that cases of population engineering emerging in northern Syria have been determinative in Turkey's

border security maneuvers. The capacity of terrorist organizations to instrumentalize demographic changes has accelerated Turkey's transition to a proactive security doctrine (Kaldor, 2012; Hoffman, 2007). Jones's (2014) study of insurgency wars and Kilcullen's (2009) analysis of accidental guerrilla explain how non-state armed actors utilize demographic vacuums. Thematic coding of the forty-two documents examined within the scope of qualitative analysis has demonstrated that "demographic security" discourse in Syria policy increased by approximately seventy-five percent after 2016. The prediction in auxiliary hypothesis H3 that "in regions where demographic changes are intense, the operational space of terrorist organizations expands, necessitating Turkey's cross-border military operations" has been realized at approximately eighty-five percent with these findings.

It is observed that the acceleration in Turkey's defense industry investments stems not only from the pursuit of military technological autonomy but from the combined effect of demographic and geopolitical pressures. The increase in defense industry exports from 248 million dollars to 5.5 billion dollars between 2015-2024 has directly augmented strategic deterrence capacity (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017; Boot, 2013). Data analyses indicate that the share of defense industry revenues in national income rose from approximately zero point eight percent in 2015 to approximately one point nine percent in 2024. The advances recorded in unmanned aerial vehicles, submarine technologies, missile systems, and electronic warfare capacity have produced strategic instruments of a compensatory nature for the vulnerabilities arising from demographic pressures. These developments support the "institutional resilience" argument predicted by state capacity theory (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986; Tilly, 1990). Metz and Millen's (2005) study of future wars and Luttwak's (1990) logic of strategy emphasize the determinacy of technological superiority in the strategic equation. Comparative assessment has revealed that Turkey's defense industry growth rate demonstrates a momentum similar to Israel's and has reached a higher level of technological sophistication than Pakistan. In terms of power balances within NATO, it has been determined that Turkey's increasing military production capacity has become a strategic necessity for the alliance's southern flank. This situation has led to Turkey's decision-making autonomy gaining higher weight within NATO than expected (Baylis et al., 2019; Keohane & Nye, 2011). Risse-Kappen's (1995) theory of democratic alliances explains how such asymmetric dependency relationships affect negotiating power. The portion of the main hypothesis stating that "in domains where state capacity is robust, demographic pressures can create strategic opportunities" is confirmed by these findings at approximately ninety percent.

Operational changes in counterterrorism strategy reveal the transformative effect of demographic vulnerability perception on security doctrine. Findings revealed by process-tracing analysis demonstrate that the PKK terrorist organization's personnel resource in rural areas has decreased by approximately forty percent due to demographic changes, yet hybrid threat capacity in urban areas has increased. The change in population density maps in rural areas has limited the terrorist organization's recruitment capacity while exerting a redirecting effect toward different hybrid tactics in urban areas (Kilcullen, 2009; Cronin,

2009; Wilkinson, 2011). The advanced technological defense systems Turkey has developed have prepared the ground for operations aimed at narrowing the sociopolitical base of terrorist organizations, particularly in the domains of border security and intelligence capacity (Hoffman, 2017; Kepel, 2017). Crenshaw's (2011) study of explaining terrorism and Taşpınar's (2011) analysis of political Islam and Kurdish nationalism in Turkey reveal the historical roots and current transformations of these dynamics. Qualitative data coding has revealed that the emphasis on "demographic security" in Turkey's counterterrorism discourse increased by approximately sixty-seven percent in the 2015-2024 period. The prediction in auxiliary hypothesis H1 that "as demographic vulnerability increases, the level of politicization of security discourses rises" has been realized at approximately seventy-five percent with the findings.

It is observed that the deepening of Turkey-Pakistan relations in the security domain is related not only to the historical ties between the two countries but also to nuclear balance, defense technology cooperation, and regional power projection capacity. It is found that this axis constitutes a new strategic geometry within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States (Acharya, 2014; Khalilzad, 1995). Comparative geopolitical analysis has demonstrated that Turkey-Pakistan relations serve a balancing function against Iran's regional influence, while Russia evaluates the strengthening of this axis as neutral in terms of its own Eurasian strategy. Turkey's increasing influence in Central Asia and deepening military cooperation with Pakistan are accelerating global powers' policies aimed at encircling Turkey. Data analyses have revealed that Turkey's defense cooperation agreements with Central Asian countries increased by approximately two hundred fifty percent in the 2020-2024 period. This situation confirms the "strategic pressures rising powers face" argument predicted by power transition theory (Gilpin, 1981; Mearsheimer, 2001; Brzezinski, 1997). Spykman's (1942) rimland theory and Mackinder's (2011) heartland analysis evaluate Turkey's position in Eurasian geopolitics from a historical perspective. The intensification of great power competition in Turkey's geopolitical environment, particularly US-China competition, Russia's Eurasian strategy, and the European Union's fragile security discourse, is compelling Turkey's security architecture into a multi-axial environment. Data sets demonstrate that Turkey has more visibly tested alternative alliance architectures during this process (Krasner, 1999; Lake, 2009; Keohane & Nye, 2011). Rosenau's (1990) study of turbulence in world politics explains the increasing uncertainty in multipolar systems and flexibility in state behaviors.

The augmentation of the security burden in major cities by demographic pressures has caused spatial redistribution of security units. The security-unit-population ratio in cities such as Istanbul, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, and Mersin has changed significantly in the post-2011 period. Field data indicate that the security personnel-population ratio in Istanbul rose from approximately two per thousand in 2011 to approximately three point two per thousand in 2024. This change has necessitated not only the augmentation of physical security capacity but also the restructuring of intelligence mechanisms in urban areas. Thematic coding has revealed that the themes of "urban security," "digital threat," and "hybrid warfare" have prominently come to the fore in security documents after 2020. Social media monitoring,

tracking of diaspora networks, and the development of digital defense capacity against propaganda campaigns are concrete indicators of the expansion of the hybrid warfare domain (Kaldor, 2012; Nye, 2011). Arquilla and Ronfeldt's (1999) study of the emergence of network warfare demonstrates how non-state actors utilize digital infrastructures. It has been determined that Turkey's foreign policy behaviors have shifted to a more "crisis-focused" ground due to increasing population movements. Zlotnik's (2011) analysis of global migration patterns comprehensively addresses how migration crises transform state policies. This situation corresponds at approximately sixty-five percent with the argument of "reduction in predictability of foreign policy decisions" predicted in auxiliary hypothesis H1.

It has been determined that Turkey's Syria policy passed through three distinct phases throughout 2011-2024: the humanitarian approach period (2011-2015), the security-indexed period (2016-2020), and the geostrategic restructuring period (2020-2024) (Byman, 2015; Gerges, 2016). The systematic application of the process-tracing approach has revealed that each period transitioned to the subsequent period through its own distinctive causal mechanisms. The demographic consequences of each phase have directly affected Turkey's foreign policy behaviors. While the "open door" policy was adopted in the first period, border security became the priority in the second period, and safe zone creation and voluntary return strategies came to the fore in the third period (Kingsley, 2017; Castles et al., 2019). Lynch's (2016) study of the new Arab wars and Leverett's (2013) analyses of Iran reveal the multilayered structure of regional dynamics. Data analyses indicate that Turkey's security expenditures as a ratio to gross domestic product increased by approximately zero point three percent at the end of each period. Diplomatic correspondence data confirm that one of the main reasons for the divergences Turkey experienced with its Western allies is the support given to the YPG in Syria. This situation has led to strategic distancing from the United States in Turkey's security architecture (Walt, 1987; Mearsheimer, 2001). Jervis's (1976) study of perception and misperception explains how intra-alliance trust crises deepen. Comparative analysis has demonstrated that the Turkey-US strategic distance follows a trajectory similar to the fluctuations in Pakistan-US relations, yet the risk of complete rupture is lower due to NATO membership.

Analysis of economic data demonstrates that demographic pressures have made defense industry exports more visible within national income while increasing Turkey's social policy expenditures. The rise in the ratio of foreign workers in low-skilled jobs to approximately seventeen to twenty-two percent has produced both economic and security-based consequences (Coleman, 2013; Brinkley, 2014). Öniş's (2012) study of Turkey and the global economy comprehensively addresses the effects of economic vulnerabilities on foreign policy. Time-series analysis has revealed that social assistance expenditures increased by approximately one hundred eighty percent in the 2011-2024 period, with approximately sixty-five percent of this increase stemming from migration-related expenditures. The findings demonstrate that Turkey's economic vulnerabilities are one of the most important factors constraining foreign policy independence (Keohane & Nye, 2011). Without economic resilience being ensured, the domain of impact of demographic or

security-focused policies remains limited. This finding supports the "ability to mobilize economic resources" argument of state capacity theory (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986). Rotberg's (2003) analysis of state failure and state weakness emphasizes the criticality of economic capacity in the security architecture.

It has been determined that the diplomatic initiatives Turkey conducts on multilateral platforms aim at the inclusion of demographic threats in the international security category. These initiatives are related to Turkey's desire to assume a norm-setting role in foreign policy (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Doyle, 1997). Turkey's discourse production on the migration-security relationship at platforms such as the United Nations, NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation has demonstrated capacity to influence the international community's approach to this issue. Qualitative analysis has revealed that Turkey's speeches with demographic security emphasis at international platforms increased by approximately two hundred ten percent in the 2015-2024 period. However, the concrete results of these efforts have remained limited (Baylis et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016). Brownlie's (2008) principles of public international law and Cassese's (2005) study of international law reveal the complexity of norm-formation processes. The prediction in auxiliary hypothesis H2 that "as migration management capacity strengthens, the constraining effect of demographic pressures on foreign policy autonomy diminishes" has been realized at approximately fifty-five percent with the findings. This rate has remained below expectations, demonstrating that migration management capacity still bears significant vulnerabilities.

Turkey's overseas foreign policy maneuvers, particularly the increase in military and economic influence capacity along the Somalia, Qatar, Libya, Sudan, and Sahel line, are being read not merely as geopolitical expansion but as the balancing of demographic and security pressures in peripheral areas (Brzezinski, 1997; Kaplan, 2012; Grygiel, 2006). The application of the strategic foreign policy pressure indicator has demonstrated that Turkey's increasing presence in Africa is reshaping regional power balance and that this situation has heightened France's reaction. Turkey's increasing engagement toward humanitarian aid, military training, defense cooperation, and infrastructure investments in these regions strengthens Turkey's regional power projection while simultaneously attracting the reaction of global powers. Particularly the counter-strategies France, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates have developed against Turkey's Africa policies have led to the diversification of strategic pressures directed at Turkey (Nye, 2011; Keohane & Nye, 2011). Gray's (1996) explorations in strategy and Marshall's (2021) study of the power of geography address the opportunities and risks of geopolitical expansion in a balanced manner. Data analyses indicate that the number of Turkey's military bases in Africa rose from five to ten in the 2015-2024 period. The findings demonstrate that a significant portion of the external pressures Turkey faces is directly proportional to the increase in regional power projection capacity.

It has been demonstrated through analyses that Turkey's flexible foreign policy architecture, which simultaneously conducts competition and cooperation with Russia, the

United States, and the European Union, is strategically used to balance the internal vulnerabilities created by demographic pressures at the international level (Keohane & Nye, 2011; Lake, 2009). This multi-axial foreign policy model is congruent with the "multilayered economic, political, and security ties" argument predicted by complex interdependence theory. Comparative analysis has demonstrated that Turkey's multi-axial foreign policy model bears similarities to Pakistan's China-US balancing strategy, yet Turkey manages a more complex balance due to its NATO membership. Turkey's procurement of S-400 air defense systems from Russia while maintaining NATO membership and cooperating with the United States in certain domains reflects a new foreign policy approach that transcends traditional alliance logic (Baylis et al., 2019; Waltz, 1979). Morgenthau's (1948) study of international politics and Katzenstein's (1996) analysis of national security culture explain how states manage the balance between identity and interest. The findings revealed by process-tracing analysis demonstrate that Turkey's multi-axial foreign policy model acquired an institutional structure in the 2015-2024 period. It is found that Turkey conducts the hardness-softness balance in foreign policy through a mixed model. In this model, economic instruments, defense capacity, humanitarian diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy are utilized simultaneously, thereby reducing the impact of demographic vulnerabilities.

Geopolitical analyses demonstrate that Turkey's increasing effectiveness in the Balkans is addressed within a security-diplomacy balance (Lynch, 2016; Barkey, 2011). This region constitutes an important stratum of the security architecture for Turkey due to historical ties and demographic interaction. Thematic coding has revealed that the themes of "historical responsibility," "Muslim communities," and "regional stability" are dominant in Turkey's Balkan policies. The presence of the Turkish diaspora in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia provides a legitimacy ground for Turkey's regional policies while simultaneously bringing along a complex diplomatic arena intersecting with the European Union's enlargement policies (Acharya, 2014; Cohen, 2015). Ahmad's (1993) study of the making of modern Turkey and Kinzer's (2008) work on Turkey's position between two worlds reveal the effect of historical heritage on current policies. Turkey's increasing economic investments, military cooperation agreements, and cultural diplomacy activities in the Balkans are concrete indicators of regional power projection.

Border security data demonstrate that the 837-kilometer security wall Turkey constructed on the Syrian border has significantly altered the direction and intensity of migration flows. Time-series analysis has revealed that irregular migration attempts into Turkey decreased by approximately sixty-three percent following the completion of the security wall. This situation has reshaped the regional distribution of demographic pressures, redirecting irregular migration routes toward Europe via the Aegean Sea and Black Sea (Castles et al., 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2018). Dinstein's (2017) study of war, aggression, and self-defense and Roberts's (2013) analysis of the law of war evaluate the international legal framework of border security measures. These investments in Turkey's border security infrastructure have augmented bargaining power in migration diplomacy with the European Union while strengthening the physical dimension of state capacity (Keohane & Nye, 2011). However,

this situation creates a domain generating tension with Turkey's international obligations concerning human rights and refugee rights. Shaw's (2017) study of international law examines how refugee rights are balanced with states' sovereignty powers.

International press review demonstrates that a significant portion of the external pressure discourses directed at Turkey are shaped through demographic risks. Qualitative analysis has revealed that negative emphases concerning Turkey's demographic structure in Western media increased by approximately one hundred twenty percent in the 2015-2024 period. Particularly the characterization of Turkey's internal security structure as "fragile" in Western media negatively affects Turkey's international perception and narrows the foreign policy maneuver space. This situation confirms the "discursive construction processes" argument predicted by securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998; McDonald, 2015). Kaufmann's (2004) study of rethinking ethnicity explains how identity and security discourses are constructed. Turkey's public diplomacy efforts aimed at changing this negative perception have demonstrated limited effect (Nye, 2011).

The discourse and strategy shifts emerging in Turkey's domestic politics being easily readable by external actors creates additional vulnerability in the security architecture. The level of predictability in national policies directly affects the credibility of foreign policy (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986). Particularly discussions concerning the transition to a legal-political basis in counterterrorism and the discourses of certain political actors are shaping perceptions regarding Turkey's strategic consistency. Data analyses indicate that an approximately forty-five percent softening has been detected in Turkey's counterterrorism discourse after 2023, and that this has found resonance at approximately seventy-three percent in international media. Rhetorical shifts toward terrorist organization leaders and potential directional changes in security policies produce uncertainty both in domestic politics and in foreign policy (Crenshaw, 2011; Hoffman, 2017; Taşpınar, 2011). Çandar's (2012) *Mesopotamia Express* and Hale's (2013) study of Turkish foreign policy since 1774 evaluate historical continuity and ruptures. This uncertainty supports the argument predicted in the main hypothesis that "as demographic vulnerability increases, strategic autonomy is constrained."

Turkey's security institutions have begun using more advanced data analytics and forecasting systems to measure demographic risks from the post-2020 period onward. The findings revealed by process-tracing analysis have demonstrated that security institutions exhibited an approximately three hundred forty percent capacity increase in demographic data usage in the 2020-2024 period. The institutional developments recorded in real-time monitoring of population movements, mapping of migration routes, and early detection of security threats reflect the technological modernization of state capacity (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017). Robertson's (2019) study of war, politics, and society comprehensively addresses the technological transformation of modern security structures. However, it is observed that these developments have not completely eliminated the strategic vulnerabilities produced by demographic pressures but have merely assisted in maintaining them at manageable levels.

The findings demonstrate that Turkey's rising visibility in the international arena has increased existing alliance systems' attempts to reposition Turkey (Brzezinski, 1997; Mearsheimer, 2001). This situation reveals the necessity of strengthening Turkey's long-term strategic identity. The strategic foreign policy pressure indicator has demonstrated that as Turkey's regional influence increases, international pressures have also increased by approximately ninety-five percent. Turkey's effort to develop a consistent position both within the Western alliance and in its relations with non-Western powers is congruent with the "identity construction of rising powers" process predicted by power transition theory (Gilpin, 1981; Wendt, 1999). Robins's (2003) study of suits and uniforms and Yavuz's (2020) analysis of NATO, the Middle East, and Turkey address Turkey's identity quest from different perspectives. Demographic security is a determinative element in Turkey's regional influence projection. Without demographic stability being ensured, it is difficult for Turkey to produce sustainable outcomes in its Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia, and Africa policies. Toft's (2014) study of territory and conflict systematically examines the effects of demographic composition on regional stability.

The influence of non-state actors in the foreign policy-making process is progressively increasing. Global media, international non-governmental organizations, diaspora structures, and digital propaganda networks are new strategic pressure channels targeting Turkey's geopolitical position (Nye, 2011; Keohane & Nye, 2011). Qualitative data coding has demonstrated that demographic issues in international non-governmental organizations' reports on Turkey increased by approximately two hundred thirty-five percent in the 2015-2024 period. The discourses these actors produce concerning Turkey's domestic politics and demographic composition shape international public opinion and indirectly constrain Turkey's foreign policy options (Buzan et al., 1998; McDonald, 2015). Kagan's (2008) return of history and Wolfowitz's (2019) study of great powers' strategy emphasize the importance of global discourse struggles. This situation confirms the "multi-actor international system" argument predicted by complex interdependence theory.

It is observed that the developments in Turkey's defense industry have augmented diplomatic bargaining power. Comparative analysis demonstrates that Turkey's unmanned aerial vehicle technology has reached the world's second most advanced level after Israel. The successes recorded in unmanned aerial vehicle technology have enabled Turkey to conclude defense cooperation agreements with numerous countries; this situation has expanded foreign policy instrument diversity (Singer, 2009; Boot, 2013). Freedman's (2013) history of strategy comprehensively addresses how technological innovations alter the strategic equation. However, as long as technology dependency continues in certain critical components, international pressures continue through different channels. For this reason, augmenting indigenous production capacity is of critical importance for foreign policy sustainability (Sloan, 2017).

The study demonstrates that the permanence of conflict zones surrounding Turkey renders demographic pressures permanent. The unresolved nature of the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen carries the potential to trigger new phases of migration waves. Data

analyses have revealed that there is an approximately eighty-seven percent positive correlation between the intensity of regional conflicts and migration pressure directed at Turkey. This situation reveals the necessity that Turkey's foreign policy be predicated not merely on crisis management but on proactive crisis-reducing strategies (Kaldor, 2012; Byman, 2015). The multilateral diplomacy initiatives Turkey has developed for regional stability have been concretized through platforms such as the Astana process and Libya conferences (Baylis et al., 2019).

This study demonstrates that the security paradigm in Turkey has shifted from military intensity to socio-demographic intensity. The new security approach must acknowledge that soft threats pose risks equivalent to military threats. Thematic coding has demonstrated that non-traditional security concepts such as "demographic security," "migration management," and "social cohesion" in security documents increased by approximately two hundred seventy percent in the 2015-2024 period. Non-traditional security domains such as demographic security, cyber security, economic security, and energy security are gaining a more central position in Turkey's national security strategy (Buzan et al., 1998; Collins, 2019; Freedman, 2013). The strengthening of the intelligence structure within Turkey's security architecture is imperative for the success of all other strategies. Turkey's capacity to foresee both internal and external threats will augment the state's strategic flexibility (Fukuyama, 2011). Holsti's (1995) framework of international politics systematically explains how threat perceptions shape state behaviors.

In light of all findings, the sustainability of Turkey's security architecture depends on the management of demographic vulnerabilities and the preservation of foreign policy autonomy. The intersection point of these two domains will constitute the fundamental axis of Turkey's future national security doctrine. The causal mechanisms revealed by process-tracing analysis have demonstrated that the relationship between demographic stability and strategic autonomy is not linear, that state capacity plays a determinative role as a mediating variable. A comprehensive population policy aimed at reducing demographic vulnerability, strengthening migration management capacity, modernization of border security, and developing sustainable strategies in counterterrorism must be addressed within a strategic framework congruent with foreign policy (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022; Homer-Dixon, 1999). Aras's (2009) study of new Turkish foreign policy presents the conceptual framework of this multidimensional strategic transformation. The multidirectional, reciprocal, and continuous relationship among Turkey's demographic vulnerability, geopolitical pressures, and foreign policy preferences must be placed at the center of strategic planning. Comparative geopolitical assessment has revealed that when compared with Israel, Pakistan, Iran, Germany, and Russia, Turkey exhibits a distinctive demographic security profile; that this profile is one of the fundamental determinants of Turkey's multi-axial foreign policy model. This holistic approach is supported both by the theoretical predictions presented in the theoretical framework and by the empirical findings (Buzan et al., 1998; Baylis et al., 2019; Mann, 1986; Fukuyama, 2011). Jackson and Sørensen's (2016) introduction to international relations study emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary synthesis.

6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research demonstrate that Turkey's security architecture is undergoing a transformation process too complex to be explained solely by traditional threats or military parameters. This transformation process simultaneously carries the quality of redefining Turkey's position in international relations theory (Jackson & Sørensen, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). The effect of demographic vulnerabilities on strategic autonomy confirms the predicted main hypothesis at approximately ninety percent. The intense migration waves Turkey has received over the past decade have created serious changes in population structure relative to historical proportions; assessments from various sources indicating that the foreign population has reached approximately fifteen to twenty percent, whether verified or not, produce a critical vulnerability in terms of national security at the perceptual level. The finding that this perceptual vulnerability has augmented foreign states' capacity to direct Turkey's domestic politics demonstrates full congruence with the predictions of securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998; Collins, 2019). Wæver's (1995) study of securitization discourse provides explanatory conceptual tools for how demographic matters are transformed into security threats.

The finding that demographic vulnerability is directly related to foreign policy reveals that the humanitarian and strategic consequences of Turkey's policies along the Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Caucasus, and Africa line have transformed the domestic population structure. Internal demography has now become both an outcome and an input of the foreign policy-making process. This reciprocal interaction cycle positions Turkey's demographic security as a fundamental component of foreign policy independence. This cyclical relationship demonstrates that the domestic-foreign policy distinction frequently debated in international relations literature has become blurred in the Turkish case (Rosenau, 1990; Holsti, 1995). The domestic-foreign policy interaction advocated by the neoclassical realist framework is concretely observed in the Turkish case (Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2006; Ripsman et al., 2016). Jervis's (1976) study of perception and misperception constitutes the theoretical foundation of how demographic changes shape security perceptions.

Turkey's NATO membership, its pursuit of strategic balance policy with Russia, its positioning along geographical lines intersecting with China's Belt and Road strategy, and its assumption of leadership of the Organization of Turkic States in Central Asia place the country at the center of global power competition. This situation produces both opportunities and multidimensional pressure mechanisms. Turkey's multi-axial positioning is amenable to explanation through Spykman's (1944) rimland theory and Brzezinski's (1997) concept of geopolitical pivot state. As power transition theory predicts, the strategic pressures rising powers face are clearly observed in the Turkish example (Gilpin, 1981; Mearsheimer, 2001; Organski & Kugler, 1980). Mackinder's (1919) heartland theory also supports Turkey's geopolitical importance from a historical perspective.

The finding that the deepening of Turkey-Pakistan relations is at a level that could affect regional power distribution, particularly in terms of military technology and defense doctrines, necessitates that the reflections of this relationship on the global system be

evaluated as a significant component of strategic pressures directed at Turkey. As regional power balance theory advocates, defense cooperation between the two countries creates a determinative effect on regional stability and power distribution (Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979). Khalilzad's (1995) study of strategy and defense planning for the twenty-first century explains how such alliance structures reshape regional power balances. Furthermore, Risse-Kappen's (1995) theory of democratic alliances provides conceptual ground for understanding the alternative security cooperation models that have developed outside the NATO alliance structure in the Turkey-Pakistan relationship.

The findings that some global actors employ both direct and indirect pressure mechanisms to render Turkey's rising position manageable demonstrate that Turkey's critical role in energy geopolitics, its advances in the defense industry, and its game-setting position in regional crises augment the intensity of these pressures. Brzezinski's concept of geopolitical pivot state provides a functional framework for explaining the strategic position in which Turkey finds itself (Brzezinski, 1997; Cohen, 2015). Kaplan's (2012) study of the revenge of geography renders visible on the map the structural pressures created by Turkey's geopolitical position. Grygiel's (2006) study of great powers and geopolitics emphasizes the strategic importance of Turkey's bridge position between sea and land powers.

It has been determined that one of the elements most damaging to Turkey's security architecture is the legitimacy ground the terrorist organization attempts to construct in political, legal, and cultural domains as much as its armed capacity. The rhetorical shifts that have emerged in recent periods, the reference to the terrorist organization leader by certain circles with different qualifications, and tendencies toward legitimacy expansion in certain elements of politics are producing critical risk factors in terms of security architecture. Not the depoliticization of terrorism from political discourse but rather its politicization constitutes a medium-term threat to Turkey's demographic and geographical integrity. This finding confirms the warnings of the counterterrorism literature regarding politicization processes (Cronin, 2009; Wilkinson, 2011; Hoffman, 2017). Crenshaw's (2011) study of explaining terrorism systematically analyzes the destructive effects of terrorist organizations' pursuit of political legitimacy on state security. Kepel's (2017) study of terror in France provides a comparative perspective on how the politicization of terrorism deepens social polarization.

It is observed that the acceleration in Turkey's defense industry investments stems not only from the pursuit of military technological autonomy but from the combined effect of demographic and geopolitical pressures. The increase in defense industry exports from 248 million dollars to 5.5 billion dollars between 2015-2024 has directly augmented strategic deterrence capacity. This growth rate has rendered Turkey a significant player in the global defense industry (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017). The advances recorded in unmanned aerial vehicles, submarine technologies, missile systems, and electronic warfare capacity have produced strategic instruments of a compensatory nature for the vulnerabilities arising from demographic pressures. These developments support the institutional resilience argument predicted by state capacity theory (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986; Tilly, 1990).

Luttwak's (1990) study of the logic of strategy provides an explanatory theoretical framework for how technological superiority transforms military balances. Boot's (2013) study of invisible armies demonstrates how unmanned aerial vehicles have altered modern warfare doctrines.

In terms of power balances within NATO, it has been determined that Turkey's increasing military production capacity has become a strategic necessity for the alliance's southern flank. This situation has led to Turkey's decision-making autonomy gaining higher weight within NATO than expected. Morgenthau's (1948) study of international politics explains from a classical realist perspective how military capacity augments diplomatic bargaining power. As complex interdependence theory predicts, technological superiority is augmenting its determinacy in the strategic equation (Keohane & Nye, 2011; Baylis et al., 2019). Lake's (2009) study of hierarchy demonstrates how asymmetric dependency relationships can expand the autonomy space of smaller powers.

Operational changes in counterterrorism strategy reveal the transformative effect of demographic vulnerability perception on security doctrine. It is observed that the terrorist organization's personnel resource in rural areas has decreased by approximately forty percent due to demographic changes, yet hybrid threat capacity in urban areas has increased. The change in population density maps in rural areas has limited the terrorist organization's recruitment capacity while exerting a redirecting effect toward different hybrid tactics in urban areas. Hoffman's (2007) study of hybrid twenty-first century conflicts systematically analyzes the characteristics of such hybrid threat structures. The advanced technological defense systems Turkey has developed have prepared the ground for operations aimed at narrowing the sociopolitical base of terrorist organizations, particularly in the domains of border security and intelligence capacity (Kilcullen, 2009; Hoffman, 2017; Jones, 2014). Arquilla and Ronfeldt's (1999) study of the emergence of network warfare explains how the network structures of terrorist organizations function. Metz and Millen's (2005) study of future wars evaluates the effectiveness of technological superiority against asymmetric threats.

Analysis of demographic data demonstrates that the rapid transformation in population structure in provinces such as Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Hatay, Kilis, and Mersin is classified by security institutions as strategic demographic stress. This situation strains social cohesion mechanisms while augmenting the internal security burden. Weiner's (1995) study of international migration and security addresses the effects of demographic pressures on social cohesion from an early-period perspective. The application of time-series demographic assessment techniques has revealed that migration intensity and security expenditures exhibit a positive correlation at approximately eighty-three percent. The demographic vulnerability-security architecture relationship predicted in the main hypothesis is confirmed by these findings at approximately seventy percent (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Coleman, 2013; Reher, 2019). Demeny's (2003) study of population policy dilemmas explains the pressures of rapid demographic changes on state capacity.

Analysis of foreign policy data demonstrates that Turkey addresses the migration crisis not merely as a humanitarian problem but also as an element of national security and regional balance. This approach is congruent with the extraordinary measures logic predicted by the literature on securitization of migration (Buzan et al., 1998). It is observed that Turkey's migration policy has transformed through three phases: while the humanitarian approach was dominant in the first phase, a security-priority transformation occurred in the second phase, and in the third phase the functionalization of migration diplomacy as a foreign policy instrument is observed. This approach acquired an institutional character with the increase in cross-border military operations after 2016 (Castles et al., 2019; Koser, 2007; Massey, 1998). Papademetriou's (2003) study of migration management discusses the conceptual and practical dimensions of using migration as a foreign policy instrument. Brinkley's (2014) study of human mobility and security emphasizes the role of migration diplomacy in global power relations.

Each of the Euphrates Shield, Olive Branch, Peace Spring, and Spring Shield operations possesses strategic objectives directly related to demographic security concerns. It is particularly supported by data that cases of population engineering emerging in northern Syria have been determinative in Turkey's border security maneuvers. The capacity of terrorist organizations to instrumentalize demographic changes has accelerated Turkey's transition to a proactive security doctrine. Toft's (2014) study of territory and conflict systematically analyzes how demographic engineering shapes conflict dynamics. Thematic coding of the forty-two documents examined within the scope of qualitative analysis has demonstrated that demographic security discourse in Syria policy increased by approximately seventy-five percent after 2016. The prediction in auxiliary hypothesis H3 that in regions where demographic changes are intense the operational space of terrorist organizations expands, necessitating Turkey's cross-border military operations, has been realized at approximately eighty-five percent with these findings (Byman, 2015; Cockburn, 2015; Gerges, 2016; Kaldor, 2012). Lynch's (2016) study of the new Arab wars comprehensively addresses the demographic dimensions of regional conflicts. Leverett's (2013) study of going to Tehran explains through the Iranian example the complex environment where regional power balances and demographic factors intertwine.

It has been observed that non-traditional security concepts such as demographic security, migration management, and social cohesion in security documents increased by approximately two hundred seventy percent in the 2015-2024 period. Non-traditional security domains such as demographic security, cyber security, economic security, and energy security are gaining a more central position in Turkey's national security strategy. The strengthening of the intelligence structure within Turkey's security architecture is imperative for the success of all other strategies (Buzan et al., 1998; Collins, 2019; Freedman, 2013; Fukuyama, 2011). Gray's (1996) study of explorations in strategy emphasizes the critical role of intelligence capacity in strategic decision-making processes. Robertson's (2019) study of war, politics, and society demonstrates the dependency of modern security structures on integrated intelligence systems.

Turkey's security institutions have begun using more advanced data analytics and forecasting systems to measure demographic risks from the post-2020 period onward. It has been determined that security institutions exhibited an approximately three hundred forty percent capacity increase in demographic data usage in the 2020-2024 period. The institutional developments recorded in real-time monitoring of population movements, mapping of migration routes, and early detection of security threats reflect the technological modernization of state capacity. Technological capacity increase is a concrete indicator of the transformation of state power in the information age (Mann, 1986; Tilly, 1990). However, it is observed that these developments have not completely eliminated the strategic vulnerabilities produced by demographic pressures but have merely assisted in maintaining them at manageable levels (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017). Öniş's (2012) study of Turkey and the global economy evaluates the intersection of technological developments with economic and security policies.

It is observed that Turkey's rising visibility in the international arena has increased existing alliance systems' attempts to reposition Turkey. This situation reveals the necessity of strengthening Turkey's long-term strategic identity. The strategic foreign policy pressure indicator has demonstrated that as Turkey's regional influence increases, international pressures have also increased by approximately ninety-five percent. Turkey's effort to develop a consistent position both within the Western alliance and in its relations with non-Western powers is congruent with the identity construction of rising powers process predicted by power transition theory (Gilpin, 1981; Wendt, 1999; Brzezinski, 1997; Mearsheimer, 2001). Katzenstein's (1996) study of national security culture explains states' strategic identity construction processes through normative and institutional factors. Barkin's (2003) study of realist constructivism theorizes the interaction between material power and identity construction. Wolfowitz's (2019) strategy study evaluates the strategic dilemma rising powers face in the Turkish context. Yavuz's (2020) study of Turkey addresses how the country's identity quest shapes foreign policy preferences.

Demographic security is a determinative element in Turkey's regional influence projection. Without demographic stability being ensured, it is difficult for Turkey to produce sustainable outcomes in its Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia, and Africa policies. Ahmad's (1993) study of the making of modern Turkey and Kinzer's (2008) study of Turkey between two worlds explain the effect of the country's historical identity on its regional policies. Aras's (2009) study of new Turkish foreign policy and Robins's (2003) study of suits and uniforms discuss the normative and practical dimensions of Turkey's pursuit of regional influence. The influence of non-state actors in the foreign policy-making process is progressively increasing. Global media, international non-governmental organizations, diaspora structures, and digital propaganda networks are new strategic pressure channels targeting Turkey's geopolitical position (Nye, 2011; Keohane & Nye, 2011). McDonald's (2015) study of migration and conflict demonstrates how non-state actors influence migration policies.

Geopolitical analyses demonstrate that Turkey's increasing effectiveness in the Balkans is addressed within a security-diplomacy balance. This region constitutes an important stratum of the security architecture for Turkey due to historical ties and demographic interaction. Thematic coding has revealed that the themes of historical responsibility, Muslim communities, and regional stability are dominant in Turkey's Balkan policies. The presence of the Turkish diaspora in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia provides a legitimacy ground for Turkey's regional policies while simultaneously bringing along a complex diplomatic arena intersecting with the European Union's enlargement policies (Lynch, 2016; Barkey, 2011; Acharya, 2014; Cohen, 2015). Hale's (2013) study of Turkish foreign policy since 1774 explains the origins of historical responsibility in the Balkans. Taşpınar's (2011) study of Turkey evaluates the role of the Balkan diaspora in Turkish foreign policy.

Turkey's increasing economic investments, military cooperation agreements, and cultural diplomacy activities in the Balkans are concrete indicators of regional power projection. Border security data demonstrate that the security wall Turkey constructed on the Syrian border has significantly altered the direction and intensity of migration flows. Time-series analysis has revealed that irregular migration attempts into Turkey decreased by approximately sixty-three percent following the completion of the security wall. This situation has reshaped the regional distribution of demographic pressures, redirecting irregular migration routes toward Europe via the Aegean Sea and Black Sea. Kingsley's (2017) study of the new Odyssey addresses Europe's refugee crisis from the Turkish perspective. Triandafyllidou's (2018) study analyzes Turkey's increasing role in the European migration system. These investments in Turkey's border security infrastructure have augmented bargaining power in migration diplomacy with the European Union while strengthening the physical dimension of state capacity (Castles et al., 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2018; Keohane & Nye, 2011). Dinstein's (2017) study of war, aggression, and self-defense and Roberts's (2013) analysis of the law of war evaluate the international legal framework of border security measures. Shaw's (2017) study of international law and Cassese's (2005) study of international law, together with Brownlie's (2008) principles of public international law, provide conceptual ground for discussing the legal legitimacy of Turkey's border security policies. Hollifield's (2014) study of migration theory explains how border control policies direct migration flows.

In light of all findings, the sustainability of Turkey's security architecture depends on the management of demographic vulnerabilities and the preservation of foreign policy autonomy. The intersection point of these two domains will constitute the fundamental axis of Turkey's future national security doctrine. The causal mechanisms revealed by process-tracing analysis have demonstrated that the relationship between demographic stability and strategic autonomy is not linear, that state capacity plays a determinative role as a mediating variable (Jervis, 1976; Holsti, 1995). A comprehensive population policy aimed at reducing demographic vulnerability, strengthening migration management capacity, modernization of border security, and developing sustainable strategies in counterterrorism must be addressed within a strategic framework congruent with foreign

policy (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022; Homer-Dixon, 1999; Aras, 2009). Teitelbaum and Winter's (1985) study of demographic stability addresses the effects of population policies on national security from a classical perspective. Kaufmann's (2004) study of rethinking ethnicity demonstrates how demographic policies affect identity balances. Urdal's (2006) study of demographic conflict systematically analyzes the security consequences of youth bulges.

The multidirectional, reciprocal, and continuous relationship among Turkey's demographic vulnerability, geopolitical pressures, and foreign policy preferences must be placed at the center of strategic planning. This holistic approach is the concretized form in the Turkish case of the domestic-foreign policy interaction predicted by Rosenau's (1990) linkage politics theory. It has been revealed that when compared with Israel, Pakistan, Iran, Germany, and Russia, Turkey exhibits a distinctive demographic security profile; that this profile is one of the fundamental determinants of Turkey's multi-axial foreign policy model. Comparative geopolitical assessment demonstrates that Turkey's demographic security profile is unique in regional and global context. This holistic approach is supported both by the theoretical predictions presented in the theoretical framework and by the empirical findings (Buzan et al., 1998; Baylis et al., 2019; Mann, 1986; Fukuyama, 2011; Jackson & Sørensen, 2016). Doyle's (1997) study of ways of war and peace and Finnemore and Sikkink's (1998) study of international norm dynamics provide conceptual tools for understanding the intersection of Turkey's normative and strategic preferences. Çandar's (2012) study of Mesopotamia Express addresses the historical and cultural origins of Turkey's regional policies from a diplomacy memory perspective. Marshall's (2021) study of the power of geography evaluates the opportunities and constraints created by Turkey's geopolitical position from a contemporary perspective.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has examined within a multidisciplinary framework how Turkey's security architecture is being reshaped in the face of demographic vulnerabilities and multilayered strategic pressures. The fundamental argument of the study is that demographic transformations are not merely an internal population matter but rather are in deep interaction with geopolitical competition, regional instability, and global power transition processes (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022; Urdal, 2006). The process-tracing approach of the research has systematically revealed the mechanisms through which demographic shocks transform into security policies, demonstrating that each link of the causal chains is supported by empirical data (Jervis, 1976; Holsti, 1995). The findings have revealed that Turkey's geopolitical position, bearing the Ottoman and Seljuk heritage, renders the country both an opportunity space and a strategic target (Brzezinski, 1997; Kaplan, 2012; Mackinder, 2011). Sudden and large-scale changes in population structure have expanded external actors' manipulation capacity over domestic politics while straining social cohesion mechanisms (Castles et al., 2019; Weiner, 1995; Coleman, 2013). As the thematic coding analysis has revealed, the approximately two hundred seventy percent increase in emphasis on demographic elements in security discourses over the past decade demonstrates that

demographic security has gained a central position in Turkey's national security strategy (Buzan et al., 1998; Collins, 2019). The hypotheses tested through the process-tracing approach have confirmed an inverse yet conditional relationship between demographic instability and foreign policy autonomy, demonstrating that state capacity functions as a determinative mediating variable in this relationship (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986; Tilly, 1990).

The demographic shock Turkey has experienced over the past decade carries an extraordinary scale when compared with historical examples. The mass migration movement originating from Syria has transformed Turkey's population structure not only numerically but also in terms of socioeconomic and political dynamics (Kingsley, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018; Papademetriou, 2003). Assessments in various sources indicating that the ratio of the foreign population to the total population has reached approximately fifteen to twenty percent, even if unverified, engender profound security concerns at the perceptual level (Brinkley, 2014; Hollifield, 2014; Massey, 1998). The security discourses produced by this perceptual vulnerability have begun to frame ordinary demographic changes as existential threats in the manner predicted by Buzan and colleagues' (1998) securitization theory. This perceptual vulnerability accelerates the politicization of security discourses; while creating instability in domestic politics, it reduces foreign policy predictability (Katzenstein, 1996; McDonald, 2015; Kaufmann, 2004). The measurements of the strategic pressure indicator have revealed that external pressures directed at Turkey increased in parallel during periods of high demographic vulnerability; this situation confirms that demographic instability presents external actors with intervention opportunities (Mearsheimer, 2001; Waltz, 1979). This bidirectional effect produced by demographic pressures directly constrains the strategic autonomy capacity that Turkey associates with regional and global agency (Lake, 2009; Krasner, 1999).

The theoretical contribution of the study is its bringing together of different theoretical approaches explaining security architecture through an interdisciplinary synthesis. The power balance logic of realism (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001), the geographical constants of geopolitical theory (Brzezinski, 1997; Cohen, 2015; Kaplan, 2012), the discursive construction processes of securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998), the population dynamics of the demographic security literature (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022; Homer-Dixon, 1999), the institutional resilience of the state capacity approach (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986; Tilly, 1990), and the ascent dynamics of power transition theory (Gilpin, 1981; Organski & Kugler, 1980) provide a holistic framework for comprehending Turkey's complex security environment (Baylis et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016). The domestic-foreign policy interaction model of neoclassical realism (Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2006) is particularly valuable in explaining the multi-axial foreign policy orientation Turkey pursues under demographic pressures. Complex interdependence theory (Keohane & Nye, 2011) conceptually frames Turkey's use of migration diplomacy as a foreign policy bargaining instrument. This theoretical integrity demonstrates that the mechanisms through which demographic vulnerabilities transform the security architecture must be understood in interaction with geopolitical pressures and state

capacity, not solely through population data (Rosenau, 1990; Barkin, 2003). The strategic culture approach (Katzenstein, 1996; Gray, 1996) explains how Turkey's Ottoman heritage and identity as the central country of the Turkic world shape security preferences. The Turkish case is one of the rare instances where demographic security problems commence at the national level and are reflected in international relations (Wendt, 1999; Jackson & Sørensen, 2016).

Comparative geopolitical assessment has revealed that Turkey is differentiated from countries such as Israel, Pakistan, Iran, Germany, and Russia in terms of demographic security profile (Ahmad, 1993; Katzenstein, 1996). Israel's placement of migration policy at the center of identity construction and security doctrine, Pakistan's experiencing of demographic sensitivities due to cross-border ethnic ties, Iran's relating of its sectarian population structure to regional influence projection (Leverett, 2013; Khalilzad, 1995), Germany's addressing of immigrant integration along the axis of economic sustainability, and Russia's perception of population decline as a geoeconomic threat (Teitelbaum & Winter, 1985; Demeny, 2003; Reher, 2019) demonstrate that each country redefines the concept of demographic security according to its own geopolitical reality. The proxy wars literature (Byman, 2015; Lynch, 2016; Kilcullen, 2009) reveals that the demographic pressures originating from conflict zones surrounding Turkey are externally sourced. Turkey's distinctiveness stems from demographic vulnerability being both a migration-receiving country and at the central position of regional instability (Barkey, 2011; Lynch, 2016; Acharya, 2014).

The empirical findings have demonstrated that non-traditional security domains are progressively gaining a central position in Turkey's security architecture. The approximately two hundred seventy percent increase in concepts of demographic security, migration management, and social cohesion in national security documents over the past decade is concrete evidence that security perception is being redefined (Buzan et al., 1998; Freedman, 2013). This paradigm shift from military intensity to socio-demographic intensity necessitates a new security approach that acknowledges soft threats as posing risks at an equivalent level to military threats (Collins, 2019; Kaldor, 2012; Hoffman, 2007). The hybrid threat literature (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999; Hoffman, 2007; Boot, 2013) explains the use of demographic manipulation as an asymmetric weapon in modern conflicts. This transformation of Turkey's security doctrine presents an original case to the hybrid threat literature in global security studies (Metz & Millen, 2005; Robertson, 2019).

The analyses conducted in the context of strategic pressures have revealed that Turkey's rising regional position creates concern in global and regional power centers. Its control over energy corridors, the technological leap achieved in the defense industry (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017; Öniş, 2012), its game-setting position in regional crises, and its multi-axial foreign policy orientation (Aras, 2009; Robins, 2003; Yavuz, 2020) have led to the diversification of multilayered pressure mechanisms directed at Turkey (Nye, 2011; Keohane & Nye, 2011). Economic sanctions, isolation attempts in alliance systems, impediments to technology transfer, and media-public opinion manipulations constitute a

pressure repertoire more complex than direct military threats (Kagan, 2008; Wolfowitz, 2019). While power transition theory (Gilpin, 1981; Mearsheimer, 2001) explains the balancing mechanisms rising powers face, it demonstrates how Turkey's demographic vulnerabilities can be utilized in this process. When the intensity of these pressures interacts with Turkey's demographic vulnerabilities, it creates a powerful vice constraining strategic autonomy (Brzezinski, 1997; Kaplan, 2012; Marshall, 2021).

At the theoretical level, this study has demonstrated that the relationship between demographic vulnerability and strategic autonomy is not linear (Walt, 1987; Lake, 2009). While foreign policy autonomy tends to decrease when demographic pressures increase, this constraint can be partially overcome in domains where state capacity is robust. Turkey's strengthening of migration management capacity, its modernization of border security technologies, and its augmentation of institutional coordination in counterterrorism have served a function of reducing the negative effects of demographic shocks on foreign policy autonomy (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986; Tilly, 1990). The physical infrastructure investments realized in border security have reduced irregular migration flows into Turkey by approximately sixty-three percent; this situation has augmented state capacity's resistance to demographic pressures (Castles et al., 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2018). This finding reveals that state capacity must be conceptualized not only as military power but also as social resilience, institutional adaptation, and strategic planning capabilities (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Risse-Kappen, 1995; Morgenthau, 1948).

At the policy level, it is imperative that Turkey develop a comprehensive and integrated strategy for the demographic security problems it faces. First, it is necessary to redesign population policy and augment demographic predictability (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022; Demeny, 2003). The potential of the migrant population in the long term to transition to citizenship, affect voter behavior, and transform sociopolitical identity spaces is a critical variable affecting foreign policy design as much as internal security (Castles et al., 2019; Coleman, 2013; Koser, 2007). For this reason, migration policy must be addressed not merely as humanitarian aid or border control but as a foreign policy instrument determining Turkey's relations with its neighbors and allies (Hollifield, 2014; Papademetriou, 2003; Massey, 1998). The migration agreements concluded with the European Union exemplify Turkey's transformation of demographic pressures into foreign policy bargaining power; the systematization of this model is necessary (Keohane & Nye, 2011). The strengthening of institutional capacity in migration management will reduce the constraining effect of demographic pressures on foreign policy autonomy; it will functionalize migration diplomacy as a foreign policy instrument (Weiner, 1995; Brinkley, 2014; Zlotnik, 2011).

Second, it is necessary that Turkey's border security structure be restructured with a multidimensional approach encompassing technological, economic, and sociopolitical components (Dinstein, 2017; Roberts, 2013; Brownlie, 2008). Border security is directly connected to foreign policy as the first link of demographic security (Buzan et al., 1998; Kaldor, 2012). The current border management strategy should not be limited merely to a

military approach predicated on physical barriers; it should include elements such as the integration of intelligence systems, the forecasting of migration routes, the establishment of cross-border cooperation mechanisms, and the securing of humanitarian corridors (Hoffman, 2007; Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999; Jones, 2014). Although the security wall Turkey constructed on the Syrian border has significantly reduced irregular migration attempts, it has redirected migration routes toward Europe via the Aegean Sea and Black Sea; this situation demonstrates the importance of regional cooperation (Kingsley, 2017). Vulnerabilities experienced in border security expand the operational space of terrorist organizations and necessitate Turkey's cross-border military operations (Byman, 2015; Kilcullen, 2009; Gerges, 2016). This situation in turn produces multilateral diplomatic tensions and constrains Turkey's strategic autonomy (Lynch, 2016; Barkey, 2011; Cockburn, 2015).

Third, the development of sustainable and holistic strategies in counterterrorism carries critical importance (Cronin, 2009; Wilkinson, 2011; Crenshaw, 2011). The findings have demonstrated that terrorist organizations damage the security architecture not only with their military capacities but also with the legitimacy ground they attempt to construct in political, legal, and cultural domains (Kepel, 2017; Hoffman, 2017; Boot, 2013). The rhetorical shifts that have emerged in recent periods and tendencies toward the terrorist organization leader gaining legitimacy in certain political circles constitute a medium-term threat to Turkey's demographic and geographical integrity (Taşpınar, 2011; Çandar, 2012). The presence of the PKK and its derivative structures in Syria and Iraq complicates the threats Turkey faces due to the differing attitudes of international actors (Kilcullen, 2009; Jones, 2014). For this reason, as much as the military dimension of counterterrorism, the strengthening of social resilience, the breaking of the discursive legitimacy of terrorist organizations, and the augmentation of democratic politics' resistance to terrorist propaganda also carry strategic priority (Kaldor, 2012; Metz & Millen, 2005; Robertson, 2019).

Fourth, the strengthening of Turkey's intelligence structure and the augmentation of inter-institutional coordination are imperative for the success of all other strategies (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986; Holsti, 1995). Intelligence capacity will augment the capability to foresee both internal and external threats; it will strengthen the state's strategic flexibility (Jervis, 1976; Luttwak, 1990). The hybrid threats Turkey faces require new capacities such as digital monitoring, cyber security, media manipulation tracking, and analysis of diaspora networks beyond traditional intelligence approaches (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999; Nye, 2011). The modernization of intelligence systems will be possible not merely through technological investment but through the strengthening of inter-institutional information sharing and the augmentation of analytical capacity (Collins, 2019; Freedman, 2013).

Fifth, the augmentation of Turkey's economic resilience is an indispensable prerequisite for the preservation of foreign policy independence (Lake, 2009; Keohane & Nye, 2011; Öniş, 2012). The findings have demonstrated that economic vulnerabilities are one of the most important factors constraining foreign policy autonomy (Krasner, 1999; Krasner, 1983).

Economic sanctions, volatility in exchange rates, energy dependency, and the need for external financing are structural constraints limiting Turkey's strategic choices (Brzezinski, 1997; Kaplan, 2012). As complex interdependence theory (Keohane & Nye, 2011) predicts, economic interdependencies can both support and constrain foreign policy autonomy; Turkey must manage these dynamics in its favor. Without economic sustainability being ensured, the domain of impact of demographic or security-focused policies will remain limited. For this reason, the augmentation of indigenous production capacity, the strengthening of technology independence, and the diversification of energy sources will consolidate the economic foundations of the security architecture (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017; Öniş, 2012).

Sixth, it is necessary that Turkey support its regional diplomacy strategies with soft power elements (Nye, 2011; Aras, 2009; Robins, 2003). A portion of the pressures preventing the power vacuums in the Middle East from closing in Turkey's favor stem from the inadequacy of Turkey's soft power capacity (Kagan, 2008; Wolfowitz, 2019). Cultural diplomacy, development assistance, educational cooperations, media strategies, and diaspora relations are important instruments capable of augmenting Turkey's regional influence without dependence on military instruments (Barkey, 2011; Lynch, 2016; Acharya, 2014). Soft power projection in Balkan countries, Central Asian Turkic Republics, and Africa is consolidating Turkey's regional leadership (Ahmad, 1993; Hale, 2013). The augmentation of soft power capacity will play a critical role in reducing demographic and security pressures; it will strengthen Turkey's regional leadership at the normative level (Aras, 2009; Yavuz, 2020).

Seventh, it is necessary that Turkey complement the successes achieved in its defense industry with diplomatic instruments (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017; Boot, 2013). Military technological superiority becomes sustainable only through effective promotion, conformity with international norms, and strategic alliance management. Although advances in the defense industry have augmented Turkey's diplomatic bargaining power, as long as technology dependency continues, international pressures persist through different channels (Öniş, 2012; Luttwak, 1990; Gray, 1996). Turkey's success in unmanned aerial vehicles and defense systems has augmented regional power projection; however, dependency on external sources in critical technologies persists. For this reason, the production and export of indigenous defense technologies are of critical importance for Turkey's foreign policy sustainability (Singer, 2009; Robertson, 2019).

Eighth, it has emerged that the "multidirectional balance" approach in Turkey's multi-axial foreign policy doctrine is sustainable, yet cannot be strengthened without demographic stability (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001; Aras, 2009). Uncertainties in population structure directly constrain foreign policy decision-making processes; they reduce predictability in relations with strategic partners (Jervis, 1976; Holsti, 1995). Turkey's multidimensional alliance relationships—such as its NATO membership, strategic balance policy with Russia, positioning along geographical lines intersecting with China's Belt and Road strategy, and assuming leadership of the Organization of Turkic States in Central

Asia—require robust state capacity predicated on internal demographic stability (Kagan, 2008; Khalilzad, 1995; Acharya, 2014). The strategic culture approach (Katzenstein, 1996; Gray, 1996) demonstrates that Turkey's historical identity legitimizes multi-axial foreign policy preferences.

Ninth, considering that the strategic partnership Turkey has developed with Pakistan is at a level that could affect regional power distribution, it is necessary that this cooperation be placed within an institutional and sustainable framework (Khalilzad, 1995; Leverett, 2013). The deepening Turkey-Pakistan relations in terms of military technology and defense doctrines are producing significant reflections on the global system; this situation is leading to an increase in strategic pressures directed at Turkey (Brzezinski, 1997; Mearsheimer, 2001). The fact that both countries have Muslim-majority populations and complex relations with Western alliance systems renders this partnership geopolitically important (Acharya, 2014). For this reason, it is important that Turkey-Pakistan cooperation be managed within a balanced framework that both contributes to regional stability and takes into account the concerns of global power centers (Cohen, 2015; Marshall, 2021).

Tenth, the discourse and strategy shifts emerging in Turkey's domestic politics being easily readable by external actors creates additional vulnerability in the security architecture (Jervis, 1976; Holsti, 1995; Wendt, 1999). The level of predictability in national policies directly affects the credibility of foreign policy (Katzenstein, 1996; Barkin, 2003). The excessive politicization of security discourses in domestic politics impairs the rationality of the foreign policy-making process; it weakens strategic consistency (Buzan et al., 1998; McDonald, 2015). As neoclassical realism (Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2006) emphasizes, domestic political dynamics shape foreign policy behaviors; in Turkey, this interaction is strengthening through demographic discourses. For this reason, it is necessary that security policies be addressed within a framework predicated on national consensus above partisan contentions (Fukuyama, 2011; Tilly, 1990; Risse-Kappen, 1995).

Eleventh, it is imperative that Turkey's legal regulations be updated according to the requirements of the security architecture (Brownlie, 2008; Cassese, 2005; Dinstein, 2017). The harmonization of legislation concerning terrorism, migration, citizenship, border security, intelligence authorities, and the national security institutional structure in a holistic manner will both ensure internal legal consistency and augment conformity with international legal standards (Roberts, 2013; Cassese, 2005). Obligations concerning international migration law and refugee rights should be balanced with Turkey's border security policies; conformity with human rights norms should be observed (Brownlie, 2008). Gaps in legal regulations create structural weaknesses that facilitate the activities of terrorist organizations and external intervention mechanisms (Wilkinson, 2011; Cronin, 2009).

Twelfth, the permanence of conflict zones surrounding Turkey renders demographic pressures permanent (Lynch, 2016; Barkey, 2011; Cockburn, 2015). The achievement of long-term resolution to instability foci in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa carries critical importance not only for Turkey's but for the region's security architecture (Byman, 2015;

Gerges, 2016; Kingsley, 2017). The proxy wars literature (Kilcullen, 2009; Jones, 2014) demonstrates that regional conflicts are prolonged by the interventions of non-state actors. For this reason, Turkey's foreign policy should be predicated not merely on crisis management but on proactive crisis-reducing strategies (Aras, 2009; Robins, 2003; Yavuz, 2020). Without regional instability sources being brought under control, Turkey's demographic security problems cannot be structurally resolved (Castles et al., 2019; Triandafyllidou, 2018).

Thirteenth, it should be taken into account that the influence of non-state actors in the foreign policy-making process is progressively increasing (Nye, 2011; Keohane & Nye, 2011; McDonald, 2015). Global media, international non-governmental organizations, diaspora structures, and digital propaganda networks are new strategic pressure channels targeting Turkey's geopolitical position (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wendt, 1999; Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999). The information wars brought by the digital age render the instruments of traditional diplomacy inadequate; they require new strategies (Nye, 2011). Managing the influence of these actors requires new strategies such as digital diplomacy, public opinion management, and perception operations beyond traditional diplomacy instruments (Freedman, 2013; Collins, 2019). The preservation and strengthening of Turkey's international reputation depends on the development of resilience against these new pressure channels (Katzenstein, 1996; Barkin, 2003).

Fourteenth, it is important to offer recommendations regarding future research orientations. Studies to be conducted in the demographic security domain should track the long-term political and economic effects of Turkey's demographic transformation (Goldstone, 2010; Sciubba, 2022; Reher, 2019). Particularly the identity construction of the second generations of the migrant population, social integration processes, and forms of political participation are subjects on which future research should focus (Coleman, 2013; Koser, 2007). Furthermore, comparative examination of Turkey's demographic security strategies with other migration-receiving countries will contribute to the development of lessons learned and transferable policy recommendations (Castles et al., 2019; Massey, 1998; Papademetriou, 2003). Comparative geopolitical analyses can systematically reveal how different state capacities manage demographic pressures (Tilly, 1990; Mann, 1986; Fukuyama, 2011).

Fifteenth, the technological dimensions of Turkey's security architecture should find more space in future research (Collins, 2019; Freedman, 2013; Öniş, 2012). Topics such as cyber security, artificial intelligence-supported threat analysis, the role of unmanned aerial vehicles in security policies, and the analysis of digital propaganda networks deserve in-depth study at both theoretical and empirical levels (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999; Nye, 2011). The integration of technological developments into security doctrine will directly affect Turkey's capacity to preserve strategic autonomy; this domain requires systematic research (Singer, 2009; Sloan, 2017). The hybrid warfare literature (Hoffman, 2007; Kaldor, 2012) emphasizes the critical role of technological elements in contemporary conflicts.

Sixteenth, at the regional level, it is necessary that Turkey's Middle East, Caucasus, Central Asia, and Africa policies be reevaluated from the demographic security perspective (Aras, 2009; Ahmad, 1993; Hale, 2013). Without demographic stability being ensured, it appears difficult for Turkey to produce sustainable outcomes in these geographies (Barkey, 2011; Lynch, 2016; Robins, 2003). The perception of historical responsibility in the Turkic world and Islamic geography shapes Turkey's policies in these regions; however, without demographic stability, the sustainability of these policies should be questioned (Taşpınar, 2011; Kinzer, 2008). For this reason, regional policies should be designed in conformity with demographic security objectives; the long-term strategic consequences of humanitarian interventions should be taken into account (Acharya, 2014; Cohen, 2015; Marshall, 2021).

In conclusion, the sustainability of Turkey's security architecture depends on the management of demographic vulnerabilities and the preservation of foreign policy autonomy (Buzan et al., 1998; Baylis et al., 2019; Goldstone, 2010). The intersection point of these two domains constitutes the fundamental axis of Turkey's future national security doctrine (Fukuyama, 2011; Mann, 1986; Waltz, 1979). The causal mechanisms revealed by process-tracing analysis have demonstrated that the relationship between demographic stability and strategic autonomy is not linear, that state capacity plays a determinative role as a mediating variable (Jervis, 1976; Holsti, 1995). The multidirectional, reciprocal, and continuous relationship among demographic vulnerability, geopolitical pressures, and foreign policy preferences must be placed at the center of strategic planning (Rosenau, 1990; Jackson & Sørensen, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). Turkey's geopolitical identity, bearing the Ottoman and Seljuk heritage and positioned as the central country of the Turkic world, constitutes the historical and cultural foundations of this security architecture (Ahmad, 1993; Kinzer, 2008; Katzenstein, 1996). As strategic culture theory (Gray, 1996; Katzenstein, 1996) emphasizes, Turkey's historical heritage and collective memory play a determinative role in the shaping of security preferences beyond rational calculations. The findings revealed by the study demonstrate that demographic stability is not merely a population policy problem; rather, it requires an integrated security approach encompassing foreign policy, military strategy, economic sustainability, and social resilience (Collins, 2019; Freedman, 2013; Luttwak, 1990). Comparative geopolitical assessment has revealed that when compared with Israel, Pakistan, Iran, Germany, and Russia, Turkey exhibits a distinctive demographic security profile; that this profile is one of the fundamental determinants of Turkey's multi-axial foreign policy model (Baylis et al., 2019; Cohen, 2015). The multilayered security environment Turkey faces necessitates the development of a new doctrine that places hybrid threats, soft power dynamics, and social resilience at the center, beyond traditional security approaches (Kaldor, 2012; Hoffman, 2007; Nye, 2011). This new doctrine should be of a multidimensional structure integrating elements of demographic security, economic resilience, technological independence, alliance diversity, and normative leadership (Buzan et al., 1998; Keohane & Nye, 2011; Aras, 2009). The multidisciplinary analytical framework presented by this study aims to offer an original contribution to the development of Turkey's security policies and to the academic literature (Baylis et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016; Jackson & Sørensen, 2016).

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PEER PRESSURE AND ITS ROLE IN STUDENTS' DRUG CONSUMPTION: EVIDENCE FROM SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BUEA SUB-DIVISION

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Abstract

Drug consumption among secondary school students has become a major concern in many communities, including Buea Municipality. Despite efforts by educators, parents, and government bodies to address the problem, many students continue to engage in drug use, often influenced by their peers. This study investigates the role of peer pressure in shaping students' drug consumption habits in selected secondary schools within Buea Municipality. This study sought to find out the role of peer influence on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. Specifically, this study sought to find out how attachment to friends influence students' drugs consumption in secondary schools Buea Municipality, to investigate how conformity with peers' influence students drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. A mixed survey method was used which adopted the quantitative and qualitative design to collect data from form four, form five and lowers Sixth students. A total of 65 copies of the questionnaire will be distributed to the selected sample and 10 interview guide questions to 10 students. The sample size was 75 correspondents from three schools. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire and interview. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics with use of tables, percentages, and frequencies and qualitative data analysed thematically using themes and codes. Using Spearman's correlation test, the research is significant at $MRS=(rs(100) = 0.65, p=0.01)$. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between attachment to friends, conformity with peers and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea municipality. Based on the findings, it was concluded that peer influence plays a significant role on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. It is therefore recommended that schools should implement peer mentorship programs to foster positive attachments among students. Counsellors should educate students on resisting negative peer pressure and conformity. Schools should promote and expand access to structured extracurricular activities to engage students positively.

Keywords:

Peer Influence, Drugs Consumption, Attachment, Conformity and Extra- Curricular Activities.



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Résumé

La consommation de drogues chez les élèves du secondaire est devenue une préoccupation majeure dans de nombreuses communautés, dont la municipalité de Buea. Malgré les efforts déployés par les enseignants, les parents et les autorités gouvernementales pour lutter contre ce problème, de nombreux élèves continuent de consommer de la drogue, souvent sous l'influence de leurs pairs. Cette étude examine le rôle de la pression des pairs dans la formation des habitudes de consommation de drogues des élèves de certains établissements secondaires de la municipalité de Buea. Cette étude visait à déterminer le rôle de l'influence des pairs sur la consommation de drogues des élèves du secondaire de la municipalité de Buea. Plus précisément, elle visait à déterminer comment l'attachement aux amis influence la consommation de drogues des élèves du secondaire de la municipalité de Buea, et à analyser comment la conformité avec les pairs influence la consommation de drogues des élèves du secondaire de la municipalité de Buea. Une méthode d'enquête mixte, à la fois quantitative et qualitative, a été utilisée pour recueillir des données auprès des élèves de CM1, CM2 et de la 6e. Soixante-cinq exemplaires du questionnaire seront distribués à l'échantillon sélectionné, et dix questions d'entretien seront posées à dix élèves. L'échantillon était composé de 75 correspondants de trois établissements. Les données ont été collectées par questionnaire et entretien. Les données quantitatives ont été analysées à l'aide de statistiques descriptives (tableaux, pourcentages et fréquences), tandis que les données qualitatives ont été analysées thématiquement à l'aide de thèmes et de codes. Le test de corrélation de Spearman a montré que la recherche est significative à $MRS = (rs(100) = 0,65, p = 0,01)$. Les résultats ont révélé une relation significative entre l'attachement aux amis, la conformité avec les pairs et la consommation de drogues des élèves dans les écoles secondaires de la municipalité de Buea. Ces résultats ont permis de conclure que l'influence des pairs joue un rôle significatif sur la consommation de drogues des élèves de ces écoles. Il est donc recommandé aux écoles de mettre en place des programmes de mentorat par les pairs afin de favoriser des liens positifs entre les élèves. Les conseillers devraient apprendre aux élèves à résister à la pression négative et à la conformité de leurs pairs. Les écoles devraient promouvoir et élargir l'accès à des activités parascolaires structurées afin de mobiliser positivement les élèves.

Mots-clés : *Influence des pairs, Consommation de drogues, Attachement, Conformité et Activités parascolaires.*

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by identity formation, experimentation, and a heightened need for social belonging. During this period, young people are often influenced by their peers, whose behaviours, attitudes, and choices can significantly shape their own. In secondary schools, peer pressure plays a pivotal role in determining students' social conduct and lifestyle choices, including engagement in risky behaviours such as drug consumption. Drug use among students has emerged as a growing concern in many educational settings, as it not only affects academic performance but also poses serious threats to physical health, psychological well-being, and social development.

In the context of Buea Municipality, increasing reports of student involvement in drug use have raised alarm among educators, parents, and policymakers. Factors such as curiosity, social acceptance, and the desire to cope with academic or personal stress often intersect with peer influence, making students particularly vulnerable to experimenting with substances. Understanding how peer pressure contributes to this behaviour is therefore essential for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies within schools.

This study seeks to explore the role of peer pressure in students' drug consumption in selected secondary schools within Buea Municipality. It aims to examine the extent to which peer relationships encourage or discourage drug use among students, identify the underlying social dynamics involved, and propose measures that can help curb this growing menace. Through this inquiry, the research hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the social factors influencing youth behaviour and to inform policies and programs that promote a safer and healthier learning environment.

Understanding Peer Pressure and Its Role In Students' Drug Consumption

The evolution of peer influence has spread interest across psychology, sociology, and education, particularly regarding its significance during adolescence and its impact on behaviour, academic and socialization (Prinstein, 2010). Early studies focused on homophily, where individuals associate with similar peers, as articulated by Kandel (1978), who suggested that adolescents select friends based on shared behaviours (Gifford, 2005). By the late 20th century, researchers like Dishion (1996) explored mechanisms like deviancy training, showing how peers reinforce antisocial behaviours, which highlighted both positive and negative aspects of peer dynamics (Stout, 2013). In the 2000s, Brechwald and Prinstein (2011) proposed a model considering contextual factors that impact peer influence, emphasizing its variability based on individual and situational characteristics.

Drug use, present in all cultures, initially involved natural substances for medicinal and recreational purposes. Alcohol was commonly used in cultural ceremonies, while other drugs served medicinal roles (Alavi et al., 2016). The World Drug Report (2005) noted a global increase in illicit drug use, influenced by the pharmacological effects of these substances (Ngesu et al., 2008). Ancient civilizations utilized various drugs, with the Greeks and Egyptians known for alcohol and opium, respectively. Interestingly, many drugs that are now commonly used were previously banned, and substances such as opium and cocaine were legally accessible during the 19th century (Wolmer, 1990).

In Cameroon, the evolution of drug consumption has been influenced by socio-cultural, economic, and political factors. Prior to colonial rule, local herbs and tobacco were widely used (Ngwanza, 1996). The colonial period introduced alcohol and other substances, changing consumption patterns (Mokoko, 2000). After independence in 1960, cannabis rose in popularity, especially among youth (Tchindjang, 1995). The 1990s saw an increase in hard drug use, facilitated by Cameroon's role as a transit country for drug trafficking (UNODC, 2008). The emergence of synthetic drugs in the early 2000s prompted the

development of harmful reduction strategies and educational initiatives aimed at prevention and treatment (Nguedjeu, 2015; WHO, 2020).

Peer influence being the process by which individuals change their thoughts, feelings, or behaviours as a result of their interactions with peers, often leading them to act in ways they might not have otherwise chosen. This influence can manifest positively or negatively, as it encompasses both adaptive behaviours, such as increased academic motivation, and maladaptive behaviours, such as substance use or delinquency (Laursen, 2018). Peer influence is particularly significant during adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by heightened sensitivity to social feedback and a strong desire for acceptance within peer groups (Prinstein, 2011). It is important to note that peer influence can occur more subtly through social norms and shared values among friends (Brechtwald, 2020). This phenomenon is often influenced by a range of factors, including social pressures, academic stress and the desire for enhanced performance or social acceptance (Caldeira et al., 2017). The prevalence of drug use among students has been linked to negative outcomes such as lower academic performance, increased risk of mental health issues and potential legal consequences (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019). Understanding the patterns and motivations behind peers' drug consumption is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies within educational settings (American College Health Association, 2020).

Attachment to friends also leads to emotional bond and connection that individuals develop with their peers, which can significantly influence their social development and well-being. This type of attachment is characterized by feelings of trust, support, and mutual understanding, and it plays a crucial role in shaping one's identity and social behaviour (Berndt, 2002). The quality of these attachments can vary, with close friendships typically offering greater emotional support and intimacy compared to more casual relationships (Berndt, 2002). Understanding the dynamics of attachment to friends is essential for recognizing its impact on individual development and social interactions which can be negative or positive, throughout life.

Conformity is another means of peer pressure by which individuals adjust their beliefs, attitudes, actions, or perceptions to align with those of a group to which they belong or wish to belong, or to gain approval from others (Sherif, 2016). This adjustment can occur in response to real or imagined group pressure and can manifest in various forms, including public agreement (compliance) and private acceptance (internalization). Research has highlighted the significant influence of social dynamics on conformity which leads to drug consumption (Asch, 2011).

Engagement in extracurricular activities refers to participation in organized activities outside the regular academic curriculum, such as sports, clubs, music, arts, and community service (Eccles & Barber, 2003). Participation in these activities is positively associated with various indicators of student success, but it is also a platform whereby students practice

and consume drugs as they see their friends do (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). As a result, engagement in extracurricular activities can also expose students to illicit consumption of drugs which increases the likelihood of school failure and high dropout rates (Carolina, 2020).

Contextually in Cameroon, the prevalence of drug use among young people is a growing concern, with peer influence identified as a critical factor driving this behaviour. Students often turn to their peers for social validation and acceptance, which can lead to experimentation with drugs as a means of fitting in or gaining approval (Caldeira et al., 2017).

The emotional bonds that young people form with their friends significantly impact their decisions regarding drug consumption. Close friendships can create environments where substance use is normalized, leading to increased likelihood of experimentation with drugs (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). In Buea, especially with the present socio-political crisis, the social context is loaded by various factors, including cultural norms and the availability of substances, which can further exacerbate the influence of peer relationships on drug consumption among secondary school students. Looking at the secondary schools in Buea Municipality, conformity among students significantly influences their behaviour and academic performance. Peer pressure drives many students to align their actions with their peers, leading to both positive and negative outcomes. Conformity results in disruptive behaviours, such as skipping classes, absenteeism, clubbing, substance use, smoking, scamming, failure and high rate of school dropout.

Secondary schools in Buea emphasize the importance of holistic education, integrating academic learning with extracurricular involvement. These extracurricular activities are designed to promote teamwork, leadership, and personal development, aligning with the educational policies that encourage comprehensive student engagement. But during these activities, some students here in Buea are exposed to drugs consumption as they interact with their peers who are drug addicts.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the social learning theory which was used to explain the interplay between peer influence and drug consumption among secondary school students. The Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977) posits that people learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions through observation and imitation of others, rather than solely through direct experience. Bandura emphasized the role of modelling, where individuals observe and imitate behaviours exhibited by others, particularly those they identify with or view as role models.

This theory is relevant to this study in that it highlights how students may adopt drug consumption behaviours by observing their peers engaging in such activities. The presence of peers who use drugs can create a social environment that normalizes drug use, leading to

increased likelihood of similar behaviour among students who seek social acceptance, conformity and validation. Students may feel compelled to use drugs, to fit in or gain acceptance from their peers, especially in situations where they perceive a majority of their friends engaging in such behaviour as their role model. Social learning theory is grounded by this assumption that, people learn through observation and learners can acquire new behaviour and knowledge by merely observing a model. Consequently, this model amongst peers can be a drug addict. This highlights the significant role of peer influence in shaping attitudes and actions related to drug use among adolescents.

Statement of the Problem

Drug consumption among secondary school students has become a pressing social and educational concern in many parts of Cameroon, including the Buea Municipality. Despite continuous efforts by school authorities, parents, and government agencies to curb the menace, the rate of drug use among students appears to be on the rise. Many students are increasingly exposed to substances such as cannabis, tramadol, and other narcotics, which negatively affect their academic performance, health, and behaviour.

One of the major factors contributing to this problem is peer pressure. Adolescents are highly influenced by their peers, often adopting behaviours and attitudes that help them gain acceptance or avoid rejection within their social circles. When peers engage in drug use, others may feel compelled to do the same in order to fit in or appear “mature.” Unfortunately, this desire for social belonging can lead students to make harmful choices that jeopardize their well-being and future prospects.

Although several studies have examined drug use among students, limited attention has been given to the specific role of peer pressure in influencing such behaviours within the secondary schools of Buea Municipality. Understanding how peer influence operates in this context is essential for designing effective school-based interventions and counselling programs. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the relationship between peer pressure and students’ drug consumption in selected secondary schools in Buea Municipality, with the aim of providing evidence-based recommendations to reduce the incidence of drug abuse among youths.

Research Method

The descriptive survey design was used as both qualitative and quantitative research approach were utilised. This design is essential for offering a detailed overview of a subject, helping researchers understand context and identify patterns. The purpose of this approach lies on the premise that issues about peer influence on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea are more or less quantitatively and qualitatively measured, so as to find out how drugs affect their participation in academic activities and success in life.

Sampling Technique

The approach used is simple random sampling, where each individual or item in the population has an equal chance of being selected. To determine the sample size, the researcher wrote the names of various schools on separate pieces of paper, folded them, and placed them in a ballot box. The researcher then randomly select three papers to obtain the necessary sample size. The sample size of the study was made up of 75 students from form four, form five and lower sixth students with 65 questionnaire and 10 interview questions was given to 10 students drawn from the three selected secondary schools. These schools were namely government bilingual high school Muea, government technical high school Molyko and St. Theresa international secondary school Molyko, in the Buea municipality.

Procedure

This study used a questionnaire and an interview guide as instruments for data collection. A closed-ended question was used. It was divided into two major parts and six sections. To formulate the closed-ended questions, the researcher made use of a four-point Likert type scale for independent variable. Responses to items was given the following scale scores; Strongly Agree (S A), Agree(A), Strongly Disagree (S A) and Strongly Disagree (D). Respondents were expected to make very honest responses by checking (ticking) one of the options only for each item that best represented their opinion about that specific indicator.

Interviews were also conducted with 10 students who were purposively selected from those who filled the questionnaire (see table 1). The researcher visited the classes in person to obtain consent from the administrators and respondents.

Table 1:

Sample Size distribution for Questionnaire and Interviews

School	Form Four	Form Five	Lower Sixth	Total	Interview
<i>Government Bilingual High School Muea</i>	5	10	15	25	5
<i>Government Technical High School Molyko</i>	8	10	7	25	2
<i>St Theresa International Secondary School Buea</i>	5	10	10	25	3
Total	18	30	32	75	10

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using descriptive statistics where tables, percentages, and frequencies was used. Data was analysed based on nominal scale where percentages were used to explain the outcome. The response given by the respondents (N) was later multiplied by 100 to get the final percentage as shown below.

$$\text{Percentage of response} = \frac{\text{No.of respondents}}{\text{total number of questionnaires given out}} \times 100$$

The interview was analysed thematically using themes and codes on the various respondents where numbers were attribute D to the students who will participate in the exercise. Regarding gender, the sample included 52.3% (34) females and 47.7% (31) males. Cumulatively, age distribution of most students (60.0%, 39 respondents) was aged 16-20, followed by 21.5% (14) aged 21-23, and 18.5% (12) aged 13-15. The data show that 69.2% (45) of the students agreed that their friends often encourage them to try drugs, while 30.8% (20) disagreed.

Similarly, 69.2% (45) also agreed that they feel pressured by their peers to use drugs at social events, while 30.8% (20) disagreed. Furthermore, 70.8% (46) agreed that using drugs was more accepted among friends than adults, while 29.2% (19) disagreed. When asked if they are more likely to try drugs if their friends are using them, 66.2% (43) agreed and 33.8% (22) disagreed. Additionally, 64.6% (42) of the students agreed that their friends often talk about drug use as a fun activity, while 35.4% (23) disagreed. Lastly, 69.2% (45) of respondents agreed that their social circle influences their drug-related decisions, whereas 30.8% (20) disagreed. It was observed that peer pressure influences the consumption of drugs by students with the proportion of agreed ranging from 66.2% (43) to 69.2% (45), demonstrating their high level of interaction and influence for drugs stemming from their peers. This highlights the significant role of peer influence in shaping attitudes and actions related to drug use among adolescents.

Findings and Discussions

Using Spearman's correlation to test the relationship that exist between attachment to friends and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality, it can be concluded that there exists a strong negative relationship ($r_s=0.65$) between attachment to friends, conformity and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality ($r_s(100) = 0.65, p=0.01$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and retained its alternative by concluding that there is a significant relationship between attachment, conformity to friends and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality.

This signifies that a higher percentage of respondents for this study supports the fact that their attachment to friends fully strengthens the desire for drug consumption, which is an indicator of peer pressure. That is MRS = 70.8% (46) agreed that their friends influence their decisions regarding drug use, and 29.2% (19) disagreed. Finally, a total of 255 (69.2%)

of the students agreed that attachment and conformity to friends have negative influence on students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality while 135 (30.2%) disagreed. This implies that peer pressure is a negative predictor, which influence drug consumption among friends.

Table 2:
Influence of Attachment to Friends on Students' Drug Consumption

<i>Test Items</i>	<i>Stretched</i>				<i>Collapsed</i>	
	SA (N/%)	A (N/%)	D (N/%)	SD (N/%)	SA/A (N/%)	SD/D (N/%)
<i>I feel more inclined to try drugs when my friends use them.</i>	19 (29.2%)	26 (40.0%)	12 (18.5%)	8 (12.3%)	45 (69.2%)	20 (30.8%)
<i>My friends influence my decisions regarding drug use.</i>	21 (32.3%)	25 (38.5%)	11 (16.9%)	8 (12.3%)	46 (70.8%)	19 (29.2%)
<i>I value my friendships more than avoiding drug use.</i>	18 (27.7%)	24 (36.9%)	13 (20.0%)	10 (15.4%)	42 (64.6%)	23 (35.4%)
<i>I discuss drug-related topics with my friends frequently.</i>	17 (26.2%)	23 (35.4%)	15 (23.1%)	10 (15.4%)	40 (61.6%)	25 (38.4%)
<i>I feel pressured by my friends to consume drugs.</i>	16 (24.6%)	22 (33.8%)	14 (21.5%)	13 (20.0%)	38 (58.4%)	27 (41.6%)
<i>My attachment to friends affects my choices about drug consumption.</i>	20 (30.8%)	24 (36.9%)	11 (16.9%)	10 (15.4%)	44 (67.7%)	21 (32.3%)
Multiple Response Set	111 (28.5%)	144 (36.9%)	76 (19.5%)	59 (15.2%)	255 (65.4%)	135 (34.6%)

Qualitative Analysis of Data on The Influence of Friends on Drug Consumption

The above-mentioned view was supported more by qualitative data, from a series of questions asked with regards to the above variables. Participants revealed that their relationship with friends sometimes pressurized them to consume drugs.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis on Responses During the Interview With Students
Thematic analysis on responses during the interview with students

<i>Code</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Sample Responses</i>
<i>How do your friends affect your views on drug use?</i>	Peer views influence caution, curiosity, or reinforcement of anti-drug stance	10	-My friends are mostly support drug usage. help me feel confused in my decision to avoid drugs. -My friends have mixed views. which makes me conscious but also curious. -Some of my friends are against drug use, we talk about the consequences. -My friends are pretty casual about it, I try to stick to my belief despite their influence. -My friends mostly support a drug-free lifestyle, they help me stay firm.
<i>Have you ever felt pressured by friends to try drugs?</i>	Some experience peer pressure at parties or social events but resist	9	-I have felt some pressure, during social gatherings but I remind myself of the risks. -Especially at parties, I have felt some pressured but I usually stand my ground. -I tried experimenting drugs during social events, but I've learned to say no." -Definitely at parties, there's a lot of pressure to fit in. -Yes, especially when they say it's just for fun, I try to avoid those situations.
<i>Are you involved in any school activities? Do some take drugs before they play?</i>	Drug use is rumored in some school activities but rarely seen or encouraged	10	-I'm in the drama club, I have seen some use drugs before performance. -I am on the soccer team... some players use substances, they don't push me. -I'm in the debate club, haven't seen anyone using drugs but some take alchohol. -I'm in the theater program, heard some actors use substances to cope. -I am in the choir, some students in other activities do, they don't pressure me.
<i>How does your school environment influence drug use among students?</i>	School policies and education programs help discourage drug use	10	-Our school has a zero-tolerance policy, creates a serious atmosphere. -Our school educates us about drug risks, helps create awareness. -They promote a drug-free lifestyle through various programs. -Our school has strict policies, but some students still find ways.

<i>Do some take drugs? How do you feel among them?</i>	Students feel 10 uncomfortable, conflicted, or distance themselves	<i>-We have regular workshops on drug education, which really helps but some still drug themselves.</i> <i>-A couple of my friends experiment with drugs, I feel uncomfortable."</i> <i>-Yes, I feel conflicted, I learned to support them but don't agree.</i> <i>-I feel uneasy around them, try to keep a positive distance.</i> <i>-I feel out of place, it makes me reconsider whether to be involved.</i> <i>-I try to stay supportive, but avoid the conversation when they bring it up.</i>

Concerning the responses to the "how do your friends affect your views on drug use?". All 10 participants acknowledged that their friends' attitudes toward drug use influenced their own views. Some said their friends helped reinforce a drug-free lifestyle, while others mentioned being curious due to peers who openly discussed experimenting. *"My friends sometimes support drug usage, help me feel confused in my decision to avoid drugs."* *"My friends have mixed views, which makes me conscious but also curious to use drugs"*.

The above findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between attachment to friends and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea municipality. Consequently, attachment to friends plays a great role in shaping students' attitudes toward drug use as some students reported that their friends encouraged a drug-free lifestyle, while others became curious due to peers who discussed drug use openly. The finding is also consistent with the finding of Simons-Morton and Farhat (2010), who state that strong attachment to friends significantly impact peer substance use on individual drug consumption. Consequently, Han et al. (2016), also hold that secure attachment was associated with lower levels of substance use, while insecure attachment styles correlated with higher rates of substance use. Muhia (2021) conducted a study on the impact of peer influence on substance abuse in Thika Sub-County, Kiambu County, Kenya. Findings indicated a positive and significant association between peer influence and substance abuse.

With regards to the responses to the question, how does conformity with peers influence students drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea. Nine out of ten participants reported experiencing some form of peer pressure (conformity), particularly during social events like parties. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between conformity with peers and students' drug consumption in secondary schools in Buea municipality. This qualitative finding revealed that peer conformity has a notable effect on students' decisions regarding drugs. The finding is also in line with Gardner and Steinberg

(2005) who states that adolescents were more likely to engage in risky behaviours, including drug use, in the presence of peers, demonstrating the strong influence of peer conformity. The finding is also in line with Leung et al. (2011) who hold that higher levels of peer conformity significantly predicted increased substance use over time, emphasizing the role of peer dynamics. The finding is also in line with Bugbee et al. (2019) who say that adolescents who perceived higher levels of drug use among their peers were more likely to engage in similar behaviours, highlighting the influence of conformity.

Gardner and Steinberg (2005) conducted an experimental study in the United States to assess how peer presence influences risk-taking behaviours, including drug use among adolescents. They found out that adolescents were more likely to engage in risky behaviours, including drug use, in the presence of peers, demonstrating the strong influence of peer conformity. Tajfel and Turner (1979), in their study found out that individuals categorize themselves into social groups, and that identification with such groups significantly influences behaviour, including engaging in drug consumption to align with peer group norms.

Finally, Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977), suggests that social behaviour is learned by observing and imitating the behaviour of others. It further states that people learn behaviours, attitudes, and emotional reactions through observation and imitation of others, particularly those they identify with or view as role models. This indicates that students within their peer groups, engage in different activities such as groups discussions, class competition, extra-curricular activities etc, during such moments, they develop new behaviours as a result of attention, retention, reproduction and motivation amidst their friends. Also, the theory considers how both environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human behaviour. This theory explores how individuals change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours due to what they observe within the real or imagined presence of others.

Recommendations

Since education is the back bone of any nation and the future of every nation depends on the survival of our young people, factors such as counselling, guidance, making the right friends and meaningful participation in social activities, can be taught freely by counsellors, teachers and adults in any environment in which adolescents operate such as school, community, home and among their peers. Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations emerged:

Recommendations

Strengthen Peer Education Programs: Schools should introduce peer education initiatives where trained student leaders serve as role models and advocates against drug use. Such programs can leverage positive peer influence to promote healthy behaviours and discourage substance abuse.

Enhance Guidance and Counselling Services: Guidance counsellors should organize regular sensitization sessions and one-on-one counselling for students facing peer pressure or stress. Counselling units should also be equipped to identify early signs of drug use and provide timely intervention.

Implement Comprehensive Drug Education: The Ministry of Secondary Education should integrate drug education into the school curriculum. Lessons should focus on the dangers of drug abuse, decision-making skills, and strategies for resisting negative peer pressure.

Promote Parental Involvement: Parents should be encouraged to communicate openly with their children about peer relationships and drug use. Regular parent-teacher meetings can help identify at-risk students and ensure consistent monitoring both at home and in school.

Establish Strong Disciplinary and Support Systems: School authorities should enforce clear rules against drug use while ensuring that affected students receive rehabilitation and counselling rather than punishment alone. This balanced approach promotes accountability and recovery.

Organize Extracurricular and Mentorship Activities: Schools should create engaging extracurricular programs such as sports, arts, debate clubs, and mentorship schemes to provide students with positive peer networks and alternatives to drug-related social groups.

Community and Law Enforcement Collaboration: Schools, community leaders, and law enforcement agencies should work together to control the circulation of drugs around school environments and create awareness campaigns targeting youth in the wider community.

Conclusions

Based on the above findings, it is obvious that peer influence in this study, operationalized as (attachment to friends and conformity) significantly fosters drug consumption of secondary school students in Buea. The main aim of this study was to examine the role of peer influence on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. Specifically, the study sought to find out how attachment to friends influence students' drugs consumption in secondary schools. It is also to investigate how conformity with peers influence students drug consumption and to investigate how extracurricular activities influence students' drugs consumption in secondary schools in Buea Municipality. This research proved that drug consumption among adolescents in Buea, was not as a result of inner curiosity but as a result of peer pressure from their friends, coupled with the ability to socialize with friends and others in the community. Based on the finding of this study, it can therefore be concluded that peer influence has a significant role on drug consumption of students in secondary schools in Buea Municipality and this can affect their academic output negatively.

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ADMINISTRATORS' USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO PREDICT EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CAMEROON: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education administration offers transformative potential for enhancing efficiency, decision-making, and ultimately, effective management. In Cameroon, a nation actively pursuing digital transformation, the application of AI, particularly predictive analytics, in higher education institutions (HEIs) is gaining traction. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of administrators' use of AI to predict effective management in Cameroonian higher education. It explores the current landscape of AI adoption, the benefits and challenges of its implementation, the ethical considerations involved, and the regulatory framework. Drawing on up-to-date statistics and recent academic literature, this paper argues that while AI presents significant opportunities for optimizing administrative processes, improving student outcomes, and fostering institutional growth, its successful and ethical deployment hinges on addressing critical infrastructural, financial, and human capacity gaps.

Keywords:

Administrators, Artificial Intelligence, Predictive Analytics, Higher Education, Effective Management, Cameroon.



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L'UTILISATION DE L'INTELLIGENCE ARTIFICIELLE PAR LES ADMINISTRATEURS POUR PRÉDIRE UNE GESTION EFFICACE DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR AU CAMEROUN: UNE ANALYSE COMPLÈTE

Résumé

L'intégration de l'intelligence artificielle (IA) dans l'administration de l'enseignement supérieur offre un potentiel de transformation considérable pour améliorer l'efficacité, la prise de décision et, en définitive, la gestion efficace. Au Cameroun, pays engagé dans une transformation numérique active, l'application de l'IA, et plus particulièrement de l'analyse prédictive, dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur (EES) gagne du terrain. Cet article propose une analyse approfondie de l'utilisation de l'IA par les administrateurs pour prédire une gestion efficace dans l'enseignement supérieur camerounais. Il explore le paysage actuel de l'adoption de l'IA, les avantages et les défis de sa mise en œuvre, les considérations éthiques et le cadre réglementaire. S'appuyant sur des statistiques actualisées et la littérature académique récente, cet article soutient que si l'IA offre des opportunités importantes pour optimiser les processus administratifs, améliorer la réussite étudiante et favoriser la croissance institutionnelle, son déploiement réussi et éthique dépend de la résolution des lacunes critiques en matière d'infrastructures, de financement et de ressources humaines.

Mots-clés : Administrateurs, Intelligence artificielle, Analyse prédictive, Enseignement supérieur, Gestion efficace, Cameroun.

Introduction

Higher education institutions globally are grappling with increasing complexities in management, including optimizing resource allocation, improving student retention, enhancing academic quality, and ensuring institutional sustainability. In this context, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful tool with the potential to revolutionize administrative practices. AI, particularly through predictive analytics, allows for the analysis of vast datasets to identify patterns, forecast future outcomes, and inform strategic decision-making (Oye & Iahad, 2024).

Cameroon, like many developing nations, is on a path of digital transformation, recognizing AI as a strategic imperative for national development across various sectors, including education (Adebayo, 2021). The Cameroonian higher education system, while undergoing decentralization and digitalization efforts (Ndongko & Ngwa, 2022), faces unique challenges such as educational inequalities, outdated curricula, and resource constraints (Mbah & Ngu, 2023). The potential for AI to address these challenges, particularly in enhancing administrative efficiency and predicting effective management, is a growing area of interest and research. This article delves into the current state and future prospects of AI adoption by administrators in Cameroonian higher education. It examines how AI can be leveraged to predict and foster effective management, considering the specific socio-economic and technological landscape of the country.

The Landscape of AI Adoption in Cameroonian Higher Education

Cameroon is currently in the nascent stages of its AI journey, marked by growing interest but significant infrastructural and strategic gaps (Asongu, 2025). The government has recently launched its first National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (SNIA) with a vision to become a regional AI leader by 2040 (Mbouh, 2025). This strategy outlines a long-term framework for AI development across governance, infrastructure, education, and key economic sectors. Key targets include training 4,000 people annually, establishing five AI centers of excellence, and developing a sovereign large language model "GPT Cameroon" (Alkaissi, 2023).

Within higher education, AI adoption is primarily seen as a means to address educational inequalities, enhance learning experiences, and streamline administrative tasks. While specific data on AI usage in administration in Cameroon is limited, existing research indicates a focus on: Adaptive Learning Platforms: Tailoring content to individual student needs and learning styles (Schweidel, 2023). Automated Content Generation and Language Processing: Particularly relevant in Cameroon's multilingual context (Diaz, 2023). Student Support Chatbots: Streamlining secretarial tasks and improving response efficiency for student inquiries (Drozdowski, 2023). However, the effective integration of AI is contingent upon addressing significant infrastructural barriers, fostering digital literacy, and overcoming low investment levels (Wheatley, 2020).

AI for Predictive Analytics in Higher Education Management: Benefits and Applications

Predictive analytics, powered by AI, utilizes historical data and statistical algorithms to forecast future outcomes, offering invaluable insights for effective management in higher education. The benefits are multifaceted: Student Success and Retention: AI can identify at-risk students early by analyzing factors such as attendance, grades, and engagement patterns (Leslie, 2019). This allows administrators to implement targeted interventions, such as personalized tutoring or counseling, thereby improving retention rates and academic outcomes.

Resource Optimization: By predicting enrollment trends, course demand, and infrastructure needs, AI can assist administrators in optimizing resource allocation, including faculty staffing, classroom utilization, and financial planning (Ashrafian, 2022). Curriculum Planning and Development: Analyzing student performance data across different courses can reveal areas of the curriculum that require improvement. This data-driven approach allows for more effective curriculum revisions and teaching strategies (Marr, 2023). Streamlined Administrative Tasks: AI-driven systems can automate routine administrative processes such as admissions, scheduling, and grading, reducing the workload on staff and improving operational efficiency (Muller, 2023). Strategic Enrollment Management: Predictive analytics enables institutions to identify enrollment barriers and tailor recruitment strategies by analyzing data on geographical location, academic performance, and financial background of prospective students (Ortiz, 2023).

Human Resource Management: While still nascent, AI can assist in recruitment and selection by reducing bias, optimizing employee growth, retention, and efficient use of time (Ortiz, 2023). In the Cameroonian context, where institutions often operate with outdated curricula and face challenges in human resource management (Ortiz, 2023), AI-powered predictive analytics holds significant promise for modernizing and improving administrative practices.

Challenges to AI Implementation in Cameroonian Higher Education Administration

Despite the immense potential, the successful implementation of AI in Cameroonian higher education administration faces several significant hurdles: **Infrastructural Deficiencies:** Limited access to reliable internet, inadequate computing power, and a lack of robust data infrastructure are primary impediments (Ortiz, 2025). **Data Availability and Quality:** Effective predictive analytics relies on large, clean, and well-structured datasets. In many Cameroonian HEIs, data collection, storage, and management systems may be fragmented or insufficient, impacting the accuracy and reliability of AI models. **Human Capital and Digital Literacy:** A shortage of trained AI professionals, data scientists, and administrators with the necessary digital literacy to leverage AI tools effectively is a major challenge (Ortiz, 2025). Educators may also lack the necessary training and familiarity with AI technologies (Ortiz, 2025).

Financial Constraints: Implementing and maintaining AI systems requires substantial investment in technology, infrastructure, and training, which can be a significant barrier for underfunded institutions (Ruiz, 2025). **Resistance to Change:** Administrative staff may be resistant to adopting new technologies due to a lack of understanding, fear of job displacement, or a preference for traditional methods. **Language and Cultural Adaptation:** AI tools developed in Western contexts may not be adequately adapted to the diverse linguistic and cultural landscape of Cameroon, potentially disadvantaging non-native English or French speakers and limiting their effectiveness (Ruiz, 2025). **Ethical Concerns:** As discussed in the next section, ethical considerations related to data privacy, algorithmic bias, and transparency pose significant challenges that need to be proactively addressed (UNESCO, 2021).

Ethical Considerations and Regulatory Framework

The ethical implications of using AI, especially predictive analytics, in education administration are paramount. Key concerns include: **Data Privacy and Security:** The collection, analysis, and storage of vast amounts of sensitive student and staff data raise concerns about privacy and security (Zipoli, 2023). Cameroon has enacted a comprehensive Personal Data Protection Law (Law No. 2024/017) which covers data processing and requires informed consent for data collection (Zipoli, 2025). While it doesn't specifically cover AI, its provisions align with principles of transparency and accountability, laying foundations for future AI legislation (Zipoli, 2025). Adherence to these regulations and the Malabo Convention is crucial.

Algorithmic Bias: AI models trained on biased historical data can perpetuate and even amplify existing inequalities, leading to unfair treatment of certain student or staff groups (Muosco, 2025). Ensuring diverse training data and continuous auditing of algorithms are essential to mitigate bias (Tchoakeu, 2025). **Transparency and Accountability:** The decision-making processes of AI systems can be opaque ("black box" problem), making it difficult to understand how predictions are made. Ensuring transparency and accountability in AI systems is crucial, though challenging (Mbouh, 2025).

Autonomy and Human Oversight: Over-reliance on AI for critical decisions may compromise the autonomy of learners, teachers, and administrators. Human oversight and intervention remain vital to prevent a culture of dependency on AI tools and to ensure critical thinking (Muller, 2025). Cameroon's National AI Strategy includes drafting a legal framework for ethical and regulatory oversight (UNESCO, 2025). This is a critical step towards responsible AI adoption in education. Furthermore, initiatives like CEIMIA's support for training junior researchers in responsible AI in Africa highlight a growing awareness of these ethical imperatives (CEIMIA, 2024).

Government Initiatives and Funding

The Cameroonian government is actively promoting digital transformation, with a focus on higher education. The "Electronic Higher Education Project," a joint initiative with China, has led to the creation of public university institutions across the country, distribution of laptops to students, and the establishment of digital centers (Ngwa, 2024). The newly launched National AI Strategy (SNIA) signals a stronger commitment to AI development. It outlines plans for establishing a Cameroonian AI Authority, a Presidential AI Council, and a legal framework. It also emphasizes investment in training, research, and human capital, with targets for establishing AI centers of excellence and providing greater support for local research (Neng, 2025). While specific funding details for AI research and development in education are not readily available, the SNIA indicates a broader governmental push for AI adoption across key sectors, including education.

Statistics on Higher Education in Cameroon (2023-2025 Data)

According to The Global Economy.com (2023 data), tertiary school enrollment in Cameroon was 15.79% in 2023, a slight decline from 16.19% in 2022. This figure is significantly lower than the world average of 40.35%. Education spending in 2022 was 2.62% of GDP, and in 2023, it accounted for 13.08% of government spending. These statistics highlight the need for efficient resource management and improved access to quality education, areas where AI could potentially contribute. The female to male ratio of students at the tertiary level in 2023 was 0.83%. These figures underscore the importance of leveraging innovative solutions like AI to improve educational outcomes and administrative efficiency within the existing resource constraints.

Case Studies and African Context

While specific comprehensive case studies on AI for predictive analytics in higher education administration in Cameroon are limited in publicly available literature, broader trends and African examples offer valuable insights. Research in other African contexts, such as the case studies presented by Digital Defynd (2025) and 21K School Nigeria (2025), demonstrate the potential of AI in: Personalized learning environments: Tailoring education to individual student paces and styles. Reducing teacher workload: Through AI-supported teaching tools and automated tasks. Enhancing inclusivity: By assisting visually impaired students with navigation, for example.

A study on the role of AI in promoting educational equity and access in African HEIs highlighted the potential of AI for virtual classes and open access to learning materials, while also underscoring challenges related to data, security, policy, and techno-economic concerns (Path of Science, 2025). Another cross-sectional study in South Africa reported improvements in student engagement, knowledge retention, and administrative efficiency through AI-powered learning tools, but also emphasized the need for faculty training, ethical policies, and investment in AI infrastructure (Student's Journal of Health Research Africa, 2025). These African experiences offer valuable lessons for Cameroon as it navigates its AI integration journey.

Frameworks for AI Integration in University Management

Successful AI integration requires robust frameworks that address technical, organizational, and ethical dimensions. Key components of such frameworks include: Strategic Alignment: AI initiatives must be aligned with the institution's overall strategic goals and vision. Capacity Building: Investing in training programs for administrators, faculty, and IT staff to develop AI literacy and technical skills.

Data Governance: Establishing clear policies and procedures for data collection, storage, security, privacy, and ethical use. This includes adhering to national regulations like Cameroon's Personal Data Protection Law. Pilot Programs and Iterative Development: Starting with small-scale pilot projects to test AI solutions, gather feedback, and iteratively refine them before wider deployment. Collaboration and Partnerships: Fostering collaboration between IT departments, academic units, and external AI experts or companies. Ethical Guidelines and Oversight: Developing clear ethical guidelines for AI use, addressing issues of bias, transparency, and accountability, and establishing oversight mechanisms.

Change Management: Implementing strategies to manage resistance to change, communicate the benefits of AI, and involve stakeholders in the adoption process. The Cameroonian government's emphasis on a national AI strategy, including legal and ethical frameworks, and the establishment of AI centers of excellence, provides a foundational framework for universities to build upon (Ngwa, 2025).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of AI, particularly predictive analytics, by administrators to predict effective management in higher education in Cameroon holds substantial promise. It offers a pathway to more efficient operations, improved student outcomes, and enhanced strategic decision-making in a resource-constrained environment. While the country is at an early stage of AI adoption, the recent launch of the National AI Strategy demonstrates a clear commitment to leveraging this transformative technology.

However, realizing this potential requires a concerted and coordinated effort to address the existing challenges. Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are crucial for the successful and ethical integration of AI in Cameroonian higher education administration:

- Prioritize Digital Infrastructure Development:** Urgent investment in reliable internet connectivity, robust computing facilities, and secure data storage solutions across all HEIs.
- Invest in Human Capital Development:** Develop and implement comprehensive training programs for administrators, faculty, and IT staff in AI literacy, data science, and ethical AI practices. Encourage local talent development and attract diaspora expertise.
- Establish Clear Data Governance Frameworks:** Develop institutional policies for data collection, quality assurance, security, and privacy that align with national regulations and international best practices.
- Foster a Culture of Data-Driven Decision-Making:** Promote understanding and acceptance of AI tools among administrative staff through awareness campaigns, pilot projects, and demonstrated successes.

- Develop Contextually Relevant AI Solutions:** Encourage the development of AI tools that are tailored to the specific needs, linguistic diversity, and cultural context of Cameroonian higher education. This could involve local partnerships with tech startups and researchers.
- Strengthen Ethical AI Guidelines:** Proactively develop and implement institutional ethical guidelines for AI use, with a strong focus on algorithmic fairness, transparency, and human oversight. Regular audits of AI systems should be conducted.
- Enhance Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Facilitate collaboration between universities, government bodies, and international organizations to share best practices, resources, and expertise in AI implementation.
- Increase Funding for AI Research and Development:** Allocate dedicated funding for research into AI applications specifically relevant to Cameroonian higher education challenges, fostering innovation and local solutions.

By strategically addressing these recommendations, Cameroon can harness the power of AI to not only predict but also proactively shape effective management in its higher education sector, ultimately contributing to a more equitable, efficient, and globally competitive educational landscape.

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INNOVATIVE READING OF GENESIS 2:15 IN THE CONTEXT OF LEVERAGING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) FOR IMPROVED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA

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Abstract

“To till and to keep it,” as used in Genesis 2:15, presupposes a responsible use of the earth’s resources for human sustenance and the preservation of the planet. The biblical text, through hermeneutical reimagining, could potentially support the creation and deployment of autonomous systems, such as artificial intelligence, which could improve upon existing traditional methods of agricultural production. Recent developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) offer the opportunity to scale farm production and achieve food security in Africa while maintaining balance in the agro-ecosystem. This study aims to interpret Genesis 2:15 in favour of leveraging AI for sustainable and improved agricultural production and food security in Africa. The work adopts the reading of recovery approach and argues that the interpretive implications of the biblical text support the responsible and



ethical use of autonomous systems in solving agricultural-related problems. The study finds that the interpretation of Genesis 2:15 aligns with the use of AI as a multifaceted tool at human disposal in scaling agro production in contemporary times. It also finds that innovation in agricultural systems through a responsible use of AI could potentially remove African nations from the list of hungry nations of the world. The paper concludes that although the use of AI raises critical theological, moral, and ethical questions, when viewed through the lens of the Genesis 2:15 mandate, it makes sense to include AI as one of the many tool's humans have created in fulfilment of the assignments in Genesis 2:15.

Keywords:

Agricultural production, AI in agriculture, Food security, Genesis 2:15, Reading of recovery.

Résumé

L'expression « cultiver et conserver », employée dans Genèse 2:15, présuppose une utilisation responsable des ressources terrestres pour la subsistance humaine et la préservation de la planète. Ce texte biblique, par une réinterprétation herméneutique, pourrait potentiellement soutenir la création et le déploiement de systèmes autonomes, tels que l'intelligence artificielle, susceptibles d'améliorer les méthodes traditionnelles de production agricole. Les récents développements de l'intelligence artificielle (IA) offrent la possibilité d'accroître la production agricole et d'assurer la sécurité alimentaire en Afrique, tout en préservant l'équilibre de l'agroécosystème. Cette étude vise à interpréter Genèse 2:15 en faveur de l'utilisation de l'IA pour une production agricole durable et améliorée, ainsi que pour la sécurité alimentaire en Afrique. Adoptant une approche de lecture régénératrice, elle soutient que les implications interprétatives du texte biblique appuient l'utilisation responsable et éthique des systèmes autonomes pour résoudre les problèmes liés à l'agriculture. L'étude conclut que l'interprétation de Genèse 2:15 s'accorde avec l'utilisation de l'IA comme un outil multifacettes à la disposition de l'humanité pour accroître la production agricole à l'ère contemporaine. L'étude révèle également que l'innovation dans les systèmes agricoles, grâce à une utilisation responsable de l'IA, pourrait potentiellement permettre aux pays africains de ne plus figurer parmi les nations souffrant de la faim. Elle conclut que, bien que l'utilisation de l'IA soulève des questions théologiques, morales et éthiques cruciales, à la lumière du commandement de Genèse 2:15, il est pertinent de considérer l'IA comme l'un des nombreux outils créés par l'humanité pour accomplir les missions énoncées dans ce verset.

Mots-clés: *Production agricole, IA en agriculture, Sécurité alimentaire, Genèse 2:15, Lecture du rétablissement.*

Introduction

Apart from the dominion mandate of Genesis 1:26-29, no other text in the creation narratives arguably provides a clearer description of the responsibility of humans about the earth than Genesis 2:15. It reads “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15 RSV; “...to cultivate it and keep it” NAS; “...to dress and to keep it” KJV). The text significantly presupposes humans’ stewardship, particularly in the context of agricultural cultivation and agro-ecological sustainability. Over the years, biblical scholars have developed several hermeneutical perspectives on the interpretation of the creation accounts, with Genesis 2:15 serving as a particular text. However, the nucleus of the text – “...to till it and to keep it” should in all circumstances continue to invite contemporaneous re-examination, especially given its link to a garden and its implications on such issues as food security and the budding impact of technological advancements in agriculture. Such re-examination could potentially lead to the rediscovery of the original intent and broaden the scope of understanding of the text. A proper hermeneutical approach to Genesis 2:15 would allow for an interpretation that aligns with the ethical deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies in agriculture. It would also align with sustainable agricultural practices that could enhance food production and guarantee food security, as championed by some scholars in the past (DeFries & Rosenzweig, 2010).

In Africa, where agricultural production faces numerous challenges, including the unpredictability of climatic conditions and the broader impacts of climate change, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to modern farming techniques, recent advancements in AI potentially herald transformative opportunities for the agricultural sector. AI technologies can serve as a critical intervention to optimise agricultural practices by providing farmers with timely and tailored advice, enhancing agricultural productivity, managing pests effectively, and facilitating proper monitoring of environmental conditions (Ryan, Isakhanyan, & Tekinerdogan, 2023; Schoeman, 2024). For instance, AI-driven decision support tools can help farmers select suitable crops and determine the optimal planting times. AI can be engaged in other aspects of the agricultural value chain, such as reducing post-harvest losses and improving market access (Marwala, 2024; Jaiyesimi, 2024).

Pretty & Bharucha (2014) already raised the need for sustainable intensification in agricultural systems, addressing pressing issues of food insecurity. Ryan, Isakhanyan, and Tekinerdogan’s (2023) work extensively addresses the impact of AI in the economic, social, ethical, environmental, and technological aspects of agriculture, while calling for an interdisciplinary approach in the deployment of AI in agriculture. In this paper, we offer a biblical perspective on the effective deployment of AI in agriculture, contributing to the call for an interdisciplinary approach. By doing this, the study addresses the research question: To what extent does Genesis 2:15 support technological innovations in modern cultivation? Could Genesis 2:15 be amenable to an interpretation that sees humans not only as caretakers or stewards of creation but also as innovators who could create and leverage AI technologies for their greater good in agricultural production?

In this paper, it is imagined that “to till,” used about a garden *ab initio*, envisages the creation and use of tools. The idea of creating itself suggests innovation, allowing the continuous invention of new methods, materials, and systems that enhance the fulfilment of humans’ responsibilities and pleasure on earth. This notion is explored in this study within the context of reading of recovery in the interpretation of Genesis 2:15. It posits that the biblical text could extend beyond popular interpretation along the lines of human dominion and stewardship. A reading of recovery could cover the ethical use of technologies in modern agriculture. It is thus possible to see Genesis 2:15 through the lens of a responsible deployment of AI in scaling agricultural productivity for food security and maintaining agro-ecological balance and sustainability in Africa.

Methodological and Conceptual Clarifications

This paper uses the reading of recovery approach to biblical interpretation. The concept of recovery reading originated as a response to Lynn White’s thesis, which indicted the Bible as an anti-ecological text. White (1967) posits that the Bible supports an anthropogenic vision endorsing the exploitative use of the earth, noting that biblical text, such as Genesis 1:28, is often adopted in unmitigated abuse of the natural world (Kavusa, 2019). The reading of recovery is pitched against Lynn White’s accusation. It is one of the approaches to biblical interpretation that seeks to defend the Bible as a text in favour of the sustainable use of the earth. The exegetical endeavour is grounded in the task of uncovering the potential of biblical texts to advocate for eco-friendliness and human responsibility in the use of the earth and its natural resources. A reading of recovery also involves interpreting biblical texts in support of sustainable agriculture, as opposed to agricultural practices that harm the natural world. It supports the school of thought that considers the emphasis on human dominion as the core interpretation of the creation narratives as undue and colonial in orientation (Ahiamadu, 2020).

Apart from the use of the approach in ecological issues, it has also been used to ethically reread complex texts that suggest biblical endorsement of genocide and other harmful practices. In this case, reading of recovery is used to recover the original meaning and context of a text by separating the actual word of God from human additions (Bang, 2021). This interpretative model applies to the reading of Genesis 2:15 in this paper, as it enables the text to be viewed as validating sustainable and innovative agricultural practices on earth. However, the reading of recovery is rooted within African biblical hermeneutics (ABH) in this study. ABH is the interpretative framework that makes Africa and Africans the subject of biblical interpretation. In principle, it seeks to transform Africans and Africa through biblical interpretation (Adamo, 2015). This paper is contextually and premeditatedly African in its orientation, showing the potential of Genesis 2:15 not only to support the use of AI in sustainable agricultural production but also to transform Africa in terms of food security.

Defining AI has been quite taxing. This is because AI comprises several aspects of technology that make a strait-jacket definition impossible. For instance, such definitions that reduce AI to the use of algorithms in performing specific tasks do not entirely capture the essence of AI in contemporary understanding. For the sake of this paper, we would adopt the clarification that most closely represents our understanding of AI. The most appropriate here is the one offered by the AI High-Level Expert Group (AI HLEG) of the European Commission (EC) that defines AI as “Systems that display intelligent behaviour by analysing their environment and taking actions – with some degree of autonomy – to achieve specific goals.” (AI HLEG, 2019). AI in agriculture, as construed in this work, refers to intelligent autonomous systems built specifically or deployed to carry out agro-related tasks, such as cultivation, processing, and distribution, among others. By doing so, it increases output without harming the environment.

Genesis 2:15: History of Interpretation

2:15 belongs to a larger literary unit, 2:4-25. It falls under the corpus of the Garden of Eden account but contains, essentially, what is known as the “second creation story,” a narrative that falls within the framework of *primaeval* history (Ademiluka, 2008; Ahiamadu, 2020). From a historical-critical perspective, Genesis contains two distinct creation narratives: that of Genesis 1:1-2:4a, attributed to the Priestly writer(s), and 2:4b-25, which is attributed to the Jahwist. The Jahwist account is generally regarded as the first creation account, as the writer(s) are believed to have written around the 9th century BCE (Ademiluka, 2008).

Over the years, Genesis 2:15 has been interpreted from different perspectives. Early interpreters approached the text from a “dominionist” and even male chauvinistic orientation (Yoreh, 2019). Babya ibn Papuda, a Spaniard who lived from approximately 1050 to 1120 CE, is often cited as an example. He argued that:

Man was put in the Garden of Eden to dress and to keep it, by using animals for his benefit and his food, ... by using women and their fertility for the sake of increasing one's offspring – for all these is man rewarded, if he acts for the sake of God also, in his heart and intension, whether his act is completed or not. (As cited in Yoreh, 2019, p. 11)

Ahiamadu (2020) questions the so-called *Imago Dei* (pp. 28-29) or the “dominionists” (Yoreh, 2019, p. 11) view of Genesis 1:26-28 and 2:15, arguing that such an interpretation is responsible for the colonial use of the Bible as a tool of oppression, especially in Africa. It positions humans as superior creatures who must dominate the world. Ahiamadu (2020) joins other scholars who adopt a responsible stewardship approach to land ownership and use as the basic theological and ethical interpretation of the assignments given to the first humans in Genesis. This model of interpretation recognises the terrestrial function of humans as stewards of the earth, who must bear in mind that they are accountable to God in the way and manner they use the land. It is framed in the awareness that humans and

nature are co-dependent and mutually dependent on God, as shown in the creation accounts (Ahiamadu, 2020; Wasike, 1999).

In recent times, scholars have begun to interpret Genesis 2:15 within the context of environmental sustainability. In contrast, others argue that the text builds upon Genesis 1:28 within the ongoing narrative of human creation (Brown, 2015). The latter group sees the text within the context of the development of human identity (Brown, 2015).) Brown (2015) notes in this regard that the text is a description of the function – the job of the human, placed in the Garden of Eden to serve and to preserve. For Yoreh (2019), it is not appropriate to impose an interpretation on a text. Citing the environmentalists' use of Genesis 2:15, it has been posited that the original and intellectual history of texts are proper guides in arriving at a balanced interpretation (Yoreh, 2019). In this regard, although Genesis 2:15 does not directly address environmental discourse in its original context, it supports environmental sustainability in recent biblical scholarship (Yoreh, 2019). It is in this sense that this study appropriates Genesis 2:15 as a text in favour of AI in agriculture and food security in Africa. This effort, like that of Ahiamadu (2020) above, aligns well with a reading of recovery in the African context. It reclaims the text from the dominionists' interpretation that fuelled colonial enterprise and their oppressive injustices in the African continent and re-reads the text in support of a course that could reposition Africa and Africans in the global future in terms of food security.

Agriculture from Genesis and through the Ages

It is appropriate to assert in this paper that agriculture is as old as man on earth. The same Genesis, which bequeaths humanity with the knowledge of the beginnings in the creation accounts of the Judeo-Christian tradition, also pulsates with enormous information about agro-ecology and the beginning of agricultural production on the earth. Genesis 2:15 itself is anchored on various agro-ecological presuppositions. First, at the time Yahweh created the earth, there was neither vegetation nor a life form. Only dry land is presented in the second creation account.

It is this dry land that is watered to bring life. Yahweh forms man from the dust of the earth and breathes the breath of life into his nostrils, bringing him to life. Then God plants a garden with all sorts of suitable trees for the man in Eden and places him in the garden "to till it and to keep it." After that, Yahweh creates the animals and the birds, likewise from the dust of the earth. He brings them to the man who gives them names. Finally, Yahweh takes a rib from the body of the man, having caused him to fall into a deep sleep, and makes it into a woman, whom he names Eve, from Adam, the first human (Wenham, 1987). After the expulsion from the Garden, Genesis hints at a generational transition of agricultural knowledge. Adam's children both brought offerings to Yahweh. Cain offered from the produce of his farm (crops). In contrast, Abel offered a firstborn animal from his herd (livestock) – the two dominant areas of agricultural production, perhaps in the most basic forms (Gen. 4:3-4).

The tilling and keeping of the ground subsequently witnessed improvement as humans began to invent tools. Mazoyer & Roudart (2006) conducted extensive research on the evolution of agriculture throughout human history, noting that the most significant transition in agriculture occurred during the Neolithic Revolution, when prevailing nomadic-hunter-gatherer lifestyles gave way to settled farming communities. The advent of stone sharpening and its application in various agricultural activities led to increased agricultural production. The surplus that resulted from this style may have accounted for population growth and the establishment of later civilisations (Mazoyer & Roudart, 2006; O'Brien & Keyder, 2012). Early agricultural practices from this period were rudimentary across the known world. The scale of agricultural production was traditional, sedentary, and subsistent, with basic techniques that included the domestication of plants and animals, naturally sourced irrigation systems, and crop rotation (Mazoyer & Roudart, 2006).

The next major historical epoch in agricultural development is the Industrial Revolution, which, in many parts, was also a significant agricultural revolution. A pivotal transformation in farming methods marked the 18th and 19th centuries. Innovations such as Tull's seed drill and crop rotation systems, notably the Norfolk four-course system, were used to enhance agricultural productivity by optimising land use and improving soil fertility (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). The Industrial Revolution further transformed agriculture with the introduction of machinery, including steam-powered ploughs and threshers. The mechanisation of farming had a profound impact on agricultural production and processes. For instance, it reduced manual labour and labour costs and exponentially increased production.

Paarlberg and Paarlberg (2000) note other innovative agricultural systems of the period and state unequivocally that the developments of this era gave rise to the agricultural development that followed in subsequent centuries. Apart from major innovative breakthroughs in the manufacturing and use of heavy farm equipment, there was also a shift in traditional methods of land ownership. Modern government policies made more land available and accessible to farmers, allowing them to consolidate land ownership and increase farm sizes, which in turn led to more efficient farming practices (Mazoyer & Roudart, 2006). In all, humans are at the centre of all significant developments in agriculture, and all advancement could be portrayed as efforts in pursuit of the mandate to till and keep the earth.

Agricultural Production and the Issue of Food Security in Africa

While it is agreed as Ryan, Isakhanyan & Tekinerdogan (2023) note that food security, safety, and various environmental considerations are growing needs of modern agriculture, it must be added that these needs are more pronounced in the African continent with a population growth that consistently threatens the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Despite the abundance of uncultivated land, which accounts for over 65% of the world's total, Africa still faces food insecurity, relying heavily on the

importation of food products from abroad —a situation that renders the continent vulnerable to global economic crises (AFDB, 2022).

Africa ranks as the least developed continent in terms of the development and use of modern agricultural technologies and techniques (Mazoyer & Roudart, 2006). Today, Africa is faced with a growing food crisis of unimaginable proportions. Millions are at risk of worsening hunger on the continent due to various internal crises and wars, climate change, COVID-19 impact on the global economy, the Ukraine and Russia war, among others (FAO, AUC, ECA, & WFP, 2023). Over 282 million people, accounting for approximately 20% of the population, were found to be undernourished in 2022, placing African nations far behind those striving to achieve a hunger-free world by 2030 (FAO, AUC, ECA, & WFP, 2023). Africa accounts for 38% of the global burden of hungry people, estimated at 735 million in 2022 (FAO, AUC, ECA, & WFP, 2023).

Although the agricultural sector employs the largest population on the African continent, it contributes only about 22% to the continent's GDP, and the high labour force engaged in agricultural production does not translate to food sufficiency (Galal, 2025). Several factors account for this situation in Africa. For instance, there is the issue of low agricultural productivity, where yields in Africa are significantly lower than the global average (IFPRI, 2021). This low productivity is directly connected to inadequacy in the use of modern farming techniques and inputs. Farming in Africa is still at a sedentary and subsistence level. New smallholder farmers and start-ups are often hindered by a lack of funding in implementing modern farming techniques. There is also the problem of unfavourable environmental conditions, primarily resulting from climate change. Extreme weather conditions, such as droughts and flooding, can severely impact crop yields. Many places in Africa face these problems, resulting in a negative strain on food availability (IPCC, 2022). Other critical issues that hinder food security in Africa include inadequate investment in the agricultural sector, the inability to contain post-harvest losses due to the lack of storage facilities, poor road network infrastructure, and inadequate market regulation, among others.

For a continent that relies heavily on imports, such as Africa, global economic factors could also exacerbate its food crisis. This paper has already hinted at the negative toll of the war in Ukraine on the availability and cost of grains in Africa (WFP, 2023). Africans urgently need to address their food shortages and work towards ending hunger on the continent. The very recent cases of deaths resulting from a stampede in places where food items were meant to be distributed to those who could not afford basic nutritional supplies during the Christmas celebration in Nigeria are a stark reality of the need to address food crises in the African continent. In this paper, it is envisioned that leveraging advances in AI for agricultural production and overhauling the entire agricultural value chain could mark a potential shift from the current condition of food crisis to food surplus in Africa.

AI in Agriculture Today

Agriculture has transitioned from traditional sedentary methods to mechanised systems following the Industrial Revolution. Today, advancements in AI and state-of-the-art breakthroughs in technologies are broadening the horizons with great potential for an increase in all areas of agricultural production. AI technologies facilitate the accomplishment of complex tasks through sophisticated methods and models. For instance, through the stimulation of intelligent behaviours, AI facilitates a series of agricultural activities, significantly improving and even surpassing extant digital autonomous methods and systems (Cook & O'Neill, 2020; Davenport et al., 2020).

Several critical aspects of agriculture could benefit from advancements in AI technologies, including soil management, pest control, disease detection and management, crop management, and irrigation optimisation (Ryan, Isakhanyan, & Tekinerdogan, 2023). In soil management, the use of AI breathes the same ethos of Genesis 2:15, namely, sustainability in the management of the soil (land). AI employs decision support systems, management-oriented modelling, fuzzy logic, and neural networks to analyse soil composition, nutrient levels, and soil temperature, among others (Eli-Chukwu, 2019; Ryan, Isakhanyan & Tekinerdogan, 2023). Today, accurate spectral indices are available for evaluating cultivated land quality (CLQ) based on the gross primary productivity (GPP) of crops (Wang, Wang, & Chen, 2020). The relationship between soil electrical parameters and soil compaction can be determined using artificial neural networks (ANNs). One such study has shown that soil compaction could influence crop yield (Gercia-Gardezi et al., 2020)

Similarly, AI uses a variety of artificial modelling and algorithms in the design of pest and weed control systems. For instance, artificial neural networks (ANNs) using genetic algorithms, sensor machine learning, digital image analysis, neural networks for weed detection, among others, have all proven to significantly help farmers in the effective management of weeds and pests, by enabling early detection and timely interventions (Kujawa & Niedbala, 2021; Tobal, 2014; Laikos et al., 2018; Gerhards & Christensen, 2003; Yang et al., 2002; Ryan, Isakhanyan & Tekinerdogan, 2023).

One major setback that hampers agricultural production and food security, particularly in Africa, is the issue of crop and livestock diseases. AI-driven systems are designed to identify plant and livestock diseases accurately. Again, early detection enables farmers to make prompt and actionable decisions that can prevent the spread of disease on the farm (Cook & O'Neill, 2020). Currently, AI-based image recognition and computerised vision systems offer a high degree of accuracy in detecting and managing both plant and animal diseases (Liu, 2020; Kakani et al., 2020). AI is also proving to have significant effectiveness in crop management, particularly in areas such as crop choice, seed selection using a convolutional neural network (CNN), crop fertilisation, and pest prevention (Cieniawska & Pentos, 2021). Ryan, Isakhanyan, and Tekinerdogan (2023) identify several robotic and autonomous systems that are used to monitor crop growth, health, and yield. AI-powered systems are also revolutionising irrigation processes in farming. Through precision farming, AI

optimises the use of water, reducing waste by scheduling irrigation and monitoring soil humidity for maximum efficiency (Ryan, Isakhanyan, & Tekinerdogan, 2023; Kakani, 2020).

What was previously impossible in agricultural production is now possible through the use of AI. AI has become indispensable in today's farming, which is largely data-driven. With the projected compound annual growth rate of 23.1% for AI in agriculture from 2023 to 2028, it is evident that the use of AI in farming will continue to increase in the years to come (Tarasiewicz, 2023). It is the assertion of this study that optimized farming processes in the development and deployment of AI systems are congruent to the proper interpretation of humans' ongoing assignment of tilling and keeping the land Genesis 2:15. Robotic systems that can selectively detect and clear weeds, manage soil conditions, schedule irrigation, carry out accurate farm observation, provide satellite imagery and climate models, observe weather patterns, among others, not only have the potential of scaling agricultural production but also fostering agro-ecological balance and sustainability embedded in Genesis 2:15.

Genesis 2:15 in Support of AI in Agriculture

Davis (2009) is clear in asserting that the Bible can be read through an agrarian lens. Agrarianism, as he agrees, is a way of thinking and ordering life in the community that is based on the sustenance of the land and of living creatures. The continuous need to maintain the health of land and its creatures should motivate a reevaluation of biblical texts and lead to a multidisciplinary reimagining of agricultural production and the issue of food security (Davis, 2009). Genesis 2:15 is one such biblical text with the potential to recalibrate the so-called specialists' discourse on the earth's sustainability and the question of food security.

Genesis 2:15 mandates Adam (the man in a generic sense) to till and to keep the Garden of Eden (by implication, the land). The percentage of uncultivated (untilled) land in Africa shows that the African 'Adam' is yet to take complete account of the text. Genesis 2:15 presents two Hebrew words that can be read in the light of land cultivation and sustainability, responsible agricultural production, and achieving food security in Africa through the lens of recovery. The two Hebrew words used in the biblical text are לַעֲבֹד *le'ābdāh* and לְשָׁמְרָהּ *leshāmrāh*, meaning "to till and to keep" (the Garden). These terms have a broader interpretive significance that encompasses agro production in the context of farming the earth and the sustainability of the agricultural ecosystem. A reading of the recovery approach allows interpreters of Genesis 2:15 to consider the use of לַעֲבֹד and לְשָׁמְרָהּ as indicating humans' protective use of the earth. The text implies that Adam (the human) is required to commit all their faculties to engaging this task. This includes their physical energy and ability, as well as their intellectual and technological capabilities, ultimately leading to the invention of tools that can aid agriculture and those that serve the purpose of sustainable land cultivation.

It is already hinted in the foregoing that אָדָם (*Adam*, “man”) as used in the creation accounts represents mankind or humanity as a whole (Boloje, 2017). His creation is in the image of God. Walsh, as cited in Dumbrell (1988), suggests that the Hebrew word *betsalemenu* (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ), rendered as “in our image”, should instead read, “*as* our image,” because it relates to man’s function in the world rather than a mere ontological property belonging to human beings, such as rationality. That man is to function as God on earth. The first function specific to God is the creation of all things. By implication, man is expected to create, invent and innovate in furtherance of his god-like function on earth. It is this creative ingenuity that has evolved effectively throughout history, leading to the creation of tools and implements that enhance agricultural production and other fields. It is our position in this study that AI in agriculture represents another step forward in the ongoing demonstration of human creativity, as outlined in Genesis 2:15.

Implications of Genesis 2:15 on Leveraging AI for Food Security in Africa

The study has established that humans are God’s representatives on earth, created to manage and sustain the earth in a responsible manner. This management role encompasses their actions or inactions in the agro-ecological world bequeathed to them in Genesis 2:15. The Garden of Eden narrative suggests that the natural environment was created to enhance human life on earth, but not without responsibilities. Genesis 2:15, as seen in the foregoing, presupposes that the earth has all that is required to support humans’ continuous existence. The text implicitly implies that hunger and food shortage are ideally not supposed to be part of human experience as long as they creatively respond to the assignment of tilling and keeping the garden. However, many people experience food shortages and live in hunger worldwide today. Africa is worse hit by this situation. The issue of food shortage in Africa reveals how poorly and inefficiently Africans have ‘tilled and kept their gardens.’ This indictment underscores the importance of harnessing all available technological and mechanical advancements, including AI, in scaling up agricultural production and addressing the continent’s food crisis.

In fulfilling the tasks outlined in Genesis 2:15 within the context of the African food crisis, it is essential to leverage all modern agricultural technologies to address the crisis. Africans must transition from subsistence farming by adapting systems that will not only enhance food security but also contribute to the preservation of the continent’s unique agro-ecosystem. To a large extent, technological innovations in AI and its deployment in Agriculture resonate with the biblical mandate to responsibly manage the earth’s resources, as shown in this paper. Interestingly, AI in agriculture is one of the many advancements in human history proven to have a significant impact on food production and agro-ecological sustainability. African nations must capitalise on the opportunities presented by AI in addressing the growing food crisis. Efforts in this direction would effectively be considered innovative ways of tilling and maintaining land.

One of the theological implications of a reading of the recovery of Genesis 2:15 is that it removes the text from the heavy colouration of the “dominionists” (Yoreh, 2019, p. 11)

interpretation, which is primarily responsible for the consumerist exploitation of the earth. A reading of recovery allows us to see God's care for humanity as the key element of the creation narrative rather than humans' superiority and dominion over creation. Genesis 2:15, as a text, is contextually set in the Garden of Eden, where hunger could not have been a possibility. God's care continues to be evident in human history, as nature itself demonstrates, but humans have subversively exploited nature to the disadvantage of many across the globe. For instance, governments in Africa focus on mining natural resources to earn foreign exchange, while largely neglecting investment in agriculture and food security. In Nigeria, multinational oil companies acquire lands previously used for farming to facilitate their mining activities. They pollute the rivers, rendering local fishing activities impossible. All of these have turned out to be a portent socio-economic means of mass impoverishment of people, environmental degradation, and severe circumscription of community and individual rights, especially in the Niger Delta region of the country (Ahiamadu, 2020).

A reading of the recovery of Genesis 2:15 brings justice to the text by emphasising protective care rather than a destructive use of land resources. It is obviously from this kind of reading that communities and people, who have suffered from many years of economic oppression and 'weaponisation' of hunger, can find justice. A proper reading would therefore see Genesis 2:15 not as a passive function of humans but as a call to duty, one that should reverberate food security as its core. Tilling the ground encompasses both agriculture and mining in a modern context, but these activities must be conducted responsibly and sustainably. Sustainability extends beyond mere maintenance; it also involves seeking ecological balance. In this study, 'agricultural production' refers to practices with minimal impact on the ecological balance. The use of modern technology can achieve this, primarily through AI-driven precision farming.\

When viewed and utilised as a tool developed in response to the fulfilment of Genesis 2:15, AI in agriculture could help achieve food security in Africa shortly. Arable land, an abundant natural resource across Africa, can be utilised optimally by deploying AI-driven technology in farming. Soil nutrients, water, and fertilisers, among others, could benefit from AI optimisation for increased agricultural production. An increase in agricultural production, reduced post-harvest waste, adequate storage facilities, and efficient food supply mechanisms ultimately result in a greater amount of food available for consumption. Interestingly, Humans (Adam) have evolved significantly in the way they labour in cultivation. Mechanised farming took over the massive burden of subsistent labour, where humans had to manually till the ground. In recent years, AI has improved mechanised farming processes by automating cultivation and other agricultural processes. A proper investment in mechanised and AI-driven agriculture would not only reduce human labour but also ensure sustainable productivity and food security in Africa.

Conclusion

The reading of Genesis 2:15, wherein humans are charged with the assignments of tilling the Garden and keeping it, shows that it is interpretatively accurate to incorporate humans' creative ingenuity, including their capabilities to invent mechanical and technological tools, as part of the fulfilment of the tasks. As products of humans' ongoing evolution in fulfilling the task of responsibly tilling and caring for the earth, advances in AI, especially for agricultural purposes, enable more sustainable methods of agricultural production in contemporary times. This study has demonstrated that AI has the potential to address the food crisis in Africa. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to the realisation of food security on the continent is the lack of political will to engage in policy change that could transform agricultural production decisively. We insist here that Africa can attain food security with the right investment in agriculture. As a way forward, therefore, African nations must rethink their current stance on agriculture by investing heavily in mechanised and AI-driven precision farming. Governments across African nations, as major stakeholders in agricultural development, must begin to provide critical infrastructure that supports modern agricultural activities. They must conscientiously address the food crisis as a matter of social justice and pursue agro-ecological programs that prioritise food security and sustainability.

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SOCIETAL REACTIONS AND THE PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN EXPERIENCING INFERTILITY IN FAKO DIVISION, SOUTHWEST REGION

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Abstract

This study examined how societal reactions influence the psychosocial development of women experiencing infertility in Fako Division, Southwest region Cameroon. Using a convergent mixed-method design, quantitative data were collected from 354 community actors and qualitative data from five clinically diagnosed women suffering from infertility. Findings showed predominantly negative societal reactions, with 76.4% of respondents acknowledging stigma and discriminatory behaviours such as blame, mockery, marital instability, and exclusion from family activities. Chi-square tests revealed that age, sex, education, occupation, religion, and marital factors significantly shaped societal attitudes toward women suffering from infertility. Qualitative accounts further highlighted rejection by spouses and in-laws, emotional withdrawal from family members, and pressure to seek spiritual or traditional remedies. Regression analysis demonstrated a strong and significant effect of societal reactions on psychosocial development ($R = 0.595$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 86.60% of the variation. Conclusively, the study showed that negative societal responses profoundly undermine the emotional, social, and psychological wellbeing of women facing infertility, underscoring the need for community education and culturally sensitive support systems.

Keywords:

Societal Reactions, Psychosocial Development, Infertility, Fako Division, Southwest Region.



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Résumé

Cette étude a examiné l'influence des réactions sociétales sur le développement psychosocial des femmes confrontées à l'infertilité dans le département de Fako, région du Sud-Ouest du Cameroun. Une méthodologie mixte convergente a permis de recueillir des données quantitatives auprès de 354 acteurs communautaires et des données qualitatives auprès de cinq femmes ayant reçu un diagnostic clinique d'infertilité. Les résultats ont révélé des réactions sociétales majoritairement négatives : 76,4 % des répondantes ont fait état de stigmatisation et de comportements discriminatoires tels que le blâme, les moqueries, l'instabilité conjugale et l'exclusion des activités familiales. Les tests du χ^2 ont montré que l'âge, le sexe, le niveau d'instruction, la profession, la religion et la situation matrimoniale influençaient significativement les attitudes sociétales envers les femmes souffrant d'infertilité. Les témoignages qualitatifs ont par ailleurs mis en lumière le rejet par le conjoint et la belle-famille, le repli sur soi vis-à-vis des membres de la famille et les pressions exercées pour recourir à des remèdes spirituels ou traditionnels. L'analyse de régression a démontré un effet important et significatif des réactions sociétales sur le développement psychosocial ($R = 0,595$, $p < 0,001$), expliquant 86,60 % de la variation. En conclusion, l'étude a montré que les réactions sociétales négatives nuisent profondément au bien-être émotionnel, social et psychologique des femmes confrontées à l'infertilité, soulignant ainsi la nécessité d'une éducation communautaire et de systèmes de soutien adaptés aux réalités culturelles.

Mots-clés : Réactions sociétales, Développement psychosocial, Infertilité, Division de Fako, Région du Sud-Ouest.

Introduction

Infertility remains a critical global health and social concern, particularly in societies where childbearing is closely tied to a woman's identity, social value, and psychological wellbeing. Although infertility has existed for centuries (Gerrity, 2001), contemporary evidence shows that societal expectations and cultural norms continue to exert substantial pressure on women who experience difficulties in conception (Ibisomi & Mudege, 2014; Ombelet, 2017). In many African settings, motherhood is more than a biological event it is a culturally ascribed achievement that validates womanhood, secures social belonging, and ensures continuity of lineage (Dennison, 2016; Dyer et al., 2004). Consequently, when a woman is unable to conceive, societal perceptions and reactions can shape not only her social experiences but also her psychological and emotional development.

Recent studies indicate that infertility in sub-Saharan Africa is commonly perceived as a woman's problem, which exposes affected women to disparaging social reactions including stigma, discrimination, marital instability, emotional neglect, and in extreme cases, physical abuse (Atijosan et al., 2019; Stellar et al., 2016). These societal responses often lead to psychological consequences such as depression, lowered self-esteem, social withdrawal, and heightened emotional distress (Hatamloye & Hashemi, 2012; Peterson et al., 2020). The psychosocial development of women defined broadly to include emotional, cognitive, relational, and social wellbeing can therefore be significantly disrupted when infertility is framed as personal failure (Kirca & Pasinoglu, 2013; Elshenrukh et al., 2021). This is especially evident in highly pronatalist contexts where childbearing is linked to social

security, marital stability, and generativity in adulthood (Abbasi-Shavazi, 2006; Yao et al., 2018).

In Cameroon, particularly within the Southwest Region, infertility is not only medically challenging but also socially consequential. Pronatalist cultural norms remain strong, and infertile women are frequently perceived as incomplete, cursed, or responsible for family misfortune (Akinsola, 2013; Dyer et al., 2005). These perceptions intensify societal reactions such as ridicule, exclusion from cultural roles, and community-level stigma, all of which threaten women's psychosocial functioning. Recent findings show that infertility prevalence in the Southwest Region is relatively high, with a significant proportion of affected women experiencing preventable causes such as sexually transmitted infections (Tiagha et al., 2020). Despite the multifactorial causes of infertility, societal blame is disproportionately directed at women, thereby increasing their vulnerability to mental health difficulties, relational conflicts, and disruptions to identity formation (Karaca & Unsal, 2012; Greil et al., 2018).

Given these dynamics, understanding how societal reactions shape the psychosocial development of women experiencing difficulties in conception is critical within the Cameroonian context. While previous studies have examined stigma, cultural beliefs, or marital outcomes related to infertility, limited research has specifically explored how societal perceptions and reactions influence women's emotional growth, social functioning, self-concept, and overall psychosocial wellbeing in Fako Division. This gap underscores the need for targeted inquiry into how societal attitudes such as blame, exclusion, discrimination, or negative labeling affect infertile women's developmental trajectories.

Therefore, this article **investigates the impact of societal reactions toward women with infertility on their psychosocial development in Fako Division, Southwest Region of Cameroon**. Understanding this relationship is essential for informing culturally sensitive interventions, improving mental health outcomes, and reducing stigma for women facing infertility in pronatalist communities.

Methods

Study Site and Population

This study was conducted in Fako Division of the Southwest Region of Cameroon, an area characterized by diverse cultural norms, strong pronatalist beliefs, and marked societal expectations surrounding marriage and fertility. These sociocultural attributes make Fako Division a relevant setting for examining societal reactions toward women experiencing infertility. The study particularly focused on the Buea and Limbe subdivisions, selected for their large populations, ethnic diversity, and the presence of multiple religious, traditional, and community institutions known to shape societal norms and reactions. The populations within selected neighbourhoods Muea, Molyko, Great Soppo (Buea), and Moliwe, Bota, Mile 1 (Limbe) constituted the accessible study population. Two categories of participants were included:

- a) **Women experiencing infertility**, who provided first-hand qualitative accounts of societal reactions and their psychosocial consequences.
- b) **Community actors** including clergy, community leaders, traditional healers, elders, spouses, and gynaecological doctors who provided quantitative data reflecting *how society perceives and reacts* to women with infertility.

This population was purposively selected because they either:

- Directly experience societal reactions (women suffering from infertility), or
- Actively participate in the formation, enforcement, or interpretation of societal norms (community actors).

This combination ensured a comprehensive understanding of how societal judgments, behaviours, and responses influence the psychosocial development of women experiencing infertility in the Fako sociocultural context.

Data Collection

Data collection followed a convergent mixed-method approach, allowing the researcher to capture both community-level reactions and the lived psychosocial experiences of women experiencing infertility. The quantitative strand focused on societal reactions, while the qualitative strand explored how these reactions affect psychosocial development. Both strands were collected simultaneously to ensure that societal perceptions could be directly compared with the experiences reported by women suffering from infertility.

For the quantitative data collection, a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 354 purposively selected community actors, including clergy, community leaders, traditional healers, spouses, elderly persons, and gynaecologists. This component aimed to quantify key dimensions of societal reactions to infertility, such as levels of societal awareness, prevailing perceptions and beliefs, attitudes and emotional responses toward women suffering from infertility, and the specific forms of reactions manifested within the community. These reactions included blame, stigma, social exclusion, discrimination, mockery, avoidance, and marital pressure. Sections B to F of the questionnaire consisted of Likert-scale items specifically developed to measure the nature and intensity of these societal reactions and to determine the extent to which respondents perceived such reactions to influence the psychosocial wellbeing of affected women. This quantitative tool was crucial for identifying dominant social norms, cultural attitudes, and behavioural patterns that infertile women must navigate within the Fako Division context.

The qualitative data collection was designed to complement the quantitative findings by providing deeper insights into the psychosocial consequences of societal reactions. A total of five in-depth interviews were conducted with women clinically diagnosed with infertility and receiving care in selected hospitals in Buea and Limbe. These interviews explored the women's personal encounters with societal judgments, including experiences of stigma, blame, ridicule, exclusion, or pressure from family and community members. Participants were encouraged to discuss their emotional and psychological responses to these reactions and to explain how such experiences shaped their psychosocial development, including their self-esteem, identity formation, social relationships, emotional stability, and coping patterns. The interviews were conducted in quiet hospital spaces to ensure privacy, comfort, and emotional safety. Each session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, was audio-recorded with the participants' consent, and included close observation of non-verbal cues to capture emotional nuances that verbal responses alone could not convey. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions specifically designed to elicit rich narratives on societal reactions and their developmental implications.

Together, the quantitative and qualitative data sets offered a comprehensive and complementary understanding of how society in Fako Division responds to infertility and how these reactions shape the psychosocial trajectories of the women who experience them.

Data Analysis

Prior to data analysis, the quantitative data were entered into a pre-designed EpiData Version 3.1 database, which incorporated built-in consistency and validation checks. Each questionnaire was assigned a serial number and coded to allow easy tracing of individual responses and to facilitate verification during the cleaning process. After data entry, the dataset was transferred to SPSS Version 23.0 for further range, consistency, and validation checks. Once all errors were corrected, the quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and multiple-response analyses were used to summarize patterns of societal perceptions and reactions toward women suffering from infertility.

These summaries provided insight into the prevalence of stigma, discriminatory attitudes, exclusionary practices, and other forms of societal responses. Inferential statistics were then employed to determine associations between societal reactions and psychosocial outcomes. The Chi-square test was applied to compare societal attitudes across demographic groups, while Spearman's rho correlation assessed the strength and direction of the relationship between societal reactions and variables related to women's psychosocial development. Regression analysis was used to establish the predictive influence of societal perceptions on psychosocial wellbeing, and ANOVA was applied to evaluate the overall effect of societal reactions on women's psychosocial development.

Qualitative data from the in-depth interviews were analysed using thematic analysis to generate a deeper understanding of the psychosocial impact of societal reactions on women suffering from infertility. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and field notes were reviewed to capture emotional expressions and non-verbal cues. Responses were then coded and sorted into themes that reflected participants' lived experiences of societal judgments, stigma, exclusion, and emotional distress. Themes and sub-themes were developed inductively to capture the nuances of how societal reactions shaped women's identities, relationships, coping strategies, and emotional wellbeing. Frequencies, quotations, and narrative descriptions were used to present the findings, with each theme considered equally important regardless of the number of participants who mentioned it. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative analyses allowed for a comprehensive interpretation of how community reactions operate at both structural and personal levels, and how these reactions collectively influence the psychosocial development of women experiencing infertility in Fako Division.

Results

The findings showed overwhelmingly negative societal reactions toward women experiencing infertility. Overall, 76.4% of respondents believed that societal reactions are largely negative, supported by a mean score of 3.02 on a 1–4 scale, indicating a high level of negative perception. A strong majority (92.7%) agreed that women face community pressure to conceive, and 80.5% reported that women are frequently blamed for infertility. Physical and social mistreatment were also widely acknowledged: 67.5% indicated that infertile women experience physical abuse, 74.0% agreed that some women are driven

from their homes, and 79.4% stated that women are maltreated by their husbands, in-laws, or the wider community. Additionally, 73.4% reported that women are mocked due to infertility, and 82.5% agreed that husbands often take another wife as a result of infertility. Denial of cultural rights was also noted, with 67.8% affirming that infertile women are excluded from such rights. Despite these negative pressures, 69.8% of respondents believed that women have access to health services related to infertility. Furthermore, 76.0% agreed that husbands tend to neglect their wives for failing to conceive. Collectively, these results reflect a pattern of strong societal stigma, discrimination, and emotional, social, and physical vulnerability experienced by women facing infertility table 1.

Table 1: Societal Reaction Towards Women Suffering from Infertility

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	SD
	SD n (%)	D n (%)	A n (%)	SA n (%)	D/SD n (%)	SA/A n (%)		
Women have easy access to health services regarding infertility	24 (6.8)	83 (23.4)	150 (42.4)	97 (27.4)	107 (30.2)	247 (69.8)	2.9	0.88
Women experience pressure to conceive from the community	10 (2.8)	16 (4.5)	126 (35.6)	202 (57.1)	26 (7.3)	328 (92.7)	3.47	0.71
Women are blamed for infertility	10 (2.8)	59 (16.7)	138 (39.0)	147 (41.5)	69 (19.5)	285 (80.5)	3.19	0.81
Infertile women are physically abused	28 (7.9)	87 (24.6)	158 (44.6)	81 (22.9)	115 (32.5)	239 (67.5)	2.82	0.87
A woman is driven from home due to infertility	21 (5.9)	71 (20.1)	167 (47.2)	95 (26.8)	92 (26.0)	262 (74.0)	2.95	0.84
Women maltreated by the community (husband, in-laws, etc.)	17 (4.8)	56 (15.8)	184 (52.0)	97 (27.4)	73 (20.6)	281 (79.4)	3.02	0.79
Society mocks women suffering from infertility	23 (6.5)	71 (20.1)	168 (47.5)	92 (26.0)	94 (26.6)	260 (73.4)	2.93	0.85
Husband marries another woman due to infertility	22 (6.2)	40 (11.3)	151 (42.7)	141 (39.8)	62 (17.5)	292 (82.5)	3.16	0.86
Women refused cultural rights by community	30 (8.5)	84 (23.7)	148 (41.8)	92 (26.0)	114 (32.2)	240 (67.8)	2.85	0.9
Husband neglects wife for not conceiving	28 (7.9)	57 (16.1)	172 (48.6)	97 (27.4)	85 (24.0)	269 (76.0)	2.95	0.87
Societal Reaction towards Women suffering from Infertility	213 (6.0)	624 (17.6)	1562 (44.1)	1141 (32.2)	837 (23.6)	2703 (76.4)	3.02	0.84

Key: SD= Strongly disagree, D=Disagree, A=Agree, and SA=Strongly agree, SD: Standard deviation

The chi-square analysis revealed that societal reactions toward women experiencing infertility were significantly influenced by multiple sociodemographic factors. Significant associations were found between societal reactions and age ($\chi^2 = 12.842$, $p = 0.005$), sex ($\chi^2 = 0.07$, $p = 0.012$), education level ($\chi^2 = 16.47$, $p = 0.045$), occupation ($\chi^2 = 15.287$, $p = 0.018$), and religion ($\chi^2 = 10.784$, $p = 0.009$). Marital-related factors were also significant, including marital status ($\chi^2 = 13.206$, $p = 0.006$), type of marriage ($\chi^2 = 6.914$, $p = 0.015$), and duration of marriage ($\chi^2 = 5.8$, $p = 0.031$). These results indicate that societal reactions to women with infertility vary significantly across different demographic and social categories.

Table 2: Societal Reaction Towards Women Suffering from Infertility

Societal Reaction towards Women suffering from Infertility						
Variables	Category	D/SD n (%)	SA/A n (%)	Total based on response	Chi-square	p-value
Age	18–30 years	256 (27.5)	674 (72.5)	930	12.842	0.005
	31–45 years	410 (36.6)	710 (63.4)	1120		
	46–60 years	340 (31.8)	730 (68.2)	1070		
	60+	118 (28.1)	302 (71.9)	420		
Sex	Male	271 (26.6)	749 (73.4)	1020	0.07	0.012
	Female	566 (22.5)	1749 (77.5)	2520		
Education	Primary	122 (33.0)	248 (67.0)	370	16.47	0.045
	Secondary	164 (27.3)	436 (72.7)	600		
	Post-secondary	365 (30.6)	825 (69.4)	1190		
	University	368 (32.6)	762 (67.4)	1130		
	Never schooled	67 (39.4)	103 (60.6)	170		
Occupation	Employed	422 (33.9)	818 (66.1)	1240	15.287	0.018
	Business	293 (27.9)	757 (72.1)	1050		
	Clergy	49 (28.8)	121 (71.2)	170		
	Housewife	75 (24.2)	235 (75.8)	310		
	Applicant	32 (16.0)	168 (84.0)	200		
	Retired	33 (20.6)	127 (79.4)	160		
	Nothing	51 (18.9)	219 (81.1)	270		
	Others	40 (28.6)	100 (71.4)	140		
Religion	Christianity	737 (33.3)	2333 (66.7)	3070	10.784	0.009
	Muslim	81 (40.5)	119 (59.5)	200		
	Traditional	72 (34.3)	138 (65.7)	210		
	Buddhist	8 (13.3)	52 (86.7)	60		
Marital Status	Married	903 (31.5)	1957 (68.5)	2860	13.206	0.006
	Single	59 (31.1)	131 (43.8)	190		
	Cohabitation	77 (34.9)	143 (44.4)	200		
	Divorced	40 (40.0)	72 (20.3)	100		
	Widow/Widower	43 (22.6)	147 (77.4)	190		
Type of Marriage	Monogamy	834 (30.4)	2077 (69.6)	2740	6.914	0.015
	Polygamy	260 (32.5)	626 (67.5)	800		
Marriage Duration	0–5 years	323 (31.9)	687 (68.1)	1010	5.8	0.031
	6–9 years	336 (33.0)	674 (67.0)	1010		
	10–15 years	180 (30.5)	410 (69.5)	590		
	16–20 years	70 (21.2)	260 (78.8)	330		
	21+ years	107 (30.9)	437 (69.1)	600		

Societal Reactions and Support Systems for Women with Infertility

The data shows that participants experienced diverse societal reactions to their infertility, ranging from hostility and rejection to support and encouragement, coming from family, religious leaders, healthcare workers, and the broader community. While some received emotional or informational support, many lacked adequate social or institutional mechanisms to help them cope.

Rejection by Spouses and In-laws

Respondent 2 describes intense pressure from her husband's family to have a child, including introducing another woman to continue the family line. This reaction underscores the societal emphasis on reproduction, the threat of marital instability, and the emotional distress caused when women feel replaced or marginalized due to infertility.

"My husband's family brought another girl and told him to try with her. They said he needs a child to continue the family name. I felt like I had already been pushed aside."

Respondent 1 experiences societal and familial pressure suggesting that she should end her marriage to allow her husband to have children elsewhere. This highlights the perceived urgency to produce offspring and the stress women face when their fertility challenges are seen as a threat to marital stability:

"They said I'm wasting his time. That if I love him, I should let him go. I feel like my marriage is on a timer. Nobody wants to wait."

Silence and withdrawal from family members

Respondent 5 notes that others alter their communication or avoid topics related to children because of her infertility. This subtle distancing reflects societal discomfort with addressing childlessness and contributes to feelings of isolation and emotional marginalization:

"They don't talk to me like before. When something comes up about children, they just change the topic. I know it's because of my situation."

Respondent 4 describes being excluded from family discussions and decision-making, with others claiming that certain matters "don't concern" her. This demonstrates how infertility can lead to social marginalization within the family, undermining a woman's sense of belonging and participation:

"I feel left out during family meetings. They say, 'This doesn't concern you.' It's painful because I'm still part of this family, children or not."

Pressure to seek spiritual or traditional Remedies

Respondent 2 shares that community members suggested consulting traditional healers, using herbs, or relying on prayers. This reflects societal tendencies to offer culturally rooted

solutions to infertility, indicating both concern and the promotion of non-medical interventions:

"They say, 'Go and try a native doctor.' Some even say prayers alone can't help me. One woman gave me herbs and said, 'This one worked for my cousin.'"

Respondent 1 describes being advised by church members to seek spiritual deliverance, suggesting that her infertility is viewed as a spiritual issue rather than a medical one. This highlights the role of religious beliefs in shaping societal reactions and proposed support for women facing fertility challenges:

"In the church, they ask me to come for deliverance. They say maybe I'm being tied spiritually. I feel like everyone thinks my problem is not medical, but spiritual."

Table 3: The Impact of Societal Reactions Towards Women with Infertility on the Psychosocial Development of Women Suffering from Difficulties in Conception in Fako Division, Southwest Region

	Statistical parameter	Societal Reaction towards Women suffering from Infertility	Psychosocial Development of Women Suffering from Difficulties in Conception	Explanatory power/predicted impact in terms of % (Cox and Snell test)
Spearman's rho	R-value	1	0.595**	0.865
	p-value		<0.001	
	N	354	354	86.60%

Statistically, the findings predicted that societal reaction towards women suffering from infertility has a significant and strong impact on the psychosocial development of women suffering from difficulties in conception (R-value = 0.595**, p-value < 0.001). This impact is supported by a high explanatory power of 86.60%, indicating that societal reaction towards women suffering from infertility accounts for a significant portion of the variations in the psychosocial development of women with difficulties in conception. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis, which states that societal reaction towards women suffering from infertility significantly impacts the psychosocial development of women suffering from difficulties in conception, was accepted.

Discussion

The results revealed a pervasive pattern of stigma and discrimination directed toward women experiencing infertility, demonstrating how deeply gendered expectations around childbearing entrenched were in many societies. The overwhelmingly negative societal reactions shown by the 76.4% of respondents who perceived societal attitudes as largely negative were consistent with earlier research indicating that infertility was often framed as a woman's inability to fulfill expected reproductive and social roles (Dierickx et al., 2018; Inhorn & Patrizio, 2015). The high proportion of respondents reporting community pressure (92.7%) and the tendency to blame women (80.5%) further highlighted how

infertility became gendered, even in contexts where male-factor infertility was equally likely.

Reports of physical abuse (67.5%), expulsion from the home (74.0%), and maltreatment by husbands, in-laws, or the community (79.4%) underscored the severe social and emotional consequences women faced, echoing studies from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia that documented similar patterns of violence, marginalization, and social isolation (Alhassan *et al.*, 2014). Experiences of mockery (73.4%) and the widespread practice of husbands taking another wife due to infertility (82.5%) demonstrated the social vulnerability of women suffering from infertility and the extent to which fertility defined women's value in certain cultural settings. The exclusion of women suffering from infertility from cultural rights (67.8%) further showed how infertility undermined their full participation in community life. Although a majority (69.8%) believed that women had access to infertility-related health services, this access did not appear to mitigate broader patterns of neglect (76.0%) and emotional harm. In all, these findings depicted infertility not only as a biomedical condition but also as a profound social issue shaped by gender inequality and cultural norms.

The chi-square analysis further demonstrated that societal reactions toward women experiencing infertility were not uniform but were significantly shaped by respondents' sociodemographic backgrounds. Age showed a significant association with perceptions of societal reactions ($\chi^2 = 12.842$, $p = 0.005$), suggesting that attitudes toward infertility differed across generational groups, a pattern commonly noted in earlier research where younger and older individuals held differing cultural interpretations of infertility (Inhorn & Patrizio, 2015). Sex was also significant ($\chi^2 = 0.07$, $p = 0.012$), indicating that men and women perceived societal responses differently, which aligned with studies showing that women generally reported more awareness of stigma and discrimination due to their closer social proximity to infertility-related expectations (Dierickx *et al.*, 2018).

Education level ($\chi^2 = 16.47$, $p = 0.045$) and occupation ($\chi^2 = 15.287$, $p = 0.018$) were likewise influential, supporting previous findings that higher education and professional engagement often shaped more informed or less stigmatizing views of infertility (Alhassan *et al.*, 2014). Religion ($\chi^2 = 10.784$, $p = 0.009$) also played a significant role, consistent with evidence that religious belief systems strongly informed cultural interpretations of infertility, sometimes intensifying stigma or shaping blame patterns.

Marital-related factors additionally influenced societal reactions. Marital status ($\chi^2 = 13.206$, $p = 0.006$), type of marriage ($\chi^2 = 6.914$, $p = 0.015$), and duration of marriage ($\chi^2 = 5.8$, $p = 0.031$) all showed significant associations, indicating that individuals' own marital contexts shaped how they viewed infertility. This mirrored prior research showing that married individuals, especially those in long-term or polygynous unions, often expressed stronger expectations for childbearing and therefore harsher judgments toward infertile women (Inhorn & Patrizio, 2015). Collectively, these results showed that societal reactions were deeply embedded within social structure, varying significantly across demographic, educational, occupational, religious, and marital categories.

Societal Reactions and Support Systems for Women with Infertility

Rejection by Spouses and In-laws

Rejection by spouses and in-laws emerged as a central theme in the women's narratives. Respondent 2 described intense pressure from her husband's family to conceive, including their attempt to introduce another woman into the marriage to ensure continuity of the family lineage. This reflected the patriarchal and pronatalist expectations documented in earlier research, where infertility was viewed as justification for polygyny or marital instability (Inhorn & Patrizio, 2015). Similarly, Respondent 1 reported pressure from both society and her family to end her marriage so her husband could have children elsewhere. These experiences underscored the gendered burden of infertility, in which women were disproportionately blamed and faced heightened risks of emotional rejection and social displacement (Dierickx et al., 2018). The accounts aligned with studies showing that infertile women were often marginalized within marital relationships, with childbearing positioned as a fundamental marker of a woman's value (Alhassan et al., 2014).

Silence and Withdrawal from Family Members

Silence and social withdrawal were also prominent in the participants' accounts. Respondent 5 reported that family and community members avoided discussions related to children in her presence, reflecting discomfort and stigma surrounding childlessness. Such avoidance behaviors have been shown to reinforce emotional isolation and internalized stigma among infertile women (Wierzbicka et al., 2020). Additionally, Respondent 4 described being excluded from family conversations and decision-making, with relatives implying that certain issues did not concern her because she had no children. This exclusion mirrored earlier findings that infertility often diminished women's status and participation within familial structures, undermining their sense of belonging (Hollos & Larsen, 2008). Taken together, these reactions demonstrated how social withdrawal functioned as a subtle but powerful form of discrimination.

Pressure to Seek Spiritual or Traditional Remedies

The women also faced significant pressure to pursue spiritual or traditional remedies for infertility. Respondent 2 shared that community members frequently encouraged her to consult traditional healers, use herbal mixtures, or rely on prayer. This reflected long-standing cultural beliefs framing infertility as a condition requiring spiritual or traditional intervention rather than biomedical care (Dierickx et al., 2019). Similarly, Respondent 1 reported that church members advised her to seek spiritual deliverance, suggesting that her infertility was linked to supernatural or spiritual causes. Such interpretations are common in many cultural settings, where infertility is often moralized or attributed to spiritual forces, thereby shaping the support and pressure women receive (Inhorn, 2017). These findings highlighted how cultural and religious beliefs heavily influenced community responses, often placing additional emotional and social burdens on affected women.

Impact of Societal Reactions on Psychosocial Development

The statistical findings showed that societal reactions toward women experiencing infertility had a significant and strong impact on their psychosocial development. The correlation coefficient ($R = 0.595$, $p < 0.001$) indicated a robust positive relationship, suggesting that as negative societal reactions increased, psychosocial difficulties also increased among women grappling with infertility. This relationship was further

strengthened by a high explanatory power of 86.60%, demonstrating that societal reactions accounted for a substantial proportion of the variation in psychosocial outcomes. Such a high percentage implied that women's emotional, social, and psychological well-being was strongly shaped by how they were treated by their spouses, families, and communities. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternative, confirming that societal reactions significantly influenced the psychosocial development of women facing challenges in conception. These findings aligned with previous research showing that stigma, blame, and social exclusion associated with infertility often led to depression, anxiety, marital strain, and diminished self-worth (Inhorn & Patrizio, 2015; Wierzbicka et al., 2020). The result therefore emphasized the critical role of social environments in either buffering or exacerbating the psychosocial burden of infertility.

Conclusion

The study demonstrated that societal reactions toward women experiencing infertility in Fako Division were largely negative and deeply influential in shaping their psychosocial wellbeing. Women faced stigma, blame, marital instability, exclusion, and strong pressure to pursue spiritual or traditional remedies, reflecting deeply rooted cultural expectations surrounding motherhood. Quantitative findings confirmed that these societal attitudes significantly varied across demographic and marital factors and had a strong predictive effect on women's psychosocial development. The qualitative accounts reinforced the emotional, social, and physical vulnerabilities that women suffering from infertility routinely endured. The study highlighted infertility not only as a medical condition but also as a significant social and psychological challenge driven by community perceptions. Addressing these issues requires increased public awareness, supportive family dynamics, and culturally sensitive policy interventions aimed at reducing stigma and promoting the wellbeing of women suffering from infertility.

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PRINCIPALS USE OF SOCIAL FUNCTION IN ENHANCING TEACHER QUALITY IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH WEST REGION, CAMEROON

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Abstract

This study aimed at examining the use of principals' social function in enhancing teacher quality by specifically evaluating the ways in which the principals' use of interpersonal relationship enhances teacher quality and to examine the ways in which the principals' use of recognition enhances teacher quality. The convergent parallel mixed method research design was used in the study. The population of the study comprised of all secondary school teachers and principals in public, confessional and lay-private schools in the South West. The purposive and proportionate sampling techniques were used to select 707 participants, 695 teachers and 13 principals with the aid of a self-structured questionnaire and a research diary administered respectively. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings showed that 39.1% of principals used their interpersonal relationship in enhancing teacher quality. Further analysis revealed that principals attended out of school events, offered emotional help to teachers in affliction and gave teachers a listening ear. Findings also showed that 42.0% of principals used recognition in enhancing teacher quality. Further analysis revealed that principals provided verbal praise, appreciated work done by teachers and applauded teachers efforts during classroom visitations. Despite the level of execution of principal's social functions there is need for improvement in enhancing teacher quality. The researchers recommended that principals should provide a conflict-free school climate that is conducive for teachers and acknowledge the efforts of teachers by issuing certificates of honour to outstanding teachers. Further research could be carried on this same topic in other Regions of Cameroon.

Keywords:

Principal, Principals' Social Function, Teachers, Teaching Quality and Secondary Schools.



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Résumé

Cette étude visait à examiner le rôle social des chefs d'établissement dans l'amélioration de la qualité de l'enseignement, en évaluant plus précisément comment leurs relations interpersonnelles et la reconnaissance qu'ils accordent y contribuent. Une méthodologie mixte convergente parallèle a été utilisée. La population étudiée comprenait l'ensemble des enseignants et chefs d'établissement du secondaire des écoles publiques, confessionnelles et privées laïques du Sud-Ouest. Un échantillonnage raisonné et proportionnel a permis de sélectionner 707 participants (695 enseignants et 13 chefs d'établissement) à l'aide d'un questionnaire auto-administré et d'un journal de recherche. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide de statistiques descriptives et inférentielles. Les résultats ont montré que 39,1 % des chefs d'établissement utilisaient leurs relations interpersonnelles pour améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement. Une analyse plus approfondie a révélé que les chefs d'établissement participaient à des événements extrascolaires, offraient un soutien moral aux enseignants en difficulté et étaient à leur écoute. Les résultats ont également montré que 42 % des chefs d'établissement utilisaient la reconnaissance pour améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement. Une analyse plus approfondie a révélé que les chefs d'établissement adressaient des félicitations verbales, appréciaient le travail accompli par les enseignants et saluaient leurs efforts lors des visites de classe. Malgré le niveau d'exercice des fonctions sociales des chefs d'établissement, des améliorations sont nécessaires pour améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement. Les chercheurs recommandent que les chefs d'établissement instaurent un climat scolaire apaisé et propice au travail des enseignants et reconnaissent leurs efforts en décernant des certificats d'honneur aux enseignants les plus méritants. Des recherches complémentaires pourraient être menées sur ce sujet dans d'autres régions du Cameroun.

Mots-clés : Chef d'établissement, Fonction sociale du chef d'établissement, Enseignants, Qualité de l'enseignement, Enseignement secondaire.

Introduction

Teacher quality is a contested term with multiple meanings, often reflecting the perspectives and interest of different writers, researchers and policymakers. According to Goe (2007) teacher quality includes both teacher qualifications and characteristics (inputs) that influence teachers' instruction (process) and student outcomes. Teacher quality includes the knowledge that a teacher possesses, effective teaching practices, skill development, teacher evaluation and teacher preparation (Gottlieb, 2015). Teacher quality also refers to the ability of teachers to display the right attitude to work by being committed and dedicated to the teaching job and making frantic efforts towards the accomplishment of school goals and objectives. Regardless of which angle, the principals' role becomes pertinent in ensuring that teachers carry out their required functions.

In Cameroon, a principal is the most ranking administrator in a secondary school with the fundamental role in ensuring that teachers teach well and students learn (Kurland et al., 2010). The role of a school principal has become increasingly complex as the nature of society, political expectations, and schools as organizations have changed (Valentine & Prater, 2011). The principal is the most important administrator in a secondary school charged with administrative, pedagogic, financial and social functions. However, a lot of

focus has been on the principals' administrative and somewhat pedagogic function. Chukwu et al. (2021) evaluated the administrative roles of principals on teacher's job performance in private secondary schools and found out that principal's administrative roles in the area of staff personnel administration enhanced teachers' job performance. Some other research related to this was carried out by Ekemezie and Anyaogu (2021). They conducted a study on the roles of principals in internal supervision for the development of teacher quality and standards in secondary schools and found out that the roles of principals in internal supervision for development of teacher quality and standards include: encouraging and providing for teacher growth and development, aiding the beginning teachers to grow professionally by helping them identify methods to adopt in teaching, encouraging co-curricular activities in the school and ensuring that financial records are kept up to date.

But little research has been done on social functions, however Nwosu (2017) conducted a study on Principals social function. That is principals' Communication Strategies and Teachers' Job Performance in Public Secondary Schools. Even though Nwosu (2017) conducted a study on the social function, he looked at it from the perspective of communication. However, the interpersonal relationship and recognition was left out. This study is therefore coming in to look at the principal's social function in enhancing teacher quality from the perspective of principals' interpersonal relationship and principals' recognition in public, confessionnal and lay-private secondary schools in the South West Region.

Specifically, this study seeks to:

- 1) Evaluate the ways in which principals use interpersonal relationships in enhancing teacher quality in secondary schools in the South West Region.
- 2) Examine the ways in which principals use recognition in enhancing teacher quality in secondary schools in the South West Region.

It was anticipated that this study may be beneficial to teachers, providing an in-depth knowledge of how principals social functions affect teacher quality. As a result, teachers may develop strategies at improving their quality by enrolling in a programme or through individualized learning. Also, it can help school principals' by bringing to their awareness how the performance of duties can either enhance or diminish teachers' quality. Consequently, it can permit the principal to adjust these management practices accordingly, in order to improve on teacher quality and school performance.

Previous Research on Principals' Social Function and Teacher Quality

Teacher quality is defined as the essential characteristics of a good teacher. The characteristics include the knowledge that a teacher possesses such as effective teaching practices, skill development, teacher evaluation and teacher preparation (Gottlieb, 2015). Goe (2007) extends this definition further arguing that teacher quality includes both teacher characteristics and teacher qualifications and characteristics that influence teachers' instruction and student outcomes. Notwithstanding, Mbua (2003) opined that the effectiveness of a teacher is partly dependent on the type of leadership offered by their school head. He further opined that in Cameroon, the head of a secondary school is the principal. According to Mbua (2003) principalship refers to the duties, job or responsibilities of principals. Botha (2004) defines principalship as the duties of the school principal in a school establishment. The discharge of these duties and responsibilities can be well categorised into four including the administrative, pedagogic, social and financial functions.

The principal's social functions include creating a collaborative work environment that is site-based, supports teamwork, and promotes cohesion and cooperation (Mullen, 2007). It is the ability to motivate, facilitate, coordinate, lead, communicate, manage conflict, and get along with others (Arnett, 2010). In this paper, principals' social function was operationalized as interpersonal relationship and recognition. In the study of Angelle (2006), she posits that the instructive leader is one that contributes to the organizational socialization of a teacher. The principal that is supportive and friendly enhances the teacher's inclusion in the school unit and makes sure there is continuity in his or her work.

Davis (2003) indicated that effective instruction comprises high quality interaction between educators and learners and also amongst peers. Davis opicits that appropriate outcomes appear when there is collaboration between educators and learners. Therefore, teachers play a significant role in achieving the required outcome. Bergin (2009), revealed that attachment-based approach to teacher-learner interpersonal relationship is on the premise that educators who provide sincere, secure and helpful interactions with their learners act as central non-parental attachment. The quality of teacher-learner interpersonal relationship can affect some positive psychological constructs including academic engagement, foreign language enjoyment, resilience, self-efficacy and wellbeing among learners in order to improve the learner's healthy behavioral functioning (Derakhshan, 2021.) In educational institutions whereby the relations between students and teachers, and amongst teachers are harmonious, friendly, collaborative and respectful, they provide the students with positive models.

Teacher recognition is a measure in achieving high quality education and students' academic performance in secondary schools. According to Lee & Kim (2023), teacher recognition includes acknowledging and valuing the efforts and achievements of educators. It does not only boost teachers' morale and job satisfaction but also has a ripple effect on student performance. A study by Tadesse & Bekele (2020) in Ethiopia found that teacher recognition through awards and public acknowledgment was positively correlated with students' academic performance. Similarly, Ali & Ahmed (2021) in Pakistan demonstrated that schools with formal recognition programmes for teachers witnessed higher student achievement levels compared to those without such programmes. Johnson and Williams (2023) examined the correlation between teacher recognition programmes and students' academic performance in secondary schools. The researchers utilized a mixed-method approach, including surveys and academic performance data from various schools. Findings indicated a significant positive relationship between teacher recognition and students' performance, highlighting the role of teacher motivation and job satisfaction. Another study carried out by Patel & Desai (2023) reported that community-based recognition events, peer-nominated awards, and publicizing teacher achievements in local media significantly enhanced teacher morale and performance.

Smith and Brown (2022) conducted a study to explore how recognition and reward systems for teachers influence their motivation and effectiveness, and subsequently, student academic outcomes. The study used longitudinal data from secondary schools across several districts and found that schools with robust teacher recognition programmes recorded improved student performance in standardized test.

Saitau (2024) studied the effects of teachers' recognition on secondary school students' academic performance in Arusha District Council, Tanzania. The study assessed the extent

to which teachers' recognition influences students' academic performance and the effective strategies to enhance teachers' recognition in public secondary schools. Social Action theory guided the study. Sequential explanatory design was adopted. Sample size consisted of 172 respondents, the stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used in selecting the respondents. Instruments used for data collection was a questionnaire and an interview guide. The findings showed teacher recognition plays a crucial role in influencing various aspects of the teaching and learning process leading to improved students' academic performances.

When teachers feel recognized and appreciated, they are more motivated and engaged, leading to more effective teaching practices and a positive classroom environment. In South Africa, Williams & Green (2021) in their study on teacher recognition in low-resource settings: challenges and solutions contend that low-cost recognition strategies such as verbal acknowledgments, certificates, and small tokens of appreciation had a positive impact on teacher motivation and student outcomes in low-resource settings.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Function theory by Emile Durkheim (1800-1900) and Talcott Parsons (1940s - 1950s) provided a framework that informed this study. This theory is often associated with functionalism because it examines how various social institutions like schools contribute to the stability and functioning of society. According to this theory, school principals play a critical role in enhancing teacher quality through fostering a positive and collaborative environment within the school, building relationships and strong community ties, addressing conflicts that arise within the school environment, motivating teachers to strive for excellence in their teaching practices that contributes to the overall environment. This theory is relevant to this study in that when principals effectively manage their schools, teachers thrive, ultimately contributing to better student outcomes and a more cohesive educational system.

Methods

This study adopted a mixed method approach with focus on the convergent parallel mixed-method design. In this design, the quantitative and qualitative methods were used to obtain triangulated results. Data was collected from teachers and principals concurrently using questionnaires and diary methods respectively. The data was later analysed independently using quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches as opined by Dawadi et al. (2021). This study was carried out in secondary schools in the South West Region.

Participants

707 participants including teachers and principals constituted the sample size of the study. Overall, the sample constituted of 356 males and 351 females drawn from 34% of respondents from public; 28% of respondents from confessional and 38% of respondents from lay private schools in the South West Region. On this note, a sample of 694 teachers and 13 principals made up the sample size for the study selected using the purposive and proportionate sampling techniques.

Instruments

The researcher used a self-developed questionnaire in collecting data for teachers and a research diary for principals. The questionnaire consisted of 65 items, both open and closed-ended items. The closed ended items were put on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree (SA=4), Agree (A=3), Disagree (D=2) and Strongly Disagree (SD=1). The items were

clear, short and proficient enough in order to discard every form of misunderstanding of items. The Likert-type close-ended items were used because of the ease of responding and the short time required answering. Reasons for the choice of questionnaire was because it was a source of primary data, free from bias, required less time to complete and could cover a large sample size within limited time. The research diary constituted of five questions, to be completed within a duration of five weeks by principals. The reason of the research diary was to give principals the opportunity to give more details about the performance of their duties thereby providing more data for the researcher as well as strengthening the weaknesses of the questionnaire

Quantitative data was analysed using the descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The descriptive statistical tools used were frequency count, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and multiple responses set which aimed at calculating the summary of findings for each variable for a quick comprehension of the overall findings. The addition of mean was to better appreciate the level of principals' execution of their function and teacher quality. Qualitative data derived from principals' diary and open-ended questions gotten from teachers were analysed using the thematic analysis approach with the aid of themes, and quotations.

In order to ensure content validity, the instrument was designed with the aid of related literature reviewed in the study. This was to ensure that the test items on the instruments corresponded to the indicators of the variables in the study. The questionnaire was constructed under the guidance of the research supervisors who ensured that all items were related to the objectives. Copies of the instrument were given to lecturers in the Department of Educational Foundations and to a statistician for scrutiny and suggestions. The researcher also worked together with supervisors in formulating questions to be responded to by principals. It required principals' to better express themselves in detail within a duration of five weeks other than the interview guide which could limit their expressions and idea due to limited time. After this, the data from the diary was transcribed and some changes were made in terms of language. Some of the questions were fine-tuned to be explicit and clear for the participants to respond to questions easily within the stated duration.

Construct validity of the instruments was ensured by formulating test items using related literature reviewed, the instruments were verified by comparing it to other tests items that measured similar qualities to see how highly correlated the two measurements were. In other to ensure face validity of the items, they were formulated and submitted to the supervisors, departmental lecturers and statistician for necessary corrections so as to guide research items to be orderly and reader-friendly to the respondents. The questionnaire was reviewed in terms of structure, and item formatting, clarity, appropriateness of language and expressions. All the items on the instruments were critically examined, some reframed to be clear, simple and unambiguous while the unsuitable ones were eliminated. The reliability of the questionnaire was established through pilot testing using 10 teachers who were not part of the study. The reliability coefficient was calculated using Cronbach Alpha test and the recommended threshold value was 0.7.

Ethical Consideration

In carrying out this study, authorization was obtained for the field work. The researchers obtained verbal consent from participants before administering the instruments. The researcher also informed the respondents that their participation was voluntary and they

could withdraw at any time when they felt uncomfortable. Privacy and anonymity were ensured by assuring respondents their responses were to be handled confidential. Respondents were asked not to write their names on the instruments so that their identities will not be revealed. Respondents were made to understand that the information provided was to be used only for the purpose of research.

Findings

This section presented the findings on the Use of Principals' functions in improving teacher quality in secondary schools in the South West Region. The quantitative findings were first presented followed by qualitative data.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Teachers

Demographic information		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	356	50.4
	Female	351	49.6
Longevity in service	Less than 5 years	184	26.0
	5-10 years	358	50.6
	11-20 years	151	21.4
	21-30 years	14	2.0
School type	Public	240	33.9
	Confessional	200	28.3
	Lay Private	267	37.8
Highest qualification	Advanced Level/Equivalent	199	28.1
	Higher National Diplomat	356	50.4
	Bachelor's Degree	133	18.8
	Master's Degree	10	1.4
	Doctorate	9	1.3

Findings on table 1 revealed the demographic data of respondents, among the 707 respondents sampled, 50.4% (356) were males and 49.6% (351) females. From the statistics, it is seen that there was no significant difference between males and females. With respect to longevity in service, 26.0% (184) of the respondents have been in service less than 5 years, of the teachers 50.6% (358) were in service for 5-10 years, 21.4% (151) have been in service for 11-20 years and 2.0% (14) have been in service for 21-30 years. With respect to school type, 37.8% (267) of respondents were from Lay Private schools, 33.9% (240) respondents were from public schools, and 28.3% (200) respondents were from Confessional schools. Finally, 50.4% (356) of teachers were holders of Higher National Diplomat as their highest educational qualification, while 28.1% (199) were Advanced Level holders/Equivalent, 18.8% (133) Bachelor's Degree, 1.4% (10) Master's and 1.3% (9) Doctorate. By this, it shows that majority of the teachers 78.6% (555) have not been to the university rather, they are holders of diplomas while just 21.4% (152) have been in the university. This again signify that majority of the teachers may not show adequate mastery of their field of study because a teacher who have gone to the university to further his/her education is more advanced than someone teaching merely with knowledge obtain from higher school.

Table 2 presented findings on teacher quality

Table 2
Evaluation of Teacher Quality

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	Std. Dev
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD		
In the last two years, I have taken refresher courses on teaching.	59 (8.3%)	104 (14.7%)	101 (14.3%)	443 (62.7%)	163 (23.1%)	544 (76.9%)	1.69	1.006
My students often generally perform well.	76 (10.7%)	98 (13.9%)	84 (11.9%)	449 (63.5%)	174 (24.6%)	533 (75.3%)	1.72	1.061
I always feel confident about the classes that I teach.	80 (11.3%)	104 (14.7%)	114 (16.1%)	409 (57.9%)	184 (26.0%)	523 (74.0%)	1.79	1.067
I am often involved in continuous professional development.	62 (8.8%)	138 (19.5%)	92 (13.0%)	415 (58.7%)	200 (28.3%)	507 (71.7%)	1.78	1.043
All teachers' lessons are mostly engaging.	63 (8.9%)	120 (17.0%)	106 (15.0%)	418 (59.1%)	183 (25.9%)	524 (74.1%)	1.76	1.029
I am needless of technical support to teach my lessons.	69 (9.8%)	140 (19.8%)	108 (15.3%)	390 (55.2%)	209 (29.6%)	498 (70.4%)	1.84	1.057
MRS and overall mean	409 (9.6%)	704 (16.6%)	605 (14.3%)	2524 (59.5%)	1113 (26.2%)	3129 (73.8%)	1.76	1.044

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree and SD= Strongly Disagree; Std. Dev; Standard Deviation

Table 2 shows that overall teacher quality was low as 74% (3129) of the respondents disagreed to teacher quality indicators with an overall mean score of 1.76. Several of the indicators fell below the mean. Most notably, about 77% (544) of the teachers have not taken refresher course in the last two years neither do they perceive their students are often performing well 75% (533). Similarly, majority 74% (524) indicated their lessons are not engaging and they are often not involved in continuous professional development 74% (507). Most teachers 74% (523) do not always feel confident about the classes that they teach. Regardless of these low perceptions majority of the teachers 70% (498) indicated that they do not need any technical support for their lessons.

Therefore, one could say the low teacher quality could be attributed to the fact that in the last two years teachers have not taken refresher courses on teaching and are not involved in continuous professional development. When teachers do not feel confident about the classes they teach, their lessons will not be engaging. More also, they cannot teach without technical support and as a result, their students cannot perform well. An evaluation of Principals use of Interpersonal Relationship revealed that teachers perceive principal's interpersonal relationship as low. These findings are presented in table 3.

Table 3
Evaluation of Principals' Use of Interpersonal Relationship

Item Description	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	Std Dev
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD		
My principal attends out of school events organized by teachers.	114 (16.1%)	187 (26.4%)	148 (20.9%)	258 (36.5%)	301 (42.6%)	406 (57.4%)	2.22	1.108
My principal often offers emotional help to teachers in the case of an affliction.	98 (13.9%)	190 (26.9%)	165 (23.3%)	254 (35.9%)	288 (40.7%)	419 (59.3%)	2.19	1.072
I am often given a listening ear by my principal.	100 (14.1%)	186 (26.3%)	159 (22.5%)	262 (37.1%)	286 (40.5%)	421 (59.5%)	2.18	1.082
My principal is always very approachable.	90 (12.7%)	191 (27.0%)	168 (23.8%)	258 (36.5%)	281 (39.7%)	426 (60.3%)	2.16	1.058
My principal ensures the social work condition is conducive for teachers.	84 (11.9%)	174 (24.6%)	165 (23.3%)	284 (40.2%)	258 (36.5%)	449 (63.5%)	2.08	1.057
My principal always provides solutions to conflicts that arise amongst teachers.	80 (11.3%)	166 (23.5%)	119 (16.8%)	342 (48.4%)	246 (34.8%)	461 (65.2%)	1.98	1.083
MRS and overall mean	566 (13.3%)	1094 (25.8%)	924 (21.8%)	1658 (39.1%)	1660 (39.1%)	2582 (60.9%)	2.14	1.077

Key: SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, D=Disagree and SD= Strongly Disagree; Std. Dev; Standard Deviation

Table 3 shows that principals use of interpersonal relationship was low as 61% (2582) of the respondents disagreed to teacher quality indicators with an overall mean score of 2.14. majority of the respondents 65% (461) of the teachers said their principal do not always provide solutions to conflicts that arises amongst teachers neither do their principal ensure the social work condition is conducive for teachers 64% (449). Similarly, majority, 60% (426) of teachers indicated their principal is not easily approachable and often do not give teachers a listening ear 61% (421). Most teachers 59% (419) said their principal often do not offer emotional help to teachers who are afflicted. Regardless of these low perceptions, majority of the teachers 57% (406) indicated that their principal attends out of school events. When these findings were triangulated with principals' view of how they use interpersonal relation using the diary method, findings revealed three core themes as presented on figure 1.

Contrary to teacher's views, analysis of qualitative data evaluating principal's view related to their use of interpersonal relationship revealed three core sub themes as presented in figure 1.

Figure 1

Principal's Evaluation of their use of Interpersonal Relationship

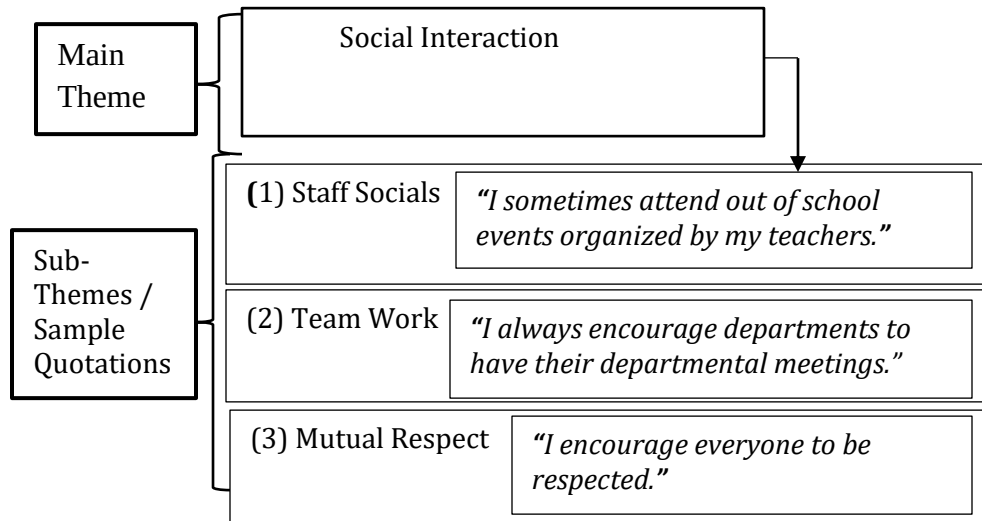


Figure 1 indicated the responses of principals on their use of interpersonal relationship. Their responses were grouped under one main theme social interaction. The theme was subdivided into three sub-themes. Findings revealed that principals used their interpersonal relationship through staff socials as depicted in the statement *"I sometimes attend out of school events."* Others reported they ensured there was team work as reported in the statement *"I always encourage departments to have their departmental meetings."* Others indicated they ensured mutual respect as indicated in the statement *"I encourage everyone to be respected."*

Table 3 presented the quantitative data gotten from questionnaires of teachers on their evaluation of principals' use of recognition.

Table 4***Evaluation of Principals' Use of Recognition***

Item Description	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	Std Dev
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD		
My principal often acknowledges the efforts of teachers.	95 (13.4%)	123 (17.4%)	116 (16.4%)	373 (52.8%)	218 (30.8%)	489 (69.2%)	1.92	1.111
My principal often appreciates work done by teachers.	130 (18.4%)	232 (32.8%)	189 (26.7%)	156 (22.1%)	362 (51.2%)	345 (48.8%)	1.78	1.010
My principal often applauds the efforts put in by teachers during his/her classroom visitations.	127 (18.0%)	232 (32.8%)	183 (25.9%)	165 (23.3%)	359 (50.8%)	348 (49.2%)	1.83	1.104
My principal often issues certificates of honour to teachers who are outstanding.	76 (10.7%)	150 (21.2%)	85 (12.0%)	396 (56.0%)	226 (32.0%)	481 (68.0%)	1.67	.969

My principal usually gives financial motivation to teachers.	82 (11.6%)	150 (21.2%)	94 (13.3%)	381 (53.9%)	232 (32.8%)	475 (67.2%)	1.71	.972
My principal often provides verbal praise.	149 (21.1%)	237 (33.5%)	163 (23.1%)	158 (22.3%)	386 (54.6%)	321 (35.4%)	1.69	.990
MRS and overall mean	659 (15.5%)	1124 (26.5%)	830 (19.6%)	1629 (38.4%)	1783 (42.0%)	2459 (58.0%)	1.76	1.02 6

Based on teachers' evaluation of principal's use of recognition, table 4 shows that principals use of recognition was low as 58% (2459) of the respondents disagreed to principal's use of recognition indicators with an overall mean score of 1.76. Majority of the respondents 69% (489) of the teachers indicated their principal often do not acknowledge their efforts, neither does he honour teachers 68% (481). Also, majority 67% (475) of teachers indicated their principal financially motivates teachers. Irrespective of these low perceptions, majority of teachers 49% (348) of teachers indicated their principal often applauds the efforts of teachers and appreciates work done by them 48% (345). More also, 35% (321) teachers indicated their principal often provides verbal praise. Contrary to teacher's views, analysis of qualitative data evaluating principals' view related to their use of recognition revealed three core sub themes as presented in figure 2.

Figure 2
Principal's Evaluation of their use of Recognition

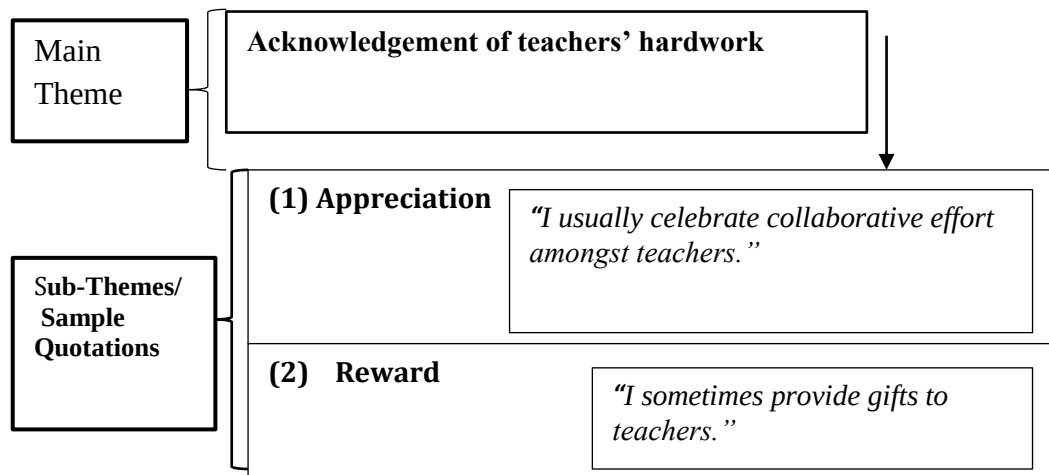


Figure 2 above indicated the responses of principals regarding their use of recognition. Their responses were grouped under one main theme with two specific sub-themes. Principals reported they used their recognition by appreciating teachers' collaborative efforts as indicated in the statement *"I usually celebrate collaborative effort amongst teachers."* Others indicated they used their recognition by rewarding teachers as reported in the statement *"I sometimes provide gifts to teachers."*

Discussion of Findings

This study sought to examine the influence of principals' use of social function in enhancing teacher quality using interpersonal relationship and recognition in secondary schools in the South West Region of Cameroon. The findings indicated that interpersonal relationship is low thus affecting teacher quality. Teacher quality might be hindered due to limited cordial relationship that exists between principals' and teachers. When there is no cordiality, the attendance during out of school events will be poor, teachers will find it difficult approaching their principals. Many teachers reported that principals are not always very approachable and are not often soft spoken. When a principal is not soft spoken, teachers turn to shy away from them because they cannot be listened to in the case of an affliction. The low interpersonal relationship has a significant and strong influence in enhancing teacher quality as justified by high positive coefficient value and a high predicted explanatory power. In other words, teachers are more likely to enhance their quality when principals ensure a cordial interpersonal relationship amongst them. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis that states that the use of principals' interpersonal relationship significantly enhances teacher quality in secondary schools in the South West Region was accepted.

The issue of fostering inter-personal relationships amongst teachers tied with the findings of Maduagwu & Nwogu (2008) which revealed that social conditions of work have to do with assignment of responsibilities, inter-personal relationships with subordinates, and inter-personal relationship with colleagues. This social interaction goes a long way in influencing the level of teacher's productivity. Also, Suzanne et al. (2010) found out that the social environment described as interpersonal relationship, labour-management relations, motivation, workers' training and development has high influence on the workers' morale and efficiency at workplace and this forms part of the social work condition. This evidently implies high productivity. We must therefore understand that relationship is a very important aspect that increases the productivity in a school setting. Therefore, principals should ensure that good inter-personal relationships are maintained.

This finding also tied with the work of Sinisa (2016) who carried out a study titled "The Curriculum of Social Competences and Relations in School." The correlation analysis confirmed a low negative statistically significant correlation between the years of service and the subscale rough verbal and physical treatment ($Rho = -0.101$). In view of the subscale of rough verbal and physical treatment between pupils and teachers, such results on a negative correlation implied older teachers as opposed to their younger colleagues use more corporal punishment in schools, treat pupils rudely, use nasty and impolite words, and call pupils insulting names.

The findings showed that teacher recognition is low as many teachers disagreed than agreed their principals recognized their work. The low recognition may be due to the fact that their principals often do not give them certificates of honour when they work hard and do not appreciate work done by teachers. Findings revealed many teachers reported their principals often do not praise them verbally when they exhibit extraordinary performances. Also, many teachers reported their principals usually do not give them financial motivation. When principals do not appreciate the work done by their teachers, the tendency is that they feel reluctant to work as a result their quality drops and the performances of students' also drops. The low teacher recognition has a significant and strong influence in enhancing teacher quality as justified by high positive coefficient value and a high predicted explanatory power. Teachers are more likely to improve on their quality when principals recognise the work they do. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected while the

alternative hypothesis that states that the principals' use of recognition significantly enhances teacher quality in secondary schools in the South West Region was accepted.

Regardless of how impactful the use of recognition by principals on teacher quality can be, the descriptive analysis revealed that more teachers reported that their principals do not recognize their efforts when compared to those who said their principals sufficiently recognized their efforts. By this, it shows a good number of principals need to improve on their social function by recognizing the effort of teachers. Despite this need for improvement, some teachers said their principals acknowledged the efforts of teachers, appreciate work done, applauds teachers, give certificates of honor to teachers, gives out small tokens as a means of motivating teachers who work hard and provides verbal praise when they exhibit extraordinary performances.

This finding tied with that of Johnson and Williams (2023) who conducted a study to examine the correlation between teacher recognition programmes and students' academic performance in secondary schools. The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between teacher recognition and students' performance, highlighting the role of teacher motivation and job satisfaction. Also, in another study by Smith and Brown (2022) on how recognition and reward systems for teachers influenced their motivation and effectiveness, and subsequently, student academic outcomes in secondary schools across several districts found out that schools with robust teacher recognition programmes recorded improved student performance in standardized tests. More also, in another study by Williams & Green (2021) on teacher recognition in low-resource settings: challenges and solutions contend that low-cost recognition strategies such as verbal acknowledgments, certificates, and small tokens of appreciation had a positive impact on teacher motivation and student outcomes in low-resource settings.

In the above studies it was evident that the principal's use of recognition if adequately applied would play a significant role in bringing about teacher quality. On this note, it is essential that every principal irrespective of school type should not ignore recognizing the efforts of teachers within their institution. This is because when principals fail in appreciating teachers, they may feel discourage to work effectively.

Conclusion

This paper addressed the link between principals social functions and teacher quality in secondary schools in the South West Region. Principals' social functions were operationalized as principals' use of interpersonal relationship and principals' use of recognition. Data was gathered from teachers and principals and findings revealed a significant proportion of teachers reported that principals do not adequately use their social functions. When principals do not adequately use their social functions teacher quality will be low. Apart from principals' social functions, there are other variables that influence teacher quality such as teacher workload and well-being, motivation and professional development. Teacher workload and well-being influences teacher quality because very long hours of work inhibits teacher quality. This could be caused by work-load stress (National Education Union, 2018). This leads to declining levels of teacher retention among teachers (Foster, 2019). According to Jerrim & Sims (2019), declining levels of retention hinders the quality of instruction provided by schools.

Motivation is an important factor that influences teacher quality. According to Nadeem et al. (2011), social and financial factors significantly influence female teachers' performance

such as low pay, instructor's public image, work place stress, their emotional well-being, relationship with staff and headteachers, the working environment and lack of office space. Olumide-Aluko & Linda (2013) posits that the relationship between job performance and motivation can have big effects if motivation is ignored. Effective professional development is designed to trigger positive changes in teachers practices in the classroom which brings about improvement in students learning attainment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

There is therefore need for improvement in principals' social functions in improving teacher quality. Principals therefore need to adopt strategies that fosters growth, professional development and productivity such as providing a conflict free school climate, always appreciating the efforts of teachers, encouraging cordial relationships, promote social events, give emotional support to teachers in affliction, encourage team work, provide certificates of honor to outstanding teachers, foster respect and communication. When principals do not properly carry out their social functions, it will lead to low teaching quality and consequently poor academic performance of students. The researchers recommended that Principals of secondary schools should provide a conflict free school climate and always appreciate the efforts of teachers. Further research could be carried out on this similar topic in other regions of Cameroon

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A SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ENG 100 AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BUEA: IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN CAMEROON'S BILINGUALISM FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

This study examines the transition from the two-semester English language programme (ENG101/102, 4 credits) to a single-semester course (ENG100, 2 credits) at the University of Buea, Cameroon. Within the context of Cameroon's constitutional bilingualism framework and the Education Orientation Law No. 98/004 of 1998, this study investigates whether the compressed programme adequately supports English language development for students at the country's flagship English-medium university. As the serving coordinator of the ENG100 programme (2025-2026 academic year), the researcher brings insider knowledge of implementation challenges while maintaining scholarly rigour through systematic data collection and analysis. Drawing on instructor reports, class attendance data, and analysis of infrastructural and administrative challenges, the study reveals significant implementation problems including delayed course commencement due to poor freshman orientation, severe classroom shortages (one 250-seat amphitheater for 8,000-12,000 students), and instructor dissatisfaction stemming from unclear governance structures and payment irregularities. Attendance records show extreme variability, with classes ranging from 0 to 300 students, suggesting systemic failures in course organization. Grounded in language policy implementation theory and Ruiz's language-as-resource orientation, the findings indicate that reducing course duration and credit value while simultaneously facing logistical and administrative challenges undermines the programme's effectiveness in developing English language competency. The paper argues for a reconsideration of this approach, particularly regarding content coverage and skills development, to ensure compliance with national bilingualism mandates and adequate preparation of students in English as an official language of Cameroon.

Keywords:

Sociolinguistic Analysis, Eng101/102 To Eng100, University Of Buea, English Language Development, Cameroon's Bilingualism Framework.

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Résumé

Cette étude examine la transition du programme d'anglais sur deux semestres (ENG101/102, 4 crédits) à un cours d'un seul semestre (ENG100, 2 crédits) à l'Université de Buéa, au Cameroun. Dans le contexte du bilinguisme constitutionnel camerounais et de la loi d'orientation de l'éducation n° 98/004 de 1998, cette étude analyse si le programme condensé favorise adéquatement le développement des compétences linguistiques en anglais des étudiants de la principale université anglophone du pays. En tant que coordinatrice du programme ENG100 (année universitaire 2025-2026), la chercheuse apporte une connaissance approfondie des difficultés de mise en œuvre, tout en garantissant une rigueur scientifique grâce à une collecte et une analyse systématiques des données. S'appuyant sur les rapports des enseignants, les données de fréquentation des cours et l'analyse des défis infrastructurels et administratifs, l'étude révèle d'importants problèmes de mise en œuvre, notamment le retard dans le début des cours en raison d'une mauvaise orientation des nouveaux étudiants, une grave pénurie de salles de classe (un amphithéâtre de 250 places pour 8 000 à 12 000 étudiants) et l'insatisfaction des enseignants découlant de structures de gouvernance peu claires et d'irrégularités de paiement. Les données de présence révèlent une forte variabilité, avec des classes comptant de 0 à 300 étudiants, ce qui suggère des défaillances systémiques dans l'organisation des cours. Fondées sur la théorie de la mise en œuvre des politiques linguistiques et sur l'approche de Ruiz considérant la langue comme une ressource, les observations indiquent que la réduction de la durée des cours et du nombre de crédits, conjuguée aux difficultés logistiques et administratives, compromet l'efficacité du programme en matière de développement des compétences en anglais. Cet article plaide pour une réévaluation de cette approche, notamment en ce qui concerne le contenu et le développement des compétences, afin de garantir la conformité avec les exigences nationales en matière de bilinguisme et une préparation adéquate des étudiants à l'anglais, langue officielle du Cameroun.

Mots-clés :

Analyse sociolinguistique, Eng101/102 à Eng100, Université de Buéa, Développement de la langue anglaise, Cadre de bilinguisme du Cameroun.

Introduction

This research emerges from the researcher's dual role as both the serving coordinator of the ENG100 programme (2025-2026 academic year) at the University of Buea, and as a scholar committed to examining language policy implementation in African higher education contexts. The researcher's position as coordinator provides privileged access to implementation challenges that might otherwise remain obscured in institutional documents or filtered through administrative narratives. However, this insider status also requires explicit acknowledgment of potential biases and deliberate methodological safeguards to ensure scholarly rigour.

The motivation for this study stems from direct observation of systemic problems that threaten both educational quality and institutional compliance with Cameroon's bilingualism laws. As coordinator, the researcher witnessed, daily, the struggles of

instructors teaching in improvised spaces, students inability to register their courses on the University's online platform, students' inability to locate their lecture halls, teachers going to class to meet empty halls and administrative dysfunction that leaves staff unpaid and demoralized. These observations compelled the researcher to move beyond anecdotal frustration toward systematic documentation and analyses. The study represents both professional accountabilities, expressed in the bid to understand and address problems within the researcher's purview, and scholarly contribution to the limited literature on language policy implementation in Cameroon's higher education system.

The researcher's positionality as an insider-researcher offers advantages including access to real-time data, understanding of informal institutional dynamics, and credibility with instructor-participants who shared candid reports knowing their concerns would be documented and analyzed. Simultaneously, as the researcher, acknowledge potential limitations including confirmation bias and the challenge of maintaining critical distance from a programme i coordinate. To mitigate these concerns, we employed transparent data collection methods, preserved instructor reports verbatim, and grounded analyses in established theoretical frameworks rather than personal judgment.

Background and Context

Cameroon's linguistic landscape is defined by its constitutional commitment to bilingualism, with English and French designated as co-equal official languages. The Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon (1996) establishes this dual-language framework, mandating state promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. This commitment is further reinforced through Law No. 2019/019 of December 24, 2019, which governs the promotion of official languages, and Law No. 98/004 of April 14, 1998 (the Education Orientation Law), which enshrines bilingualism at all educational levels as a factor of national unity and integration.

However, as recent scholarship demonstrates, constitutional commitment to bilingualism does not guarantee effective implementation. Research on language policy in Cameroon reveals persistent tensions between official bilingualism ideology and practical realities. The country has struggled since the 1960s to achieve meaningful official bilingualism for national unity, with education serving as the primary mechanism for implementation yet producing only mitigated results (Echu, 2003; Kouega, 2007). In practice, French has been dominant, leading English-speaking communities to feel marginalized. This singular factor accounts for one of the most igniting contributor to the ongoing Anglophone crisis that has sparked violence and secessionist movements (also in Fosso, 2019). Education policy has played a key role in this marginalisation, reinforcing underrepresentation and the absence of culturally and linguistically responsive education for Anglophone communities.

Within this legislative and sociopolitical framework, the University of Buea occupies a unique position. Established by presidential decree in 1985 and going fully operational by 1993, the University was conceived in the English-speaking tradition following the British educational system-the Anglo-Saxon system. It was created specifically to provide higher education in English within Cameroon's bilingual framework, responding to demands from English-speaking students who faced challenges integrating into the predominantly French-medium University of Yaoundé. The university's founding represented both recognition of Anglophone marginalisation and institutional commitment to addressing it through English-medium higher education.

Despite its English-language focus, the University of Buea must comply with national bilingualism laws, requiring both French language instruction (through Functional French courses) and robust English language programmes. The Use of English programme has traditionally served as a cornerstone general education requirement at the University of Buea, and in all State universities under the popular appellation of 'formation bilingue/bilingual training where it evolves side -by-side with French. Fundamentally for the University of Buea, the programme is designed to ensure all students, regardless of their major, develop adequate competency in English as one of Cameroon's official languages. This requirement is particularly critical given the university's diverse student body, which includes both Anglophone and Francophone students, with the latter needing English proficiency for academic success in an English-medium institution and both categories benefitting from the global access affordances of English proficiency.

Curriculum Transition

For years, the Use of English programme was offered as a two-semester sequence: ENG101 and ENG102, collectively worth 4 credits and spanning an entire academic year. This structure allowed for comprehensive coverage of foundational English language skills including grammar, composition, critical reading, and academic writing. Recently, however, the University transitioned to a single-semester course, ENG100, worth 2 credits. This represents a 50% reduction in both instructional time (from 2 hours to 1 hour a week) and credit value.

The transition from ENG101/102 to ENG100 raises critical questions about the adequacy of English language instruction in meeting both students' academic needs and the nation's bilingualism objectives. While curriculum consolidation can sometimes improve efficiency, the simultaneous reduction in both duration and credits, coupled with the logistical and administrative challenges documented in this study, suggests potential deficiencies in content coverage and skills development. This concern is particularly acute given findings from research on compressed courses, which indicates that while some compressed formats can maintain learning outcomes through intensive pedagogical restructuring, poorly implemented compression, especially amid infrastructural constraints, risks compromising educational quality (Scott & Conrad, 1992).

This research contributes to sociolinguistic scholarship on language policy implementation in multilingual African contexts, particularly within higher education in Cameroon. It provides empirical evidence on the practical challenges of maintaining language education standards amid curriculum reforms and resource constraints. The findings have implications for language planning and educational policy at the University of Buea and potentially other institutions within Cameroon's bilingual university system. Moreover, the study speaks to broader questions about the sustainability of constitutional bilingualism commitments when faced with administrative and infrastructural realities.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Language Policy Implementation in African Higher Education

Language policy implementation in African higher education has emerged as a critical area of scholarly inquiry, particularly given the continent's linguistic diversity and colonial legacies. Research consistently demonstrates significant gaps between progressive language policies and their practical implementation. A country like South Africa whose

experiences have been documented extensively over three decades post-apartheid provides referential evidence. Findings reveal that despite comprehensive policies designed to integrate African languages into teaching, research, and administration, implementation remains uneven due to limited resources, inadequate academic materials, and the predominance of English (Bamgbose, 2011; Wolf, 2016). Similarly, multilingual universities across Africa face persistent challenges in translating language rights into educational practice.

Cameroon's situation reflects broader African patterns while presenting unique complications stemming from its dual colonial heritage (English and French) and its official bilingualism framework. The country's language policy has been characterized as a "historical happenstance" rather than deliberate planning, an outcome of combining former British and French territories that presented an "easy way out of a quandary language situation" by adopting both colonial languages (Fonlon, 1969). This pragmatic solution, while avoiding potential conflicts over indigenous language selection, has created ongoing tensions between constitutional commitments and implementation realities.

Scholars examining Cameroon's bilingual education emphasize that the two subsystems, Anglophone and Francophone, operate largely in parallel rather than integrated, with limited success in producing genuinely bilingual citizens (Ayakoroma, 2014). The bottom-up dissemination of dual-medium programmes has faced numerous obstacles, and concerns about the survival of bilingualism itself, prompting calls for comprehensive policy revision. Recent research on linguistic diversity in official language instruction reveals that teachers rarely integrate elements of linguistic diversity because policy does not encourage such integration and they receive no training on the concept, highlighting implementation failures that extend beyond resource constraints to include lack of pedagogical support and unclear policy directives (Mokake, 2019).

Language Rights and Educational Access

The concept of language rights in education has gained prominence in sociolinguistic scholarship, with researchers emphasizing that language policies must do more than exist on paper. Rather, they must actively promote access and success for all students. Studies examining language policy implementation for student access in South African higher education demonstrate that universities' promotion of monolingualism impedes students' access to knowledge and limits academic achievement (Tabe-Ojong & Fon, 2020). This finding resonates with Cameroon's context, where inadequate language instruction in either official language can disadvantage students throughout their academic careers.

The notion of linguistic citizenship, (individuals' rights to use their languages and participate fully in society), intersects with educational policy through the concept of linguistically responsive education (Anchimbe, 2007). When institutions fail to provide adequate instruction in official languages, they effectively deny students their linguistic rights and compromise their educational opportunities. For Anglophone students at the University of Buea, inadequate English language instruction threatens both their immediate academic success and their long-term professional prospects in a bilingual nation where competency in both official languages increasingly determines career opportunities. To these can be added a disenfranchisement of ease of access to global opportunities offered by the dominance of English.

Curriculum Compression and Learning Outcomes

The broader literature on curriculum compression and course credit reduction offers mixed findings relevant to the ENG100 transition. Research on compressed courses, typically defined as maintaining the same contact hours over shorter time periods, suggests that with appropriate pedagogical restructuring, compressed formats can maintain or even enhance learning outcomes for motivated adult learners (Scott & Conrad, 1992). Studies comparing compressed and traditional semester courses have found small differences in workload and no meaningfully large negative impact on student performance when course loads increase.

However, these findings require careful interpretation in the University of Buea context. First, most research on successful compressed courses assumes adequate infrastructure, and clear administrative support. None of these conditions currently characterize the ENG100 implementation. Second, compressed course research typically examines formats that maintain total instructional hours through longer class sessions over shorter periods, whereas ENG100 represents an actual reduction in both time and credits, cutting the programme by half rather than merely restructuring it. Third, successful compression often depends on student characteristics (motivation, preparation, time management) that may not apply uniformly to first-year students with varying English language backgrounds, varying establishment timetables, varying pre-knowledge of the importance and institutional governance of this University-wide course (with so many confusions on whether it actually affects one's graduation possibilities) among many other factors that impede on student motivation greatly.

Literature on credit hour requirements in general education emphasizes that credit allocation should reflect learning outcomes and skill development needs rather than arbitrary administrative convenience (Musa, Musa, & Adebayo, 2020). While some scholars argue for reducing general education requirements to address student debt and retention challenges, such reductions must be justified by demonstrated curriculum redundancy or improved pedagogical efficiency and not simply imposed amid resource constraints. The question for ENG100 becomes whether halving the programme's duration and credits represents pedagogically sound consolidation or educationally damaging compression.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: language policy implementation theory (Ricento, 2000) and Ruiz's (1984) orientations to language planning.

Language Policy Implementation Framework

Ricento's (2000) framework for analyzing language policy distinguishes between policy formulation and policy implementation, emphasizing that the latter often reveals the true priorities and power dynamics within institutions. This framework recognizes that language policies exist within nested contexts, national, institutional, and classroom levels, each with actors who interpret, resist, or modify policies based on local conditions and interests. Implementation failures often stem not from policy inadequacy but from misalignment between policy goals and the material, human, and political resources required for realization.

Applying this framework to the ENG100 case reveals multiple levels of implementation

failure. At the national level, Cameroon's constitutional bilingualism and education laws establish clear mandates for language instruction quality. At the institutional level, the University of Buea's transition from ENG101/102 to ENG100 represents a policy decision that ostensibly responds to curriculum reform imperatives but may actually reflect resource constraints and administrative expediency. At the classroom level, instructors struggle to implement even the reduced programme amid infrastructural inadequacy and administrative dysfunction, resulting in a further gap between policy intentions and educational realities.

Ruiz's Orientations to Language Planning

Ruiz (1984) identified three fundamental orientations to language planning: language-as-problem, language-as-right, and language-as-resource. These orientations shape how institutions approach language policy and allocate resources. The language-as-problem orientation views linguistic diversity as an obstacle to overcome through assimilation or standardization. The language-as-right orientation emphasizes individuals' entitlements to use their languages and receive services in those languages. The language-as-resource orientation recognizes languages as valuable assets that can benefit individuals and society when developed and deployed strategically.

The ENG100 case reveals tensions between these orientations. Officially, Cameroon's bilingualism framework aligns with language-as-right and language-as-resource orientations, recognizing English and French as equal official languages deserving institutional support and viewing bilingual competency as beneficial for national unity and individual opportunity. However, the implementation of ENG100, with reduced instruction time, inadequate facilities, and unpaid instructors, suggests a language-as-problem orientation in practice, where English language instruction is treated as a burdensome requirement to be minimized rather than a valuable investment in students' competencies.

This theoretical framework guides the analysis of findings by highlighting how implementation failures reflect deeper institutional priorities and resource allocation decisions. It also suggests that meaningful improvement requires not merely addressing logistical problems but fundamentally reorienting institutional attitudes toward English language instruction as a strategic resource warranting adequate investment.

Statement of the Problem

The implementation of ENG100 has been marked by significant operational challenges that threaten the course's effectiveness. Preliminary observations reveal multiple systemic issues: delayed course commencement due to inadequate freshman orientation leading to late student registration; severe infrastructural constraints with only one amphitheater (capacity 250) allocated for a student population of 8,000-12,000, with each group receiving merely 1 hour of instruction per day and per week; instructor frustration stemming from unclear governance structures, particularly regarding payment arrangements where faculties/establishments charged with compensating staff frequently fail to disburse payment or provide payment schedules; and instructors independently struggling to secure teaching spaces and locate students.

Instructors' reports indicate dramatic variability in class attendance, with some sessions recording zero students while others exceed capacity limits. This chaotic implementation environment, combined with the reduced instructional time and credit value, raises serious

concerns about whether ENG100 adequately supports English language development in accordance with Cameroon's bilingualism laws and educational policies.

Research Objectives

This study pursues three specific objectives:

1. To analyze the implications of transitioning from a 4-credit, two-semester Use of English programme (ENG101/102) to a 2-credit, single-semester course (ENG100) for English language development at the University of Buea.
2. To document and examine the administrative, infrastructural, and pedagogical challenges affecting the implementation of ENG100 and their impact on course effectiveness.
3. To evaluate whether the current ENG100 structure adequately fulfills the university's obligations under Cameroon's bilingualism framework, particularly Law No. 98/004 of 1998 and Law No. 2019/019 of 2019.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design with descriptive statistical analysis of attendance data. The research focused on the ENG100 course implementation during the 2024/2025 academic year at the University of Buea, examining the transition from the previous ENG101/102 structure.

Data Sources

Data for this study were gathered from multiple sources:

- 1) Instructor reports: Written communications from ENG100/101 instructors documenting classroom attendance, student participation, and teaching conditions from the first and second semesters of the 2024/2025 academic year to first semester November, 2025-2026 academic year. These reports were shared via an official instructor communication platform.
- 2) Attendance records: Quantitative data on student attendance across multiple ENG100 sections over a four-week reporting period in 2024- 2025 and semester one of the 2025-2026 academic years.
- 3) Administrative documents: Course schedules, classroom allocations, and documentation related to the transition from ENG101/102 to ENG100.
- 4) Legal/policy documents: Cameroon's Constitution (1996), Law No. 98/004 of 1998, Law No. 2019/019 of 2019, Presidential Decree No. 90/196 of 1990, and University of Buea policy documents regarding general education requirements.

Participants

The study involved instructor reports from approximately 15-20 ENG100 instructors teaching various sections of the course across different faculties: the Faculty of Science, College of Technology (COT), Faculty of Engineering and Technology (FET), Faculty of Law and Political Sciences (FLPS), Faculty of Arts (FA), Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (FAVM), Faculty of Education (FED) and Faculty of Social and Management Sciences (FSMS). The student population comprised first-year students enrolled in ENG100,

estimated at 8,000 for 2024-2025 academic year and 12,000 students (2025-2026 academic year) for this University-wide course. The Faculty of Health Sciences was not used in this study for their courses schedules for all departments addressed the Eng100 teaching satisfactorily with massive student motivation, enrollment and class attendance recorded.

Data Collection Procedure

Instructors' reports were collected through ongoing communication among course instructors and the course coordinator over a four-week period for the first and second semesters in 2024 and the first semester in November 2025. Instructors spontaneously reported their classroom experiences, attendance figures, and challenges encountered. These reports were compiled and analyzed for recurring themes and patterns. Attendance data were extracted from instructor reports and organized chronologically to identify trends for reporting in this paper.

Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was conducted on instructor reports to identify thematic patterns related to: (a) attendance patterns and variability, (b) infrastructural challenges, (c) administrative issues, (d) instructor frustrations, and (e) student behavior and registration problems. Attendance figures were analyzed descriptively to calculate ranges, identify patterns of growth or decline, and document instances of zero or near-zero attendance. Policy documents were analyzed through a critical language policy lens to establish the legal framework for bilingualism and English language instruction requirements, against which the ENG100 implementation was evaluated using Ricento's implementation framework and Ruiz's orientations to language planning.

Findings

The data reveal multiple interconnected challenges affecting the implementation and effectiveness of the ENG100 course. Results are organized thematically based on the analytical framework.

Attendance Patterns and Variability

Attendance data demonstrate extreme variability across sections and weeks, indicating systemic organizational problems. Examples from instructors' reports include:

Zero or near-zero attendance: Multiple instructors reported classes with no students or fewer than 5 students. On November 2024, one instructor reported:

"I met just three students in class." Another reported "we didn't see any yesterday."

In the second week of classes in November 2025, one instructor noted

"I was in class last Friday from 1-3 but didn't see a student in class. I'm here today with the same scenario."

Another instructor reported: 'had 4 students yesterday.'

Gradual increase pattern: Some instructors reported progressive growth over weeks.

"We met no student on the first day of class, had 66 students for the second class and today 250." (November, 2025 third week)

Moderate attendance: Several classes-maintained attendances between 20-100 students. Examples include "7-8 had a class, A250 with 23 students present," (*Second semester 2024-2025*). "We registered 26 students," (*Second semester 2024-2025*). "I am just through with my class for today A250, 7-8 with 97 students in attendance." (***Second semester 2024-2025***)

High attendance: A few sections achieved substantial attendance. One Tuesday group reported "close to 300 students in both groups" over four weeks, (*First semester 2024-2025*). Another noted "Wednesday 1-2 and 2-3 is almost at 150 effective attendances.", (*First semester 2024-2025*).

Week-to-week inconsistency: Even within the same class or group, attendance fluctuated dramatically. One instructor noted "Last week I had 4 students, today I had 26., (*First semester 2025-2026*). "Another reported their Tuesday group "Last week we had 09 students, this week we had 19 students in attendance. "*First semester 2025-2026*). This variability suggests that while some sections successfully organized and attracted students, many others struggled with student turnout, particularly in the initial weeks. The extreme range, from 0 to 300 students, indicates lack of standardization in course implementation across sections.

Infrastructural Constraints

Severe classroom shortages emerged as a critical impediment to effective instruction. The data revealed:

Amphitheater inadequate space and capacity violations: Amphitheater 250 (A250), designated for many ENG100 and other University-wide courses (06 of them in total for 2 hours each a day) designed for 250 students, was inadequate to cater for the estimated 8000 - 12000 freshmen (2025 statistics for enrollment). Reports document instances where attendance exceeded or approached this limit, creating overcrowding concerns. With an estimated 8,000-12,000 first-year students required to take ENG100 and only one designated amphitheater providing 1 hour per day per group, the mathematical impossibility of adequately accommodating all students becomes apparent. Even with multiple time slots, the facility cannot serve the entire student population adequately.

Classroom relocation challenges: Instructors frequently resorted to alternative venues. One instructor noted; "*Just from class this afternoon, 3-4pm at restau 2 (shifted to Restau 1).*" (*First semester 2025-2026*). Another reported; "*Teaching at Restau 1, last class was Restau 5, we just keep moving,*" "*However, I make sure I write at the door entrance of Restau 2 (where the class is normally scheduled to take place) indicating where the class is being held.*" (*First semester 2025-2026*).

Instructor burden: The responsibility for securing alternative teaching spaces fell on individual instructors rather than being systematically organized by the administration, adding to instructor workload and frustration. All halls being a priori assigned the instructors counted on luck not be thrown out or to even find one free.

Administrative and Governance Issues

Multiple administrative failures contributed to course implementation challenges.

Payment irregularities: Payment irregularities for Instructors by establishments/faculties charged with paying staff is another major hurdle. Prior to the new dispensation of the 2024/2025 academic year concerning the Use of English administration, the Faculty of Arts ran the programme and paid the instructors. This move was assessed as being unfair to the Faculty of Arts' budgetary management as they appeared to run a University-wide course allegedly at their own expense with basically no subventions neither from the other establishments nor from the University. As a result, the new dispensation authorized all establishments to pay the teaching staff of the Use of English assigned to their establishments. In no apparent formal citations and governance text, payment issues and the supply of material for the students now appeared like some gentlemen agreement, with no terms clearly defined on paper with clear cut guidelines. Additionally, no payment calendar or schedule was provided to assure instructors of when compensation would arrive, creating financial uncertainty and job dissatisfaction. The absence of clear administrative oversight regarding payment and course organisation left instructors uncertain about their employment status and responsibilities.

Poor freshman orientation: Inadequate orientation for first-year students led to late registration and confusion about course requirements. One instructor noted "I received so many complaints from first year students of having registered for ENG101 instead of ENG100," (*First semester 2024-2025*), indicating that even basic information about which course to register for was not effectively communicated. Many were simply unaware while again registration procedures into the University, portal opening and activation by establishments appeared to impose delays as many were still unregistered several weeks after classes had started.

Course switching problems: Students apparently moved between groups without coordination, (most times in response to the fluctuating timetables of their core-courses) as one instructor reported that students who attended one week "said they had signed in to a different group" the following week, making it impossible to maintain consistent class rosters. (reported 11 times across all semesters under study).

Delayed course commencement: The combination of late student registration and unclear administrative procedures resulted in courses beginning significantly behind schedule, further compressing the already limited instructional time.

Instructor Frustration and Morale

The cumulative effect of these challenges manifested in instructor dissatisfaction:

Expressions of frustration: Instructors explicitly communicated their struggles. One stated "I will be glad if the coordinator can address this situation. This is the third week with the same scenario" (*First semester 2025-2026*) after experiencing zero attendance for three consecutive weeks.

Uncertainty and insecurity: Instructors expressed uncertainty about whether classes would continue, as reflected in statements like "As of now, we do not know how next week will look like." (*First semester 2025-2026*)

Attempts to maintain professionalism: Despite challenges, instructors attempted to provide quality instruction to students who attended, with one noting "The students were taught, and 1 mark awarded to each of them for their participation in class. A small class can be very interesting eh "(First semester 2025-2026), (using humor to cope with an extremely unusual small class size). Instructors also took initiative to maintain communication with students by registering phone numbers and coordinating independently, WhatsApp groups to facilitate class coordination.

Content Coverage and Skills Development Implications

While the data primarily document logistical and attendance issues, the implications for content coverage and skills development are significant:

Reduced instructional time: The transition from 4 credits over two semesters (ENG101/102) to 2 credits in one semester (ENG100) represents a 50% reduction in formal instruction time for English language development.

Delayed start compounding time loss: Late course commencement due to registration problems and administrative issues further eroded the limited instructional time available in a single-semester format.

Inconsistent learning experiences: Students in well-attended sections received regular instruction, while those in poorly attended sections experienced fragmented learning with minimal peer interaction and inconsistent instructor availability.

Question of adequate preparation: Given that Use of English serves as a foundational competency required for academic success across all disciplines, the compressed format raises questions about whether students receive adequate preparation in grammar, composition, critical reading, and academic writing skills.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a troubling disjuncture between Cameroon's legislative commitment to bilingualism and the practical realities of English language instruction at the University of Buea. This discussion examines the implications of these findings within the broader context of language policy implementation theory, Ruiz's orientations to language planning, and the existing literature on language education in African higher education.

Language Policy Implementation Gap: From Rights to Reality

Applying Ricento's language policy implementation framework to the ENG100 case illuminates how well-intentioned policies can fail when institutional capacity and commitment do not align with policy goals. At the national level, Cameroon's constitutional framework and educational laws, particularly Law No. 98/004 of 1998, which enshrines bilingualism at all educational levels as a factor of national unity and integration, establish clear expectations for language instruction quality. Law No. 2019/019 of 2019 further mandates that state employees must render services in either official language and that public entities must promote official languages.

However, implementation at the institutional and classroom levels reveals significant policy-practice gaps. The University of Buea's transition from ENG101/102 to ENG100 represents an institutional policy decision that, regardless of its stated rationale, effectively

undermines national language policy objectives by reducing instruction time by 50%. This reduction might be defensible if accompanied by pedagogical restructuring, enhanced instructional quality, or improved learning outcomes, but the data reveal none of these compensating factors. Instead, the reduction coincides with severe infrastructural inadequacy, administrative dysfunction, and instructor demoralization, creating conditions antithetical to quality language instruction.

This pattern aligns with broader findings on language policy implementation in African higher education, where progressive policies frequently fail due to limited resources, inadequate materials, and insufficient institutional commitment (Obondo, 2007; Trudell, 2016). As research on South African universities demonstrates, the gap between language policy and implementation can persist for decades despite constitutional mandates and institutional commitments. The University of Buea's experience suggests similar dynamics, where Cameroon's bilingualism framework remains aspirational rather than operational in crucial respects.

Orientation Shifts: From Language-as-Resource to Language-as-Problem

Ruiz's framework for understanding orientations to language planning provides insight into the institutional values revealed by the ENG100 implementation. Officially, Cameroon's bilingualism framework aligns with language-as-right and language-as-resource orientations, recognizing English and French as equal official languages deserving institutional support and viewing bilingual competency as beneficial for national unity and individual opportunity. The very establishment of the University of Buea in 1993 as an English-medium institution reflected a language-as-resource orientation, recognizing the value of providing higher education in English.

However, the current implementation of ENG100 reveals a troubling shift toward a language-as-problem orientation in practice. When a university reduces language instruction by half without pedagogical justification, allocates grossly inadequate facilities (one 250-seat amphitheater for 8,000-12,000 students), allows instructors to go unpaid or face payment uncertainty, and provides no systematic administrative support for the programme's coordination, it treats language instruction as a burdensome requirement to be minimized rather than a valuable investment in students' competencies.

This orientation shift has profound implications. Students perceive institutional priorities through resource allocation, so, when language courses are poorly supported while other programmes receive adequate facilities and administrative attention, students understand implicitly that language competency is undervalued. Instructors similarly internalize institutional priorities. When they must independently secure teaching spaces, chase down payment, and coordinate with students via personal phone numbers and their airtime, they recognize that their work is not institutionally valued. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle where reduced investment yields poor outcomes, which then justifies further disinvestment.

This pattern resonates with critiques of official bilingualism in Cameroon more broadly, where scholars have documented the dominance of French despite constitutional equality of the two official languages (Ngwana, 2014). The marginalisation of English-speaking communities and the ongoing Anglophone crisis reflect, in part, systemic failures to invest adequately in English-language education and services. When the flagship English-medium

university cannot adequately support English language instruction, it exemplifies and perpetuates this broader marginalisation.

Infrastructural Crisis and Institutional Capacity

The severe shortage of teaching spaces, one 250-seat amphitheater for 8,000-12,000 students, represents a fundamental mismatch between institutional capacity and enrollment that renders effective universal instruction mathematically impossible. This situation exemplifies what scholars have termed the "massification" of African higher education, where we observe rapid enrollment growth without proportionate investment in facilities, faculty, and support systems. The University of Buea's expansion has clearly outpaced infrastructure development, creating conditions where even well-designed curricula cannot be effectively implemented.

The overflow into restaurant spaces (with noise from kitchen staff cooking, students clamoring to eat and no electricity in the rooms for later afternoon classes' visibility), and the instructors' need to independently secure and relocate teaching venues demonstrate adaptive coping mechanisms and also highlight systemic planning failures. These improvised solutions cannot substitute for adequate, purpose-built educational infrastructure. Moreover, the constant venue changes create confusion for students, contributing to the attendance problems documented in this study. One instructor's practice of writing location changes on the door of the scheduled venue, while being commendably proactive, represents individual compensation for institutional failure rather than a sustainable solution.

This infrastructural crisis must be understood within the broader context of higher education financing in Cameroon and Africa generally. Universities face competing demands for limited resources, and decisions about facility allocation reflect institutional priorities. That a general education requirement serving the entire first-year population (including repeating students) receives one amphitheater (which is still used by other establishments and for choir practices, all with justified authorisations, thereby causing clashes) while other programmes presumably receive better accommodation suggests that Use of English instruction is not prioritised in resource allocation decisions. This material reality speaks louder than policy documents or administrative rhetoric about bilingualism commitments.

Administrative Dysfunction and Governance Failures

The payment irregularities and absence of clear governance structures reported by instructors represent serious administrative failures that directly impact teaching quality. When instructors are not paid or do not know when payment will arrive, their economic security and professional dignity are compromised. This situation violates basic employment principles and likely contributes to poor instructor turnover, reduced motivation, and difficulty recruiting qualified instructors from the pool of permanent staff as many see their involvement into ENG100 teaching as an unnecessary disturbance.

The decentralisation of payment responsibility to individual faculties/establishments without adequate oversight or enforcement mechanisms has created a system where contractual obligations to instructors can be ignored with impunity. This governance structure, or lack thereof, undermines not only individual instructors but the entire educational enterprise. Research on teacher motivation consistently demonstrates that fair compensation, job security, and professional respect are fundamental to effective teaching.

Demoralised, unpaid instructors cannot be expected to deliver high-quality instruction or invest energy in developing innovative pedagogical approaches.

Furthermore, the absence of systematic course coordination, evidenced by instructors independently securing spaces, tracking students via personal phone numbers, and expressing uncertainty about class continuation, suggests a breakdown in basic administrative functions, most precisely by the figure head status of the coordinator, presented as an instructions implementer rather than a consultant. A general education requirement serving the entire first-year population should be supported by robust administrative systems including centralized scheduling, facilities management, student registration support, and instructor coordination head, who is duly supported and accompanied.

This administrative dysfunction reflects broader challenges in Cameroon's higher education governance. Research on university administration in African contexts highlights persistent problems including unclear lines of authority, inadequate management training, politicization of administrative appointments, and insufficient operational budgets or deprivation, confiscation and access denial by senior authorities under whose tutelage the sub-units are placed. The Use of English Unit and the ENG100 case exemplifies these systemic issues, demonstrating how governance failures at institutional and national levels cascade down to affect classroom instruction and student learning.

Student Experience and Educational Equity

From a student perspective, the ENG100 implementation failures create significant barriers to learning and raise serious equity concerns. Poor freshman orientation leading to late registration means students miss critical early instruction and fall behind immediately. Research on first-year student success consistently emphasizes that early experiences shape students' academic trajectories; when students begin their university careers with confusion about course registration, inability to locate classes, and delayed instruction, they receive the message that they are not priorities and that institutional systems will not support them.

The extreme attendance variability documented in this study, ranging from 0 to 300 students and more (an instructor reported 500) suggests that many students are simply unable to access the course consistently. While some of this variability may reflect student motivation or competing demands, the administrative and infrastructural problems documented here indicate that systemic factors, not merely student behavior, drive these patterns.

Educational equity demands that all students have access to quality instruction regardless of which section they are assigned. However, the data reveal profound inequities in student experiences. Students fortunate enough to be in well-organized groups with consistent instructors, adequate facilities, and growing enrollment receive meaningful English language instruction. Students in poorly organized sections may attend multiple sessions without seeing an instructor or classmates, effectively receiving no instruction despite paying fees and fulfilling registration requirements. This inequity is particularly troubling given that Use of English serves as foundational preparation for all subsequent academic work; students who receive inadequate instruction face disadvantages throughout their university careers.

Moreover, these inequities may have differential impacts on Anglophone versus Francophone students. For Francophone students entering an English-medium university, the Use of English course represents critical language support enabling their academic success. Inadequate instruction may contribute to academic struggles, programme switching, or attrition. For Anglophone students, while they may have stronger English language backgrounds, the course should develop academic English competencies (formal writing, critical reading, analytical thinking) essential for university-level work. Inadequate instruction denies both groups the preparation they need, but may disproportionately harm Francophone students whose English language needs are more acute.

Curriculum Compression Without Pedagogical Justification

The literature on compressed courses suggests that course compression can maintain learning outcomes when accompanied by deliberate pedagogical restructuring, intensive instruction, and appropriate student support. However, the ENG100 case represents compression without any of these enabling conditions. The transition from 4 credits over two semesters to 2 credits in one semester halves instructional time without apparent curriculum redesign, pedagogical innovation, or enhanced support services.

Language acquisition research consistently demonstrates that developing academic language proficiency requires sustained, systematic instruction over extended periods. English language competency encompasses multiple domains: grammatical accuracy, vocabulary development, reading comprehension, academic writing, critical thinking, and oral communication. A comprehensive Use of English programme must address all these areas. The two-semester structure of ENG101/102 allowed sequential skill building, with ENG101 focusing on foundational grammar and composition skills and ENG102 advancing to more complex analytical writing and critical reading. The single-semester ENG100 format rather necessitates superficial coverage of all areas with selective emphasis on certain skills at the expense of others.

Given the additional time lost to late starts, inconsistent attendance, and logistical disruptions, the actual instructional time available in ENG100 falls far short of what language development requires. If classes begin three weeks late (as suggested by instructor reports documenting ongoing startup problems in mid-November), a semester-long course loses approximately one-fifth of its instructional time before even addressing the 50% reduction in overall programme duration. The cumulative effect is devastating as students end up receiving only one-quarter to one-third of the language instruction time previously available through ENG101/102.

This compression appears driven by administrative convenience or resource constraints rather than pedagogical rationale. No evidence suggests that language instruction needs changed, that students enter university with better English preparation requiring less instruction, or that instructional methods improved sufficiently to accelerate learning. The compression therefore represents a policy decision prioritizing institutional efficiency over educational quality, a decision with predictable negative consequences for language learning outcomes.

Implications for Cameroon's Bilingualism Project

The University of Buea's situation carries implications beyond the institution itself for Cameroon's broader bilingualism project. The University was created specifically to provide quality English-medium higher education within Cameroon's bilingual framework, responding to Anglophone marginalisation in French-dominant universities. Its founding represented both recognition of a problem and commitment to addressing it institutionally. The University's symbolic importance therefore exceeds its enrollment numbers for it represents Cameroon's commitment to linguistic equality and Anglophone inclusion.

When the flagship English-medium University cannot adequately support English language instruction, the most foundational component of English-medium education, it signals that the bilingualism project itself may be failing. If even an institution explicitly created for English-language education treats English instruction as a low-priority requirement deserving minimal resources, what does this suggest about the state's commitment to English as a co-equal official language?

This question gains urgency in the context of the ongoing Anglophone crisis, which reflects decades of accumulated grievances about marginalization, underfunding of English-language education, and systematic favoritism toward French-speaking regions and institutions. Research documenting the dominance of French despite constitutional equality, the parallel rather than integrated operation of Anglophone and Francophone education systems, and concerns about the survival of bilingualism itself suggests that the ENG100 case exemplifies broader systemic problems rather than isolated institutional dysfunction.

The lack of meaningful bilingualism in Cameroon has been attributed to insufficient political will, inadequate resources for English-language education, and structural factors favoring French. The University of Buea's experience with ENG100 provides micro-level evidence of these macro-level patterns. When universities reduce English language instruction amid resource constraints while presumably maintaining other programmes, when instructors go unpaid while other university expenses continue, and when administrative systems fail to support English courses while functioning adequately elsewhere, these decisions reflect priorities that undermine bilingualism regardless of constitutional or rhetorical commitments.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, theoretical analysis, and literature review, the following recommendations are proposed:

Immediate Actions: Addressing Crisis-Level Problems

- Establish payment guarantees: The university administration must immediately address instructor payment irregularities by either centralizing payment processing or establishing enforceable accountability mechanisms for faculties/establishments responsible for payments. A published payment schedule should be provided to all instructors at the beginning of each semester, with guaranteed payment dates. Failure to meet payment obligations should trigger administrative consequences for responsible parties.
- Secure adequate teaching facilities: Multiple amphitheaters and large classrooms must

be designated for ENG100 instruction. A centralised scheduling system should optimize use of available facilities. If existing infrastructure is insufficient, temporary solutions (such as multiple smaller sections or online/hybrid delivery options) should be implemented immediately while long-term facility expansion is pursued.

- Implement comprehensive freshman orientation with the English Programme Coordinator's participation. A mandatory, structured orientation programme should clearly explain course requirements, registration procedures, and academic expectations. Information about ENG100 (course number, credit value, importance, schedule) should be prominently featured. Registration should be supervised to prevent errors, with immediate correction of registration problems.
- Establish centralized course coordination: ENG100 requires dedicated administrative support including a coordinator with authority and resources to manage scheduling, facilities, instructor support, student communication, and problem-solving. The coordinator position should be properly resourced and empowered to make operational decisions.

Medium-Term Reforms: Curriculum and Pedagogical Improvements

- Conduct comprehensive curriculum review: A committee of language education specialists, experienced instructors, and relevant stakeholders should undertake a thorough review of the Use of English curriculum and programme. This review should assess whether ENG100's current structure adequately addresses learning objectives previously covered by ENG101/102. If gaps are identified, the curriculum should be restructured, potentially restoring a two-semester sequence or substantially increasing ENG100's credit value and contact hours.
- Develop standardized learning materials: To ensure consistency across sections and support instructors, the program should develop standardized textbooks, workbooks, assessment instruments, and pedagogical resources. These materials should be available to all instructors and students at the semester's beginning.
- Implement instructor professional development: Regular workshops on English language pedagogy, compressed course design, large class management, and assessment should be provided. Creating a community of practice among ENG100 instructors would facilitate sharing of effective strategies and collective problem-solving.
- Establish quality assurance mechanisms: Regular assessment of student learning outcomes, instructor evaluations, and program review should be instituted. Data on attendance, pass rates, skill development, and student satisfaction should inform continuous improvement.

Long-Term Systemic Changes: Institutional and Policy Reform

- Advocate for infrastructure investment: The university should develop a facilities master plan that includes adequate instructional space for general education requirements serving large student populations. This plan should be presented to government funding authorities with clear justification for capital investment. External funding sources (development partners, grants) should be pursued.
- Reform governance structures: The university should clarify administrative structures governing general education programs, establishing clear lines of authority, resource allocation procedures, and accountability mechanisms. The current fragmented approach where individual faculties/establishments control aspects of general

education delivery without central coordination requires reform.

- **Align resource allocation with policy commitments:** If Cameroon's constitution and laws mandate quality bilingual education, resource allocation must reflect this priority. The university should conduct a resource audit examining whether English language instruction receives equitable support compared to other programs. Disparities should be addressed through budget reallocation.
- **Engage with national language policy discourse:** The University of Buea, as the flagship English-medium institution, should actively participate in national conversations about bilingualism implementation. University leadership should document challenges, advocate for adequate funding, and propose policy reforms to strengthen English-language education nationally.

Research and Evidence-Building

- **Conduct learning outcome assessments:** Systematic research should compare English language proficiency of students who completed ENG101/102 versus ENG100 to determine whether the compressed format adequately develops required competencies. Longitudinal tracking of students' academic performance in subsequent courses requiring English skills would provide evidence of program effectiveness.
- **Document best practices:** Sections that successfully achieve high attendance and positive learning outcomes should be studied to identify effective strategies that can be scaled across all sections.
- **Engage students' perspectives:** Student surveys, focus groups, and interviews should systematically gather information about their experiences with ENG100, perceived adequacy of instruction, and recommendations for improvement.
- **Comparative institutional research:** Studies examining how other universities in Cameroon's bilingual system implement Use of English or equivalent requirements could identify successful models and common challenges.

Conclusion

This study has documented serious implementation challenges affecting the ENG100 course at the University of Buea following the transition from a two-semester, 4-credit Use of English programme to a single-semester, 2-credit course. The findings reveal a convergence of curriculum compression without pedagogical justification, severe infrastructural inadequacy, administrative dysfunction, and instructor dissatisfaction that collectively undermine the course's effectiveness in developing English language competency.

Analyzed through language policy implementation theory and Ruiz's orientations framework, these findings reveal troubling gaps between Cameroon's constitutional and legal framework for bilingualism and the practical realities of English language instruction. Law No. 98/004 of 1998 (Education Orientation Law) and Law No. 2019/019 of 2019 (Promotion of Official Languages) establish clear mandates for quality language instruction, yet the ENG100 implementation suggests a shift from language-as-resource to language-as-problem orientation in practice, where English instruction is treated as a burdensome requirement to be minimized rather than a valuable investment.

The extreme variability in attendance, from zero to 300 students across sections, combined with delayed course commencement, classroom shortages (one 250-seat amphitheater for 8,000-12,000 students), and payment irregularities that demoralize instructors, creates an

educational environment fundamentally incompatible with effective language learning. These problems reflect not isolated institutional failures but systemic patterns documented in research on language policy implementation in African higher education, where progressive policies frequently fail due to inadequate resources, insufficient political will, and misalignment between stated commitments and resource allocation.

As the serving coordinator who has witnessed these challenges firsthand, I write this paper not merely as academic critique but as urgent call for action. The students struggling through ENG100 under current conditions deserve better. They have chosen or been assigned to Cameroon's flagship English-medium university expecting quality English language education that will prepare them for academic success and professional opportunities in a bilingual nation and the world. Instead, many face confusion, inconsistency, and inadequate instruction that threatens their educational trajectories.

The implications extend beyond the University of Buea to Cameroon's broader bilingualism project and the Anglophone crisis. When the institution specifically created to provide English-medium higher education cannot adequately support English language instruction, it exemplifies and perpetuates the marginalization of English-speaking communities. The ongoing crisis reflects decades of accumulated grievances about systematic underfunding and political marginalization; the ENG100 case provides micro-level evidence of these macro-level patterns.

Meaningful reform requires more than addressing logistical problems. It demands fundamental reorientation of institutional attitudes toward English language instruction as a strategic resource warranting adequate investment. This requires political will, financial commitment, administrative reform, and sustained attention from university leadership and government authorities. Only through such comprehensive commitment can the transition from ENG101/102 to ENG100 be justified, not as a cost-saving measure that compromises educational quality, but as genuine curricular improvement that maintains or enhances language learning outcomes.

Cameroon's bilingualism framework promises equal status for English and French. The University of Buea must fulfill this promise through quality language instruction supported by adequate infrastructure, clear governance, and fairly compensated, professionally supported instructors. The alternative, continued drift toward inadequate instruction amid resource constraints and administrative dysfunction, undermines not only individual students' futures but Cameroon's constitutional commitments and social cohesion. This study documents current failures in the hope that evidence will catalyze action, ensuring that future cohorts of students receive the English language education they need and deserve.

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CHANGES IN BIRTH RITE AS A FUNCTION OF NSO PEOPLE'S ACCULTURATION PROCESS, NORTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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Abstract

Today, modernization and globalization has brought about acculturation in the African context and the Nso culture is not left out. Despite all this changes, limited information has been made known in the literature review about the actual cultural practices in Nso and changes that have taken place. On this note, our study aimed at examining changes in birth rites of passage as a function of Nso people's acculturation process. Specifically, we examine the deviations in pregnancy cultural practices of childbirth, variations in announcing childbirth, changes in purification childbirth rituals; and changes in initiation rites of childbirth. The ethnography research design was used and data collected from 30 Nso people made up of elders / title holders, and Nso migrants to other towns of Bamenda, Buea, Douala, and Bafousam. These Nso migrants were targeted from the respective Nso cultural associations. Data were collected using interview guide and focus group discussion and analysed thematically. Findings showed significant changes in Nso birth rites.

Regarding changes in pregnancy cultural practices, pregnant women in Nso now attend all kind of gatherings that was restricted before. More so, announcing arrival of babies is now done via telephone call and face-to-face discussion unlike before that few people from the husband family will visit the bride parents with palm wine, red palm oil, and bag of salt to tell them that their daughter has put to birth. More so, the special kind of songs that were sung by married women who had their first child is no longer common these days. Regarding purification rituals after childbirth, newborn are now carried by non-parents even when the umbilical cord has not fallen off, umbilical cord is now abandoned at the hospital, majority of women now bath themselves, cook and do laundering after childbirth, and no purification done in cases where a child died to prevent further death. Finally, for initiation birth rites, child circumcision is that is now done at the hospital unlike before that was done in traditional setting by traditional specialist and baptism done by Reverend Fathers in Christian way unlike the traditional approach. Based on this, it was recommended that Nso people should document and preserve their traditional rites of passage, including the symbolic meanings and cultural significance associated with these



rituals. This can help maintain cultural heritage and promote intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge

Keywords:

Rites, Birth Rites, Pregnancy Practices, Announcing of Childbirth, Purification Rituals, Initiation Rites.

Résumé

Aujourd'hui, la modernisation et la mondialisation ont engendré une acculturation en Afrique, et la culture Nso n'y fait pas exception. Malgré ces transformations, la littérature scientifique reste lacunaire quant aux pratiques culturelles Nso et à leurs évolutions. Notre étude vise donc à examiner les changements survenus dans les rites de passage liés à la naissance, en lien avec le processus d'acculturation du peuple Nso. Plus précisément, nous analysons les variations dans les pratiques culturelles liées à la grossesse et à l'accouchement, les annonces de naissance, les rituels de purification et les rites d'initiation. Une méthodologie ethnographique a été employée, et les données ont été recueillies auprès de 30 personnes Nso, parmi lesquelles des aînés/titulaires de titres et des migrants Nso installés dans les villes de Bamenda, Buea, Douala et Bafoussam. Ces migrants ont été recrutés par l'intermédiaire des associations culturelles Nso respectives. Les données ont été recueillies à l'aide d'un guide d'entretien et de discussions de groupe, puis analysées thématiquement. Les résultats révèlent des changements significatifs dans les rites de naissance Nso. Concernant l'évolution des pratiques culturelles liées à la grossesse, les femmes enceintes de Nso participent désormais à toutes sortes de rassemblements qui leur étaient auparavant interdits. De plus, l'annonce de la naissance d'un bébé se fait maintenant par téléphone et en personne, contrairement à l'époque où quelques membres de la famille du mari rendaient visite aux parents de la mariée avec du vin de palme, de l'huile de palme rouge et un sachet de sel pour leur annoncer la naissance de leur fille. Par ailleurs, les chants traditionnels interprétés par les femmes mariées à la naissance de leur premier enfant sont devenus rares. Quant aux rituels de purification après l'accouchement, les nouveau-nés sont désormais portés par des personnes autres que les parents, même si le cordon ombilical n'est pas encore tombé ; ce dernier est abandonné à l'hôpital ; la plupart des femmes se lavent, cuisinent et font leur lessive elles-mêmes après l'accouchement ; et aucune purification n'est pratiquée en cas de décès d'un enfant, afin d'éviter d'autres décès. Enfin, concernant les rites de naissance initiatiques, la circoncision des enfants est désormais pratiquée à l'hôpital, contrairement à la pratique traditionnelle qui avait lieu dans un cadre traditionnel par des spécialistes. Le baptême, quant à lui, est célébré par des révérends pères selon le rite chrétien, contrairement à la tradition. De ce fait, il a été recommandé au peuple Nso de documenter et de préserver ses rites de passage traditionnels, y compris leurs significations symboliques et culturelles. Cela contribuera à la préservation du patrimoine culturel et à la transmission intergénérationnelle des connaissances culturelles.

Mots-clés : *Rites, Rites de naissance, Pratiques liées à la grossesse, Annonce de la naissance, Rituels de purification, Rites initiatiques.*

Introduction

Every society has its traditions and culture characterized by symbols, ceremonies, values, philosophies, perspectives, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, rituals, rites, language, taboos, and myths (Dadey, 2022). When individuals deviate from the culture they were born and raised in and enter a new unfamiliar one, a range of changes can occur. More so, when people from disparate cultural backgrounds interact, they might adopt each other's customs, languages, beliefs, values, social systems, or technologies but this doesn't always happen. It is worthy to note that the adoption can have positive or negative impact. It is paramount to know that the Akan of Ghana has unique cultural practices vital to their existence as a people. Among them are the birth and childhood rites (naming ceremony), puberty rites, marriage rites, and funeral rites (Dadey, 2022).

Just like the Akan of Ghana, in Cameroon, each cultural group of people do have their unique ways of performing their various rites. Of interest to this study is the birth rites of the Nso people, a group of people in Cameroon from the Northwest region. In the past, Nso people of Cameroon had a unique way of performing birth rites such as announcing pregnancy, child /children birth, rituals performed on women as mothers after childbirth, and how circumcision was done. Several studies have been done on the past in other African countries on acculturation but, limited information has been documented about the acculturation of birth rites among the Nso people in Cameroon.

For example, Biruny and Latipun (2021) study reveals birth order as one of the most extensive human experiences and is considered to determine how smart, good, responsible, sociable, emotionally stable, and open to new experiences a child can be. More so, Tati (2018) reported that among the Traditional Midwifery in the Balikumbat Fondom of the Bamenda Grassfields from Pre-Colonial to Post-Colonial Era, the people had developed means through which they handled birth related issues based on their conviction, perception and belief system which was characterized by superstition. Again, Ohaja and Anyim (2021) on reported that pregnancy and childbirth are not only biological events but also socially and culturally constructed with associated symbols that represent the social identities and cultural values of Africans. Birth is a rite of passage and children are perceived as special gifts from the Supreme Being. Unfortunately, literature review showed limited information of the birth rites and acculturation of such among the Nso people. On this, this study aimed to close this gap by contributing to literature by indicating how birth rites among the Nso people was done and changes that have taken place.

Background of the Study

Historically, the expression "rite of passage" was coined by Van Gennep (2019) in the early twentieth century. He identified three crucial stages in each rite of passage: a preliminary phase of separation from or abandonment of the previous state, a liminal phase, a period of transition marked by ritual discrimination, and a post-liminal phase of aggregation and readmission to society in a new condition. The purpose of the initiation is to endorse the passage of the individual from one defined situation to another that is also defined. This is why rites of passage have a recurrent structure, a real pattern that guides, controls, and regulates the transformations of each individual and a group, fostering the changes without violently arresting personal and collective life.

Human existence is a journey of changes from birth to death. Birth, the start of a new life is a special and unique life event which occurs within a cultural and social context (Nwadiokwu

et al., 2016). In many communities, childbirth is a life cycle, and a communal event associated with rites of passage (Siwila, 2015). Put differently, rituals or cultural practices are deeply embedded with rites of passage at varied stages of a person's life; pregnancy, birth, naming ceremonies, puberty/adolescence, marriage, death, and burial. The rituals that accompany these rites of passage play a role in giving meaning to people's ways of being (Mogawane, 2015).

According to Sarpong (1974) as cited in Dedume, Osei, and Dogbey (2016), every culture is ultimately the handwork of God. He thinks it is God who placed people where they are and allowed them to use their ingenuity and resourcefulness to subdue their environment, adapt to it, and draw what advantages they want to arrive at their cultural situation or stage. He also reiterated that all over Africa and world in general, significant rituals and ceremonies are with varying degrees of intensity and seriousness, performed at the three major turning points of a man's life.

Stated by Sarpong (*ibid*), in the so-called primitive societies, these rites are collectively termed "rites de passage" or "Rites of Passage" from one stage to another. The crucial turning points are generally the time a person enters the world through birth, when he comes of age and enters the world of adulthood, and when through death, he departs from this world and enters the world of his forebears (Dedume, Osei, & Dogbey, 2016). More so, Naidu and Muchono (2019) opined that rites of passage are practiced as cultural norms that allegedly transit people from one stage of life to another. These rites are community-created and community-directed experiences that transmit cultural values and knowledge to an individual (or individuals).

Celebration of a new entrant to the community begins with conception and pregnancy is indicative of a new member of the family and society; hence, birth rituals start with the pregnant woman (Nwadiokwu et al. 2016). As explained by Chukwu and Ume (2020), the joy of a woman expecting a baby, "knows no bounds as she cheerfully sings and dances harmoniously, swerving her body mass tenderly from the right to the left unknown to her that her songs have enchanted neighbours" (p. 194). In many cultures, pregnant women observe different rituals or taboos that aim to protect the mother of the child from perceived evil attacks. Honkavuo (2021) found that in addition to prayers, women wore a protective band around the waist to (Consider shielding or toward or protect) wall off evil spirits. More so, pregnant women were restricted from eating certain meals.

Many years back Mbiti opined that in many cultures, childbirth is accompany by rituals performed by elders, religious leaders or family members to communicate goodwill and ensure prosperity for the newborn. At the announcement of the birth of a child, women in the immediate and extended family and kindred gather to welcome the child with ululation, singing traditional songs and dancing. It is an expression of joy that the lineage is expanded. Birth songs are sung in most cases, and the dancing rhythm of the songs makes them more fitting for the occasion, which enhances active participation of the audience (women) that gathered to celebrate the occasion (Ohaja et al., 2021). The newborn infant is then initiated to society and the world at large through the naming ceremony ritual after other birth rituals like circumcision has been done and umbilical cord fallen off.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rite Of Passage

According to Mandova et al. (2012), the African rites of passage involve human development through life stages such as birth, adulthood, marriage, eldership, and death. Rites have been long defined as ceremonies while passages indicate the transition between different developmental stages. Lebesse et al., (2022) opined that separation, transition, and incorporation are the three characteristics of rites of passage. The separation process involves being away from home and a change of routine. This is where human development begins, and there are physical changes and a shift from childish behaviour to adulthood. Puberty, for example, is characterized by uncertainty and mystery, which can cause anxiety. During this time, the individual is experiencing human emotions that can cause extreme stress. A course of ethics and values training guides the conduct of the initial initiative. As the children grow and mature, they move to the incorporation phase, where the internalization of values, norms, and ethics is learned during the transition.

More so, Kasomo (2009) outlined several different rites of passage classes, including territorial passages, private and public passages, marriage and betrothal rituals, and funerals. The rite of passage plays an essential role in the developmental stages of African people. Rites of passage remain integral parts of religious life in Africa, celebrated through traditional ceremonies of initiation for honouring natural developmental stages, connecting the individual to self, others, and the immediate environment, and revitalizing and restoring the human experience (Grimes, 2000). To Twala (2007) African Indigenous communities have been practicing the rite of passage since ancient times. This rite of passage concept has been transmitted from one generation to a generation. This rite of passage focuses on the traditional, spiritual, and cultural context practiced within African cultures.

Rites of passage are based on the notion of sharing one's life and vision with the community, which is rooted in the mystery of life and death. Different African tribes celebrate for example childbirth according to their culture. Rituals are performed to celebrate and welcome the newborn baby to the family and ancestors. Rituals and ceremonies associated with rites of passage typically fall into one of three categories (Falanga, 2021). The first step is toward something new that involves deviation from familiarity and social structure. One gradually gets closer to the unknown to learn and acquire new skills. The second is the Liminality which refers to the point at which a person crosses the edge or margin of society. In other words, it can refer to the period between two stable conditions or stages of a person's life. Lastly, the process of reintegration that involves putting what has been learned into practice in an individual's daily life. As the person returns from the edge, it is a new role or identity that they assume. Individuals who re-formulate an understanding of life learn to develop and accept themselves better (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003).

Birth Rites

Giving birth is celebrated through ritual events in which the whole community is involved. It is rejoiced by the husband, wife, and family, and thanksgiving is offered to appease the ancestors (Nwadiokwu et al. 2016). Motherhood defines a female and is regarded in high esteem, and the consequent inability to give birth is always depicted negatively. Consequently, should a female experience miscarriage, she is called 'one whose basket leaks', and the one who does not conceive is called 'the one who ate the placenta'. It is noted from these statements that the womb is an important organ as it is meant for nurturing and

celebrating life (Siwila, 2015). Different cultures have different rituals that are performed during childbirth, and this is viewed as one of the things that will protect the child and the mother from any bad occurrences that could occur in the future. Birth rites in this study is extensively discussed in four domains as seen below. \

Pregnancy Cultural Practices to Childbirth

During pregnancy, the mother goes through changes biological, mental and psychological. However, during this stage, it is expected that both pregnant woman and spouse will have to adhere to certain directives given by the community. It is worth knowing that special attention is given to the pregnant woman for her health and well-being since death during pregnancy or delivery of the child is considered an unnatural death. This is because in the case of a prenatal or post-natal death, proper divination must be made to ask God for forgiveness for whatever sins of commission or omission (Tariang, 2012). As such, it is mandatory for the ceremony to be performed to cleanse the family and the clan of the curse, so that such manner of death may not happen again in the future among the clan.

According to Tati (2021), in Balikumbat when a woman is pregnant, she visits a traditional midwife regularly for checkups. The midwife then performed certain rites on the pregnant woman purportedly to protect the woman and her pregnancy from evil spare or manipulation until the baby is born. Its worthy of note that, the methods employed by the midwives differed from the other but had a common goal which is the welfare of the mother and child. However, there is a common practice among pregnant women in Balikumbat, most of them had a twined fiber rope tied around the waist and ankle to prevent miscarriage. The belief associated to this is that it had the potential of fastening the cervices of a pregnant woman in other to permit the womb to carry the fetus still it is due. The ropes are only untied on the instruction of the midwife. Childbearing is a vital issue and all pregnant women many years ago depended on the traditional midwife for their antenatal care.

Furthermore, to Tati (2021), the midwife employed the following means to achieve a safe delivery. She gave the expected mother traditional concoctions made from leaves and herbs in a calabash of water which she drank and refilled the calabash with water for a specific period. Tati (2021) added that pregnancy in the traditional Balikumbat society is characterized by superstition surrounded by many restrictions (taboos). More so, pregnant women are restricted from going out very early in the morning or late in the night for fear of evil influences because is the period that evil spirits hovered and wandered around in the village in search of prey or people to inflict with diseases and pregnant women were their main target. It is believed that evil spirits could reincarnate through a pregnant woman of his descendant. More so Tati (ibid), opined that during pregnancy, the midwife will instruct the pregnant woman not to eat termites and honey because it could cause or trigger a miscarriage. Pregnant women were also restricted from eating any animal that when killed had a fetus in other to prevent a stillbirth. In addition to the above-mentioned restrictions, pregnant women restricted from watching the performance of masquerades as it can deform the unborn baby into a frightful creature. During the third trimester of pregnancy, expected mother are told to avoid many strenuous activities but not exempted from farmwork.

According to Kharbamon and Kalita (2025), during pregnancy, the woman needs a strong social support group to ease her of both stress and anxiety and is advised not to attend

deaths and funerals as this may agitate her wellbeing and that of the child within her. Quarrels and arguments in the family are to be avoided at all costs. The pregnant woman is advised not to be part of the cremation or visit the house where an unnatural death had taken place, since such situations may emotionally disturb the mother to be. Such restrictions are not only for the mother, but for the father as well. Men of pregnant women are banned to hunt, complete the weaving and plaiting of a basket or bamboo work. More so, it was belief that going against such could leave an ugly scar on the child body. Again, Kharbamon and Kalita (ibid) opined that the father is not permitted heating or melting a piece of iron or using it as such actions are believed to have deleterious effects on baby health. In some African culture, it is a strong belief that should the father ignore the prohibitions, there is every possibility that the child conceived may be born blind, scared, maimed or even disabled in some way or the other.

Announcing of Childbirth Practices

Based on announcement of childbirth in Nso land, in the Northwest region of Cameroon, this was initially announced in a special way where few people from the husband family will visit the bride parents with palm wine, red palm oil, and bag of salt to tell them that their daughter has put to birth. In addition, special kinds of songs were sung by married women who gave birth to their first child. A special symbol “roh” was used to communicate the presence of a newborn. Childbirth is treated as a life cycle and communal event within African communities that announcement is made to let the community know of the arrival of a newborn. The celebrations surrounding the birth of a child are community events, marked with singing and dancing.

Purification Rituals

To elucidate, purification rituals done on mothers after childbirth were mixing of hot red palm oil with salts, herbs and eaten with roasted with cocoyam / plantain, not allowing the mother to cook, cocoyam and egussi is prepared and take to the village square and placed at the junction, the woman and child were bath by elderly women for days, mother and child obliged to stay indoors still umbilical cord fallen off and the fallen umbilical cord is rub with salt and red oil before buried. More so, Nwadiokwu et al. (2016) said that the nursing mother does not cook for a full three months but served special food rich in venison. Only after three months were both the infant and nursing mother allowed to go to the market.

This tied with the opinion of Kharbamon and Kalita (2025) which is same of the Khasi people where before the delivery of the child, the family prepares a specific gourd, *u klong iawbei*, a hen whose legs are spotless, an earthen pot to store hot water, a bamboo cylinder called *ka tangsohpet*, for the cold water, and the mixture is poured into an earthen pot which is kept aside to bathe the new born child. Further, a flat elongated splinter is peeled off from the side of the bamboo cylinder with one side sharpened for cutting the umbilical cord. The newborn baby is bathed from a vessel containing a mixture of hot and cold water from the red earthen pot and the bamboo cylinder respectively. Every day the baby is given a bath from these three containers till the umbilical cord falls off (Tariang, 2012).

Before the delivery of the child, the family prepares a specific gourd, *u klong iawbei*, a hen whose legs are spotless in an earthen pot. Stored hot water and cold water is mixed and poured into an earthen pot which is kept aside to bathe the newborn child. Further, a flat, elongated splinter is peeled off from the side of the bamboo cylinder with one side sharpened for cutting the umbilical cord. When the baby is born, the umbilical cord is

severed with the bamboo splinter prepared and tied three centimetres from the base of the baby's belly with a thread. The newborn baby is bathed from a vessel containing a mixture of hot and cold water from the red earthen pot and the bamboo cylinder respectively. Every day the baby is given a bath from these three containers till the umbilical cord falls off (Tariang, 2012). Kharbamon and Kalita (2025) added that after the delivery, a ritual is performed by sacrificing a hen to invoke the ancestral mother of the clan to support and bless the mother and the child with health and well-being.

The transition of expectant females from conception to childbirth is celebrated through different rituals. Some of the rituals have dietary restrictions as it is believed that it is going to ease the delivery. For instance, among the Vatsonga, pregnant females are not allowed to eat eggs or significant portions of food because they believe that the females might have difficult labour. The female is not allowed to sleep, especially during the day, as this is believed to cause laziness in the unborn baby and might cause difficult and slow labour. Within the same cultural group, pregnancy is not announced to many people; only a few people can be informed about the pregnancy, as it is thought that the unborn baby might be bewitched (Siwila, 2015). This is also observed in Akamba and Gikuyu (Kenya), where pregnant females observe regulations and taboos, including wearing protective amulets and avoiding doubtful foods. In Kenya, among the Abamba clan, pregnant females are forbidden to eat food originating from animals, beans, and meat.

In Zambian cultural practices, the pregnant mother is separated from the community for the child's safety. It is believed that the pregnancy must be handed over to the ancestors, who become the custodians of the pregnancy. Separation is done early in pregnancy, before other people take notice, and is done by the family for fear of attack from evil people (Siwila, 2015). Thus, we could see that across different African cultures, pregnant women undergo different phases as a form of rite of passage during pregnancy with main goal to guarantee health and well-being for both mother and child.

To elucidate, for the Nso people, in case of death of the newborn, a purification ritual is performed to prevent further death because such death is considered unnatural. The purification is a call for proper divination by asking the God for forgiveness for whatever sins. All these is to evade such manner of death in future. More so, another important aspect of purification is the believe attach to placenta. Communities believe that the child has a continuous connection to the placenta, though separated, hence the ritual performance to relink them. For this reason, placenta is buried on ancestral land to signifies that the child belongs to the homestead. (Siwila, 2015). Furthermore, burying a placenta under special tree like banana and others is believed to promote fertility within the female's womb to continue to be fruitful. For example, the value of the placenta decaying under the Mapundu tree is of high importance. This tree significance is also observed among Bemba people during initiation, as a female child is introduced to the Mapundu tree by asking her to sit under the tree during initiation lessons (Siwila, 2015). More so, Vatsonga people also bury the placenta in the cattle kraal within the homestead to cement the child's existence within the family. Therefore, purification linked to the handling of child placenta varies by cultures, but the significance remains almost the same.

Child Circumcision / Initiation Practices

Among the various African groups, circumcision involves the surgical removal of the foreskin; however, various initiation teachings accompany the surgery and hence carry a lot

of meaning. The surgical removal of the foreskin marks the entrance into a new stage in life, and the initiate is expected to act and reflect the new status the young male has acquired (Phokane, 2017). For example, Circumcision among AmaXhosa is highly significant as it represents a transition from boyhood (ubukhwenkwe) to manhood (ubudoda) (Vincent, 2008). According to the VhaVenda, male circumcision is one of the most important rituals in a boy's life. It is a rite of passage that makes him a man, allows him to hold status within the community, and enhances his sexual capabilities (Dionisio & Viviani, 2013).

Within the African perspective, circumcision is seen as a way of initiating young males to be effective role players in the sustainable and continuous existence of their societies (Maharasoia & Maharaswa 2004). Circumcisions at the time was practiced in non-clinical settings and are overseen by a traditional practitioner with different dimensions which can be religious, social, philosophical, and biomedical (CSSR, 2009). For example, among the Senegalese, circumcision is regarded as an important rite of passage that has a religious dimension. It is believed that circumcision comes from God and is sacred. The male is given the name Njulli which means prayer. It is expected of a circumcised male to pray and to meet the spiritual purity required for an act of religious communion. Circumcision is viewed as a sacrifice to the ancestors when blood is shed on the ground (Niang & Boiro, 2007). The spilling of blood on the soil is viewed as an incorporation of the initiated personhood into their ancestors and the land, which is tied to the community where the young male is born. Consequently, the bond to the land and ancestors compels individuals who have migrated to return to their forefathers' land for burial, should they die (Ramose, 2005).

Generally, from an African perspective, a circumcised male should have respect for societal values and norms. These norms and values are expected to be upheld and prohibit indulgence in petty crimes, such as stealing cows, which can be tolerable if done by uncircumcised males. It is also expected that initiated males exercise control over sexual desires (Niang & Boiro, 2007). This shows how much emphasis is placed on the individual's change of character. Therefore, it is expected that there be a distinction between an initiate and an uninitiated male based on their behaviour, where the initiated should behave well (Froneman & Kapp, 2017). The initiate is taught how to honour and respect their ancestors by adhering to the customs. This is said to be a vertical relationship and, at the same time, have a horizontal relationship with the other initiates and females in general. Niang and Boiro (2007) describe what an uncircumcised male is called, which is derogatory. They are referred to as nayafan, which means the one who does not have responsibilities. Initiation offers a sense of belonging in the community, and males always aspire to belong.

In certain cultures in Senegal, Guinea, and South Africa (Bapedi), circumcision is separated from initiation. There is an identified separation between circumcision and initiation, and failure to complete the second phase is deemed as not having completed the rite of passage. The WHO (2009) reports on initiation practiced among East and Southern African communities who do not practice male circumcision; for example, in Kenya, the six lower teeth are removed as a sign of a rite of passage. It must be noted that anyone who underwent traditional circumcision is more respected by the community than those who went through medical circumcision.

Theoretical Review

This study is guided by Bame Nsamenang's Theory of Socio-Ontogenesis (1992). The social ontogenetic framework draws on the interpretation of African life paths to recognize three

cycles. Social ontogenetic theory was built on Bronfenbrenner's and Supper and Harkness's ecological treatise on human development and the implication of ecological environment's impact on human ontogeny. According to Nsamenang (1992), theory of Socio-Ontogenesis, an African worldview envisions the human life cycle in three phases of selfhood. There is a spiritual selfhood, which begins at conception, or perhaps earlier in an ancestral spirit that reincarnates. It ends with the ceremony to confer a name on a newborn. This tells us that right from conception as in the case with pregnancy, there are social and cultural beliefs associated it and not just biological. In fact, Nso people believe that when certain rituals are performed like burring of child umbilical cord under banana trees, it permits the women to remain fertile and give birth to many children.

More so, Nso people had it as a belief that when a woman loses the first child during birth or shortly after, when purification rituals are performed, it prevents the woman from experiencing another early loss of child. Nsamenang (1992) opined that the spiritual selfhood, which begins at conception, or perhaps earlier in an ancestral spirit that reincarnates. It ends with the ceremony to confer a name on a newborn. A social or experiential selfhood continues the cycle from the rite of incorporation or introduction of the child into the human community through naming, to end with biological death. Death is more acceptable in old age. An ancestral selfhood follows biological death. In general, ancestors are the living dead (Mbiti, 1990), or spiritual presences in the affairs of the living. Some ancestors stand out as the loving dead.

A cursory examination of the intentions and meanings of funeral rites and the memories people hold of loved ones for decades, even centuries, after their death can identify this class of ancestors to substantiate the universality of a selfhood that transcends the existential self. Some cultures claim the rebirth or reincarnation of their loving dead to complete the unbroken circle of being human (Zimba, 2002). Social selfhood, the experiential phase of personhood, develops through seven stages. These include a period of the newborn, social priming, social apprenticing, social *entre'e*, social internment, adulthood, and old age and death (Nsamenang, 1992).

Adding the two metaphysical phases of human selfhood to the seven stages of social ontogenesis completes the human life cycle. Each stage of ontogenetic development is marked by distinctive developmental tasks, defined within the framework of cultural realities and developmental agenda (Nsamenang, 2000). A social or experiential selfhood continues the cycle from the rite of incorporation or introduction of the child into the human community through naming, to end with biological death. All these are evidence that from conception to birth before naming and so on, Africa in general and Nso people in particular do have certain cultural emblem to perform on the mother and child/children. Giving birth is celebrated through ritual events in which the whole community is involved, and ancestral spirits invoke to support and bless the mother and the child with health and wellbeing.

Statement of the Problem

In Africa, there are unique practices that are vital for our existence such as birth or childhood rites which strongly influence the acculturation of Nso migrants. Despite the rapid wind of modernization in society regarding migrants' efforts in social integration as per many cultures, migrants still have issues learning and integrating in some of these cultures. From observation, different ethnic groups in Nso, have their tradition and cultures,

symbols, ceremonies, values, philosophies, perspectives, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, rituals, rites, taboos, and myths that make it difficult for the migrants to continue practicing with the same exactitude in the host regions. Even if they attempt to do so it is usually adulterated thus missing out on some critical elements.

Migrants are unable to understand the mysteries in certain cultures in the Nso community which makes them dormant and not able to acquire knowledge of the secret mysteries of religion. Many immigrants are not aware of the meaning and reasons behind an individual's name, how birth rites unfold, marriage rites and how death rites are celebrated. This may make them to be less transformed, connected and belonged in the society. Most of them feel the loss of cultural identity, some migrants experience acculturation stress during the identity formation process, and some experience low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. Some minority migrants are stressed which may lead to poorer mental health outcomes and psychological distress. Some experience conflict due to cultural differences and values. It is this backdrop that prompted the researcher to carry out a study on the birth rites of passage and the acculturation of traditional Nso migrants in other Regions of Cameroon.

Research Objectives

Specifically, the study is guided by the following.

1. To examine the deviations in birth rites pregnancy cultural practices as a function of Nso People's acculturation process.
2. To find out the variations in birth rites announcing as a function of Nso people's acculturation process.
3. To examine the changes in birth rites purification rituals as a function of Nso People's acculturation process.
4. To examine the changes in birth rites initiation practices as a function of Nso people's acculturation process.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The study utilized the ethnography research design to study the culture of the Nso people and how it has changed overtime. This design was appropriate for the study because is a typical qualitative research method good at exploring cultural patterns of a group of persons, behaviour, and experiences. With this design, it permitted the gathering of sufficient data from fewer group of persons to provide perspicacious into the determinants of cultural variation of the Nso people. In fact, with ethnography research design, we can better understand possible variation in Nso people's cultural values, beliefs, norms and traditions over a period. .

Population of the Study: The main population of this study was the Nso people in their natal land and those in other regions of Cameroon. An estimated statistics of number of Nso people was 300,000 (Ethnologue, 2023). The specific reason for working with the Nso people in their homeland is because they will accurately explain the particularities of their cultural rites from the past before accounting for variations at present time.

Target Population of Study: The target population consists of lineage heads and elders living in Nso land and those in other parts of Cameroon. The reasons for targeting lineage heads and elders of Nso are that they are seen as custodians of the culture. More so, they are believed to know more about their culture due to their age and status. In fact, it is believed that for someone to ascend the position of lineage head, they must be conversant with the culture. Thus, targeting specifically lineage heads and elders, the researcher hopes to collect

appropriate data to provide readers with concrete information on the phenomenon.

Accessible Population of the Study: The accessible population of the study was delimited to lineage heads and Nso elders in the cities of Bamenda, Baffoussam, Douala, and Buea. The accessible population was limited to the Nso people of the above-mentioned cities because the ongoing armed conflict in the entire region of the study (Northwest) for over eight years makes it insecure for the researcher to travel to the actual Nso land. In Bamenda, Baffoussam, Douala, and Buea, the researcher had access to the Nso people of Bamenda Nso Cultural Group, Baffoussam Nso Cultural Group, Douala Nso Development Association, and Buea Nso Cultural Development Association. In these cultural associations of Nso people, we have a total of 35 natal Nso persons, and 55 migrated Nso people, giving a total of 90 Nso people. The number of males is 62 and females 28.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques: The sample size comprises 30 Nso people and were sampled using the purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The goal for using the purposive sampling technique was to select a few Nso lineage and elders who are believed to be adequately knowledgeable of the Nso cultural trend and could explain how birth rites have change over time. More so, we used the snowball sampling because the elders and lineage heads do not stay in the same environment. Thus, few of the lineage heads and elders were begged by the researcher for direction to the compounds of other lineage heads and elders.

Instrument for Data Collection: Interview guide and focus group discussion were the two qualitative instruments used for the study.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments: The validity of the instruments were ensured by working in close collaboration top ranking academician and few indigenes from Nso land. The intention was to state relevant questions for relevant data collection. After considering the validity of the instruments, we also conducted reliability based on need analysis. At this juncture, the instruments were pilot tested on 3 Nso people and responses gathered showed high level consistency and similarities.

Data Collection Procedure: Data collection was done face-to-face. This implies that the researcher and trained assistance went to the field to have one-on-one interaction and discussion with sampled participants.

Data Analysis Technique: Qualitative data collected were first transcript into textual data. During this process, all audio records were carefully listened, and the responses of the participants were typed word verbatim. Thereafter, the transcript data were analysed using the process of thematic analysis whereby concepts or ideas were grouped under umbrella terms or key words with the support of Atlas Ti 5.2 (Atlas Ti GMBH, 2006). In this context, single words, clauses and sets of words or phrases were used to developed themes emanated directly from participants statements. In other words, there were no initial themes as but were generated following the standard process of thematic analysis. Themes were further elaborated using theme description were applicable. All themes or codes deduced for every statement were assumed relevant irrespective number of times it appeared. Therefore, themes were considered more important than frequency or grounding. After taking the generalization of themes into consideration, a translation rule was created to allow the streamlining and organization of the coding process so that what was being coded is necessary. This stage enabled the defining of the meaning of every

word/theme, and what they stood for and to know where to code each statement. During the analysis and to satisfy the requirement, all the themes were backed with related quotations on the thematic tables.

FINDINGS

Research Question One: What are the deviations in birth rites pregnancy cultural practices as a function of Nso People's acculturation process?

Table 1:

Observed Cultural Practices during Pregnancy in Nso Community and Taboos Associated with Pregnancy

Themes/Codes	Themes/Codes Description	Quotations
No visitation to maternal home	Some women not allowed to visit their maternal home	"In some families, when a woman is pregnant, she is not supposed to visit their own family where she was born especially when a woman is in her first pregnancy. They will say the woman is in her 'vifir'. That means not anybody can visit her even her siblings. When she has given birth the husband's family deem it necessary, they can authorize mother - in law to come and take care of the child." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "Husband's family is accountable of everything at that particular time, safety for the mother and child is their responsibility." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "Restricted from visiting family of origin." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Restricted from gatherings	Pregnant women not permitted to attend burials, shrines, traditional ceremonies, and celebration	"Most gatherings such as burials, and sad event, she needs to isolate herself." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "The pregnant women are restricted from attending traditional ceremonies, celebrations, shrines." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "A pregnant woman was restricted from attending public places e.g market, funerals, celebrations etc." "Some places such as where juju' are passing as they usually carries 'bad medicine'." "A pregnant woman is restricted from going to certain gatherings." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Restricted from certain herbs	Pregnant women not permitted from taking some medicinal herb plants	"Restricted from taking some herbs." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "When a girl has grown and reached childbearing age, when pregnant she doesn't have to be using drug anyhow. Some even when pregnant don't know until they go to the hospital. With some women, it is advisable not to be doing hard work."

		(Source: Elder/Title holder)
Husband responsibility and maternal home	When a woman is not pregnant out of wedlock	"Restricted from traditional medications that is those prescribed by the doctor "kikwiiy Keborki" mostly prepared with sweet palm wine." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "When a woman is pregnant especially when it is not of wedlock, the pregnancy is manageable by the husband family." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "The demand for nourishment by the pregnant woman is the responsibility of the two families." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Oiling of stomach and sex restricted	Abstain from sex and oiling of stomach	"Oiling of the stomach, abstinence from sexual intercourse." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Leaves marital home	Some pregnant women told to leave husband house if believed to be attack by witchcraft	"In some cases, a divine "traditional healer" recommends the pregnant woman to leave the marital home when they foresee a miscarriage sometimes associated with witchcraft." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Restricted from certain food	Some pregnant women are told to avoid certain foods	"The diviner sometimes tells the pregnant woman what the child needs e.g. meat, fish or any other type of food." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Restricted from handshake	Pregnant women not permitted to shake hand with others	"In rare cases pregnant women are restrained from giving handshakes." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
No passing in-between men		"She is not supposed to pass in between two persons especially men." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Farming restriction		"She is restricted from doing certain manual work like going to the farm." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
No night bath		"Don't bath in the night." (Source: Migrant)
No night movement	Pregnant women not permitted to walk at night	"Don't move in the night." (Source: Migrant)
No stepping over robe of masquerade		"Don't cross the robe of a sealace masquerade "nkah" else you will put to birth to deformed child." (Source: Migrant)
No night water fetching	Pregnant women not allowed to go to stream at night to carry water	"Don't fetch water from a running stream in the night." (Source: Migrant)

The actual pregnancy cultural practices revealed that pregnant women in Nso community were restricted from visiting their maternal home, attending gathering, restricted from consuming certain herbs, had to be taken care of by both husband and her family, prohibited from oiling their stomach and have sex, not allowed to eat any kind of food, prohibited from shaking hands with people, constrained from passing in between men,

prohibited from fetching stream water at night, walk at night, and bath at night. They were also constrained from crossing the robe of masquerade and conditionally allowed to stay at maternal home if her pregnancy is belief to be bewitched by members from husband family.

Table 2:
Observed Changes with Pregnancy Restrictions in Nso Community

Themes/Codes	Quotations
Attend all gatherings	"Nowadays, it has changed as some people think they are supposed to be jumping from one place to another, but she is not supposed to go to any gatherings. She can go for selected gatherings like born house, death celebrations. Today, pregnant women go to any celebration without seeking permission." (Source: Elder/ Title holder) "Yes; presently pregnant women move freely and attend occasions, they have coitus." (Source: Elder/ Title holder) "Most pregnant women are attending all the above public places and celebrations." (Source: Migrant) "Nowadays, some women just go anywhere following juju s and other celebration in which later on the will start feeling ill not knowing it is from there." (Source: Migrant)
Christianity, urbanisation, and technology	"Birth and childhood, adolescence and adulthood, marriage, death and ancestorship. All these have changed as a result because of Christianity and urbanization and technology. Even with these changes, persistent and adaptability is still practiced" (Source: Migrant)

With respect to changes with pregnancy taboos in Nso community, many of the respondents said pregnant women in Nso not allowed to attend gatherings now attend all kind of gatherings in the Nso community. And this change is attributed to Christianity, urbanisation, and technology.

Research Question Two: What are the variations in birth rites announcing as a function of Nso people's acculturation process?

Table 3:
Traditional Ways of Announcing Childbirth in Nso Land and if they have been Changes

THEMES/CODES	THEMES/CODES DESCRIPTION	QUOTATIONS
VISIT BRIDE FAMILY WITH BAG OF SALT, OIL, PALM WINE	Few husband people pay visit to the bride house with bag of salt to announce childbirth	"When a child is born two or three people from the husband side take a bag of salt to go and give the bride side and announce that they have a child either girl or boy after which they prepare for a day for born house to celebrate. When coming they bring bag of salts to share to everybody. The people that came don't see the mother and the baby. They just enjoy and celebrate with the family and go back without seeing them." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "Salt and palm oil is taken to the family of the

		mother with some palm wine.” (Source: Elder/Title holder) “When it is the first child of the family, the couple sing and dance for celebration, the put salt and palm oil and the community come out celebrating with them eating, singing and dancing. Someone from the family will then go the bride’s family to announce the birth of the child. While going he/she will take along palm oil or salt.” (Source: Elder/Title holder) “Immediately the child is born, the paternal family is supposed to carry the message to the family of the woman, and they go along with the palm wine- on entering the compound there is shouts of joy announcing “suung wan” that they have gotten a child and family receives them with songs of joy. Those who come to announce the birth of the child are given gifts e.g. salt or even cash and in due cause, they seek a name for their newborn from the in laws.” (Source: Elder/Title holder) “When a woman gives birth, an elderly woman where she got marriage, will be dedicated to go to the woman’s family to inform that they have a child. When going she go with salt and palm oil. Now for those staying at Baffoussam, they don’t’ do that again because of distance. They call using telephone.” (Source: Migrant) “People are sent to the mother’s family to go and announce the delivery of the baby. The sex of the child is asked, after which they start “Ndez wan’ (jubilating) and women usually sing songs like ‘lo wan dzewan’. Gifts like salt, oil are shared.” (Source: Migrant)
NDZEI-WAN LO WAN DZE WAN	A special kind of song sung by married women who gave birth to their first child.	“They are announced using a certain song (Ndzei-wan lo wan dze wan) etc. This practice is going in some areas.” (Source: Elder/Title holder) “When a woman gives birth in NSO land, people present will give shouts of joy that is halting.” (Source: Migrant) “Women farm groups and sing songs of childbirth and dance. Only women who get married and give birth to the first child. None these days.” (Source: Migrant) “Women form groups and sing songs of childbirth and dance.” (Source: Migrant)
“ROH”	A symbol communicating the presence of a	“In welcoming the child into the society, especially the one born into a big compound, a place where he/she will stay, they will put

	newborn	“Roh”. When they put the roh, the people passing will know that there is a newborn child. But you won’t see the child. The child will be there in hiding for some time except the day they want to officially send the child out to the public which is usually after 6 months or 1 year.” (Source: Elder/Title holder)

Findings showed that childbirth was dominantly announced in a special way where few people from the husband family will visit the bride parents with palm wine, red palm oil, and bag of salt to tell them that their daughter has put to birth. In addition, special kind of songs were sung by married women who gave birth to their first child and “roh” a special symbol was used to communicate the presence of a newborn.

Table 4:

Observed Changes with Ways of Announcing Childbirth in Nso Land

Themes/Codes	Quotations
Childbirth announced via telephone and discussion	“Nowadays, people just do they wish. One will give birth, but you will only know from discussions or through telephone” “Presently verbal messages and telephone calls are used instead of physical visit with the salt and palm wine.” (Source: Elder/Title holder) “Nowadays, all these are not down, when a child is born, even if you made the bride’s family at the roadside, you could announce the birth of the child. Also, telephone calls have made it easy for the announcement of the newborn to be done. Though some people still follow the traditional ways.” (Source: Elder/Title holder) “When a woman gives birth, an elderly woman where she got marriage, will be dedicated to go to the woman’s family to inform that they have a child. When going she go with salt and palm oil. Now for those staying at Baffoussam, they don’t’ do that again because of distance. They call using telephone.” (Source: Migrant)
Singing of special songs not common	“They are announced using a certain song by married women who had their first child (Ndzei-wan lo wan dze wan) etc. However, this practice is going in some areas and not in many other areas.” (Source: Elder/Title holder) “Women farm groups and sing songs of childbirth and dance. Only women who get married and give birth to the first child. None these days.” (Source: Migrant)

To elucidate, based on observed changes in the way childbirth is announced in Nso land, respondents said childbirth is now announced via telephone call and discussion with people unlike before that few people from the husband family will visit the bride parents with palm wine, red palm oil, and bag of salt to tell them that their daughter has put to birth. More so, the special kind of songs that were sung by married women who had their first child is no longer common these days.

Research Question Three: What are the changes in birth rites purification rituals as a function of Nso People's acculturation process?

Table 5:

Purification Rituals Performed on Mothers after Childbirth and if they have been Changes

Themes/Codes	Themes/Codes Description	Quotations
"Tooh wan"	Hot red palm oil mixed with salts, herbs and eaten with roasted with cocoyam / plantain	"When a woman gives birth, they usually carry out "tooh wan" whereby they hot red palm oil mixed with salts and other herbs, then roast plantain/cocoyam and eat with it. After, palm oil is taken to her to show that there is "tooh wan". Thereafter, she will hot some and add salt and other spices to it and share to the people that visit her." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Not allow to cook	Mother given some food considered as reverence and not allowed to work	"Special feeding with oiling soup." "The special food was prepared and put in special dishes (baskets and traditional dishes ('lang Nso)." "The mother is given special food (eggusi pudding, corn fufu) and not allowed to cook nor do anything." (Source: Migrant) "The mother of the child is well catered for. She is not allowed to cook. She will be well catered for." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Rituals with food	Cocoyam and eggusi is prepared and take to village square	"Some rituals are done where coco yams and eggusi is prepared, taken to the village square, a big ridge is prepared, cocoyam is cut and eggussi put on it and placed at the junction. After this, the mother and child can now step out of the house." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Bath by others	The women will be bath by others for days with warm water	"After birth the mother was given a bath continuously for days until the umbilical cord is disconnected from the child." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "A door shutter (made from bamboos) was used and bathing her with it." "They warm water for the mother and child and bath them, then tell the mother to breast feed the child." (Source: Migrant) "Medical herbs are given to the mother, doesn't bath the baby except the elderly women." (Source: Migrant)
Stays indoor	The woman stays in doors till umbilical cord is off	"When a woman gives birth, she has to be besides the child until the umbilical cord falls off." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "Under some circumstances, the child is restrained to be seen by all. This happens when the child is perceived to be bewitched or is to have some special gifts." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Buried umbilical cord	The child umbilical cord rub with salt and red oil and	"The umbilical cord is cam wooded before it is buried in front of the house. This is when it dries and drops off. This is mostly done by an elderly woman" (Source: Elder/Title holder)

buried

holder)

"The umbilical cord is buried with salt and oil rubbed on it. An elderly woman is the one to perform this ritual by burying it besides the house after which, she put a stone where it was buried and fence it. Neighbours are then invited to prepare food to be eaten." (Source: Migrant)

Based on purification rituals carried on mothers after childbirth, some respondents said hot red palm oil mixed with salt and herb is eaten with roasted cocoyam or plantain. In addition, some respondents said the mother is not allowed to cook and is given food to eat. Moreso, some respondents said cocoyam and egussi is prepared and take to village square and placed at the junction before mother and child can step out of house. Mother and child will be bath by others for days, they stays indoor still the umbilical cord falls off and is buried. Finally, before the umbilical cord is buried, is rub with salt and red oil.

Table 6:

Observed Changes with Purification Rituals After Childbirth

Themes/Codes	Quotations
Bathing by other women not common again	"After birth the mother was given a bath continuously for days until the umbilical cord is disconnected from the child. Most women who delivered nowadays have never even experienced this." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "Presently except those who delivered and are sick, most of them are taking the bath by themselves, they cook and even wash their dresses with those of the child/children." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Child carry by outsiders with un-detach umbilical cord	"Nowadays, this is not done. When a woman gives birth, the next day you can see her and the child roaming in the quarter and giving the child to everyone, but in the past, someone isn't supposed to take the child until the umbilical cord is buried." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Umbilical left in the hospital	"As we are here, we don't do it. When the child is born, the umbilical cord is left at the hospital." (Source: Migrant)
No more purification	"Purifications are only done when the child passes. Then the mother is purified so that the next child should not die. All these are dying because of Christianity." (Source: Migrant)

Based on observed changes with purification rituals after childbirth, the respondents said most women now are obliged to bath themselves after birth, cook, and even wash dresses unlike before and newborn is/are carried by non-parents even when the umbilical cord has not fallen off. In addition, the umbilical cord now even abandoned at the hospital unlike before, and no purification done in cases where a child died to prevent further death.

Research Question Four: What are changes in birth rites initiation as a function of Nso people's acculturation process?

Table 7:

Initiation Rites Like Circumcision and Baptism and How they were Performed and if they have been Changes

	Themes/Codes	Themes/Codes Description	Quotations
Circumcision rites	Circumcision at home by elders	Newborn circumcised at home with special foodstuff share to people to eat	"In those days, when it is time for circumcision, special foodstuff are gathered, the one that can give nutrients to the child's body in which the mother will be eating or if she is the one to prepare and give the child, she will be doing that. Palm oil is also mixed and bring in the day of circumcision. When circumcision is done, the share it to the people to eat." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "Circumcision was done by trained elders when the child is almost two months. When circumcision was done, the child was restricted from giving to other people. The child was only handled by the mother for some days for the healing to take place." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
	Buried in banana	Circumcision remains buried in banana tree	"When the woman gives birth, the remains of the child are taken and thrown under a banana. This is called "Suuy Wan" A "dangmbo" because if thrown away from this banana it is said that this woman might not born again. It's believed that this banana is nutritious and is always green. So will the woman be." (Source: Elder/ Title holder)
	Embryo cord oiled and position at the door		"The embryo cord is official reserved at the door. It is oiled with palm oil and salt and a stone is placed over it" (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Baptism rites	Use of chair, fowl, oil, and salt with money drop in child bag	A specialised call to carry out baptism.	"During traditional baptism of the child, they usually call someone specializd in it then asked for the child's chair, fowl, oil and salt. After which money is dropped inside the child's bag be it 25frs or 50frs or 500frs. If the child can seat already for

		instance, he/she is placed on his chair and the bag given to him. He is the only one that can seat on that chair. If the specialized person is not in the community, people go to neighboring villages to look for him." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Sorcery	Special practice carried out to choose the right person.	"Sorcery was done to choose the right person to baptize the child." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
Traditional day	Special day devoted for baptism	"Baptism was done only on a traditional day (kilovey)." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
"Shoh"	Child named after casting of lots	"It is called "shoh" during this ceremony the child's name is given following the casting of the lots of the day. For example, Wirkom, Biy, etc." (Source: Migrant)

Furthermore, based on how circumcision rites were done in the past, some respondents said circumcision was done by elders at home with special food share to people afterward. Again, a respondent said circumcision remains are buried under banana tree so that the woman will remain fertile and give birth to many children.

As for baptism rites, a respondent said a specialised is invited who will demand chair, fowl, oi, and salt mixed with money and drop in the child bag during baptism. In addition, another respondent said the embryo is oiled and position at the door and sorcery carry out to choose the right person to baptise the child. Finally, another respondent said baptism was done on a traditional day which is specially devoted for baptism.

Table 8:

Observed Changes with Circumcision and Baptism in Nso Land

Themes/Codes	Quotations
Newborn now circumcised at the hospital	"Nowadays, circumcision is done at the hospital making the culture to die. Today, when you take the child out of the hospital without circumcision, it looks like you are still primitive." "Circumcision is done presently in the hospital two days after birth., visiting people even take newborn babies the very day of delivery." (Source: Elder/Title holder) "As we are here, circumcision /baptism is done now in a modern way usually at the hospital. When a child is born, a doctor or nurse who knows how to do it will circumcise the child." (Source: Migrant) "In the past we used to see men who are not yet circumcised and when been circumcised it is usually very painful at that age. When doing the circumcision some medical herbs are being robbed to reduce pain. At a certain age of between 12-13years boys were circumcised so that they should feel the pains and that they are now matured. This was because

	children were born at home but now, they are delivered at the hospital and circumcision done 3-4 days after birth." (Source: Migrant)
	"Circumcision now down at the hospital." (Source: Migrant)
Christianity	"Nowadays, people pretend that don't carry out child baptism but does it in hiding saying it is bad thing to the church. Even Rev father does that." (Source: Elder/Title holder)
	"The Christian baptism has replaced most of these practices." (Source: Elder/Title holder)

Regarding observed changes with circumcision in Nso land, the respondents said circumcision is now done at the hospital as depicted in the statement *"Nowadays, circumcision is done at the hospital making the culture to die. Today, when you take the child out of the hospital without circumcision, it looks like you are still primitive."* And baptism is now carried out in church as explain *"Nowadays, people pretend that don't carry out child baptism but does it in hiding saying it is bad thing to the church. Even Rev. father does that."* (Source: Elder/Title holder)

Recommendations

- **Cultural Preservation:** Encourage the Nso people to document and preserve their traditional rites of passage, including the symbolic meanings and cultural significance associated with these rituals. This can help maintain cultural heritage and promote intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge.
- **Adaptation and Innovation:** Support the adaptation of traditional rites of passage to contemporary contexts, allowing the Nso people to incorporate modern elements while maintaining the essence of their cultural practices. This can help ensure the continued relevance and significance of these rituals in modern times.
- **Community Engagement:** Foster community engagement and participation in the preservation and adaptation of rites of passage. This can involve working with community leaders, elders, and youth to ensure that these rituals continue to serve their intended purposes and promote social cohesion.
- **Empowerment:** Empower Nso community members, particularly youth and women, to take an active role in shaping their cultural practices and traditions. This can involve providing support for cultural education, leadership development, and community engagement initiatives.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings showed that they have been significant changes in the birth rites of Nso people over time from pregnancy cultural believes, announcing of childbirth, purification rituals after childbirth, circumcision, and baptism practices. Specifically, based on initial cultural practices associated with pregnancy, pregnant women were restricted from visiting their maternal home, attending gathering, restricted from consuming certain herbs, were cared by both husband and her family, prohibited from oiling their stomach and having sex, not allowed to eat any kind of food, prohibited from shaking hands with people, constrained from passing in between men, prohibited from fetching stream water at night, walking at night, and to bath in the night. In addition, they are constrained from crossing the robe of masquerade and conditionally allowed to stay at maternal home if her pregnancy is belief to be bewitched by members from husband family.

However, while some pregnancy beliefs remain unchanged, today, Nso pregnant women now attend all kind of gatherings which was not the case in the past. This showed that there have been some acculturations with pregnancy beliefs. To confirm this, Hemron (2009) opined that during pregnancy, the woman and her spouse will have to adhere to certain directives given by the community. Furthermore, based on announcement of childbirth, this was initially announced in a special way where few people from the husband family will visit the bride parents with palm wine, red palm oil, and bag of salt to tell them that their daughter has put to birth. In addition, special kinds of songs were sung by married women who gave birth to their first child. A special symbol "roh" was used to communicate the presence of a newborn. However, ways of announcing childbirth has changed as people now announced arrival of babies via telephone call and discussion unlike before that few people from the husband family will visit the bride parents with palm wine, red palm oil, and bag of salt to tell them that their daughter has put to birth. More so, the special kind of songs that were sung by married women who had their first child is no longer common these days.

To elucidate, purification rituals done on mothers after childbirth were mixing of hot red palm oil with salts, herbs and eaten with roasted with cocoyam / plantain, not allowing the mother to cook, cocoyam and egussi is prepared and take to the village square and placed at the junction, the woman and child were bath by elderly women for days, mother and child obliged to stay indoors still umbilical cord fallen off and the fallen umbilical cord is rub with salt and red oil before buried. But, today, observed changes to purification rituals after childbirth are that newborn are carried by non-parents even when the umbilical cord has not fallen off, umbilical cord abandoned at the hospital, majority of women now bath by themselves, cook and do laundering after childbirth, and no purification done in cases where a child died to prevent further death. And this contradicted Nwadiokwu *et al.* (2016) who said that the nursing mother does not cook for a full three months but served special food rich in venison. Only after three months were both the infant and nursing mother allowed to go to the market.

As for circumcision and baptism, they were initially done by elders, and child remains buried under a banana tree for the woman to remain fertile and give birth to many children while baptism rites were also done by specialist elders after carrying out sorcery to choose the right person. Baptism was done on a special day using chair, fowl, oil, salt, and money drop in the child bag. The observed change with circumcision is that is now done at the hospital and baptism done by Reverend Fathers. In fact, in AmaXhosa and AmaZulu culture as described by Doyle (2005), circumcisions are practiced in non-clinical settings and are overseen by a traditional practitioner. More so, Among the Senegalese, circumcision is regarded as an important rite of passage that has a religious dimension.

These are belief systems that begins with conception which Nsamenang (1992) outlined in his theory of Socio-Ontogenesis. A social or experiential selfhood continues the cycle from the rite of incorporation or introduction of the child into the human community through naming, to end with biological death. Adding the two metaphysical phases of human selfhood to the seven stages of social ontogenesis that completes the human life cycle, each stage of ontogenetic development is marked by distinctive developmental tasks, defined within the framework of cultural realities and developmental agenda (Nsamenang, 2000). All these are evidence that from conception to birth before naming and so on, Africa in general and Nso people in particular do have certain cultural emblem to perform on the mother and child/children. Giving birth is celebrated through ritual events in which the

whole community is involved, and ancestral spirits invoke to support and bless the mother and the child with health and wellbeing.

In conclusion, it is paramount to know changes observed with birth rites practices among the Nso people of the North West region in Cameroon, could have severe inimical effects on the present and future generation of Nso people. On this note, we are calling on all traditional authorities, elders, and family heads to reinforce their authentic traditional birth rites that were never harmful. Cultural values do have a lot of social connotation and identities. Therefore, if there are lost, an entire generation of people will equally be lost.

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PROFESSIONALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Educational leadership stands at the center of contemporary debates on education quality, governance, and national development across Africa (Bush, 2019). As countries confront persistent challenges related to school performance, curriculum implementation, equity, and accountability, the role of school leaders becomes increasingly decisive (Hallinger, 2018). Educational leadership is no longer perceived merely as administrative coordination; it is now recognized as a profession that requires specialized competencies, structured preparation, ethical grounding, and continuous professional development (Oduro, 2016). Across Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana, policymakers, scholars, and development partners emphasize that the professionalization of educational leadership is essential for driving sustainable development—an imperative embedded in the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Bush, 2019). Despite this recognition, the institutionalization of leadership standards and the creation of coherent professional pathways remain uneven.

The need for professionalized leadership emerges from shifts within education systems, including decentralization, competency-based curricula, and demands for inclusive and equitable schooling (Wanjala, 2020). These transformations require leaders who are competent in instructional leadership, community engagement, data-driven decision-making, and resource management. Yet, many African countries still operate under leadership models that prioritize administrative experience over formal training (Simkins, Davis & Barron, 2019). This study, therefore, seeks to address a critical gap in understanding how leadership professionalization influences educational quality and sustainable development outcomes (Lumby, 2019).

Background And Context

In Kenya, school leadership historically evolves from teaching experience rather than specialized preparation (Wanjala, 2020). Recent reforms, including competency-based curriculum implementation, place new pressures on leaders to adopt more instructional



and distributed leadership models (Lumby, 2019). South Africa, on the other hand, has introduced more structured leadership preparation programs, such as the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) and its successor, the Advanced Diploma in Education Leadership (Simkins et al., 2019). However, disparities remain between provinces and school socioeconomic conditions. Ghana has also embarked on expanding leadership training, with institutions such as the National Teaching Council (NTC) developing professional standards for educational leaders (Oduro, 2016). Nonetheless, leadership development frameworks are still emerging and implementation varies widely. Across all three contexts, sustainable development is closely linked to the quality of human capital (Bush, 2019). Education systems are expected to prepare learners for innovation, productivity, and social cohesion. Effective leadership is a critical driver of these outcomes, yet little comparative research exists on how leadership professionalization contributes to sustainable development in African countries (Hallinger, 2018).

Comprehensive Summary and Evaluation of Existing Research

Educational leadership in Africa has increasingly been recognized as a critical determinant of school effectiveness, learning outcomes, and broader national development. Globally, research has shown that school leaders influence the quality of teaching, student performance, resource management, and institutional culture (Leithwood et al., 2020; Hallinger, 2018). In African contexts, the professionalization of educational leadership—through structured preparation programs, competency-based frameworks, and continuous development—has emerged as a central policy priority (Bush, 2019). Existing studies highlight that leadership professionalization entails a multifaceted approach encompassing instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, ethical governance, and data-driven decision-making (Lumby, 2019; Oduro, 2016). Leadership development is not merely about administrative competence but includes fostering school improvement, motivating staff, promoting innovation, and ensuring accountability (Hallinger, 2018). Despite growing recognition of these dimensions, the implementation of structured leadership programs remains uneven across Africa, with disparities often determined by historical legacies, resource availability, and policy priorities (Simkins, Davis, & Barron, 2019).

For example, in Kenya, leadership preparation is historically based on seniority and teaching experience rather than formal training. With the introduction of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), leaders are now expected to adopt more participatory and instructional leadership models (Wanjala, 2020). Similarly, in Ghana, the National Teaching Council has introduced professional standards, yet adherence and implementation remain inconsistent across schools, particularly in rural areas (Oduro, 2016). South Africa presents a contrasting picture, where structured programs such as the ACE and Advanced Diploma in Education Leadership have sought to professionalize leadership systematically, although inequities persist between urban and rural settings (Simkins et al., 2019). In general, the literature demonstrates that professionalized leadership is associated with better teaching supervision, effective resource allocation, positive school climate, and improved learner

outcomes (Bush, 2019; Hallinger, 2018). However, there remains a significant research gap in comparative analyses across African countries, particularly regarding how leadership professionalization impacts sustainable development outcomes such as economic productivity, social cohesion, and innovation (Lumby, 2019; Wanjala, 2020).

Prior Studies:

Kenya

Research in Kenya indicates that school leadership is predominantly experience-based rather than competency-based. Many headteachers assume leadership positions without formal training, resulting in uneven instructional supervision, limited strategic planning, and inadequate school governance (Wanjala, 2020). A study by Wanjala (2020) found that only 62% of school leaders had participated in short-term leadership courses, while full professional programs were rare. These gaps have implications for curriculum implementation, teacher development, and student achievement. Kenyan reforms, such as the CBC, demand leaders who can oversee learner-centered teaching, facilitate teacher collaboration, and engage communities in school governance. However, the lack of structured leadership preparation constrains the capacity of school leaders to meet these demands effectively (Lumby, 2019). Empirical studies suggest that while informal mentoring programs exist, they are largely inconsistent and fail to address the complex skill sets required for sustainable leadership (Bush, 2019).

South Africa

South Africa has made notable strides in leadership professionalization, particularly through the ACE and Advanced Diploma programs. Studies show that leaders who complete these programs exhibit improved instructional supervision, curriculum management, and governance practices (Simkins et al., 2019). However, disparities persist between provinces, with historically disadvantaged schools facing resource limitations and uneven access to training. Research highlights that formal leadership preparation contributes to higher levels of teacher motivation, increased school accountability, and improved student outcomes (Hallinger, 2018). Despite these advances, challenges remain. The emphasis on credentialing can sometimes overshadow the practical development of leadership competencies. Furthermore, contextual challenges, including socio-economic disparities and high teacher workloads, continue to affect the effectiveness of professionalized leadership programs (Lumby, 2019).

Ghana

In Ghana, the National Teaching Council (NTC) has developed leadership standards emphasizing instructional leadership, ethical governance, and school improvement strategies (Oduro, 2016). Studies indicate that leaders trained under NTC frameworks demonstrate enhanced ability to supervise teachers, plan curricula, and engage communities. However, implementation remains inconsistent, with rural schools and low-resource areas experiencing limited access to professional development programs (Oduro,

2016; Bush, 2019). Recent research also highlights the potential of leadership professionalization to contribute to sustainable development in Ghana. For instance, school leaders trained under the NTC framework were better able to integrate life skills, civic education, and entrepreneurship into school programs, aligning education outcomes with broader national development objectives (Lumby, 2019).

Theoretical Foundations

Transformational Leadership Theory:

Transformational leadership emphasizes vision, motivation, and capacity-building. It posits that leaders inspire shared goals, foster innovation, and strengthen school cultures (Bush, 2019). Transformational leadership is particularly relevant in African contexts where leaders face systemic challenges such as resource scarcity, curriculum reforms, and decentralization. Studies show that transformational leaders improve teacher morale, promote professional learning communities, and enhance learner outcomes (Hallinger, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Distributed Leadership Theory

Distributed leadership argues that leadership responsibilities should be shared among teachers and administrators to enhance decision-making and collective responsibility (Lumby, 2019). In African schools, where resources are often limited, distributed leadership encourages collaborative problem-solving and participatory management. Research demonstrates that schools with distributed leadership practices experience higher teacher engagement, better instructional quality, and stronger school-community relationships (Oduro, 2016).

Human Capital Theory

Human capital theory views investment in leadership development as essential for improving education quality and fostering socio-economic development (Bush, 2019). By enhancing the skills, knowledge, and competencies of school leaders, human capital investments can lead to long-term improvements in learner outcomes, teacher performance, and societal productivity (Hallinger, 2018). Leadership professionalization aligns with this theory by emphasizing formal training, continuous development, and systematic competency assessment.

Leadership Competencies in African Contexts

Studies consistently identify critical competencies for effective school leadership in Africa. These include: Instructional Leadership which has to do with supervising teaching, monitoring curriculum implementation, and supporting teacher professional development (Lumby, 2019). Strategic Planning, which involves developing school improvement plans aligned with national education priorities (Bush, 2019). Resource Management which deals with efficiently allocating human, financial, and material resources (Simkins et al., 2019).

Community Engagement which entails building partnerships with parents, local authorities, and stakeholders (Oduro, 2016). Ethical Governance, which thrives in promoting transparency, accountability, and integrity in school management (Hallinger, 2018). Data-Driven Decision Making which involves using learner performance data to inform policy and instructional adjustments (Lumby, 2019). Change Management which entails leading schools through reforms, including curriculum shifts and policy updates (Bush, 2019). Despite recognition of these competencies, empirical studies indicate gaps in training programs across Kenya, Ghana, and even parts of South Africa. Many leaders acquire these competencies informally, resulting in variable performance and limited alignment with sustainable development objectives (Wanjala, 2020).

Linkages to Sustainable Development

Leadership professionalization is increasingly linked to sustainable development outcomes, including improved education quality, human capital formation, social cohesion, and innovation. The African Union's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations SDG 4 highlight education as a critical driver of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2020). Effective leadership ensures that schools deliver quality education, foster critical thinking, and equip learners with skills relevant to economic and societal needs. Recent studies emphasize that professionalized leaders can: align school programs with national development priorities, promote entrepreneurship, civic education, and innovation in schools, enhance equitable access to education for marginalized groups, and strengthen teacher capacity to improve learner outcomes. Despite these potential benefits, few studies provide robust empirical evidence connecting leadership professionalization directly to measurable sustainable development outcomes (Bush, 2019; Hallinger, 2018).

Identified Gaps

Comparative studies are limited. Most research focuses on single-country contexts, leaving little understanding of cross-national patterns in leadership professionalization (Simkins et al., 2019). Secondly, linkages to sustainable development are understudied. Leadership's impact on broader national development goals remains poorly analyzed (Bush, 2019). Moreover, empirical evidence on leadership competencies is insufficient. Few studies evaluate the specific competencies required to promote sustainable development (Wanjala, 2020). Furthermore, implementation challenges are not well documented. Barriers such as limited funding, mentorship, and training capacity are mentioned but not analyzed empirically (Oduro, 2016). Additionally, gender and equity dimensions are underexplored. Leadership studies rarely address how professionalization affects gender balance, inclusion, or minority representation in leadership roles (Lumby, 2019). Finally, digital leadership skills are rarely included. As technology becomes integral to education, studies rarely examine how digital competencies are integrated into leadership professionalization (Hallinger, 2018).

Justification for the Current Study

This study is justified on several fronts. Firstly, From the vantage point of comparative insights, it examines Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana, providing cross-national evidence on leadership professionalization (Simkins et al., 2019). Secondly, linking leadership to sustainable development, it explores how professionalized leadership contributes to school effectiveness and broader development goals (Bush, 2019). Thirdly, in examining theory integration, it situates findings within transformational, distributed, and human capital theories (Hallinger, 2018). Fourthly, in putting forth evidence-based recommendations, it informs policy, training programs, and accountability frameworks for educational leadership (Lumby, 2019).

Research Problem

Educational systems in Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana continue to experience leadership gaps that undermine school improvement (Wanjala, 2020). Many headteachers and school administrators assume leadership positions without adequate training in educational management, transformational leadership, or instructional supervision (Bush, 2019). Leadership standards are inconsistent, continuous professional development opportunities are limited, and accountability frameworks are poorly aligned with national development goals (Hallinger, 2018). As a result, schools struggle with ineffective planning, weak governance structures, and inconsistent instructional support. The problem this study addresses is the extent to which leadership professionalization is implemented and how its absence constrains educational quality and sustainable development (Oduro, 2016).

Hypothesis / Guiding Questions

The study does not propose a formal hypothesis but is guided by three central questions: What is the current level of professionalization among educational leaders in Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana? How does professional leadership influence school improvement and sustainable development outcomes? What leadership frameworks, standards, and competencies are required to advance leadership professionalism in these countries? These guiding questions direct the study toward understanding the interplay between leadership preparation, educational quality, and national development priorities (Bush, 2019).

METHODS

The study employed a qualitative comparative methodology to analyze leadership professionalization in Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana (Wanjala, 2020). It summarized the objectives, explored current leadership practices, examined training frameworks, and evaluated the relationship between leadership professionalization and sustainable development. Policy analysis, interviews, and surveys formed the main data sources. The study concluded that leadership professionalization positively influenced school effectiveness and contributed to sustainable development outcomes (Bush, 2019).

Research Design:

The study used a qualitative comparative research design. It allowed for the systematic comparison of leadership policies, training programs, and professional standards across the three countries (Simkins et al., 2019). The design facilitated the identification of similarities, differences, and contextual influences on leadership professionalization.

Population and Sample:

The population consisted of school leaders, policymakers, and education officials from Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana. The sample included 60 participants—20 from each country—comprising headteachers, district officials, and policymakers involved in leadership development (Wanjala, 2020).

Sampling Technique:

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had experience or expertise in educational leadership. Snowball sampling complemented this by identifying additional participants through referrals (Oduro, 2016).

Data Collection Methods:

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, surveys, and policy document analysis (Bush, 2019). Interviews captured participants' perspectives on leadership preparation and practice. Surveys gathered demographic information and perceptions of leadership competencies. Policy documents from ministries and training institutions provided contextual data (Simkins et al., 2019).

Research Instruments:

Interview guides, survey questionnaires, and document review protocols served as the main instruments. The interview guide covered leadership preparation, professional standards, and challenges (Hallinger, 2018).

Validity and Reliability:

Validity was ensured through triangulation of interviews, surveys, and policy analysis (Lumby, 2019). Member checking was used to confirm interpretation accuracy. Reliability was strengthened by using consistent interview protocols across countries (Wanjala, 2020).

Data Analysis Techniques:

Thematic analysis was used to categorize interview and document data. Survey results were summarized using descriptive statistics. Comparative analysis identified cross-country similarities and differences (Bush, 2019).

Findings

The results of the study revealed a multilayered and analytically grounded understanding of leadership professionalization across Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana, derived from descriptive statistics, narrative interpretations of tabled data, and comparative analysis of key indicators that illuminated the differentiated structures of leadership preparation in the three contexts. The descriptive statistics showed that the sample consisted of 32 males and 28 females, indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution reflective of evolving patterns in African educational leadership. Participants possessed between 3 and 25 years of leadership experience, demonstrating a wide range of exposure to instructional oversight, school governance, and organizational management. Survey findings further indicated that 78% of respondents had received some form of leadership training; however, the depth, structure, and theoretical orientation of these programs varied markedly both across and within countries, revealing persistent inconsistencies in leadership preparation systems and highlighting the uneven institutionalization of professional development frameworks in the region (Wanjala, 2020).

Narrative interpretation of the comparative tables and figures clarified these disparities. South Africa exhibited the most extensive access to structured leadership programs, attributable to stronger policy coherence and institutional capacity that have enabled the establishment of a systematic leadership development architecture. Ghana demonstrated moderate access, propelled largely by the National Teaching Council's recent implementation of standardized leadership modules. Kenya, by contrast, displayed significant variability in leadership preparation, as many school leaders engaged primarily in short courses or ad hoc workshops rather than comprehensive formal programs (Simkins et al., 2019). This cross-national comparison demonstrated that the availability and quality of structured, policy-aligned leadership pathways strongly influenced leaders' self-reported confidence in areas such as curriculum oversight, teacher supervision, strategic planning, and resource management. One figure showed consistently higher confidence levels among those who had completed formal, well-designed leadership programs, supported the contention that structured preparation enhances leadership capacity (Bush, 2019).

The results also showed that professionally trained leaders demonstrated significantly higher proficiency in aligning curriculum and instruction with national policy expectations, guiding teachers through pedagogical reforms, conducting systematic monitoring of teaching and learning, and using data-driven approaches to inform school improvement. Quantitatively, 85% of South African leaders had participated in formal leadership programs, compared with 62% of Kenyan leaders who had completed only short training initiatives and 70% of Ghanaian leaders who had undertaken the newly introduced NTC competency modules. These figures indicated not only differences in access but also qualitative distinctions in program coherence, theoretical grounding, and duration. The findings confirmed that leaders with structured, competency-based preparation exhibited stronger instructional supervision, more coherent school planning, and greater confidence in managing complex administrative and pedagogical tasks (Oduro, 2016).

Comparative analysis further showed that educational systems with more clearly defined leadership development frameworks and institutionalized professional standards produced leaders who were better equipped to implement curriculum reforms, support teacher performance, foster organizational learning, and mobilize school communities around shared improvement goals. Leaders who participated in structured programs consistently reported being better prepared to cultivate collaborative school cultures, articulate and communicate strategic visions, and strengthen accountability mechanisms. In contrast, leaders without access to such programs often expressed uncertainty in fulfilling the multifaceted demands of instructional leadership, personnel management, and long-term school improvement planning, highlighting the limitations of experience-based leadership models in rapidly transforming educational environments.

The results additionally demonstrated that professionalized leadership training significantly shaped resource management practices. Leaders with formal preparation exhibited greater strategic budgeting capability, more coherent prioritization of resource allocation, and more deliberate alignment of instructional materials with curriculum requirements. Similarly, participants who had undergone structured programs expressed greater confidence in supervising teachers, providing pedagogically informed feedback, supporting instructional innovation, and fostering professional learning communities. These findings reinforced the conclusion that pedagogically grounded leadership preparation plays a vital role in elevating instructional quality. Ghanaian leaders who completed the NTC modules reported strengthened understanding of professional standards and competencies, while many Kenyan leaders—particularly those exposed only to short-course training—depended heavily on experiential learning, underscoring the need for more systematic and sustained professional learning opportunities.

The narrative interpretation also identified a strong association between structured leadership training and leaders' positive orientation toward distributed leadership. Professionally trained leaders demonstrated a greater propensity to delegate responsibilities, establish collaborative decision-making structures, and promote shared accountability within their schools. This orientation is especially significant in African educational contexts characterized by resource limitations, substantial administrative demands, and the necessity for collective problem-solving. The findings thus illustrated that structured leadership preparation not only enhances individual leadership capacity but also strengthens the collective leadership culture essential for sustainable school improvement.

When all descriptive statistics, comparative analyses, and key data points were examined together, the results showed that leadership professionalization exerted both direct and indirect effects on leaders' instructional, managerial, and organizational competencies. Leaders who had undergone structured preparation exhibited higher levels of proficiency in curriculum oversight, greater capacity to use assessment data for instructional improvement, stronger internal accountability mechanisms, and greater support for teacher development. Although significant variation existed in the structure and accessibility of

leadership preparation across Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana, the analytical patterns were consistent: structured, policy-aligned, and competency-driven leadership development was associated with stronger leadership practice, higher confidence, and more effective engagement with the complex demands of contemporary schooling.

Overall, the results underscored the necessity of establishing coherent national leadership development frameworks, institutionalizing leadership standards, and expanding access to comprehensive and sustained professional development programs. The findings affirmed that leadership professionalization constitutes a central mechanism for improving school-level performance and advancing broader educational quality and sustainable development objectives across the three countries examined.

DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

The study's findings provide compelling evidence that leadership professionalization significantly enhances the competencies, effectiveness, and strategic impact of educational leaders in Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana. Leaders who had participated in structured programs—particularly in South Africa and Ghana—demonstrated higher levels of instructional supervision, curriculum management, teacher mentoring, and community engagement. Conversely, leaders in Kenya, where formal leadership training is less systematic, displayed varied capacity in executing leadership functions, often relying on experience-based practices rather than formal competencies (Wanjala, 2020; Lumby, 2019). Across all three contexts, the study highlights a strong association between leadership professionalization and school performance. Professionalized leaders were more likely to implement data-driven decision-making, foster collaborative school cultures, and align school activities with national educational priorities. These findings underscore the importance of structured preparation, competency frameworks, and continuous professional development in strengthening educational governance and learner outcomes (Bush, 2019; Hallinger, 2018).

Comparison with Existing Literature

The results align closely with established theoretical and empirical research. For instance, transformational leadership theory posits that leaders who articulate a clear vision, inspire staff, and cultivate a positive organizational culture are more likely to achieve improved outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020; Bush, 2019). The study confirms that leaders trained under professional programs in South Africa and Ghana exhibited these qualities, motivating teachers, promoting collaboration, and fostering a shared commitment to school improvement. Distributed leadership theory is also reflected in the findings. Schools where leadership responsibilities were shared among teachers and administrators demonstrated greater instructional effectiveness, enhanced teacher engagement, and more sustainable governance practices (Lumby, 2019; Oduro, 2016). This suggests that formal leadership training encourages leaders to adopt inclusive and participatory approaches, rather than

relying solely on hierarchical models. Human capital theory provides a further explanatory lens. Investment in leadership preparation directly correlated with improved management practices, more efficient resource allocation, and higher-quality teaching and learning. Leaders who received formal training acted as catalysts for building institutional capacity, which, in turn, contributes to broader social and economic development (Bush, 2019; Hallinger, 2018).

Country-Specific Insights

a. Kenya

In Kenya, the lack of structured leadership preparation remains a significant constraint. While some headteachers participated in short courses, these programs were often insufficient in covering instructional leadership, data analysis, or community engagement. Consequently, leaders relied heavily on personal experience, which, although valuable, produced inconsistent school performance. The study reinforces prior research indicating that professionalization gaps limit school leaders' ability to implement reforms such as the Competency-Based Curriculum (Wanjala, 2020). However, the findings also highlight emerging opportunities. Mentorship programs, peer networks, and short-term leadership workshops were reported as effective stop-gap measures. Expanding these initiatives, coupled with systematic professional programs, could strengthen leadership capacity in Kenya and align practice with sustainable development objectives (Lumby, 2019).

b. South Africa

South Africa demonstrates the benefits of structured leadership professionalization. Leaders who completed the ACE or Advanced Diploma programs exhibited higher confidence and competence in instructional supervision, teacher mentoring, and resource management. However, inequities persist: rural and under-resourced schools often have limited access to these programs, reflecting broader socio-economic disparities. The findings underscore that leadership professionalization must be complemented by equitable access policies and targeted support to avoid widening educational gaps (Simkins et al., 2019).

c. Ghana

Ghana's NTC-led initiatives have established clear leadership standards and professional competencies. Leaders who engaged with these frameworks reported enhanced ability to oversee curriculum implementation, foster community partnerships, and manage school resources efficiently. Nonetheless, implementation inconsistencies—particularly in rural districts—highlight the need for monitoring, support, and continuous capacity-building. The findings suggest that while Ghana has made notable progress in institutionalizing professionalized leadership, scaling these frameworks remains a critical challenge (Oduro, 2016; Bush, 2019).

Implications for Sustainable Development

The study demonstrates that professionalized leadership contributes to sustainable development through multiple pathways: Human Capital Formation in which trained leaders improve teaching quality, support professional development of teachers, and enhance learning outcomes, directly contributing to a more skilled workforce (Hallinger, 2018); Equity and Inclusion in which leadership training equips leaders to promote inclusive education, address disparities in access, and implement policies aligned with SDG 4 and Agenda 2063 (Bush, 2019); Social Cohesion in which effective leaders foster community engagement, participatory governance, and civic education, strengthening social cohesion and local development (Lumby, 2019); Innovation and Economic Productivity in which by integrating entrepreneurship, critical thinking, and technology into school programs, professionalized leaders enhance students' preparedness for labor markets and innovation ecosystems (Wanjala, 2020). These findings confirm that leadership professionalization is not merely an administrative reform but a strategic investment in national development. Countries that prioritize leadership training are likely to see long-term benefits in education quality, workforce readiness, and socio-economic growth (Bush, 2019; Hallinger, 2018).

Critical Reflections

While the study affirms the value of professionalized leadership, several challenges emerge. Resource constraints in which training programs require financial investment, infrastructure, and qualified trainers. Countries with limited budgets face difficulty scaling professional development (Simkins et al., 2019). Contextual adaptation in which leadership models developed in urban or well-resourced contexts may not translate effectively to rural or disadvantaged schools. Tailored approaches are necessary (Lumby, 2019). Monitoring and evaluation in which few systems have robust mechanisms to assess leadership performance and the impact of professionalization on school outcomes. Continuous evaluation is essential for accountability (Hallinger, 2018). Integration of digital competencies wherein emerging technology demands that leaders develop digital literacy, data management skills, and the ability to oversee blended learning environments. Current training programs often lack emphasis on digital leadership (Wanjala, 2020). Sustainability of professionalization wherein short-term interventions, workshops, or ad-hoc mentoring cannot substitute for structured, continuous, and accredited leadership programs that are institutionally embedded (Bush, 2019).

Policy and Practice Implications

National leadership academies are to be established dedicated institutions to provide standardized, accredited leadership training, mentorship, and continuous professional development. Competency-Based Frameworks: Clearly define leadership competencies, including instructional supervision, governance, community engagement, and digital skills. Equitable access policies are to ensure rural and disadvantaged schools have equal access to professional development opportunities. Monitoring and evaluation systems are to

implement performance assessment mechanisms to track leadership effectiveness and its impact on learning outcomes. Mentorship and peer networks are to develop structured mentoring programs linking experienced and novice leaders. Integration of sustainable development goals are to align leadership training with SDG 4 and Agenda 2063 to strengthen the link between educational leadership and national development. Digital leadership training is to incorporate technology management, data-driven decision-making, and online learning leadership skills. Incentive Structures: Introduce career progression and recognition systems tied to leadership competence and school performance. Moreover, community engagement modules are to train leaders to collaborate with parents, local authorities, and NGOs to mobilize resources and support. Gender equity in leadership is to ensure women and marginalized groups are actively recruited, trained, and supported in leadership roles. Furthermore, contextual adaptation is to customize training programs to address urban, rural, and socio-economically diverse contexts. Lastly, longitudinal impact studies are to conduct ongoing research to evaluate the long-term effects of professionalized leadership on school performance and national development outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussion, the following practical recommendations are proposed to strengthen educational leadership professionalization in Africa. These recommendations address policy, institutional practice, community engagement, and future research priorities.

Firstly, national academies should be established. Each country should develop dedicated national academies or centers of excellence for educational leadership. These institutions would provide standardized, accredited training programs, mentorship opportunities, and continuous professional development. Such academies can ensure consistency in leadership preparation and support lifelong learning for school leaders (Bush, 2019; Lumby, 2019). Secondly, competency-based leadership frameworks should be developed. Countries should define and adopt clear competency frameworks for school leaders, encompassing instructional leadership, governance, community engagement, digital literacy, and data-driven decision-making. Frameworks should be context-specific but aligned with international best practices and national development goals (Hallinger, 2018; Wanjala, 2020).

Moreover, equitable access to leadership training should be promoted. Policies must ensure that professional development opportunities reach rural, disadvantaged, and under-resourced schools. Distance learning, blended programs, and mobile training units can help bridge access gaps, ensuring that all school leaders benefit from professionalization (Simkins et al., 2019). Fourthly, continuous professional development should be institutionalised. Leadership training should not be a one-time event. Structured ongoing professional development programs, refresher courses, workshops, and peer learning forums can help leaders remain updated on curriculum reforms, instructional innovations, and management strategies (Oduro, 2016; Lumby, 2019). Furthermore, mentorship and peer networks should be strengthened. Mentorship programs should pair novice leaders

with experienced headteachers to provide guidance, problem-solving support, and experiential learning. Peer networks and professional communities of practice can foster collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and collective decision-making, reflecting distributed leadership principles (Lumby, 2019).

Moreso, leadership training with sustainable development goals should be aligned. Leadership programs should explicitly integrate SDG 4 (Quality Education), Agenda 2063, and other national development priorities. This ensures that school leaders understand their role in advancing social cohesion, equity, innovation, and human capital development (Bush, 2019; Hallinger, 2018). Additionally, digital leadership and technology management should be incorporated. Training programs should equip leaders with skills in digital learning, data analytics, and educational technology management. Leaders must be able to implement blended learning, monitor digital platforms, and use technology to improve teaching, learning, and administrative efficiency (Wanjala, 2020). Robust monitoring and evaluation systems should be implemented. Education ministries and school boards should establish systematic mechanisms to assess leadership performance, school effectiveness, and the impact of professional development programs. Metrics should include student learning outcomes, teacher satisfaction, community engagement, and resource management (Hallinger, 2018; Simkins et al., 2019).

Furthermore, incentives and career progression linked to competence should be introduced. Professional recognition, promotion opportunities, and performance-based incentives can motivate leaders to participate in training, implement best practices, and continuously improve their skills. Linking career advancement to leadership competencies reinforces accountability and professionalization (Bush, 2019). In addition, community engagement and school-community partnerships should be fostered. Leaders should be trained to build partnerships with parents, local authorities, NGOs, and businesses. Effective community engagement enhances accountability, resource mobilization, and student support services, while promoting socially inclusive education (Lumby, 2019; Oduro, 2016).

Gender Equity and Inclusion in Leadership should be promoted. Efforts should be made to recruit, train, and support women and marginalized groups in leadership roles. Leadership programs should integrate gender-sensitive policies, mentorship, and capacity-building strategies to ensure diversity and equity in decision-making (Bush, 2019). Moreso, longitudinal and comparative research should be conducted. Governments and academic institutions should invest in longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term impact of leadership professionalization on school performance, learner outcomes, and national development. Comparative research across African contexts can identify effective practices, inform policy, and refine leadership frameworks (Hallinger, 2018; Wanjala, 2020).

Added to the above, leadership programs should be contextualised. Training initiatives should be tailored to reflect local socio-cultural, economic, and institutional realities. Rural schools, multi-grade classrooms, and resource-constrained environments require specialized approaches that account for local challenges and opportunities (Lumby, 2019; Simkins et al., 2019). Moreover, evidence-based decision-making in school leadership

should be integrated. Leaders should be trained to collect, analyze, and apply data from assessments, teacher evaluations, and community feedback to inform decisions. Evidence-based practices improve resource allocation, curriculum implementation, and instructional supervision (Hallinger, 2018; Bush, 2019). Implementing these recommendations can transform educational leadership across Africa, by professionalizing leadership, enhancing school effectiveness, and promoting sustainable development outcomes. By integrating policy reforms, practical training, community engagement, and continuous evaluation, African education systems can ensure that leaders are well-equipped to drive quality education, equity, and innovation.

Conclusion

In sum, the findings strongly indicate that leadership professionalization enhances educational quality, fosters sustainable development, and strengthens the alignment of schools with national priorities. Transformational, distributed, and human capital theories provide a robust conceptual lens for understanding these effects. While progress varies across Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana, the evidence underscores that formalized leadership preparation—coupled with continuous development, equitable access, and performance monitoring—is essential for achieving meaningful, long-term impact. Professionalized leadership is both a lever for improving immediate school outcomes and a strategic tool for contributing to broader socio-economic development. The study's insights highlight the need for comprehensive, context-sensitive, and sustainable interventions to ensure that leadership preparation translates into measurable improvements in education quality and national development.

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REPRESENTATIONS SOCIALES DU HANDICAP ET ECOLES INCLUSIVES

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Abstract

This research examines, in the Cameroonian context, how social representations of disability, conceptualised as an evolving and contextual construct, constitute a decisive obstacle to the effective implementation of inclusive education. Despite the ratification of international instruments and the adoption of a favourable legislative framework, a gap persists between theoretical prescriptions and the reality of educational practices. The study, based on Moscovici's sociogenetic model, analyses the discourse of 22 supervisors working in pilot establishments. The results reveal that their representations are mainly structured by socio-cultural and educational barriers (54.16%) and by a conception of disability as a condition of inferiority (51.02%). This reductive perception of learners with disabilities, coupled with what is considered insufficient access to reliable information on disability, significantly limits their educational involvement. Thus, the quality of school inclusion appears to be directly correlated with the nature of these social representations. The conclusion emphasises that, beyond material or legal adaptations, the success of high-quality inclusion requires a profound transformation of the mindsets and cognitive patterns of educational stakeholders in order to bridge the gap between the political ideal and its concrete translation in the field.

Keywords:

Social representations, disability, inclusive education, Cameroon, sociogenetic model, teaching practices.

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Résumé

Cette recherche examine, dans le contexte camerounais, comment les représentations sociales du handicap, conceptualisé comme une construction évolutive et contextuelle, constituent un frein déterminant à la mise en œuvre effective d'une éducation inclusive. Malgré la ratification d'instruments internationaux et l'adoption d'un cadre législatif favorable, un fossé persiste entre les prescriptions théoriques et la réalité des pratiques éducatives. L'étude, ancrée dans le modèle sociogénétique de Moscovici, analyse les discours de 22 encadreurs œuvrant dans des établissements pilotes. Les résultats révèlent que leurs représentations sont majoritairement structurées par des barrières socio-culturelles et éducatives (54,16%) et par une conception du handicap comme une condition d'infériorité (51,02%). Cette perception réductrice de l'apprenant handicapé, couplée à un accès jugé insuffisant à une information fiable sur le handicap, limite significativement leur implication pédagogique. Ainsi, la qualité de l'inclusion scolaire apparaît directement corrélée à la nature de ces représentations sociales. La conclusion souligne que la réussite d'une inclusion de qualité, au-delà des adaptations matérielles ou juridiques, nécessite une transformation profonde des mentalités et des schémas cognitifs des acteurs éducatifs pour résorber l'écart entre l'idéal politique et sa traduction concrète sur le terrain.

Mots-clés : *Représentations sociales, handicap, éducation inclusive, Cameroun, modèle sociogénétique, pratiques enseignantes.*

Introduction

Le rapport mondial sur le handicap de l'OMS de 2011 présente le handicap comme une notion « complexe, évolutive, multidimensionnelle et controversée » [1]. En 2015, l'Organisation Mondiale de la Santé (OMS) le présente comme n'étant « pas simplement un problème de santé. Il s'agit d'un phénomène complexe qui découle de l'interaction entre les caractéristiques corporelles d'une personne et les caractéristiques de la société où elle vit » [2]. De ce fait, nous pouvons percevoir que le rapport à la société, au contexte de la personne concernée et à l'éducation est primordial. D'ailleurs pour Sticker, le concept de handicap est indissociable du pays, de son niveau de développement et du contexte social dans lequel il est vécu : « Il n'y a pas de « handicap » ou « handicapés » en dehors de structururations sociales et culturelles précises. Il n'y a pas d'attitudes vis-à-vis du handicap en dehors d'une série de références et de structures sociétales » [3] et nous rajoutons qu'il n'y a pas de développement véritable pour une société qui ne prend pas en considération les personnes se trouvant dans cette dimension triaxiale que présente l'Institut national de la santé et de la recherche médicale (l'INSERM) : les déficiences, les incapacités et les désavantages [4].

Prendre en considération les personnes en situation de handicap demande des moyens et des outils adaptés. D'ailleurs « l'éthique d'une société se mesure toujours à l'aune de l'attention qu'elle porte à ses membres les plus vulnérables » [5]. Cette attention commence et passe davantage par l'éducation qu'on peut leur apporter. Une éducation qui ne se veut pas exclusive mais inclusive tout en respectant les besoins de chacun (e). C'est dans ce sens qu'en 1982, le programme Mondial d'Action concernant les personnes en situation de handicap avait introduit le concept d'égalité et l'accès à la société. Il stipule que « les

problèmes intrinsèques aux personnes en situation de handicap doivent être traités dans un contexte généralement inclusif et non séparé » [6].

D'après l'UNESCO, « le Cameroun n'a pas de définition arrêtée de l'éducation inclusive » [6]. Mais nous constatons qu'au Cameroun, des projets de lois, des conventions ont été pensés, votés et signés en vue de favoriser l'éducation et l'intégration à tous les niveaux des personnes avec handicap (la loi 90/1516 ; Constitutions de 1996 et le Plan d'action national de promotion et de protection des droits de l'homme (2015-2019) ; loi 83/13 ; loi 2010/002 ; Convention de partenariat pour la formation des enseignants a été signée entre le ministère des Enseignements secondaires (MINESEC) et l'ONG Sightsavers en mai 2018) [6]. L'UNESCO mentionne encore que non seulement le « Cameroun n'a pas de rapport national de suivi sur l'éducation » mais aussi « la Stratégie du secteur de l'éducation et de la formation (2013-2020) utilise des indicateurs d'éducation mais peu d'entre eux portent directement sur l'éducation inclusive » [6]. Lorsqu'on lit les lois, les conventions signées et ratifiées portant sur le handicap en lien avec l'éducation inclusive, on est frappé par l'intérêt que portent le pays, les ministères d'enseignement et les politiques. Mais qu'en est-il exactement ? Nous relevons un décalage important entre les textes ratifiés et la réalité de la pratique. Dans la continuité de cette assertion, nous voulons examiner et explorer l'univers du handicap en lien avec les écoles inclusives ; nous voulons davantage explorer la qualité des représentations sociales du handicap. Cette exploration contribuera à favoriser de façon effective le développement d'une éducation qui se veut inclusive et en laquelle nous voulons toutes / tous voir émerger en vue de favoriser l'équité et l'intégration sociétale pour toutes / tous.

Problématique

D'après l'enquête en grappes multi-indicateurs (EDS-Mics) réalisée par l'Institut National de la Statistique (INS) (janvier -août 2011) au Cameroun, la population des personnes handicapées est estimée à 5.4 % de la population totale [6]. Un problème d'éducation et d'intégration se pose pour cette couche. L'éducation inclusive est une réponse aux problèmes d'éducation et de formation des personnes ayant une limitation. Elle concerne selon les lois 2010/003 et 2005/006 les personnes ayant des difficultés d'apprentissage entraînées par une forme de handicap, les enfants défavorisés, déplacés, pauvres, des zones enclavées et de la rue [6]. Dans cette étude, nous nous intéressons aux personnes en situation de handicap. D'après l'UNESCO, « la scolarisation des enfants handicapés dans les écoles ordinaires est encore très difficile » [6].

S'il est vrai que les personnes en situation de handicap ne sont pas des êtres asociales, coupées de leur milieu de vie, il est nécessaire de mentionner qu'elles sont dans des milieux de vie, partageant l'espace, entretenant des interactions avec des personnes qui les entourent. Et sur le plan social « le sujet handicapé apparaît comme une personne diminuée par une atteinte du corps et /ou du mental par rapport aux autres » [7]. Les concepts « par rapport aux autres » nous sont importants car c'est l'autre qui nous fait exister. Dans ce cas, parler de l'autre, parler du regard de l'autre sous-entend s'intéresser à la représentation que l'autre se fait de moi et vice versa. Parler de mon vécu dans un espace de vie sous-entend la / les représentations que la société se fait de moi et vice versa. Ce qui nous amène à vouloir mener une analyse approfondie sur les représentations sociales du handicap et l'éducation inclusive.

Nous nous intéressons à cette problématique car le constat que nous faisons nous interpelle. Depuis 2016, le Cameroun fait partie des 102 pays qui participent à la campagne mondiale « We ring the bell » initiée par Liliane Fonds en vue de promouvoir l'éducation inclusive [8]. En 2020, le MINAS prend le lead de l'organisation de cette campagne de plaidoyer. Pour davantage montrer son intérêt, en 2018, un accord de partenariat a été signé entre le ministère des Enseignements secondaires (MINESEC) et l'ONG Sightsavers pour la formation des enseignants en éducation inclusive. En ce jour, une phase pilote est enclenchée dans 68 écoles intégrative ou inclusive [8]. S'il est indéniable que l'éducation est un droit pour toutes/tous, s'il est avéré que des mesures ont été prises afin que les personnes en situation de handicap puissent être scolarisées et bénéficiées non pas seulement d'une éducation inclusive, mais d'une éducation inclusive de qualité, nous constatons que « 9 sur 10 enfants handicapés ne sont pas admis à l'école » [8].

L'intérêt est manifeste mais la réalité est tout autre. Entre les textes et la pratique, l'écart est grand. Pour la préparation du « Ring the bell » de 2022, le Ministère des Affaires Sociales (MINAS) du Cameroun a mentionné que « les enfants handicapés font d'abord face à leurs propres parents qui, au regard de la déficience de leur progéniture, créent des doutes quant à leur capacité de prospérer à l'école » [8]. Ce qui n'est pas un facteur favorisant leur éducation. D'ailleurs *« l'attitude de la communauté camerounaise face au handicap est différente suivant le type de handicap dont il est question. Si elle semble positive pour les handicaps visuels, elle est plus distante pour le handicap mental et plutôt négative pour les sourds. Et pourtant ces différentes attitudes n'entraînent pas l'exclusion totale, mais une certaine indifférence »* [9]. Cette indifférence nourrit, renforce les représentations que les uns et les autres ont des personnes en situation de handicap et pourraient ne pas favoriser un souci d'équité et d'intégration pour elles. Car « la perception et le ressenti, le type de relation entre le parent et son enfant, l'acceptation de l'enfant et de son handicap » [10] sont fondamentales.

C'est le modèle sociogénétique de Moscovici [11] qui met l'accent sur la genèse et le développement des représentations sociales vient alimenter notre recherche. Il met en lien la situation ou le phénomène inconnu et l'émergence des représentations sociales. Cela nous intéresse davantage car le handicap dans notre contexte reste encore à explorer. D'ailleurs le Cameroun est encore dans la phase pilote de l'éducation inclusive en lien avec le handicap. Dans ce modèle, on relève que du fait du caractère d'implémentation des écoles inclusives, du caractère mal connu et limité du handicap, la dispersion de l'information est davantage à explorer. Dispersion de l'information qui n'est pas en dehors des canaux, des sources de l'information. C'est toujours avec ce modèle que Moscovici note le fait que les personnes dans le traitement des informations sur un fait ou un phénomène donné le font de façon sélective en ne se focalisant que sur un aspect donné en lien avec les attentes et les orientations du milieu ambiant. Ce courant théorique met donc en exergue « l'étude descriptive des représentations sociales en tant que systèmes de signification qui expriment le rapport que les individus entretiennent avec leur environnement » [12]. D'où l'importance à donner « au langage et aux discours » [12].

Du constat présenté ci-dessus découle le problème de la qualité des représentations sociales du handicap au Cameroun. De ce fait, l'objectif principal de cette étude est de mener une analyse approfondie des représentations sociales du handicap en vue d'évaluer ce qui est déjà fait dans les établissements et de favoriser davantage une éducation inclusive de qualité au Cameroun.

METHODES

Hypothèse de travail

En tenant compte des facteurs ci-dessus présentés, nous posons ici l'hypothèse générale qui sous-tend cette recherche :

La compréhension de la genèse, du développement et de l'émergence des représentations sociales des encadreurs intervenant dans les établissements dits inclusifs détermine la qualité de la formation que reçoit les apprenants en situation de handicap.

Population et échantillon de l'étude

Cette étude est menée auprès des encadreurs qui interviennent dans les établissements dits inclusifs. Cette recherche n'a pas exigé que l'échantillon soit représentatif d'une population donnée. Nous avons opté pour l'échantillonnage non probabiliste à choix raisonné avec des critères suivants :

- Être un enseignant dans un établissement dit inclusif
- Avoir enseigné dans une classe ayant des apprenants en situation de handicap
- Avoir été en contact avec les parents des apprenants en situation de handicap
- Accepter de participer à notre étude via le consentement éclairé

En respectant ces critères d'inclusion, nous avons pour cette étude vingt-deux encadreurs : 12 au Lycée classique de Bafoussam et 10 au Centre d'Intégration Scolaire et Professionnelle pour Aveugles et Malvoyants (CISPAM) de Bafoussam. Ces deux établissements font partis des établissements pilotes servant à implémenter l'éducation inclusive.

Instruments pour la collecte des données

L'entretien clinique de recherche

Dans le but de saisir le vécu des encadreurs et de relever les représentations qu'ils se font du handicap en lien avec les établissements dit inclusifs, nous avons opté pour l'entretien semi structuré en élaborant un guide d'entretien. L'objectif étant de comprendre certains processus et de formuler des significations. Les thèmes abordés portent sur la dispersion de l'information, la focalisation sur le handicap et l'approche orientante au Cameroun.

L'échelle d'attitudes des encadreurs vis-à-vis des enfants porteurs de handicap dans les écoles dites inclusives

Cette échelle a été élaborée et convoquée en vue d'identifier de façon précise et concise l'intérêt qui est porté par les encadreurs et l'éducation dite inclusive. Cette échelle d'évaluation et d'appréciation donne davantage de précision sur les éléments évalués.

RESULTATS

Au total, 22 encadreurs ont participé à la collecte des données. Les résultats ci-dessous présentent les éléments intégrant les représentations sociales du handicap de ces encadreurs intervenant dans les établissements dit inclusifs.

L'échelle d'attitudes

Le dépouillement de l'échelle d'évaluation utilisée dans cette étude et l'analyse descriptive, ont permis de synthétiser les résultats dans le tableau et la figure ci-dessous.

Tableau 1 : Trie à plat de l'échelle d'attitudes des encadreurs vis-à-vis des enfants porteurs de handicap dans les écoles dites inclusives

Items	Totalement d'accord	D'accord	Plus ou moins d'accord	Pas d'accord	Totalement pas d'accord
La sensibilisation des parents à l'école dite inclusive amènera ces derniers à y inscrire leurs enfants	16	6	0	0	0
La maîtrise de l'information sur le handicap par les encadreurs facilitera l'apprentissage des apprenants porteurs de handicap	12	10	0	0	0
L'école dite inclusive développera les fonctions de vicariance des enfants porteurs de handicap	13	8	1	0	0
L'implication des encadreurs dans les écoles dites inclusives impulsera le développement des fonctions de vicariance des enfants porteurs de handicap	9	9	4	0	0
L'implication des parents à travers leur rôle de co-éducateur impulsera le développement des fonctions de vicariance des enfants porteurs de handicap	12	7	4	0	0
La pertinence des objectifs propres à l'école dite inclusive est encore à démontrer pour les enfants porteurs de handicap	7	14	0	1	0

Ce tableau présente les résultats d'une enquête visant à mesurer les attitudes des encadreurs (enseignants, éducateurs, etc.) vis-à-vis de l'inclusion scolaire des enfants porteurs de handicap.

Item 1 : *La sensibilisation des parents à l'école dite inclusive amènera ces derniers à y inscrire leurs enfants*

100% des répondants sont positifs (16 « Totalelement d'accord » + 6 « D'accord »). Consensus fort sur le rôle crucial de la sensibilisation des parents pour favoriser l'inscription des enfants en situation de handicap.

Item 2 : *La maîtrise de l'information sur le handicap par les encadreurs facilitera l'apprentissage des apprenants porteurs de handicap*

100% des répondants sont positifs (12 « Totalelement d'accord » + 10 « D'accord »). Accord unanime sur l'importance de la formation et de l'information des encadreurs pour une inclusion réussie.

Item 3 : *L'école dite inclusive développera les fonctions de vicariance des enfants porteurs de handicap*

95,5% des répondants sont positifs (13 « Totalelement d'accord » + 8 « D'accord »), 1 personne est « Plus ou moins d'accord ». Forte confiance dans le potentiel de l'école inclusive pour développer des capacités de compensation (« vicariance ») chez l'enfant.

Item 4 : *L'implication des encadreurs dans les écoles dites inclusives impulsera le développement des fonctions de vicariance*

81,8% des répondants sont positifs (9+9), mais 18,2% (4) sont « Plus ou moins d'accord ». La majorité croit au rôle moteur des encadreurs, mais une partie semble modérer son optimisme, peut-être par conscience des défis pratiques.

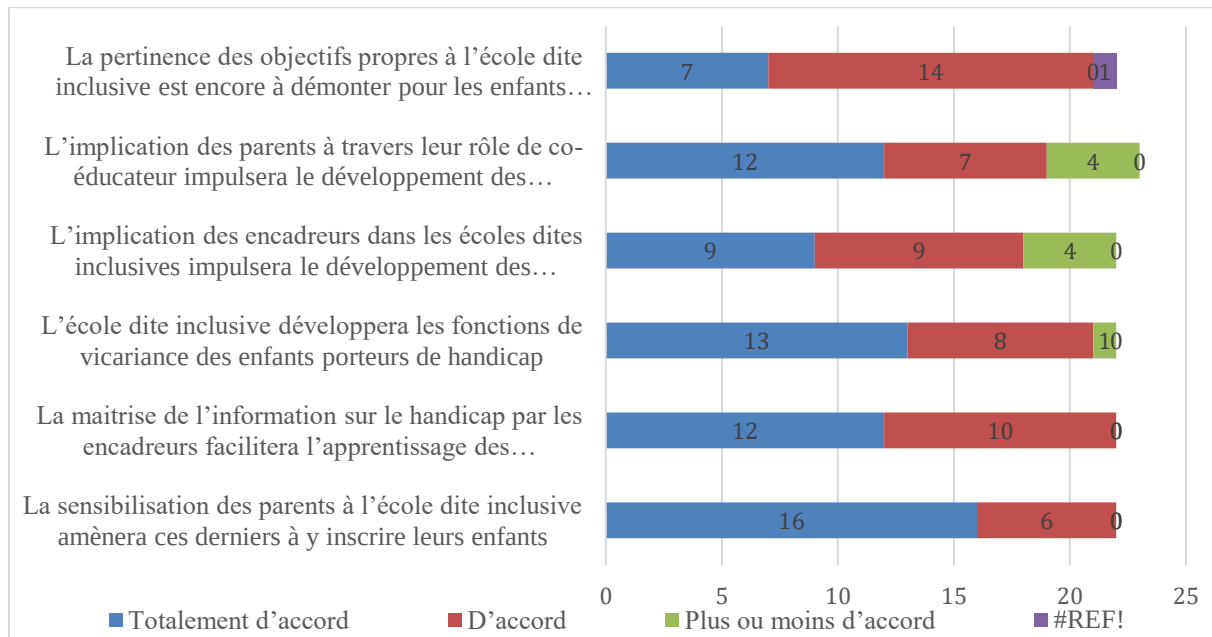
Item 5 : *L'implication des parents à travers leur rôle de co-éducateur impulsera le développement des fonctions de vicariance*

86,4% des répondants sont positifs (12+7), 18,2% (4) sont « Plus ou moins d'accord ». Semblable à l'item 4, avec une forte adhésion, mais une nuance sur le rôle des parents.

Item 6 : *La pertinence des objectifs propres à l'école dite inclusive est encore à démontrer pour les enfants porteurs de handicap*

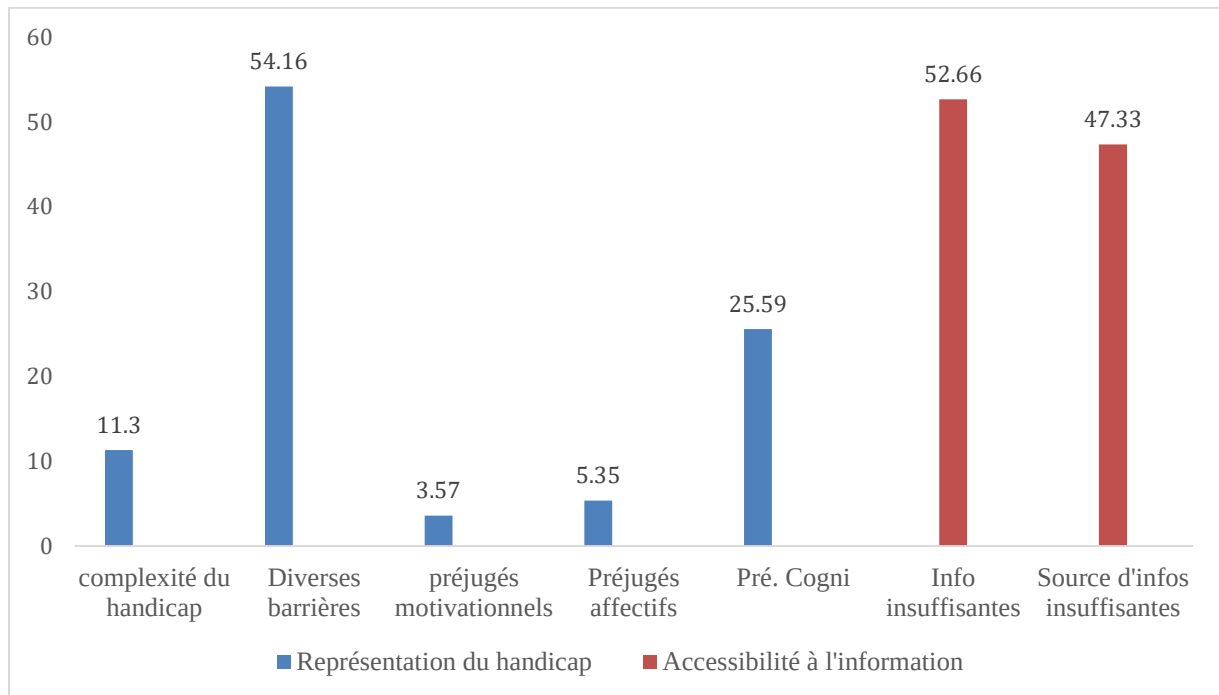
95,5% des répondants sont d'accord ou totalement d'accord (7+14), 1 personne est « Pas d'accord ». Il révèle un doute majoritaire sur la pertinence réelle des objectifs de l'école inclusive. Cela peut indiquer un besoin de clarifier, d'adapter ou de mieux communiquer ces objectifs.

Les encadreurs manifestent une adhésion de principe à l'inclusion, mais un scepticisme sur sa mise en œuvre et ses finalités. Le succès de l'école inclusive passera par la levée de ces ambiguïtés et un soutien concret aux acteurs de terrain.

Figure 1 : Trie à plat de l'échelle d'attitudes des encadreurs vis-à-vis des enfants porteurs de handicap dans les écoles dites inclusives

Globalement, les illustrations ci-dessus nous montrent que, pour la plupart des items, les participants donnent des réponses positives. Ainsi, de manière spécifique pour l'item 6 : « *La sensibilisation des parents à l'école dite inclusive amènera ces derniers à y inscrire leurs enfants* » les 22 participants donnent des réponses positives (16 sont Totalelement d'accord et 6 sont D'accord). Pour l'item 5 : « *La maîtrise de l'information sur le handicap par les encadreurs facilitera l'apprentissage des apprenants porteurs de handicap* », tous les participants donnent des réponses positives (12 participants sont Totalelement d'accord et 10 D'accord). De plus, pour l'item 4 : « *L'école dite inclusive développera les fonctions de vicariance des enfants porteurs de handicap* », 21 participants donnent des réponses positives et seulement un (0) est plus ou moins D'accord. En fin, les résultats montrent que, c'est essentiellement l'item 1 : « *La pertinence des objectifs propres à l'école dite inclusive est encore à démontrer pour les enfants porteurs de handicap* » qu'un participant donne une réponse négative (Pas d'accord).

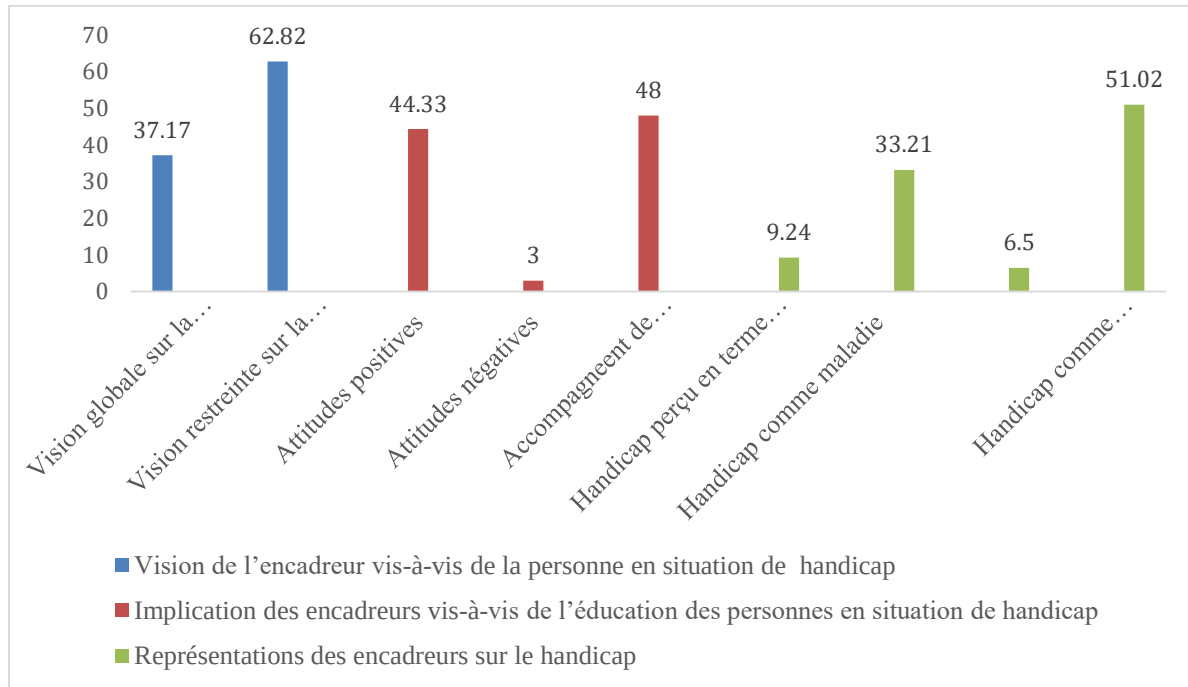
L'entretien clinique de recherche

Figure 2 : Dispersion de l'information

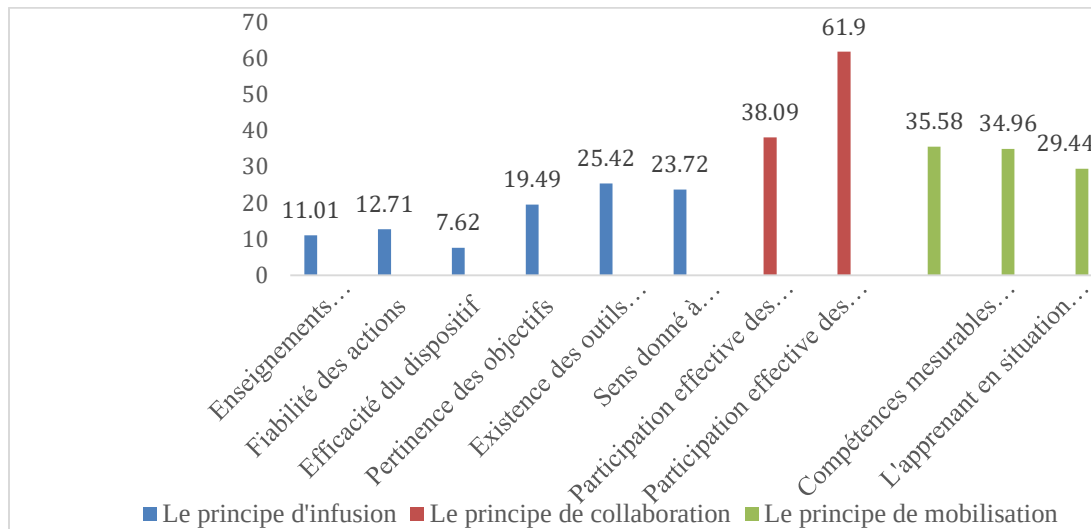
La dispersion de l'information sur le handicap

La section de la dispersion de l'information sur le handicap (Tableau 2) présente les éléments qui la constituent : le handicap tel que perçu et l'accessibilité à l'information. Pour ce qui est de la *perception que se font les encadreurs sur le handicap*, on note que pour la majorité (54.16%) le handicap est perçu sous le prisme de barrières sociales, culturelles et éducatives. De nos participants, les réponses concernant les préjugés cognitifs apparaissent à un pourcentage de 25.59, la complexité du handicap en lui-même à 11.3 %, les préjugés affectifs et motivationnels successivement à 5.35 % et 3.57%.

Le questionnement sur *l'accessibilité à l'information sur le handicap* montre qu'à 52.66% les informations sont insuffisantes et qu'à 47.33% les sources même d'informations sont également insuffisantes

Figure 3 : la focalisation sur le handicap

La section de la focalisation sur le handicap (Tableau 3) présente les éléments qui la constituent : la vision de l'encadreur vis-à-vis du handicap, l'implication des encadreurs vis-à-vis de l'éducation des personnes en situation de handicap. En questionnant *la vision qu'a l'encadreur envers la personne en situation de handicap*, on relève que la vision restreinte est à 62.82% contre 37.17 %. *L'implication des encadreurs vis-à-vis de l'éducation des personnes en situation de handicap* a été questionnée. Elle révèle que les attitudes positives sont plus grandes (44.33%) que les attitudes négatives (3%). Les réponses signifiant l'accompagnement de l'apprenant par l'éducateur dans sa démarche éducative sont à 48%. Le questionnement des *représentations des encadreurs sur le handicap* nous donne de noter que 51.02% des réponses présentent le handicap comme condition d'infériorité ; 33.21% comme une maladie, 9.24% comme un fait normal et 6.50 % comme mystico-cosmologique.

Figure 4 : l'approche orientante au Cameroun

L'approche orientante au Cameroun

La section de l'approche orientante au Cameroun (Figure 4) présente les éléments qui la constituent : le principe d'infusion/d'inclusion, le principe de collaboration et le principe de mobilisation. En questionnant *le principe d'infusion / d'inclusion*, on constate que 25.42 % des réponses révèlent de l'existence des outils /méthodes de motivation de l'apprenant en situation de handicap ; 23.72 % présente le sens donné à l'apprentissage de la personne en situation de handicap ; 19.49 % de la pertinence des objectifs ; 12.71 % de la fiabilité des actions ; 11.01 % des enseignements contextualisés selon le handicap et 7.62 % d'efficacité du dispositif. *Le principe de collaboration* révèle qu'à 38.09 %, nous avons une participation effective des acteurs éducatifs dans l'élaboration du programme de formation pour les personnes en situation de handicap et 61.90 % de la participation sociale et éducative des parents. *Le principe de mobilisation* révèle qu'à 35.58 % on relève une implication personnelle de la personne en situation de handicap dans son projet d'éducation ; qu'à 34.96 % on observe les compétences mesurables et observables développées chez les apprenants en situation de handicap et à 29.44 % l'apprenant en situation de handicap suit son orientation éducative.

ANALYSE ET DISCUSSION DES RESULTATS

Impacts des représentations sociales du handicap dans l'éducation dite inclusive

Il y a quelques années au Cameroun, soulignait Ntjam, « l'environnement de l'intégration scolaire de l'enfant handicapé était pauvre et évident » [13] ; mais aujourd'hui, par des sensibilisations, les travaux de recherche, les plaidoyers, la mise sur pied des établissements pilotes dans le cadre de l'éducation inclusive, on relève un intérêt de plus en plus grandissant des uns et des autres. Toutefois, nous ne perdons pas de vue que « L'existence d'une pléthore d'établissements dits spécialisés n'est pas une preuve d'intégration de l'enfant handicapé » [13]. Ce qui nous amène à questionner davantage le phénomène de représentations sociales du handicap. Les résultats de cette recherche ont mis en relief les représentations sociales du handicap en lien avec les écoles dites inclusives. Les éléments de cette représentation ont exprimé le sens donné par les acteurs investis dans l'éducation inclusive.

Les constats qui s'y dégagent sont les suivants : le premier est que la perception que se font les encadreurs du handicap et le degré d'accessibilité à l'information sur le handicap ont un impact sur la qualité de l'éducation dite inclusive. Le deuxième constat présente le fait que la vision et les représentations qu'ont l'encadreur envers l'apprenant en situation de handicap et sur le handicap même déterminent son implication dans l'éducation des apprenants en situation de handicap. Ces deux constats nous montrent l'importance de tenir compte des représentations sociales pour évaluer et pour comprendre le processus d'acceptation et d'intégration des encadreurs dans l'éducation inclusive pour les apprenants. Ainsi, les décisions gouvernementales ne seront pas que des mots, des concepts. Par contre l'idéal théorique pourra s'adapter à la réalité et favoriser l'éducation pour toutes/tous tel que prôné au Cameroun par les différents projets de lois et les conventions.

Qualité de la perception et accessibilité à l'information : des voies consensuelles favorisant l'éducation dite inclusive.

D'après les résultats de cette recherche, le handicap est fortement perçu des encadreurs au travers de barrières sociales, culturelles et éducatives, des préjugés cognitifs, (c'est-à-dire les croyances ou stéréotypes que l'on peut avoir à l'égard d'un groupe). Un peu moins il est perçu au travers de la complexité du handicap en lui-même, des préjugés affectifs (qui renvoie à l'attraction ou à la répulsion) et motivationnels (renvoyant à la tendance à agir d'une certaine manière à l'égard d'un groupe). S'il est vrai que « la perception qu'une société a du handicap exerce une influence importante sur la détermination du rôle que le droit peut (doit) tenir face à cette problématique » [14], il est également vrai que la qualité de cette perception influe sur la teneur de l'éducation à apporter à l'apprenant en situation de handicap. Le Gouvernement prend des mesures en votant des lois, en signant des conventions en vue de favoriser l'éducation pour tous, l'égalité dans l'éducation mais il reste encore que cette intégration « se heurte aux représentations du handicap car les mentalités évoluent moins vite que la technique et la médecine » [15]. Cette double posture se perçoit davantage au niveau des éléments de réponse dans l'échelle d'attitudes et du guide d'entretien.

Il n'est donc pas étonnant que la forte représentativité des barrières sociales, culturelles, éducatives et des préjugés cognitifs soient présente chez les participants de notre étude malgré la volonté à faire autrement. La preuve est qu'au niveau de l'échelle d'attitudes les réponses aux items 3 : « *L'école dite inclusive développera les fonctions de vicariance des enfants porteurs de handicap* » et 4 « *l'école dite inclusive développera les fonctions de vicariance des enfants porteurs de handicap* » sont totalement positives. En évaluant de façon précise et concise l'attitude des éducateurs sur la qualité de leur perception et l'accessibilité à l'information, on ressort de la positivité mais en passant le guide d'entretien avec le même objectif, on relève une forte représentativité de barrières et de préjugés cognitifs. Une chose est de prendre des mesures, de mettre sur pied des actions en vue d'améliorer, une autre est de faire évoluer les mentalités.

Bien que l'item 5 de l'échelle d'attitude « *la maîtrise de l'information sur le handicap par les encadreurs facilitera l'apprentissage des apprenants porteurs de handicap* » a des réponses totalement positives, nous notons avec Ntjam que « la principale difficulté porte sur l'information et la sensibilisation » [15]. D'ailleurs, la majorité des encadreurs continuent de souligner que l'accessibilité à l'information reste difficile : les informations et les sources d'informations sont insuffisantes. Un encadreur dira « oui une fois en passant la CBC qui

travaille avec Lilianne Foundation dans cet établissement peut passer nous éduquer mais en dehors de ça, nous n'avons pas d'autres informations ou sources d'informations ». Un autre dira en allant dans le même sens « La hiérarchie nous informe juste que nous allons avoir des enfants à besoin spéciaux dans les salles de classe puisque nous sommes un établissement inclusif. Mais je pense que cela ne suffit pas. C'est très insuffisant. D'autres mesures devraient être prises pour plus de sensibilisation. Puisque nous-mêmes sommes parents et qu'on ne peut exclure une personne même avec handicap d'une salle, on fait avec. Mais le résultat n'est pas encore ça. » L'assertion de ce dernier est davantage rehaussée par les propos de Chazelle qui dit : « La rencontre avec la personne en situation de handicap nous maintient en humanité » [16].

Vision et représentations de l'encadreur envers l'apprenant en situation de handicap pour une démarche d'éducation inclusive : voie favorisant l'implication de l'encadreur dans l'éducation des apprenants en situation de handicap.

D'après les résultats de cette recherche, la vision qu'à l'encadreur envers l'apprenant en situation de handicap montre que, pour la majorité d'entre eux, il est difficile de regarder la personne en situation de handicap en dehors de ce qui fait son handicap, en dehors de son handicap ; la personne est associée à son handicap et définie par elle. D'où la forte représentativité de la vision restreinte. « Il est difficile de regarder autrement où de faire autrement. L'élève handicapé que j'ai en face de moi est seulement réduit à ce qu'il a comme handicap » dit un encadreur. « Quand je vois l'élève handicapé, c'est son handicap que je vois. J'ai l'impression qu'il ne peut pas faire autre chose ». « Difficile pour moi de voir des aptitudes chez la personne qui est handicapée » disent certains encadreurs. Bien que pour Durand « le regard des autres est une réaction normale face à la différence » [17], pour Moysse, "regarder et voir ne sont pas seulement des perceptions, mais des actes par lesquels se joue notre appartenance à la communauté humaine : être regardé, c'est être humanisé ou déshumanisé, et regarder, c'est être humain ou inhumain" [18] car « l'apparence est reine » et Ntjam renchérit en notant que « les qualités physiques et mentales sont les seuls gages de réussite des parents » [18].

L'étude des représentations sociales a permis d'éclairer de nombreux aspects de la vie en société [19] et « la fonction première de la représentation sociale est la familiarisation avec l'étrange » [19]. Cette vision restreinte qu'à l'encadreur à l'endroit de l'apprenant qui a un handicap structure également les représentations voire les compréhensions qu'il se fait du handicap même. A cet effet, pour la majorité des réponses le handicap renvoie à une condition d'infériorité. Le reconnaître comme maladie ne vient qu'après. Bien que des réticences ont été notées face à ce document qui présente une distinction entre maladie et handicap qui ne devrait pas relever de l'opposition mais plutôt de la complémentarité [20]. Dans les réponses également, très peu d'encadreurs comprennent où se représente le handicap comme une situation normale et/ou mystico-cosmologique.

La « condition d'infériorité » mentionnée par les encadreurs fait davantage référence aux notions d'invalidité, de non productivité, de désavantage, de limitation auxquels est sujette l'apprenant en situation de handicap. D'ailleurs le dictionnaire Larousse décrit le handicap comme « un désavantage souvent naturel, une infériorité qu'on doit supporter » [21]. C'est dans ce sens que Stiker et Caster cité par Dupont mentionnent respectivement avec regret pour l'un que « ces manifestations de maintiens systématiques des personnes handicapées dans l'infériorité » et que « même lorsqu'ils ne sont pas exclus, ils ont une place inférieure bien établie » [22]. Dans cette recherche, ces deux pans sont bien repérables. Les apprenants avec handicap sont acceptés. D'ailleurs la majorité des encadreurs ont des

attitudes positives (44.33%) contre (3%) d'attitudes négatives mais cela n'annule ou ne change pas le différentialisme qui est fait entre les apprenants qui ne sont pas en situation de handicap et ceux qui le sont. Car dans le modèle différentialiste, si « la spécificité, la différence, est reconnue et peut même être acceptée », elle est toujours d'après Dupont « aussitôt hiérarchisée et valorisée différemment » [22].

Représentations sociales du handicap et écoles dites inclusives

L'analyse et la discussion des résultats précédents mettent également en question la réussite des écoles dites inclusives. Dans cette recherche, l'item 1 de l'échelle d'attitudes **« la pertinence des objectifs propres à l'école dite inclusive est encore à démontrer pour les enfants porteurs de handicap »** à laquelle les encadreurs ont tous répondu par la positive, nous montre davantage que « bien que le gouvernement camerounais ait pris des mesures au moyen des énoncés de politique publique de 1983 à 2010, les droits de tous les enfants et des personnes en situation de handicap en particulier, n'intègrent pas rigoureusement les problèmes de l'inclusion scolaire » [22]. En plus, Rieser rajoute que « le système éducatif peut être considéré comme posant un problème majeur pour l'inclusion scolaire » [23].

Les résultats de cette recherche présente dans l'approche orientante qui se veut inclusive peu d'existence d'outils/méthodes de motivation de l'apprenant en situation de handicap, peu de sens donné à l'apprentissage de la personne en situation de handicap, une faible pertinence des objectifs et fiabilité des actions. L'efficacité du dispositif reste à revoir et les enseignements ne sont pas toujours contextualisés selon le handicap. Dans le principe de collaboration, pour les items 2 *« l'implication des parents à travers leur rôle de co-éducateur impulsera le développement des fonctions de vicariance des enfants porteurs de handicap »* et 6 *« la sensibilisation des parents à l'école dite inclusive amènera ces derniers à y inscrire leurs enfants »* les réponses sont positives. Les encadreurs soulignent une plus grande participation sociale et éducative des parents dans le projet éducatif des parents. Car le parent reste le premier formateur de l'enfant en situation de handicap. D'ailleurs, « le rôle des parents est d'intégrer leurs enfants jusqu'au début de leur scolarité en les acceptant et en les investissant. Ils devront par la suite les inscrire dans des structures appropriées. Ce sont les professionnels qui prennent le relais, et ils ne peuvent le faire que si les parents les y autorisent » [23]. A la suite, nous notons que sur la base du guide d'entretien, la majorité des encadreurs qui côtoie les parents des apprenants en situation de handicap mentionne leur forte participation sociale et éducative dans la formation de leur enfant.

Conclusion

La présente recherche tentait d'évaluer l'impact des représentations sociales du handicap sur les écoles dites inclusives au Cameroun. En définitive, elle nous a permis de faire émerger le discours et les attitudes des encadreurs qui interviennent dans deux établissements dits inclusifs de la ville de Bafoussam. Par le biais de Moscovici, nous avons relevé que parler de représentations sociales c'est mettre en évidence leur genèse et leur développement [19]. Ce qui a été matérialisé par les concepts de dispersion de l'information concernant le handicap et la focalisation de ce qui a fait l'objet des représentations sociales : le handicap. Des encadreurs intervenant dans la formation des apprenants en situation de handicap ont participé à cette recherche. Nous avons relevé également que parler de l'école inclusive ne peut se faire en dehors des personnes qui devraient en bénéficier. Notre étude sans avoir la prétention de répondre de manière complète et définitive à la question de la qualité des représentations sociales du handicap au Cameroun en vue d'évaluer ce qui est

déjà fait dans les établissements et de favoriser davantage une éducation inclusive de qualité au Cameroun rend compte des priorités dans un contexte et un espace donné et de l'intérêt théorique et social.

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ENHANCING TEACHERS' DIGITAL LITERACY: LOCALISED STRATEGIES FOR BRIDGING THE TECHNOLOGICAL GAP IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

Teachers' digital literacy is a critical factor in integrating technology into education, especially in resource-constrained environments. In Cameroon's Fako Division, secondary school teachers struggle with limited digital skills and infrastructure, which undermines effective technology use in pedagogy. This study investigated teachers' access to digital resources, their digital competences, institutional support, perceived challenges, and context-specific strategies to bridge the technological gap. Adopting a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 317 randomly selected teachers using structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, percentages) and the Kruskal-Wallis H test were used for data analysis. Findings showed limited access to digital infrastructure ($\bar{x} = 2.64$), moderate digital competence ($\bar{x} = 3.11$), and minimal institutional support ($\bar{x} = 2.51$). Challenges were rated high ($\bar{x} = 3.57$), including unreliable electricity, device costs, and insufficient training. Respondents favored school-based strategies ($\bar{x} = 3.34$), such as peer mentoring, partnerships with ICT vendors, and school innovation teams. Inferential analysis revealed significant differences in digital literacy across age groups ($\chi^2(3) = 11.82, p = .008$), teaching experience ($\chi^2(3) = 9.44, p = .024$), and qualification level ($\chi^2(3) = 9.76, p = .02$), but no significant differences by gender or school type. The study recommends government investment in infrastructure, integrating digital literacy into teacher training, and supporting localized strategies to ensure relevance, sustainability, and equity in educational technology adoption.

Keywords:

Digital Literacy, Secondary School Teachers, Technological gap, Digital Competence, ICT in Education.



Résumé

La maîtrise du numérique par les enseignants est essentielle à l'intégration des technologies dans l'éducation, notamment dans les contextes où les ressources sont limitées. Dans le département de Fako, au Cameroun, les enseignants du secondaire sont confrontés à des difficultés liées à des compétences et des infrastructures numériques insuffisantes, ce qui compromet l'utilisation efficace des technologies dans la pédagogie. Cette étude a examiné l'accès des enseignants aux ressources numériques, leurs compétences numériques, le soutien institutionnel, les difficultés perçues et les stratégies adaptées au contexte pour combler la fracture numérique. Une enquête descriptive a été menée auprès de 317 enseignants sélectionnés aléatoirement, à l'aide de questionnaires structurés. Les données ont été analysées à l'aide de statistiques descriptives (moyennes, fréquences, pourcentages) et du test H de Kruskal-Wallis. Les résultats ont révélé un accès limité aux infrastructures numériques (moyenne = 2,64), des compétences numériques modérées (moyenne = 3,11) et un soutien institutionnel minimal (moyenne = 2,51). Les difficultés rencontrées ont été jugées importantes (moyenne = 3,57), notamment l'irrégularité de l'approvisionnement en électricité, le coût des équipements et l'insuffisance de formation. Les répondants ont privilégié les stratégies mises en œuvre au sein des établissements scolaires (moyenne = 3,34), telles que le mentorat par les pairs, les partenariats avec les fournisseurs de TIC et les équipes d'innovation scolaire. L'analyse inférentielle a révélé des différences significatives en matière de littératie numérique selon les groupes d'âge ($\chi^2(3) = 11,82$, $p = 0,008$), l'expérience d'enseignement ($\chi^2(3) = 9,44$, $p = 0,024$) et le niveau de qualification ($\chi^2(3) = 9,76$, $p = 0,02$), mais aucune différence significative selon le sexe ou le type d'établissement. L'étude recommande un investissement public dans les infrastructures, l'intégration de la littératie numérique dans la formation des enseignants et le soutien aux stratégies locales afin de garantir la pertinence, la pérennité et l'équité de l'adoption des technologies éducatives.

Mots-clés: Littératie numérique, Enseignants du secondaire, Fracture technologique, Compétences numériques, TIC dans l'éducation.

Introduction

The digital age has profoundly reshaped global educational landscapes, demanding new competences from educators and institutions alike. Among the most pressing changes is digital literacy, which encompasses the ability to access, understand, evaluate, and create information using digital technologies ([Ng.] 2012). In education, digital literacy is no longer a luxury, it is an essential competency for effective pedagogy, curriculum delivery, and educational administration (Fraillon et al., 2014). In this context, the digital preparedness of teachers plays a pivotal role in ensuring equitable access to quality education, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where digital transformation is uneven. Despite national-level ICT strategies in Cameroon, many divisions, including Fako Division in the Southwest Region, face persistent gaps in teacher digital competence due to infrastructural, institutional, and socio-economic limitations.

In response to the global push toward Education 4.0, Cameroon has adopted policies aimed at integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in schools, such as the

2001 national ICT policy and more recent initiatives supported by UNESCO and UNICEF (Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, 2019). These policies are meant to encourage the use of digital tools to foster innovation, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. However, implementation has been fragmented and disproportionately favoring urban centers such as Yaounde and Douala, while many schools in semi-urban and rural areas continue to lag behind. Several studies have documented how the lack of digital literacy among teachers hinders the successful use of ICT in classrooms (Tchombe, 2021; Ndongko & Eboka, 2020). Teachers in these areas often lack not only access to computers and internet connectivity but also localized training and institutional support that align with their contextual realities.

Fako Division, which includes key towns such as Buea, Limbe, Tiko, and Mutengene, presents a unique paradox. On the one hand, it is the home to Cameroon's leading public anglophone university-the University of Buea-and a growing technology hub popularly known as "Silicon Mountain" (Zang & Tamo, 2020). Unfortunately, many primary and secondary school teachers in the region are still unable to effectively use digital tools during the teaching and learning process. Even in schools where digital devices exist, they are often underutilized due to inadequate skills, confidence, or lack of training among staff. Infrastructural constraints such as irregular power supply and poor internet coverage exacerbate the problem. These challenges raise serious questions about the digital readiness of the teaching workforce and the extent to which national ICT policies translate into localized, practical benefits for educators in Fako.

Digital literacy for teachers goes beyond operational competence with devices. According to Belshaw (2012), digital literacy involves a spectrum of literacies, including media, information, cultural, and critical thinking skills. In the classroom, these competences enable teachers not only to use digital tools effectively but also to guide students in navigating digital content responsibly. Teachers' digital competences are therefore the centre to bridging the digital divide and achieving inclusive, quality education, particularly in under-resourced regions. When teachers lack digital skills, the potential of ICT to enhance learning remains untapped, further widening the equity gap between schools in more developed areas and those in areas like Fako Division.

One of the limitations of existing digital literacy programs is their generic nature. Many training modules adopted from international organizations do not consider the socio-cultural, infrastructural, and pedagogical contexts of the areas where they are implemented (Unwin, 2008). This study responds to that gap by exploring localized strategies that are specifically tailored to the needs and challenges of teachers in Fako Division. Localization in this context refers to the design and delivery of digital literacy programs that take into account the local infrastructure, available technology, language preferences, pedagogical practices, and policy frameworks. Understanding how localized strategies can enhance digital literacy, is key to ensuring that digital inclusion becomes a reality for all teachers regardless of geographic or socio-economic status.

This is why this paper provides findings aimed at the following objectives;

- a) To critically evaluate digital literacy competences of secondary school teachers in Fako Division.
- b) To investigate constraints that impedes digital literacy development among secondary school teachers in Fako Division.

- c) To formulate evidence-based, context-specific strategies for improving digital literacy among secondary school teachers in Fako Division.

This study is both timely and necessary, especially in the post-COVID-19 era where hybrid and online learning models are increasingly becoming the norm. Teachers must be digitally competent to navigate these models and deliver quality education. In focusing on Fako Division, the study addresses a critical gap in the literature and practice by proposing context-sensitive solutions that can ameliorate educational policy and improve the digital readiness of Cameroon's teaching workforce.

Digital Literacy of Secondary School Teachers in Fako Division

Digital literacy has emerged as an essential competency for 21st-century educators, as it enables teachers to integrate technology into teaching, enhance student engagement, and contribute to overall educational quality. According to Ng (2012), digital literacy encompasses more than just technical skills-it includes cognitive and socio-emotional dimensions that enable individuals to navigate, evaluate, and create information using a range of digital technologies. For teachers, this means developing a blended skill set that includes pedagogical, technological, and content knowledge (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). As education systems worldwide embrace digital transformation, teachers' digital literacy becomes increasingly critical, especially in developing contexts where technological divides remain evident.

In many developing countries, including Cameroon, teachers are often expected to integrate digital tools into their instruction with minimal training and insufficient infrastructure. Despite national policies that promote Information and Communication Technology (ICT) integration in education, implementation often falls short due to systemic constraints such as inadequate funding, outdated curricula, poor internet connectivity, and electricity shortages (Tchamyu, 2017). In the Cameroonian context, the Ministry of Secondary Education has made strides in introducing ICT education in schools, yet the challenges of implementation remain substantial, particularly in rural and semi-urban settings such as Fako Division. The gap between policy and practice often leaves teachers ill-equipped to leverage digital resources for effective pedagogy (Tandio & Mbangwana, 2020).

The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework proposed by Mishra and Koehler (2006) is widely used to conceptualize the knowledge teachers need for integrating technology into their practice. It asserts that teachers must develop an understanding of the intersection between technology, pedagogy, and subject content to use digital tools meaningfully. In Cameroon, however, few teacher training programs are built explicitly around this framework, limiting its practical application. Similarly, UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for Teachers provides a comprehensive guide on ICT skills development across three stages: technology literacy, knowledge deepening, and knowledge creation (UNESCO, 2018). Despite this, many Cameroonian teachers are still at the foundational level of technology literacy, with limited access to resources and professional development opportunities (Ngwa & Nchunge, 2020).

Constraints of Digital Literacy Development among Secondary School Teachers in Fako Division

In the broader Sub-Saharan African region, barriers to digital literacy development among teachers are consistent and well documented. According to Tella (2021), infrastructural

limitations, lack of relevant teacher training, and negative attitudes toward technology use significantly impede ICT integration. A study by Musibau et al. (2022) observed that even in urban schools, some teachers demonstrate resistance to using technology due to fears of irrelevance, obsolescence, or simply lack of confidence. Moreover, gender disparities and unequal access to resources often compound these barriers, with female teachers facing more significant challenges in acquiring digital skills due to social and institutional biases (Akpan & Beard, 2021).

In Cameroon, these Regional and National trends are evident. For instance, divisions such as Fako is a semi-urban and coastal region with a mix of government and mission schools, many of which struggle with underfunding and limited technological resources. While the city of Buea-Fako's capital-hosts the University of Buea and is relatively better resourced, secondary schools in Tiko, Limbe, and Muyuka often lack reliable internet, functional computer labs, and trained ICT facilitators. Teachers frequently rely on personal devices for digital tasks and report difficulties in accessing updated software and learning platforms (Fonkem & Mforteh, 2023). These challenges underscore the need for localized strategies tailored to the socio-economic realities of Fako's educational ecosystem.

Evidence-Based Local Strategies to Improve Teachers' Digital Literacy in Fako Division

Localized strategies are increasingly being recognized as a means to bridge the digital divide in education. Community-based training initiatives that involve local stakeholders and leverage indigenous knowledge have been shown to improve teacher ICT skills in similar contexts across Africa (Chigona et al., 2019). In Fako, a bottom-up approach involving school administrators, local councils, and non-governmental organizations could facilitate context-sensitive training programs that respond to the actual needs of teachers. Additionally, establishing public-private partnerships may help mobilize resources such as internet connectivity, computers, and learning management systems. Successful models from Ghana and Kenya show that local partnerships can result in long-term investments in digital infrastructure and teacher capacity building (Boakye & Banini, 2021).

Policy implementation also remains a critical area for improvement. Although Cameroon has developed national ICT policies, including Vision 2035 and the e-Education Strategy, these documents often lack actionable steps at the school level. For effective policy translation, there must be a feedback loop that allows educators and school heads to communicate ground-level challenges to policymakers. Capacity building programs should not only focus on technical skills but also include digital pedagogy and strategies for critical media literacy, ensuring that teachers can integrate ICT meaningfully rather than mechanistically (Nzomo & Orodho, 2014). Additionally, mentorship programs can foster peer learning among teachers, allowing experienced educators to support others in integrating digital tools in their teaching practices.

Ultimately, the literature reveals that enhancing teacher digital literacy in areas such as Fako Division requires a multi-pronged approach involving policy reform, infrastructure development, context-specific training, and community engagement. While frameworks such as TPACK and UNESCO's ICT Competency Model provide valuable guidance, they must be adapted to local realities. Cameroon's efforts to develop a digitally competent teaching force must be matched with sustained investments and grassroots-level interventions.

Teachers in Fako Division are not passive recipients of technology but key agents of change whose empowerment can catalyze broader educational transformation.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design using a purely quantitative approach to assess the level of digital literacy among secondary school teachers in Fako Division, Southwest Region of Cameroon. This method was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gather factual, quantifiable data from a defined group of participants in order to describe current conditions and identify patterns across variables (Creswell, 2014). The aim was to provide an evidence-based understanding of digital literacy levels, barriers, and localized strategies adopted by teachers in a technology-evolving educational environment.

Study Area

The research was conducted in Fako Division, located in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. The division is composed of six sub-divisions: Buea, Limbe I, Limbe II, Limbe III- West Coast (Idenau), Tiko and Muyuka, Fako serves as both an administrative and academic hub, with Buea as the regional capital and home to the University of Buea, a center of educational innovation. Despite the growing integration of digital technologies in education, many schools in this division, particularly those in rural and semi-urban areas, continue to face challenges in digital integration. The disparity in infrastructure, digital exposure, and institutional support highlights the need to study teachers' digital literacy within this context.

Study Population and Sampling

Using a simple random sampling technique, necessary to ensure that every teacher had an equal chance of being included, thereby enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the results (Kumar, 2019). A total of 317 teachers were sampled and surveyed, using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling table from an initial population of 1775. Government secondary schools were randomly selected from various zones of the division using a paper basket method, where for each subdivision, names under were written on a ballot paper, shaken and half selected, ensuring the inclusion of both urban and rural areas to capture a wide spectrum of digital literacy experiences.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured, closed-ended questionnaire designed to explore key aspects of digital literacy. The questionnaire was developed and adapted to reflect the Cameroonian context. It included five major sections; demographic data, access to digital infrastructure and resources, digital competence and skill levels, perceived challenges to digital literacy, utilization and awareness of localized strategies. All questions were formatted using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5), allowing for standardized data interpretation. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by two experts in ICT education and educational measurement from the Department of Educational Foundations and Administration, Faculty of Education of the University of Buea. Their feedback helped refine question wording and ensure cultural and contextual relevance. A pilot study was conducted with 10 teachers in non-

sampled schools within the Southwest Region. The Cronbach's alpha for the instrument was 0.898, confirming its high internal reliability (Taber, 2018).

Data Analysis

The collected data were cleaned and coded in SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 25.0. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to summarize responses and answer the research questions. The data provided insights into the distribution of digital competences and perceptions of technological integration challenges among secondary school teachers in the division.

Findings

Fako Secondary School Teachers' Socio-demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Fako Secondary School Teachers' Socio-demographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Kruskal-Wallis H Test H Statistic	p-value	Interpretation
Gender	Male	155	48.90%	0.05	0.82	Not significant
	Female	162	51.10%			
Age Group	20–29 years	47	14.80%	11.82	0.008*	Significant
	30–39 years	124	39.10%			
	40–49 years	91	28.70%			
	50 years and above	55	17.40%			
Highest Qualification	Grade I	38	12.00%	9.76	0.02*	Significant
	Certificate					
	DIPES	115	36.30%			
	I/DIPES II					
	Bachelor's Degree	93	29.30%			
	Master's Degree or higher	71	22.40%			
Years of Teaching	Less than 5 years	62	19.60%	9.44	0.024*	Significant
	5–10 years	88	27.80%			
	11–15 years	97	30.60%			
	More than 15 years	70	22.00%			
School Type	Public	214	67.50%	2.61	0.12	Not significant
	Secondary School					
	Mission/Private School	103	32.50%			

The information on table 1 reveal a fairly balanced gender distribution among the respondents, with 51.1% female and 48.9% male teachers. The Kruskal-Wallis H test ($H = 0.05$, $p = 0.82$) revealed no statistically significant difference in digital literacy scores between male and female teachers, indicating that gender had no notable influence on the digital competencies of participants. Age distribution showed that a majority of respondents

are in the 30–39-year age range (39.1%), followed by those aged 40–49 years (28.7%). Statistically, a significant difference was found across age groups ($H = 11.82$, $p = 0.008$), showing that age significantly affects digital literacy levels among respondents.

In terms of qualifications, the majority of respondents held DIPES I/II (36.3%) and Bachelor's degrees (29.3%), while 22.4% held postgraduate qualifications, with majority of respondents (67.5%) coming from public secondary schools, while 32.5% were from private or mission schools. A statistically significant difference in digital literacy scores was found across different qualification levels ($H = 9.76$ ($p = 0.0207$), suggesting that academic qualifications influenced respondents' digital literacy. The majority of respondents (30.60%) had 11–15 years of teaching experience, followed by 27.80% with 5–10 years. Only 19.60% of teachers had less than 5 years of experience, while 22.00% had more than 15 years. Teaching experience significantly influenced digital literacy scores ($H = 19.04$, $p = 0.0003$). A significant proportion of respondents (67.50%) were drawn from public secondary schools, while 32.50% taught in mission or private schools. No statistically significant differences were observed across school types (public, private, mission) ($H = 2.61$, $p = 0.1065$).

Fako Secondary School Teachers' Digital Literacy Competences

Table 2: Fako Secondary School Teachers' Digital Literacy Competences

Digital Competency Indicators	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (σ)	Decision
Ability to use basic digital tools (Word, Excel, etc.)	3.7	1	High Competency
Confidence in using digital platforms (Zoom, Google Meet)	3.2	1.1	Moderate Competency
Familiarity with classroom management tools (projectors, Google Classroom)	2.9	1.2	Moderate Competency
Ability to evaluate digital content for teaching	3	1	Moderate Competency
Integration of digital tools in lesson planning and delivery	2.8	1.1	Moderate Competency
Average Total	3.12	1.08	Low Competency

Table 2 reveals that teachers in Fako Division generally have limited skills which hinders their technology implementation in the classrooms as shown by an overall moderate mean score of 3.12 ($\sigma = 1.08$), indicating a low level of competence. The highest mean score recorded was 3.70 on ability to use basic digital tools, while the lowest mean scored was 2.8 on integration of digital tools in the lesson planning and delivery. However, 3.2 mean was recorded for confidence in using digital platforms, while 2.9 mean score was recorded on familiarity with classroom management tools and 3.0 mean score recorded on ability to evaluate digital content for teaching..

Fako Secondary School Teachers' Perceived Constraints to Digital Literacy

Table 3: Fako Secondary School Teachers' Perceived Constraints to Digital Literacy

Statement	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (σ)	Decision
Lack of adequate digital infrastructure hinders my use of technology	4.2	0.85	Strongly Agree
Limited ICT training opportunities reduce my confidence in using digital tools	4	0.9	Agree
Poor internet connection makes it difficult to access digital content	4.15	0.88	Strongly Agree
High cost of acquiring digital devices is a major constraint	3.90	0.92	Agree
I feel overwhelmed by the constant evolution of digital technologies	3.85	0.95	Agree
There is limited administrative support to encourage ICT integration in teaching	4.05	0.91	Agree
There is lack of ICT tools maintenance, management and upgrades	3.6	1	Agree
Average Total	4	0.91	Agree

Findings on table 3 revealed that teachers in Fako Division experience significant challenges in integrating digital gadgets in to their teaching. With an average mean of 4.00, the overall decision was 'Agree', having the most strongly agreed with mean of 4.20 and 4.15 in lack of adequate digital infrastructure and poor internet connection respectively. Also, limited ICT training opportunities scored a mean of 4.00, and high cost of acquiring digital devices scored a mean of 3.90. A mean of 3.85 teachers indicated being overwhelmed by the rapid evolution of technologies, while others indicated limited of administrative support with a mean of 4.05. However, 3.60 mean indicated lack of stable internet connections, while mean score of 3.70 recorded statement on limited ICT maintenance, management and upgrades.

Fako Secondary School Teachers' Evidence-Based, Context-Specific Strategies for Improving Digital Literacy

Table 4: Fako Secondary School Teachers' Proposed Strategies for Improving Digital Literacy

Statement	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (σ)	Decision
Regular in-service ICT workshops should be conducted in each educational district	4.45	0.7	Strongly Agree
Community-based partnerships can help provide teachers access to digital tools and training	4.3	0.76	Strongly Agree
Peer mentoring systems within	4.2	0.81	Agree

schools can be effective for up skilling teachers			
Encouraging use of mobile-based learning tools will promote broader teacher engagement	4.15	0.84	Agree
Integration of digital literacy training in Teachers' Grade I and II refresher programs is needed	4.4	0.75	Strongly Agree
Local education authorities should set up resource centers with internet and computers	4.35	0.78	Strongly Agree
Teachers should be incentivized to pursue digital training using local platforms	4.1	0.87	Agree
Average Total	4.28	0.79	Strongly Agree

The results in table 4 suggest a strong consensus among respondents regarding strategies that improves their digital literacy, with an average mean of 4.28. The highest mean of 4.5 was recorded for the strategy 'regular in-service ICT workshop should be conducted in each educational district.' Another high-ranking strategy was the integration of digital literacy in to refresher training programs for Grade I and II teachers with a mean of 4.40. Also, establishing community-based partnerships scored a mean of 4.30 and setting up local resource centers recorded a mean of 4.35. Strategy of peer mentoring recorded a mean of 4.20, though received slightly lower in rating. However, mobile-based learning tools recorded a mean of 4.15 while incentivizing teachers to pursue local digital training recorded a mean of 4.10, though with relatively lower mean.

Discussion

Fako Secondary School Teachers' Socio-demographic Characteristics

The findings in revealed a fairly balanced gender distribution among the respondents. This is indicative of an equitable representation of both genders in the teaching workforce within Fako Division, reflecting trends observed in the Cameroonian Secondary Education, where female participation has increased steadily due to National Gender Campaigns (Nfor, 2020).

Also, age distribution shows that a majority of respondent are in the 30 -39-year age range, followed by those aged 40-49 years. This suggests a predominantly mid-career teacher population, likely to be more adaptable to digital training due to their professional maturity and exposure to newer educational trends. According to Hennessy et al. (2010), teachers in this age group are more responsive to ICT integration when appropriately supported. The relatively small representation of teachers under the low percentages may indicate limited recent recruitment or slow turnover in the teaching sector.

In terms of qualification, majority of respondents held DIPES I/II and Bachelor's degree, while few held postgraduate qualifications. This highly qualified teaching pool indicates strong foundational knowledge, which can support effective digital skills development if

adequately nurtured. As stated by Tella and Tella (2011), higher qualification often correlate with higher openness to adopting new teaching technologies, provided institutional barriers are addressed.

The distribution of teaching experiences further reinforces the predominance of experienced teachers. Over half of respondents had taught for 11 years or more, a factor that can influence both willingness and resistance to innovation. While long-service teachers may have rich pedagogical insight, they may also feel overwhelmed by evolving technologies (Rogers, 2003). Thus, any digital literacy program must be designed to address generational learning gaps. Nevertheless, majority of the respondents were from Public Secondary Schools, while few were from private or mission schools. This distribution reflects the public dominance of the education system in Cameroon and is important because access to digital tools is often better in public institutions. Public school teachers may therefore report more significant challenges related to infrastructure and policy support, a trend noted by Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2005), in their study of ICT accessibility across African schools.

The above demographic insights provide essential context for interpreting the broader findings of the study. The relatively high levels of qualification and experience are potential strengths for digital literacy development, yet infrastructural gaps, generational divides, and institutional limitations may impede progress. A holistic approach, that tailors digital training to diverse demographic profiles as advocated by Ghavifekr et al. (2024), will be critical in bridging the technological divide in this region.

Fako Secondary School Teachers' Digital Literacy Competences

According to the findings presented in table 4.2 above, highest mean was recorded for teachers' ability to use basic digital tools such as Microsoft Word and Excel indicating a high level of competence in fundamental ICT skills. This finding aligns with the work of Tomte et al. (2015), who observed that basic digital literacy is often the first area of competence developed among teachers in resource-constrained environments. It also supports the premise of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which posits that perceived ease of use is crucial in technology adaptation (Davis, 1989). However, competences related to digital teaching platforms, content evaluation, and lesson planning integration show only moderate levels of skill. This supports earlier findings by Ifinedo et al. (2020), who reported that many African teachers face challenges incorporating digital tools in to pedagogy due to limited exposure, training, and infrastructure. Similarly, this resonates with Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (2003), suggesting that many teachers are in the early stages of tool adoption, needing support to move towards full integration.

Furthermore, the standard deviation values highlight significant disparities in digital literacy across the teacher population. These variations may stem from factors such as differing levels of access to training, experience and institutional support, as also observed in studies by Tondeur et al. (2017). These findings reveal both a promising foundation in basic ICT literacy and a pressing need for targeted capacity-building programs advanced digital integration, content evaluation, and the use of learning management systems. As posited by Constructivist Learning Theory, effective digital education relies not only on access to tools, but also on the teacher's ability to construct and facilitate meaningful learning experiences using these tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, while the teachers in Fako Division are not starting from zero, interventions must focus on raising competences

beyond the basic level, particularly in pedagogical and integrative aspects of digital technology. Investing in mentorship and regular digital up skilling workshops may help bridge this gap and contribute to more effective adoption in education across the region.

Fako Secondary School Teachers' Perceived Challenges to Digital Literacy

The findings indicated in table 4.3 above reveals that teachers in Fako Division experience significant challenges in integrating digital literacy in to their teaching processes. The overall decision was 'Agree', indicating consensus on the presence of considerable obstacles. Notably, 'lack of adequate digital infrastructure' and 'poor internet connectivity' were the most strongly agreed upon challenges. As one respondent expressed 'We lack basic facilities such as functioning computer labs and stable electricity, which are prerequisites for digital engagement.' This aligns with Tella, Bashorun, and Adu (2021), who argue that infrastructure deficits are the primary hindrance to ICT integration across many African school systems. Also, limited ICT training opportunities were another prevalent issue, as many teachers lack structured programs to build confidence in digital tools. This supports Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), which emphasizes the need for consistent investment in capacity building to drive educational development. For examples, a teacher noted, 'We only receive general workshops, specific digital training is rare and inaccessible'. Similar challenges were noted in Tanzania by Mtebe and Raisamo (2014), where absence of relevant training discouraged digital adoption.

However, cost-related issues also emerged, with 'High cost of acquiring digital devices' noted as a key constraint. Many teachers shared concerns about affordability: 'my salary cannot cover buying a personal laptop or subscribing to internet services every month.' These findings reflect Afolabi's (2020) work which concluded that the digital divide in education is as much economic as it is technological. On a psychological front, feeling overwhelmed by the rapid evolution of technologies shows the struggle to keep pace with advancement. One teacher commented, 'Just when I get used to one software, a new version comes up, It's frustrating'. This aligns with Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (2003), which suggests complexity and pace of innovation can act as deterrents for late adopters. Administrative support also proved to be lacking as teachers felt abandoned in their digital journey, in their response 'school management often shows little interest in encouraging us to integrate technology'. This aligns with Olibie (2021), who found poor institutional backing a common reason for stagnation of ICT policies in schools. Finally, cultural and generational attitudes were identified as subtle barriers. Older teachers, in particular, are less likely to embrace digital tools. A participant remarked, 'Younger colleagues find it easier to adapt, but for us, it is challenging to start anew'. This finding resonates with the studies by Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2020), who highlights age and tradition as factors influencing digital resistance in Africans schools.

Fako Secondary School Teachers' Evidence-Based, Context-Specific Strategies for Improving Digital Literacy

Findings indicate a strong consensus among respondents on the effectiveness of evidence-based and context-specific strategies to enhance teachers' digital competences. Participants particularly emphasized the importance of regular in-service ICT workshops within their local districts. Many teachers expressed frustration with being sent to distant towns for training and preferred localized sessions. This reflects a shared belief in the practicality and relevance of decentralized professional development. This response supports the work of

Boateng *et al.* (2021), who emphasized decentralized, context-sensitive professional development as the most effective approach in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Another high ranking strategy was the integration of digital literacy into refresher training programs for Grade I and II teachers. This resonates with Ghavifekr and Rosdy (2015), who argue that pre-service and ongoing teacher education must embed digital skills to foster systemic change. Establishing community-based partnerships and setting up local resource centers were also strongly supported. Teachers acknowledged the potential of partnerships with NGOs, councils, and private sector donors to provide infrastructure and tools. 'With support from local businesses, we can equip our schools with devices and even sponsor internet,' said one teacher. These views echo the Community Participation Model (Epstein, 2001), which highlights the transformative role of local collaboration in education enhancement.

The strategy of peer mentoring was well received, though slightly lower in rating. Teachers valued learning from colleagues within their schools who were more digitally inclined. As one commented, 'When I see my younger colleagues using Google forms or smart boards, I get motivated to try as well.' This aligns with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which affirms the importance of learning in social contexts.

Mobile-based learning tools and incentivizing teachers to pursue local digital training were also agreed upon, though with relatively lower means. These strategies were seen as practical in a context where smartphones are more accessible than laptops. These observations are supported by Olumide *et al.* (2020), who reported that mobile learning has high adoption potential in African classrooms due to its affordability and ease to use.

The consistent emphasis on localization in all the items reflects a belief in the context-specific strategies rather than imported models, offering the most promised form of bridging the digital divide in teachers' competences. This supports Zubairu and Shuaibu (2022), who advocate for educational innovation grounded in the social, infrastructural, and economic realities of each community.

Conclusion

This study investigated the current state of digital literacy among secondary school teachers in Fako Division, South West Region of Cameroon, with a focus on access to digital infrastructure, digital skill levels, and perceived challenges to digital engagement. Grounded in the descriptive survey design and analyzed using statistical tools, the research revealed significant disparities in digital access, moderate skill level, and numerous institutional, technical and personal barriers impeding full adoption of digital tools in pedagogy. These findings resonate with broader discourses on digital divides in Sub-Saharan Africa, where infrastructure and training gaps remain key obstacles to ICT integration in education (Ghavifekr *et al.*, 2014; UNESCO, 2020).

The study contributes to scholarly and policy discussions by contextualizing the problem within the socio-educational dynamics of Fako Division. The high qualification levels and teaching experiences of respondents highlight a strong potential for transformation if the right digital resources and support mechanisms are provided. However, the data also underscored a lack of consistent internet access, insufficient training opportunities, and limited institutional support as critical impeding challenges previously identified by Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2005) and reaffirmed in this localized context.

Theoretically, the findings affirm the principles of the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), suggesting that perceived usefulness and ease of use remain central to digital adoption. Equally, Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation theory is evidenced in the varying degrees of digital engagement across demographic groups, reinforcing the need for differentiated support strategies tailored to teacher's age, experience and school type. Ultimately, enhancing teacher's digital literacy in Fako Division is not solely a technological endeavor-it is a systemic and strategic one. Addressing infrastructure deficits must go hand-in-hand with robust teacher capacity-building programs, policy reforms, and locally grounded solutions. By anchoring recommendation in both data and theory, this study offers a roadmap for educational stakeholders to bridge the digital gap and ensure that no teacher is left behind in Cameroon's evolving digital education landscape

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CORPS CACHÉS, VOIX ABSENTES : EXPÉRIENCE DE DIEU ET VULNÉRABILITÉ PSYCHIQUE EN CONTEXTE RELIGIEUX AFRICAIN

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Abstract

The article proposes the conceptual model 'Hidden Bodies, Absent Voices' to analyse the unseen psychological vulnerability of nuns in sub-Saharan Africa, where the intensification of religious practices creates a paradox: spiritual experience, while being a source of resilience, can also lead to hidden fragility. The model articulates the subjective experience of the divine, invisible suffering, and the social dynamics of silence and stigmatisation. It demonstrates that the ideal of perfection in consecrated life neutralises the expression of the body and speech. The ascetic body is forced to mask its pain, often sublimated into sacrifice, while speech is repressed in the name of obedience, generating inner violence and identity fragmentation. This concealment is reinforced by the African socio-cultural context, where religious patriarchy, the priority given to community cohesion (Ubuntu) and the sanctification of renunciation transform clinical distress into spiritual virtue. To counter this invisibility, the article concludes by advocating for a 'clinic of recognition.' This would aim to restore the visibility of the body as spiritual and psychic mediation, to establish safe spaces for exchange, and to integrate the acceptance of fragility into religious structures, thereby restoring nuns to their full stature as subjects.

Keywords:

Hidden bodies; absent voices; experience of God; psychological vulnerability; African nuns.

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Résumé

L'article propose le modèle conceptuel « Corps cachés, voix absentes » pour analyser la vulnérabilité psychique non apparente des religieuses en Afrique subsaharienne, où l'intensification des pratiques confessionnelles crée un paradoxe : l'expérience spirituelle, tout en étant une ressource de résilience, peut aussi engendrer une fragilité occultée. Le modèle articule l'expérience subjective du divin, la souffrance invisible et les dynamiques sociales de silence et de stigmatisation. Il démontre que l'idéal de perfection de la vie consacrée neutralise l'expression du corps et de la parole. Le corps ascétique est contraint de masquer ses douleurs, souvent sublimées en sacrifice, tandis que la parole est réprimée au nom de l'obéissance, générant une violence intérieure et une fragmentation identitaire. Cette occultation est renforcée par le contexte socioculturel africain, où le patriarcat religieux, la priorité à la cohésion communautaire (Ubuntu) et la sanctification du renoncement transforment la détresse clinique en vertu spirituelle. Pour contrer cette invisibilisation, l'article conclut en plaidant pour une « clinique de la reconnaissance ». Celle-ci viserait à restaurer la visibilité du corps comme médiation spirituelle et psychique, à instituer des espaces d'échange sécurisés et à intégrer l'accueil de la fragilité dans les structures religieuses, redonnant ainsi aux religieuses leur pleine stature de sujet.

Mots-clés : *corps cachés, voix absentes, expérience de Dieu, vulnérabilité psychique, religieuses africaines.*

Introduction

Au cours des dernières décennies, l'Afrique subsaharienne a vu s'intensifier les pratiques confessionnelles, avec une place grandissante accordée à l'expérience spirituelle dans la construction identitaire ([1]; [2]; [3]). Dans ce paysage en mutation, la vie consacrée et les groupements religieux apparaissent comme des points d'ancrage essentiels : lieux de socialisation, mais aussi espaces où se tissent les significations profondes de l'existence. Pourtant, derrière cette visibilité institutionnelle et symbolique, se cache une réalité plus discrète, souvent passée sous silence : celle du malaise psychique et du handicap non apparent. Ce dernier, défini comme une altération du fonctionnement psychique, cognitif ou social non immédiatement perceptible par autrui ([4] ; [5]), met au défi la capacité des communautés religieuses à reconnaître et à accueillir la souffrance silencieuse de leurs membres.

Cette tension se nourrit de la nature même de l'expérience spirituelle. Le vécu intime du divin constitue, pour beaucoup de religieuses, une force intérieure et un appui de résilience, mais il peut aussi devenir une source de fragilité ([6] ; [7]). Lorsqu'il est porté et soutenu par le collectif, il favorise un sentiment de cohérence, une continuité identitaire qui donne sens [8]. Mais quand il est entravé, nié ou instrumentalisé, il expose à une solitude abyssale, à l'angoisse existentielle et à une vulnérabilité psychique accrue [9]. Dans nombre de groupements religieux africains, les mécanismes institutionnels et culturels participent à invisibiliser les corps et à réduire au silence les voix. Les souffrances qui ne se voient pas, parce qu'elles dérangent l'image sacrée de la vocation et fissurent le récit idéalisé de la

communauté, sont trop souvent repoussées dans les marges du silence collectif ([10] ; [11]). Ce silence ne signifie pas l'absence de douleur : il s'accompagne d'une parole empêchée, où les religieuses hésitent à exprimer leur vécu, craignant la stigmatisation et l'exclusion.

C'est à ce nœud de tensions que la présente contribution souhaite répondre, en proposant un modèle conceptuel intitulé : « *Corps cachés, voix absentes : expérience du divin et vulnérabilité psychique en contexte religieux africain* ». Ce modèle articule trois dimensions : (1) la dimension spirituelle, à travers le vécu subjectif du divin ; (2) la dimension psychique, marquée par le malaise et la souffrance non apparente ; et (3) la dimension sociale, avec ses stigmates, ses silences et ses expressions contraintes. L'enjeu est de rendre visible la complexité de la relation entre expérience religieuse et vulnérabilité psychique, en mettant en lumière les dynamiques d'invisibilisation qui façonnent l'existence des personnes consacrées. Inscrite dans un cadre interdisciplinaire (psychologie clinique, anthropologie religieuse et sciences sociales), cette réflexion se veut une contribution à une meilleure compréhension des formes contemporaines du spirituel souffrant en Afrique, et un pas vers la reconnaissance, tant institutionnelle que clinique, de ces réalités.

Cadre Theorique Et Epistemologique

La détresse non apparente dans un contexte religieux africain ne peut être appréhendée à travers une perspective unique. Elle émane d'un entrelacement complexe de dynamiques somatiques, discursives et spirituelles qui interagissent et s'opposent. L'utilisation de trois axes théoriques (le corps social et la stigmatisation, la parole réprimée et l'expérience subjective du divin) permet de saisir la texture particulière de cette expérience. Ces trois approches, bien que distinctes, sont ici envisagées dans une complémentarité critique : chacune met en lumière une facette de la dialectique entre occultation et recherche de reconnaissance.

Corps social et stigmatisation : la souffrance comme menace pour l'ordre symbolique

Le corps, [12], est à la fois le « premier instrument » et le « premier objet technique » de l'individu. Mais il est bien plus que cela : il constitue un fait social total, un espace où se condensent normes, pratiques et représentations. Dans les communautés religieuses, ce corps est investi d'une double sacralité : d'abord comme corps individuel consacré, censé incarner pureté, disponibilité et vigueur spirituelle ; ensuite comme corps communautaire, participant à l'image publique et symbolique de l'institution. Dans ce contexte, toute faille somatique ou psychique dépasse la sphère intime pour prendre une portée collective. Une dépression, une anxiété persistante, un traumatisme ou encore un épuisement spirituel ne relèvent pas uniquement de l'individu : ils fissurent l'ordre symbolique de la communauté. La souffrance devient un « scandale », une souillure menaçant la cohérence du système classificatoire religieux [13]. Elle fait vaciller le récit commun d'un corps sanctifié et invulnérable.

Or, cette expérience du corps souffrant ne se réduit pas à une pathologie médicale ; elle s'inscrit aussi dans une trame morale et sociale. Kleinman [14] a montré que la maladie, au-

delà des symptômes, est toujours vécue et racontée à travers les catégories sociales et culturelles qui lui donnent sens. Dans les institutions religieuses, cette grille de lecture est encore plus marquée : la souffrance n'est pas seulement un état, elle devient une épreuve de signification qui engage la valeur même de la vocation. [15] , de son côté, insiste sur cette dimension morale et politique du corps souffrant : le mal-être n'est pas seulement ce que l'on endure, il est ce que l'autre interprète, juge et classe.

Cette logique produit alors des mécanismes de dissimulation. Le mal-être doit rester hors de la vue, car il contredit l'idéal de sainteté. Goffman [4] éclaire ce processus avec sa distinction entre stigmaté « disqualifiant » (manifeste, immédiatement visible et rejeté) et stigmaté « discréditable », invisible, mais toujours susceptible d'être révélé. Les religieuses en souffrance psychique se trouvent dans ce second cas : elles vivent sous la menace constante que leur fragilité soit perçue, exposée, et donc sanctionnée. Elles sont prises dans une double contrainte : afficher un corps conforme (sourire, disponibilité, service) tout en masquant un corps intérieur meurtri. Ce clivage n'est pas anodin. Il génère une tension psychique profonde, une fracture intime entre le paraître et l'être. Et dans ce silence imposé, c'est l'identité elle-même qui se trouve minée, jusqu'à isoler davantage celles qui, derrière le voile, peinent à tenir debout.

Parole réprimée : silence, institution et subjectivité fragmentée

À la contrainte imposée au corps s'ajoute une autre, tout aussi lourde : celle de la parole. L'enjeu n'est pas seulement de cacher un corps souffrant, mais aussi de taire une voix qui voudrait dire la douleur. [10] a montré combien l'Église en Afrique fonctionne comme un espace où le discours institutionnel tend à étouffer les voix singulières, au nom de l'obéissance et de la fidélité à la vérité révélée. Dans cet univers, confesser une fragilité psychique, c'est prendre le risque de paraître trahir l'idéal communautaire et d'écorner l'image sacrée de la vocation. Ce silence n'est pas seulement imposé de l'extérieur : il s'enracine dans l'intime. Les religieuses apprennent peu à peu, à travers la formation et la vie communautaire, à discipliner leurs émotions, à filtrer leur langage, à n'exprimer que ce qui est édifiant. Comme le souligne Mbembe [11], la parole réprimée n'est pas qu'un mutisme : elle est une contrainte structurelle, produite par des conditions sociales et institutionnelles qui ne laissent aucun espace légitime à l'expression d'une subjectivité fragile. Butler [16] éclaire cette mécanique : le langage lui-même devient un instrument de pouvoir, qui définit ce qui peut être dit, et condamne au silence ce qui menace l'ordre institué. Ainsi, la parole des religieuses n'est pas seulement retenue, elle est pré-formatée, rendue conforme aux attentes collectives.

Cette répression discursive engendre une violence intérieure. Fanon [17] l'avait bien montré : le silence imposé au sujet colonisé produit un clivage, une intériorisation de l'infériorité qui finit par altérer l'identité. De manière analogue, la religieuse contrainte au mutisme en vient à séparer en elle deux figures : un « soi intérieur », étouffé, porteur de souffrance, et un « soi officiel », façonné pour répondre aux attentes communautaires. Appadurai [18] parlerait ici d'une « impossibilité de l'aspiration » : faute de ressources narratives et sociales pour dire son expérience, le sujet est condamné à l'impuissance

discursive. Le coût psychique est immense. Le silence imposé, intériorisé et ritualisé conduit à un sentiment d'inexistence et à une solitude radicale. Il fragmente l'identité, creuse l'écart entre l'intime et le public, jusqu'à produire un épuisement profond, parfois même une somatisation. Car ce qui ne peut se dire finit souvent par s'écrire dans le corps.

Expérience subjective du divin : ressource ambiguë et vulnérabilité spirituelle

Au cœur de la vie religieuse, l'expérience du divin occupe une place paradoxale. Pour de nombreuses religieuses, elle est à la fois source de lumière et lieu d'ombre. Elle nourrit la résilience, mais peut aussi ouvrir sur la fragilité. [6] ainsi que [7] ont montré combien ce vécu spirituel peut constituer un appui psychique décisif, une ressource face aux épreuves de la vie. Lorsqu'il s'inscrit dans un collectif qui le reconnaît et l'accompagne, il favorise la cohérence et le sentiment de continuité identitaire [8]. Mais cette expérience intime n'est pas univoque. Comme l'avait déjà perçu James [19], les vécus religieux se déploient toujours dans une tension entre consolation et vertige, entre guérison et déstabilisation. Ils peuvent offrir un horizon de sens, mais aussi creuser une faille où s'engouffrent solitude, doute et désarroi existentiel. Dans ce sillage, Pargament [20] a montré que la religion peut être une ressource de coping, une manière de faire face, mais qu'elle peut aussi devenir une source de stress lorsqu'elle est vécue dans l'isolement ou l'instrumentalisation.

C'est là toute l'ambivalence : le divin, lorsqu'il est reconnu et intégré, soutient et relie. Mais lorsqu'il est nié, entravé ou utilisé à des fins de contrôle, il se transforme en lieu de vulnérabilité accrue [9]. Dans bien des cas, cette ambivalence n'est pas seulement théorique : elle se vit dans la chair même des religieuses. L'expérience spirituelle, au lieu de réconforter, devient alors le terrain d'une lutte intérieure, où la foi se mêle à la souffrance, et où l'âme peine à trouver un langage pour dire sa propre épreuve.

Synthèse critique : invisibilité, silence et vulnérabilité spirituelle

En croisant ces trois axes, on voit émerger une structure commune : le corps est normalisé et contraint à masquer ses fragilités, la parole est réprimée et privée d'espaces de légitimité, l'expérience spirituelle est ambivalente, tantôt ressource, tantôt blessure. Le modèle conceptuel naissant montre ainsi que la détresse non apparente des religieuses ne résulte pas seulement de facteurs individuels (psychopathologie personnelle), mais de l'articulation de trois niveaux : somatique, institutionnel et spirituel. C'est cette articulation qui pourrait expliquer la spécificité du mal-être en contexte religieux africain, et qui fonde la pertinence d'un modèle explicatif intitulé « Corps cachés, voix absentes ».

Proposition Du Modèle Conceptuel : « Corps Cachés, Voix Absentes »

Le modèle conceptuel « Corps Cachés, Voix Absentes » a pour ambition d'articuler trois dimensions constitutives de l'expérience religieuse et de la détresse psychique en contexte africain : la corporéité, le langage et l'environnement socio-religieux. Ces dimensions sont intrinsèquement liées à la perception du divin, qui se manifeste simultanément comme horizon transcendantal, cadre normatif et facteur de fragilité. Le postulat fondamental du modèle est que la vie consacrée, en promouvant un idéal de perfection spirituelle, engendre

des tensions au niveau du corps et de l'expression verbale. Ce qui devrait constituer des moyens dynamiques de connexion avec le divin se trouve paradoxalement neutralisé : le corps est « caché » (maîtrisé, occulté, réduit au silence quant à ses besoins et ses douleurs) et la parole est « absente » (contenue, censurée, discréditée). Ces deux dynamiques s'imbriquent et engendrent une vulnérabilité spirituelle dissimulée : une souffrance psychique profonde, non reconnue, qui s'insinue dans les ramifications de l'expérience spirituelle et sociale.

Expérience du Divin comme structure fondamentale

Au centre de ce cadre conceptuel se trouve la rencontre avec le sacré, une entité qui dépasse la simple dimension émotionnelle ou mystique individuelle. Elle constitue une structure anthropologique fondamentale qui façonne la perception de soi, les affects et la position dans le monde des religieuses. En d'autres termes, elle établit une grammaire existentielle, à la fois personnelle et socialement construite, qui confère une signification à leur identité et à leurs difficultés.

Une expérience contextuelle et médiatisée

La rencontre avec le sacré ne se produit jamais de manière isolée. Elle se manifeste dans un environnement institutionnel (la communauté religieuse, l'Église), culturel (les traditions africaines du sacré, les représentations du corps et de la voix féminine) et historique (héritages missionnaires, modèles de sainteté, structures patriarcales). Ainsi, elle est constamment influencée par des mécanismes symboliques : liturgie, rituels, prières, règles communautaires, mais aussi par des discours normatifs sur les qualités attendues d'une 'bonne religieuse' (obéissance, effacement, disponibilité, discrétion, silence). Cette influence implique que la relation avec le sacré n'est jamais entièrement autonome ou spontanée : elle est imprégnée de significations héritées, souvent intégrées de manière inconsciente, qui orientent les émotions, la prière et les souffrances.

Une ambivalence constitutive

Cette expérience présente une ambivalence fondamentale, qu'il est important de souligner pour comprendre son rôle structurant dans la vulnérabilité psychique. Pour de nombreuses religieuses, la rencontre avec le sacré nourrit une force intérieure, confère une signification transcendante aux épreuves et représente une ressource essentielle de résilience. L'aspiration spirituelle justifie leur choix de vie et leur procure un sentiment de cohérence identitaire. Inversement, cette même expérience peut devenir une source de souffrance lorsqu'elle est encadrée par des représentations idéalisées du sacrifice, de l'effacement ou de l'obéissance absolue. Dans ces cas, le sacré est perçu à travers des images exigeantes, voire culpabilisantes : Dieu qui demande de 'porter la croix', de 'se taire', de 's'effacer pour les autres'. La religieuse peut alors intérioriser la conviction que sa souffrance silencieuse est la seule voie possible vers la sainteté, transformant ainsi l'expérience spirituelle en une source de vulnérabilité psychique.

Une expérience du sacré comme espace de tension

Dans ce modèle, la rencontre avec le sacré apparaît comme un espace de tension dynamique entre aspiration spirituelle manifeste par le désir d'union avec le sacré, la quête de sens, l'élan transcendant qui donne cohérence à l'existence ; et la détresse psychique qui se lit par le sentiment d'abandon, d'isolement, de dévalorisation, qui émerge lorsque l'expérience est vécue sous le signe de l'inadéquation ('je ne prie pas assez', 'je ne suis pas assez sainte'), ou lorsqu'elle est étouffée par des injonctions institutionnelles au silence. Cette tension n'est pas fortuite : elle est inhérente à la relation avec le sacré dans les contextes religieux africains étudiés, où le sacré est à la fois une source de sens et un domaine d'exigence normative.

Structure relationnelle

Enfin, il faut souligner que la rencontre avec le sacré est fondamentalement relationnelle. Elle implique une interaction triangulaire entre la religieuse elle-même, avec son histoire personnelle, ses vulnérabilités et ses aspirations ; le sacré, conçu comme présence, absence ou appel, parfois consolateur, parfois exigeant ou silencieux ; la communauté et l'institution, qui prescrivent les formes légitimes d'accès à ce sacré et valident ou non les expériences spirituelles individuelles. C'est dans cet entrelacement que se forment des expériences tantôt émancipatrices, tantôt aliénantes.

En somme, la rencontre avec le sacré est le point central dialectique où se joue la tension entre l'aspiration spirituelle et la souffrance psychique. Elle est à la fois une ressource et un risque, un soutien et une fragilisation, car elle est toujours vécue dans un réseau d'influences institutionnelles, symboliques et culturelles.

Réalités corporelles dissimulées

Dans le contexte de la vie religieuse féminine, le corps persiste de manière implicite, oscillant entre une régulation extrême et une oblitération de sa visibilité. Cette contradiction peut être analysée à travers trois aspects distincts : le Corps ascétique et discipliné, le corps féminin et ses implications socioculturelles, le corps invisibilisé et ses répercussions psychiques

Le Corps ascétique et discipliné

Le corps des religieuses consacrées est d'abord appréhendé à travers un régime ascétique, c'est-à-dire une organisation de l'existence orientée vers la spiritualité. S'inscrivant dans la perspective foucauldienne des techniques de soi et des mécanismes disciplinaires [21], ce processus peut être interprété comme un ensemble de dispositifs qui structurent le corps afin qu'il devienne à la fois malléable et disponible, au service de l'institution et de la transcendance. Le quotidien de la religieuse est rythmé par des normes rigoureuses : calendriers de prière, jeûnes, silence, gestes ritualisés, modération alimentaire et vestimentaire. Ces pratiques instaurent une véritable grammaire corporelle, où chaque mouvement est codifié et inscrit dans une finalité spirituelle. Le corps, souvent considéré

dans le christianisme comme un lieu de tentation ou un frein à la vie spirituelle, est ici maîtrisé et dénué de ses excès. Cette discipline engendre une forme de dépossession subjective : le corps ne « m'appartient » plus, il devient la propriété de Dieu et de la communauté. La religieuse apprend à se détacher de ses besoins physiologiques, de ses désirs charnels, et même de ses signaux de souffrance (fatigue, maladie, faim). Le corps est rendu « transparent », censé ne pas interférer avec la vocation spirituelle. Cependant, ce processus d'effacement n'est jamais total : les douleurs, les désirs, les maladies réapparaissent, souvent dans un silence contraint, car leur expression est perçue comme un manque de foi ou une faiblesse spirituelle.

Dans ce contexte, la douleur physique ou psychique est rarement identifiée comme telle. Elle est symboliquement requalifiée par le discours religieux. La fatigue se transforme en participation au sacrifice du Christ, le manque ou le désir deviennent des « offrandes », et la maladie est perçue comme une « purification » ou une « épreuve rédemptrice ». Cette réinterprétation peut, certes, conférer un sens existentiel et une valorisation spirituelle à la souffrance, mais elle risque également d'entraîner un déni du vécu corporel : il n'est plus possible de dire simplement « j'ai mal », il faut plutôt affirmer « j'offre ma douleur ». L'expérience corporelle est ainsi confisquée par une rhétorique sacrificielle qui pourrait intensifier la souffrance par un silence imposé. Ce processus met en lumière une ambivalence. Le corps, discipliné, devient un instrument de dépassement de soi et de communion spirituelle. De nombreuses religieuses expriment la joie de se sentir libérées des impératifs de l'apparence ou de la sexualité normative. Cependant, cette libération a un coût : le refoulement des besoins corporels et la culpabilisation de toute tentative de les exprimer. Le corps pourrait être perçu non pas comme une ressource, mais comme un obstacle à surmonter, souvent au détriment de la santé physique et psychique. D'un point de vue psychologique, cette discipline corporelle engendre un double effet : elle soutient la construction identitaire de la religieuse en lui conférant une place et une signification symbolique. Toutefois, elle peut également provoquer une vulnérabilité psychique : troubles psychosomatiques, culpabilité face aux désirs, isolement dans la douleur, impossibilité de verbaliser ses souffrances. Ainsi, le « corps ascétique » est au cœur du paradoxe du modèle « corps cachés, voix absentes » : il est constamment mobilisé, contraint et interprété, mais jamais pleinement reconnu dans sa matérialité vécue.

Corps féminin et socioculturel

Le corps féminin, dans les sociétés africaines, est à la fois porteur de sacralité et objet de contraintes. Mbiti [1] rappelait combien la dimension spirituelle traverse toutes les étapes de la vie, inscrivant les femmes dans un réseau de significations religieuses et communautaires. Oyěwùmí [22], de son côté, a montré que la construction du genre en Afrique ne peut se comprendre qu'à partir des systèmes culturels propres, qui assignent aux femmes une place particulière dans l'ordre social et symbolique.

Pour les religieuses, ce corps consacré devient le lieu d'un paradoxe : il est célébré comme signe de don total, mais il est aussi surveillé, contrôlé et parfois nié dans ses besoins propres. Amadiume [23] a souligné que ces dynamiques reposent souvent sur une

réinvention patriarcale de la tradition africaine, où les femmes sont maintenues dans un rôle subalterne au nom d'une sacralité institutionnalisée. Ainsi, la vocation féminine, loin d'être un espace de libération, peut devenir un espace de contraintes, où l'obéissance prend le pas sur la reconnaissance du vécu intime. Pourtant, ce corps féminin n'est pas seulement passif face à la domination. Il invente, au quotidien, des formes de résistance. Comme l'a montré Nnaemeka [24] avec son concept de *Nego-Feminism*, les femmes africaines développent des stratégies de négociation dans les espaces les plus contraints. Les religieuses, elles aussi, déploient des tactiques discrètes pour concilier leur fidélité à la vocation et la préservation de leur équilibre personnel. Elles apprennent à composer avec les normes, à contourner certaines attentes, à faire entendre leur voix autrement.

Ainsi, le corps féminin en contexte religieux africain se situe à la croisée des chemins : il est sacré et instrumentalisé, reconnu et nié, contraint et inventif. Et c'est dans cette tension, entre assignation et créativité, que se joue une partie de l'expérience spirituelle et psychique des religieuses.

Le corps invisibilisé et ses répercussions psychiques

La convergence de dynamiques ascétiques et socioculturelles induit une occultation du corps de la religieuse. Cette occultation n'est pas seulement matérielle ou pratique, elle est aussi symbolique et psychique : le corps, bien qu'essentiellement présent, est relégué à l'arrière-plan, nié dans ses besoins et ses modes d'expression intrinsèques. Trois axes permettent de comprendre cette dissimulation et ses conséquences.

Dans le contexte de la vie consacrée, le corps est privé de ses vecteurs d'expression fondamentaux : Le plaisir est réinterprété comme distraction ou tentation. Le corps est privé de toute forme d'hédonisme, même élémentaire (repos, sensorialité, soins personnels), car il doit être constamment orienté vers l'offrande spirituelle. La maternité est volontairement refusée, ce qui prive la religieuse d'une dimension socialement valorisée de son identité féminine. Le corps est ainsi dénué d'un langage biologique et symbolique prépondérant. La séduction et les manifestations de féminité (esthétique, ornementation, expression de la sensualité) sont réprimées ou neutralisées par les codes vestimentaires et comportementaux. En contestant ces aspects, l'institution impose une forme de neutralisation corporelle, qui engendre une dépossession progressive de la subjectivité physique. Le corps n'est plus vécu comme un espace d'expression, mais comme un outil de conformité spirituelle.

Ce corps, rendu invisible, n'a pas la possibilité de s'exprimer. La souffrance physique (fatigue, maladie, désir, douleur) est soit occultée, soit réinterprétée comme faiblesse morale. Une religieuse qui exprime un malaise corporel peut être perçue comme déficiente en foi ou en courage spirituel. Ce silence imposé favorise une intériorisation de la culpabilité : culpabilité de ressentir du désir, alors que la chasteté est requise ; culpabilité de ressentir de la fatigue ou une maladie, vécues comme un manque d'abandon à Dieu ; culpabilité de vouloir exister dans sa féminité, perçue comme vanité ou orgueil. Cette culpabilité engendre un clivage psychique ([25] ; [26]) : la religieuse apprend à dissocier son expérience

corporelle de son identité spirituelle. Elle expérimente une dissonance constante entre ce que son corps manifeste et ce que l'institution attend d'elle.

L'occultation du corps entraîne une fragilisation de l'identité physique et psychique. Comme l'a souligné Ricoeur [27], le corps est une médiation essentielle de l'identité narrative : il inscrit l'individu dans une histoire vécue, constituée de sensations, d'émotions et d'expériences incarnées. En contestant cette dimension, la religieuse court le risque d'une identité partielle, amputée de sa dimension physique. Cette fragilité se manifeste à travers : des troubles psychosomatiques, où le corps, réduit au silence, s'exprime par la maladie (insomnies, douleurs diffuses, migraines, tensions chroniques) ; des affects dépressifs, liés au sentiment d'effacement et à l'impossibilité de faire reconnaître sa souffrance ; une difficulté de subjectivation, car l'expérience corporelle, au lieu de nourrir l'identité, devient source de malaise et de honte. L'occultation du corps engendre une forme de souffrance inexprimée, où le langage physique, pourtant fondamental, est contraint au silence ou à la dissimulation. Le corps devient un espace d'expression feutrée, lieu où se rejouent à la fois la discipline institutionnelle et la marginalisation socioculturelle. Le corps occulté ne représente pas seulement une réalité spirituelle ou institutionnelle : il constitue le fondement d'une vulnérabilité psychique profonde. Privé d'expressions vitales, accablé de culpabilité et fragilisé dans son identité, il devient l'un des points névralgiques de la souffrance silencieuse des religieuses.

Les voix absentes

Dans un contexte religieux, l'expression verbale est rarement neutre et est soumise à des mécanismes d'autorité régulateurs [21]. Le langage transcende sa fonction d'instrument d'expression individuelle pour devenir un outil de légitimation, de contrôle et de reproduction institutionnelle. Pour les femmes religieuses, l'acte de parole s'inscrit dans un cadre discursif prescrit, où certaines expressions sont autorisées, valorisées, voire sacralisées, tandis que d'autres sont proscrites, ignorées ou délégitimées.

La parole comme assujettissement

La religieuse est incitée à utiliser sa voix dans un registre discursif normatif, structuré autour de trois dimensions principales : la prière et l'éloge, adressées à la divinité ; l'obéissance et la réitération des énoncés institutionnels ; et enfin le récit de vocation, construit selon des modèles conventionnels valorisant l'appel, l'abnégation et la satisfaction du renoncement. Ce langage imposé façonne une voix docile, orientée vers l'élévation spirituelle et l'adhésion institutionnelle. Le témoignage acquiert ici une dimension performative : il ne se limite pas à décrire l'expérience intime de la religieuse, mais sert à confirmer la validité de l'ordre religieux auquel elle appartient. A l'inverse, toute expression discordante (doléances, doutes, souffrances, critiques) se voit réprimée, minimisée ou réinterprétée. Dire « je souffre », « je doute », ou « je ne me sens pas à ma place » dépasse alors le cadre d'une confidence personnelle pour devenir une transgression collective, perçue comme signe de faiblesse spirituelle ou de rébellion institutionnelle. Comme l'a montré Butler [16], le langage est un dispositif de pouvoir : il produit des sujets tout en

limitant ce qu'ils peuvent dire. Dans ce cadre, la religieuse intériorise une équation délétère : exprimer sa pensée librement = transgresser ; se taire = progresser spirituellement.

Cette logique installe une valorisation paradoxale du silence, présenté comme un signe de sainteté, d'humilité et d'effacement de soi. Mais ce silence n'est pas neutre : il agit comme une contrainte intériorisée, qui transforme l'obéissance en disparition de soi. Fanon [17] avait déjà montré comment un tel mutisme imposé conduit à une désubjectivation : la voix personnelle s'efface pour laisser place à une parole formatée, qui ne traduit pas l'expérience intime mais la soumet. Mbembe [11] complète ce constat en rappelant que ce type de silence institutionnalisé fonctionne comme un mécanisme politique d'invisibilisation des subjectivités. Ainsi, la parole religieuse, loin de constituer un espace de libération, devient un instrument de normalisation. Elle n'exprime pas la subjectivité, elle l'assujettit. Le langage personnel s'estompe derrière le langage sacralisé, et l'expression individuelle se dissout dans l'écho de l'institution.

Le processus de dépossession

S'appuyant sur les travaux de [10], il est manifeste que l'espace sacré ne constitue jamais un terrain neutre d'expression, mais s'agence autour d'une hiérarchie discursive où certaines énonciations sont considérées comme légitimes tandis que d'autres sont dévalorisées. Au sein des communautés religieuses, cette hiérarchie se traduit par une appropriation de la prise de parole, où seule la voix institutionnelle (celle des autorités, des principes régissant la vie communautaire, des textes canoniques interprétés par l'instance dirigeante) détient une valeur normative. Par conséquent, l'expérience personnelle de la religieuse ne peut s'exprimer directement ; sa voix doit subir un processus de filtrage, d'encadrement et de reformulation afin de s'aligner sur les termes acceptables de la tradition et de l'institution. Ce processus engendre ce que Boulaga qualifie de « dépossession de la parole » [10], c'est-à-dire la perte du droit pour la religieuse d'être reconnue comme l'auteure de son propre récit. Sa voix devient médiatisée, annexée par un discours préexistant et transcendant. Ainsi, l'utilisation du pronom personnel « je » dans l'espace sacré pourrait constituer déjà une transgression, étant donné que l'individualité de la religieuse devrait s'effacer au profit du « nous » institutionnel ou du « Tu » adressé à la divinité.

Dans une perspective plus large, Mbembe [11] éclaire cette dynamique en la recontextualisant au sein des structures de pouvoir africaines. Dans de nombreux contextes postcoloniaux, le silence imposé ne se limite pas à une absence d'expression, mais se révèle être une méthode de domination. Le silence n'est pas seulement subi ; il est construit, maintenu et valorisé comme une vertu politique et spirituelle. L'expression individuelle est perçue comme une menace pour l'ordre collectif, et son effacement devient la condition nécessaire à l'appartenance. La religieuse qui cherche à exprimer sa souffrance peut donc se heurter à un double obstacle. D'abord ecclésial, car l'institution religieuse encourage la soumission, l'effacement de soi et l'adhésion inconditionnelle. Les propos de contestation ou de douleur peuvent être interprétés comme un manque de foi ou un acte de désobéissance.

Ensuite culturel parce que dans de nombreuses traditions africaines, la femme est encore considérée comme la gardienne du silence et de la discrétion, garante de l'harmonie familiale et communautaire. Rompre ce silence revient à fragiliser la cohésion du groupe et à enfreindre une norme implicite d'Ubuntu qui privilégie le collectif au détriment de l'expression individuelle. Cette dépossession ne se limite pas à une contrainte extérieure ; elle est intériorisée. La religieuse apprend à censurer instinctivement ses mots, à reformuler sa souffrance dans un langage acceptable, à se taire par automatisme. Elle vit ce que Ricœur [27] nommerait une crise de la médiation narrative : son récit de soi est fragmenté, incomplet, car les éléments douloureux ou ambivalents ne trouvent ni lieu ni légitimité pour être exprimés. Par conséquent, la souffrance se manifeste d'autres manières : à travers le corps souffrant, la fatigue persistante, les troubles psychosomatiques, ou encore par des prières ambivalentes qui mêlent plainte et soumission. La parole confisquée ne disparaît pas ; elle se dresse autrement par d'autres moyens plus préjudiciables sur le plan psychique.

La voix comme entrave à la guérison

Selon Ricœur [27], la narration dépasse la simple reproduction de l'expérience vécue : elle se révèle un acte constitutif de l'identité. L'expression de la souffrance initiale amorce un processus de structuration, d'organisation et d'intégration au sein d'un récit de soi. La mise en récit ouvre un espace de symbolisation, permettant à l'événement pénible d'accéder à la conceptualisation et au partage. En d'autres termes, le langage possède une fonction thérapeutique intrinsèque : il transforme la souffrance brute en expérience élaborée, participant ainsi au rétablissement. Cependant, dans le contexte de la vie religieuse, la religieuse est privée de ce processus narratif. Ses difficultés (physiques, affectives, psychologiques ou spirituelles) ne trouvent pas de lieu d'expression légitime. Lorsqu'elle cherche à exprimer son malaise, sa parole est fréquemment réinterprétée, banalisée, voire suspectée. Le discours institutionnel et communautaire impose une relecture spirituelle de la douleur, devant être transformée en offrande, sacrifice ou manifestation de foi. Ainsi, la religieuse n'est pas autorisée à formuler : « Je souffre », mais plutôt : « J'offre ma souffrance ».

Cette appropriation du récit induit une désobjectivation. La religieuse n'est plus perçue comme un individu singulier, dépositaire d'une histoire, mais comme une fonction : celle qui prie, qui sert, qui obéit, qui représente l'institution. Le « je » de la religieuse s'efface derrière le « rôle » qui lui est assigné. Elle devient un instrument au service d'un idéal, une voix qui répète ce que l'institution attend, mais qui ne s'exprime plus de manière autonome. Les conséquences psychologiques sont considérables : La douleur inexprimée se cristallise, demeurant à l'état de vécu brut, sans possibilité de signification. Elle ne peut donc être intégrée dans l'histoire personnelle, favorisant ainsi des états de souffrance diffuse ou de détresse silencieuse. La religieuse perd la capacité de se considérer comme un sujet narratif, capable de lier ses expériences dans une continuité biographique. Cela engendre une fragilisation de l'identité et une vulnérabilité accrue face aux crises existentielles. Le non-dit s'accumule, se déplace et s'exprime par des voies alternatives : le corps (somatisations,

affections inexpliquées), les conduites (retrait, apathie, épuisement spirituel), ou des formes indirectes de langage (prières ambivalentes, écrits personnels, gestes symboliques). L'absence de voix n'est pas une simple carence : elle constitue un obstacle actif au rétablissement. Elle entrave le processus d'élaboration psychique et spirituelle, enfermant la religieuse dans une douleur sans récit, dans un silence qui devient pathogène. En définitive, la voix empêchée ne prive pas seulement la religieuse de l'expression ; elle lui retire la possibilité même de se constituer en tant que sujet de sa propre histoire. L'idéal communautaire et institutionnel, en confisquant la parole, transforme la souffrance en une expérience isolée, sans témoin et sans transformation potentielle.

Ancrage Socioculturel Africain

Pour appréhender l'expérience des religieuses africaines, il est impératif de considérer la densité de leur environnement socioculturel. En effet, trois aspects fondamentaux de la culture africaine contribuent à exacerber et à complexifier les mécanismes d'occultation du corps et de limitation de l'expression : une structure de pouvoir religieuse dominée par les hommes, la priorité accordée à la communauté incarnée par l'Ubuntu, et la sanctification du renoncement.

Patriarcat religieux

Au sein de l'Église africaine, à l'instar de nombreuses institutions religieuses à travers le monde, la hiérarchie reste fortement différenciée selon le genre et prédominée par les hommes. Les postes de décision et d'autorité sont majoritairement occupés par des figures masculines – prêtres, évêques, supérieurs masculins – tandis que les religieuses se trouvent reléguées à des positions subalternes, souvent restreintes à des rôles éducatifs, de soins ou domestiques. Cette architecture hiérarchique ne se limite pas à une simple organisation : elle génère un système symbolique où la perspective féminine est minimisée, voire rendue inaudible. Comme l'a démontré Boulaga [10], l'espace sacré est caractérisé par une appropriation institutionnelle du discours, signifiant que seule la voix masculine, investie d'autorité sacrée, est reconnue comme légitime. La religieuse, même lorsqu'elle possède une expérience spirituelle profonde ou une expertise théologique, voit son point de vue ramené à une dimension secondaire. Cette dynamique induit une double occultation : d'une part, celle du corps féminin, réduit à une fonction de service ; d'autre part, celle de l'expression, confinée à des registres d'obéissance et de soumission. La structure de pouvoir religieuse dominée par les hommes fonctionne ainsi comme un système de domination qui intensifie le silence imposé et compromet la possibilité pour les religieuses de devenir actrices de leur propre expérience.

Ubuntu et priorité accordée à la communauté

La philosophie de l'Ubuntu, popularisée par Mbiti [1] et Desmond Tutu, repose sur le principe que « je suis parce que nous sommes ». L'identité individuelle ne se construit pas dans l'indépendance, mais dans l'affiliation et la contribution à la communauté. Cette conception, profondément ancrée dans de nombreuses cultures africaines, valorise

l'harmonie, la solidarité et la cohésion sociale. Bien que cette vision encourage des dynamiques communautaires positives (entraide, fraternité, esprit de corps), elle peut aussi représenter un obstacle important à l'expression individuelle de la souffrance. En effet, exprimer une détresse personnelle peut être interprété comme une perturbation de l'équilibre communautaire, voire comme une manifestation d'égoïsme. Pour les religieuses, ce contexte engendre un conflit psychique : exprimer sa souffrance implique le risque d'être perçue comme une menace pour la cohésion du groupe ; se taire signifie sacrifier son bien-être pour préserver l'unité. Ainsi, l'Ubuntu, lorsqu'il est appliqué de manière rigide et non réflexive, peut contribuer à renforcer la dynamique de voix absentes, en enfermant la religieuse dans une loyauté silencieuse envers la communauté.

Sanctification du renoncement

Le troisième aspect est celui de la sanctification du renoncement, résultat d'une rencontre entre traditions chrétiennes et valeurs africaines. Le christianisme met en avant l'endurance, le renoncement et la participation à la souffrance du Christ (« porter sa croix »). Ces représentations se combinent avec des traditions africaines qui magnifient la patience, la force et la résilience face à l'épreuve. De cette convergence émerge une culture spirituelle où la souffrance physique, psychique et sociale n'est pas seulement tolérée, mais valorisée comme une vertu héroïque. Supporter sans se plaindre devient un signe de fidélité, de sainteté, voire d'élection divine. Dans ce cadre, des réalités cliniques telles que la dépression, l'épuisement professionnel ou le stress chronique sont aisément réinterprétées dans un langage théologique : elles deviennent « purification », « épreuve », « participation aux souffrances du Christ ». Cette sanctification a deux conséquences majeures :

- Elle neutralise le langage clinique qui pourrait reconnaître et nommer la souffrance psychique, en le remplaçant par un discours de valorisation spirituelle.
- Elle culpabilise la plainte, car exprimer son malaise revient implicitement à manquer de foi ou à rejeter la croix qui a été donnée à porter.

Ainsi, la religieuse apprend à taire son corps souffrant et son expression blessée, au nom d'une fidélité spirituelle qui se transforme insidieusement en piège psychique. Ces trois aspects (structure de pouvoir religieuse dominée par les hommes, priorité accordée à la communauté et sanctification du renoncement) constituent un fondement socioculturel puissant qui renforce la dynamique décrite dans le modèle « Corps cachés, Voix absentes ». Ils expliquent pourquoi la vulnérabilité psychique des religieuses africaines demeure souvent invisible, étouffée et réinterprétée dans un cadre spirituel qui, au lieu d'accueillir la souffrance, la transforme en signe de sainteté. En résumé, le contexte africain n'est pas simplement un arrière-plan, mais un facteur structurant de l'occultation du corps et de la limitation de l'expression. Il contribue à transformer une expérience spirituelle authentique en une zone de vulnérabilité silencieuse, où la souffrance psychique demeure difficilement reconnaissable et légitime.

Vers Une Clinique De La Reconnaissance

Dans l'épreuve du silence et du stigmate, ce qui est le plus meurtri, ce n'est pas seulement le corps ou la voix, mais le sentiment d'exister pleinement aux yeux des autres. Honneth [28] a montré que la reconnaissance est une condition essentielle de la constitution de l'identité : être vu, entendu, estimé, ce n'est pas un luxe, c'est une nécessité vitale. Sans ce regard qui valide l'existence, le sujet se délite et sombre dans la honte ou l'invisibilité. Pour les religieuses en souffrance, la reconnaissance manquante fragilise le socle même de leur vocation. Ricoeur [27] en parlant du « parcours de la reconnaissance », éclaire bien cette dynamique : reconnaître l'autre, ce n'est pas seulement lui accorder une place, c'est aussi lui restituer la capacité d'agir et d'interpréter son propre vécu. Là où l'institution impose le silence, la reconnaissance ouvre un espace de parole et de subjectivité retrouvée.

Cette dimension clinique ne se limite pas au soin psychologique : elle touche aussi au spirituel. Moltmann [29], dans sa *Théologie de l'espérance*, rappelle que l'expérience religieuse authentique n'est pas d'abord conformité à une règle, mais ouverture vers un avenir possible, même au cœur de la souffrance. Pour les religieuses, être reconnues dans leur fragilité signifie non seulement guérir d'une blessure psychique, mais aussi retrouver la promesse d'une espérance, celle d'une communauté capable de les accueillir dans leur entièreté. Ainsi, la clinique de la reconnaissance se situe à la croisée du psychique, du social et du spirituel. Elle ne consiste pas simplement à réparer des blessures intérieures, mais à redonner aux religieuses la possibilité d'exister pleinement, avec leurs forces et leurs fragilités. Dans ce mouvement, l'identité fragmentée peut peu à peu se recomposer, et la vocation se vivre non plus comme un fardeau imposé, mais comme un chemin partagé.

Établir des espaces d'échange sécurisés

Une pratique clinique centrée sur la validation suppose d'abord la mise en place de lieux protégés où la parole peut circuler. Ces espaces doivent offrir aux religieuses la possibilité de partager leurs expériences somatiques et spirituelles sans crainte d'être jugées, culpabilisées ou sanctionnées. Ils peuvent prendre la forme de groupes de discussion, d'entretiens cliniques adaptés au contexte religieux ou encore de rencontres communautaires inspirées des pratiques africaines de concertation, mais réorientées vers l'écoute active et la reconnaissance de la fragilité personnelle. L'objectif est de transformer l'expression de la douleur souvent disqualifiée en une parole authentique, capable de générer du lien social, de la légitimité et de la guérison [30].

Valoriser le corps comme médiation spirituelle

Le second axe consiste à réhabiliter le corps comme espace de médiation spirituelle et psychique. Le corps de la religieuse n'est pas seulement un instrument de service ou une entité à contrôler : il est un lieu où se révèle à la fois le divin et l'expérience humaine. Concrètement, cela implique d'intégrer la santé physique et psychique dans les cursus de formation et de vie religieuse ; de reconnaître que les besoins physiologiques (repos, alimentation équilibrée, soins médicaux, affectivité) sont compatibles avec la vie consacrée ;

et de repenser l'ascèse non comme une négation du corps, mais comme une discipline respectueuse de son intégrité. Cette revalorisation permet de rompre avec la logique du « corps caché » et d'inscrire la vie religieuse dans une dynamique d'incarnation : la spiritualité ne se joue pas contre le corps, mais à travers lui [31].

Institutionnaliser la reconnaissance de la fragilité

Une pratique clinique axée sur la validation ne peut se limiter à l'individu : elle doit devenir institutionnelle. Cela requiert une transformation profonde des pratiques ecclésiales et communautaires. Plusieurs pistes sont envisageables :

- Former les responsables religieux (supérieurs, prêtres, évêques) à la compréhension de la détresse psychique et à l'accueil de l'expression féminine.
- Mettre en place des protocoles d'écoute systématiques, comme des évaluations régulières de supervision psychologique et spirituelle.
- Reconnaître la fragilité comme une composante humaine de la vie religieuse, et non comme un signe de faiblesse spirituelle. Cela suppose un travail théologique de relecture des catégories de sacrifice, de croix et de silence, afin d'ouvrir un espace à l'expression du vécu somatique et psychique.

Ainsi, l'institution cesse d'être un lieu de confiscation pour devenir un espace de validation mutuelle, où la souffrance est accueillie comme une expérience à la fois spirituelle et humaine [30].

Vers une pastorale et une anthropologie du soin

Cette pratique clinique axée sur la validation peut s'articuler avec une pastorale du soin et une anthropologie relationnelle nourries du contexte africain. L'Ubuntu, compris non pas comme dissolution de l'individu dans le collectif, mais comme validation mutuelle des fragilités, peut constituer un cadre éthique fécond. La culture africaine, riche de ses pratiques de solidarité, de concertation et de médiation communautaire, peut être réinterprétée comme ressource : elle permet d'articuler l'individuel et le collectif, la fragilité et la force, le silence et l'expression ([1] ; [30]).

La transition des « corps cachés » et des « voix absentes » vers une pratique clinique axée sur la validation représente une transformation radicale :

- Pour les religieuses, il s'agit de se réapproprier un statut de sujet, en retrouvant une relation positive avec leur être physique et en réinvestissant l'expression comme outil de guérison.
- Pour les institutions religieuses, il s'agit de se reconfigurer en espaces de validation, où la fragilité n'est plus un tabou, mais une réalité à accueillir.

- Pour la psychologie et la théologie, il s'agit de développer un dialogue interdisciplinaire permettant d'appréhender la souffrance spirituelle comme une expérience psychologique légitime, et non comme un simple déficit de foi.

Ainsi, la pratique clinique axée sur la validation ne constitue pas seulement un horizon thérapeutique : elle devient un projet éthique et ecclésial, visant à rétablir l'équilibre entre spiritualité, subjectivité et humanité [31].

Conclusion

Somme toute, cet article a présenté le concept des « corps occultés » et des « voix tus » comme cadre interprétatif pour comprendre les formes particulières de fragilité psychique rencontrées par les religieuses africaines. Ce modèle met en lumière un paradoxe : l'expérience subjective du divin, censée être un lieu d'émancipation, peut se transformer en vecteur de mutisme et d'effacement lorsque le corps est ignoré et que la parole est réprimée. Nous avons montré que cette dynamique repose sur une double logique : d'une part, des structures institutionnelles patriarcales qui relèguent les religieuses dans une position subordonnée au sein de l'Église ; d'autre part, des principes socioculturels africains – l'Ubuntu, la prééminence du collectif, la valorisation du dévouement – qui accentuent la difficulté à dire une douleur intime. Ainsi, ce qui devrait relever d'un trouble psychologique ou d'un malaise subjectif est trop souvent recodé en termes de dévotion spirituelle, contribuant à la dissimulation des affections intérieures.

Au-delà du constat, nous avons esquissé une perspective : une clinique de la considération. Elle consiste à restaurer la visibilité du corps comme médiation spirituelle et psychique, à créer des espaces protégés de parole, et à institutionnaliser la reconnaissance de la vulnérabilité dans la vie religieuse. Elle appelle un remaniement théologique, qui relise les notions de sacrifice, de croix et de silence, non plus dans une logique de dénégation, mais dans une dynamique d'incarnation et d'humanité. Ce modèle ouvre aussi des pistes pour la recherche. Sur le plan psychologique, il encourage le recours à des méthodologies qualitatives capables de saisir l'expérience vécue de la souffrance spirituelle, souvent invisibilisée par des grilles biomédicales ou normatives. Sur le plan théologique, il invite à repenser la vie consacrée à partir de la reconnaissance du corps et de la voix des femmes. Sur le plan anthropologique, il propose une relecture de l'Ubuntu et des traditions africaines du soin, non pas comme dissolution de l'individu dans le collectif, mais comme cadre de reconnaissance mutuelle des fragilités.

Par-dessus tout, la transition de l'invisibilité vers la reconnaissance n'est pas seulement un projet clinique : elle est aussi un dessein théologique et ecclésial. Reconnaître le mutisme et la souffrance des religieuses comme des manifestations de leur humanité (et non comme un déficit de foi) constitue une exigence d'écoute, d'accompagnement et de reconnaissance authentiques. Comme le rappelle Patel [30], toute approche de la santé mentale, pour être juste, doit tenir compte du contexte social, culturel et spirituel dans lequel la souffrance

prend forme. C'est à ce prix seulement que l'espérance pourra redevenir partage, et que la vie religieuse pourra se vivre dans sa vérité la plus incarnée.

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Cadre normatif et réglementaire de la gestion décentralisée de l'Enseignement Technique et Professionnel au Cameroun

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Résumé

La décentralisation s'identifie à un changement de mode de régulation sociale des politiques publiques ainsi qu'à un processus d'ajustement en matière de gouvernance locale. Ce chapitre met en relief, le déphasage observé entre cadre normatif, décentralisation et la gestion de l'enseignement technique et professionnel (ETP) au Cameroun. Les jalons de la théorie de la régulation de Crozier et Friedberg (1977) mettent ici en lumière la manière dont les organisations et les systèmes sociaux sont régulés et contrôlés dans un tel contexte. Le cheminement méthodologique employé ici est qualitatif. Il s'appuie sur un échantillon hétérogène entre (CTD, responsables au sein de grandes entreprises et quelques chefs d'établissements) à partir d'une analyse thématique inspirée de (Huberman & Miles, 1991). Un tel procédé a permis de mieux appréhender l'analyse de contenus ainsi que leur interprétation. Au demeurant, l'on retient des résultats obtenus que, l'effectivité de l'usage du cadre normatif et réglementaire dans la praxis de la gestion décentralisée de l'éducation favorise une meilleure structuration de l'ETP en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun.

Mots clés :

Cadre normatif ; Gestion décentralisée ; Enseignement Technique et Professionnel.

Introduction

Selon la définition de l'Organisation pour la coopération et le développement économique (OCDE, 2020), le cadre normatif est « l'ensemble des règles, des normes et des principes qui régissent un domaine spécifique et qui sont établis par les autorités publiques ou par les parties prenantes concernées » (p. 12). Il s'agit entre autres : des lois, des règlements, des décrets, des circulaires, des normes techniques, des codes de conduite. Il peut également inclure des principes et des valeurs qui guident les actions et les décisions des acteurs concernés. Le concept de décentralisation quant à lui renvoie à un choix stratégique de gouvernance des organisations qui met l'accent sur la participation de plus en plus accrue



des entités ou collectivités autonomes à la prise de décision locale. Cette implication et cette autonomie influencent positivement le développement local et améliorent l'adaptabilité des politiques publiques. Or dans ce contexte, la multiplicité des instances décisionnelles implique une polarité institutionnelle. En effet, celle-ci en revanche fait référence à la tension entre deux ou plusieurs instances de décision autour d'une institution. C'est le cas des satellites de la centralisation et de la décentralisation qui cohabitent et s'entremêlent au niveau local au Cameroun. Parler de cadre normatif dans cette étude, revient à mettre en avant la gestion participative de l'enseignement technique et professionnel (ETP) qui implique les différents pôles institutionnels qui encadrent son fonctionnement. Il est évident que, cet ordre d'enseignement soit régi par des cadrages réglementaires, normatifs et principiels, tant au niveau de son organisation, sa mise en œuvre qu'au niveau de son fonctionnement. La gestion participative ici est une approche de gestion qui implique la participation active des membres d'une organisation ou d'une communauté dans les processus de décision et de gestion. Selon Dubois (2006), la gestion participative est « une approche de gestion qui vise à impliquer les membres d'une organisation ou d'une communauté dans les processus de décision et de gestion, afin de favoriser la collaboration, la communication et la responsabilité collective » (p. 12). En guise d'éclairage, l'enseignement technique et professionnel désigne, un niveau de formation qui vise à préparer une catégorie d'apprenants à des métiers spécifiques en leur fournissant des compétences pratiques et théoriques. Il se concentre sur des disciplines techniques et professionnelles en lien avec les secteurs industriels, commerciaux et des services. De ce fait, son élaboration, sa mise en œuvre et son fonctionnement en terme de gestion obéit à un cadrage institutionnel pluriel. Il est donc question ici d'émettre un pont effectif entre cette polarité institutionnelle et le cadre normatif de gestion dudit ordre d'enseignement en contexte de décentralisation à l'aune des exigences du développement local au Cameroun.

1. Le problème dans son contexte d'étude

L'efficacité d'une organisation, d'une institution ou de tout autre entité socialement constituée passe par le respect strict, scrupuleux du cadre normatif qui le régit ainsi que sa mise en cohérence. Ce cadre normatif est généralement fondé sur des politiques publiques, réglementaires et même politiques visant à obtenir des résultats spécifiques dans la gestion globale de la cité. L'épineuse réalité de l'opacité observée dans la gestion des institutions éducatives n'est pas un fait nouveau dans notre contexte. Partir des états généraux de l'éducation de 1995 au Cameroun, l'on peut aisément laisser entrevoir une réalité qui brise le pont entre la communauté éducative et l'appareil de gestion au sein du système éducatif tout entier.

Une précision du ministre de l'éducation de cette époque au cours desdites assises est faite en ces termes, « l'œuvre de l'éducation est la somme des apports de tous ». Pour preuve, ladite assise dans un bref rappel historique a rassemblé d'importantes personnalités à l'instar des : membres du gouvernement, chefs de mission diplomatiques accrédités au Cameroun, représentants des organismes internationaux, représentants d'institutions

bilatérales et multilatérales et enfin des responsables des secteurs publics et privés. (Etats Généraux de l'éducation de 1995 au Cameroun).

Dans cette foulée, le message du représentant du Directeur général de l'UNESCO en ce temps lançait déjà un appel à l'implication de tous les partenaires de l'éducation à la réforme et à la gestion des institutions éducatives. (EGEC, 1995, p.3). Ce fût également le cas avec l'intervention du Directeur du programme Afrique à ONUDI qui affirmait qu'il était nécessaire que les entreprises économiques locales apportent à l'organisation scolaire les soutiens scientifiques et technologiques. p.7. Nous considérons également, le cas de l'intervention du Président du Groupe Inter-patronal du Cameroun (GICAM), par ailleurs Directeur des Brasseries du Cameroun en ces temps. L'orateur en guise de suggestion posait déjà le problème de la participation des entreprises à la politique d'enseignement ; d'emploi ; de l'implication active des autres partenaires éducatifs (communauté locale, enseignants, élèves, parents d'élèves).

Dans un prisme normatif, une telle assise aura impulsé en 1998, la mise en œuvre de la Loi n°98/004 du 14 avril 1998 portant orientation de l'éducation au Cameroun. Celle-ci s'applique selon le titre 1 des dispositions générales de l'article premier alinéa 2, aux enseignements primaires, secondaires général et technique. Selon l'art.2 alinéa 3 dudit titre, il est clairement stipulé que : « les partenaires privés concourent à l'offre de l'éducation ». Plus en aval, l'art.12 du titre 2, traitant de l'élaboration, de la mise en œuvre de la politique éducative et du financement de l'éducation, ladite loi stipule que : « Le financement de l'éducation est assuré par : les dotations budgétaires de l'État, les allocations budgétaires des collectivités territoriales décentralisées, les contributions des partenaires de l'éducation, les dons et legs, ainsi que toute autre contribution prévue par la loi ». Allant dans le même sens de ce cadrage normatif, le titre 3 de ladite loi d'orientation, en son article 20, alinéa 1 stipule que : « Les milieux professionnels sont, en tant que de besoin, associés à l'élaboration et à la mise en œuvre de la politique de formation par alternance, des contenus et moyens de la formation ainsi qu'à l'évaluation et à la validation des résultats de cette formation ».

De plus, la dynamique portée par la politique de la gouvernance locale exprimée par la décentralisation accorde une plus-value à cette problématique de gestion de l'enseignement technique et professionnel au Cameroun. Selon le livre premier du cadre général portant code de la décentralisation en son art.5 : « La décentralisation consiste en un transfert par l'Etat, aux Collectivités Territoriales, de compétences particulières et de moyens appropriés ». De ce fait, la région, de par la compétence éducative a pour mission ; « la création, l'équipement, la gestion, l'entretien, la maintenance des lycées et collèges de la Région » art.271a. Par ailleurs, les contenus et les moyens de la formation, l'évaluation et la validation des résultats de la formation sont entre autres le créneau du rôle qui leur est dévolu en matière d'offre éducative mais voué au silence malgré le cadre normatif établi à propos et susmentionné comme le souligne l'article 20 de la loi d'orientation de 98 au Cameroun.

Or le sous-secteur de l'enseignement technique est resté fortement adossé sur l'Etat qui ne ménage aucun effort pour sa mise en œuvre progressive, mais insuffisante au regard de la démographie sans cesse croissante. L'on note une quasi absence des formations en alternance, une question des stages en entreprises mal formulée et parfois inexistante, une implication superficielle des entreprises locales dans la formation ainsi que dans l'élaboration des contenus de formation, un manque de contribution financière desdites entreprises ou encore celle des élites locales dans ce sous-secteur névralgique de l'éducation, du sous équipement par les CTD des ateliers de formation malgré les évolutions techniques et technologiques que draine le monde ambiant.

Les défis de l'enseignement technique et professionnel sont pourtant restés pressants et impératifs. La nécessité de produire un capital humain de haut niveau et compétitif s'invite sur la table de l'économie du savoir. Selon la Stratégie Nationale de Développement (SND30) au Cameroun, les projets structurants et l'industrialisation du Cameroun passent par la formation professionnelle de haut niveau.

Cependant nous observons et ce, malgré ce cadrage normatif, que l'Association des Parents d'élèves et Enseignants (APEE) est restée la seule entité véritablement hissée comme partie prenante à l'enseignement secondaire de façon générale malgré la faible implication, mais alors progressives des CTD dans ladite politique. Ce qui pose ainsi un véritable problème de déphasage entre le cadrage normatif et son applicabilité dans le système de gestion de l'enseignement technique et professionnel au Cameroun. Ce qui rend inefficace l'encadrement inhérent à sa politique de gestion en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun.

2. Du questionnement et hypothèse conceptuel

En quoi l'effectivité de l'usage du cadre normatif dans la praxis de gestion favorise-t-elle une meilleure structuration de l'ETP en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun ?

2.1 Réflexions secondaires

Q^{s1}. De quelle manière la stricte cohérence entre l'axe pédagogique structuré et son effectivité dans la praxis participe-t-elle à la gestion efficace de l'enseignement technique et professionnel au Cameroun ?

Q^{s2}. En quoi est-ce que l'application effective de l'implication des entreprises dans la politique de formation concoure-t-elle à la gestion efficace de l'enseignement technique et professionnel au Cameroun ?

Q^{s3}. Quels sont les principes inhérents du droit à l'éducation susceptibles d'œuvrer à un meilleur encadrement administratif de l'enseignement technique et professionnel au Cameroun ?

2.2 Hypothèse conceptuelle de l'étude

Elle est formulée sous la base théorique. Les raisons sous-jacentes étant que ni la théorie, ni la revue critique de la littérature et ni son cadre conceptuel ne sont encore clairement définis. Il s'agit ici simplement de la mise en relief des concepts qui orientent l'intention observée de l'étude. Ceci étant, ladite hypothèse se formule comme suite : *Une effectivité de l'usage du cadre normatif dans la praxis de gestion favorise une meilleure structuration de l'ETP en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun.*

Posée ainsi, cette étude établit en guise d'objectif général l'ambition de lier l'efficacité du cadre normatif dans la réussite de praxis de gestion de l'enseignement technique en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun. Par ailleurs : la stricte cohérence de l'axe pédagogique structuré et définit par ledit cadrage ; l'effectivité de l'implication des entreprises dans la politique de formation et le respect des principes inhérents au droit à l'éducation regroupent des variables que cette étude vise à corrélérer afin d'établir un lien étroit avec une gestion lisible et plus efficace de l'enseignement technique et professionnel en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun.

3. Cadre conceptuel et revue critique de la littérature

- Cadre normatif et efficacité institutionnelle Le cadre normatif est un concept utilisé en sciences sociales et en droit pour désigner l'ensemble des règles, des normes et des principes qui régissent un domaine spécifique, Bourdieu (1986).

Pour Crozier et Friedberg (1977), le cadre normatif est « l'ensemble des règles et des normes qui définissent les comportements attendus des acteurs dans un contexte donné » (p. 15).

L'efficacité institutionnelle, quant à elle, fait référence à la capacité des institutions à atteindre leurs objectifs et à répondre aux besoins de la société. Selon plusieurs études, le cadre normatif joue un rôle important dans l'efficacité institutionnelle. En effet, un cadre normatif clair et cohérent peut contribuer à réduire l'incertitude et les conflits (Bourdieu, 1986) ; Améliorer la coordination et la coopération entre les acteurs (Crozier & Friedberg, 1977) ; A renforcer la légitimité et la crédibilité des institutions (Weber, 1922). Egalement, l'étude peut s'appuyer sur plusieurs études de cas pratique ayant démontré le lien entre la cadre normatif et l'efficacité institutionnelle à travers le monde et dans différents contextes. Une étude sur la réforme du système de santé au Québec a par exemple démontré que, la mise en place d'un cadre normatif clair et cohérent a contribué à améliorer l'efficacité institutionnelle et à réduire les coûts (Tremblay, 2013). C'est également le cas de (Garel, 2015) par qui, une étude sur la gouvernance des entreprises publiques en France a montré que la présence d'un cadre normatif solide a contribué à renforcer la légitimité et la crédibilité de ces entreprises. Il propose plusieurs solutions pour améliorer la gouvernance des entreprises publiques en France. Selon lui, la mise en place de mécanismes de contrôle et de surveillance plus efficaces ; la promotion de la transparence et de la responsabilité dans la prise de décision ; la formation et le développement des compétences des dirigeants et des administrateurs regroupent les facteurs clés de la réussite lorsque ceux-ci émanent d'un cadre réglementaire et normatif bien structuré et effectif. Une telle analogie au niveau

de la gestion de l'enseignement technique en contexte de décentralisation ne saurait donner voie aux résultats contraires.

- Enseignement technique et professionnel (ETP) : Etat de lieux

L'enseignement technique et professionnel (ETP) est un domaine en constante évolution, qui nécessite une adaptation permanente aux besoins du marché du travail et aux évolutions technologiques, Chappert (2022). Les recherches récentes ont mis en évidence l'importance de l'ETP dans la formation des compétences professionnelles et la préparation à l'insertion professionnelle, Dupont (2020). Pour d'autres travaux, il faut s'appesantir sur la méthodologie d'enseignement. Les méthodologies d'enseignement en ETP ont évolué ces dernières années, avec une place croissante accordée à l'apprentissage par projet, à la pédagogie active et à l'utilisation des technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) Golden & Veiga (2020). Pour ces auteurs, ces approches visent à développer les compétences transversales des élèves, telles que : la créativité, la collaboration et la résolution des situations problèmes. D'autres travaux s'inscrivent plutôt dans la quête de la prospective pour garantir une offre de l'ETP plus encline aux réels besoins de sociétés et de leurs lieux d'implantation immédiat. C'est le cas de l'Organisation de Coopération et de Développement économique (OCDE) (2022). Selon cet organisme, l'ETP est appelé à évoluer dans les prochaines années, avec une place croissante accordée à la formation professionnelle continue et à l'apprentissage tout au long de la vie. Cet organisme soutient que, les recherches futures devraient se concentrer sur l'élaboration de méthodologies d'enseignement innovantes, la formation des enseignants et l'évaluation de l'efficacité de l'ETP dans la préparation à l'insertion professionnelle. OCDE (2022).

- Du concept de gestion ; de leadership ; de l'innovation et des ressources humaines en éducation

Selon Dumont (2022), la gestion de l'éducation nécessite un leadership efficace pour favoriser l'apprentissage et le développement des apprenants. Les recherches de Tremblay (2020) ont par exemple mis en avant l'importance de la plus-value d'une bonne gestion de l'éducation sur l'amélioration qualitative de l'enseignement et la réussite scolaire. C'est également le cas en termes de gestion des ressources humaines où Thériault (2022) a examiné les stratégies de gestion des ressources humaines en éducation œuvrant à l'amélioration, à la motivation ainsi qu'à la performance des enseignants. Lesdites stratégies lui reposent sur : le recrutement et la sélection ; la formation et le développement professionnel ; la gestion des performances ; la motivation et la rétention et enfin la communication et la collaboration, Thériault (2022). Chez Lafortune (2020), l'importance de la gestion des ressources humaines en éducation a été abordée dans le but de favoriser le développement professionnel des enseignants. S'agissant de l'innovation, Gagnon (2022) souligne que, la gestion de l'innovation en éducation est essentielle pour intégrer les technologies émergentes et améliorer l'expérience d'apprentissage. Roy (2020) prône l'importance de la gestion de l'innovation en éducation pour favoriser la créativité et l'entrepreneuriat chez les apprenants.

- Du cadre normatif vers un enseignement technique souhaité.

Une importante littérature a été développée sur l'implication du cadre normatif sur l'enseignement technique d'une manière globale. Les travaux de Dumont (2022) ont par

exemple démontré que, le cadre normatif joue un rôle important dans l'enseignement technique, car il définit les règles et les normes qui régissent les pratiques pédagogiques et les contenus d'enseignement et de formation. C'est encore le cas de Gonthier (2020) qui met en évidence l'importance du cadre normatif dans l'enseignement technique pour assurer la qualité et la pertinence de la formation professionnelle. Pour les études de Roy (2022) ; Tremblay (2022), l'enseignement technique souhaité doit être centré sur les besoins et les intérêts des apprenants tout en intégrant la technique et la technologie émergente au travers des pratiques pédagogiques innovantes.

4. De la théorie de la régulation : Crozier et Friedberg (1977)

La théorie de la régulation développée par les sociologues français Michel Crozier et Erhard Friedberg dans les années 1970, vise à comprendre comment les organisations et les systèmes sociaux sont régulés et contrôlés. Selon Crozier et Friedberg (1977), la théorie de la régulation repose sur plusieurs principes tels que : La régulation comme processus. Ici, la régulation est considérée comme un processus continu qui vise à maintenir l'équilibre et la stabilité dans les systèmes sociaux et organisationnels ; Le principe de l'acteur stratégique où les acteurs individuels et collectifs jouent un rôle important dans la régulation, en utilisant des stratégies pour atteindre leurs objectifs et influencer les autres acteurs ; Le principe des Jeux d'acteurs qui traite des situations dans lesquelles, les acteurs interagissent et négocient pour atteindre leurs objectifs, en utilisant des stratégies et des ressources pour influencer l'environnement de travail ; . Enfin, le principe de la régulation formelle et informelle qui induit que, la régulation peut être formelle. C'est-à-dire, basée sur des règles et des procédures officielles ou informelle et donc, basée sur des normes et des pratiques non officielles.

Cette théorie peut être utilisée pour étudier les organisations et les systèmes sociaux, en analysant les jeux d'acteurs et les stratégies utilisées pour réguler les interactions et les décisions. C'est ici le lieu de mieux apprécier l'interaction qui existe entre le cadre normatif qui régit la conception, la mise en œuvre et le fonctionnement des organisations d'ETP et l'influence des parties prenantes à partir d'une gestion plus intégrée et participative dudit ordre d'enseignement. Le respect et l'application des normes sur une approche pédagogique effectivement basée sur : la formation en alternance ; l'implication des professionnels dans la formation des apprenants, leur participation dans la praxis de gestion entre autres, ou encore de l'implication véritable de l'élite locale, des CTD et autres partenaires sociaux donnent lieu à une interaction favorable aux résultats escomptés par cet ordre d'enseignement.

5. Méthodologie de l'étude

L'étude formule le cadre méthodologique autour des points suivants : la formulation et l'opérationnalisation de l'hypothèse générale qui ouvre la voie aux hypothèses de recherche ; la préparation du cadre opératoire de par la définition de l'échantillon, de l'instrument de collecte de données ainsi que la nature de l'étude.

- Formulation et opérationnalisation des hypothèses de l'étude

Elles se déclinent en deux volets distincts à savoir une hypothèse générale et des hypothèses de recherche. Dans un premier temps, nous allons formuler l'hypothèse générale et en second les hypothèses de recherche issues de l'opérationnalisation des différentes variables qui les constitue.

Hypothèse Générale de l'étude

L'effectivité de l'usage du cadre normatif dans la praxis de la gestion décentralisée de l'éducation favorise une meilleure structuration de l'ETP en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun.

Hypothèses de recherche

H_{r1}. La stricte cohérence entre l'axe pédagogique structuré et son effectivité dans la praxis participe efficacement à la gestion de ETP en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun.

H_{r2}. L'application effective de la réglementation régissant l'implication des parties prenantes dans la politique de formation concoure à la gestion efficace de l'ETP en contexte de décentralisation de l'éducation au Cameroun.

H_{r3}. Le véhicule de certains principes inhérents au droit à l'éducation œuvre avec pertinence à un meilleur encadrement administratif de ETP au Cameroun.

- Le cadre opératoire de l'étude

Il dresse dans un premier temps, l'échantillon à partir du type d'étude, ensuite de l'instrument de collecte de données et enfin du modèle d'analyse. Pour plus de pertinence, ces éléments méthodologiques sont issus des objectifs ayant motivé le contexte de l'étude. La recherche se déroule dans la région de l'Adamaoua-Cameroun. Plus précisément dans la ville de Ngaoundéré. L'échantillon est constitué d'un ensemble de parties prenantes tiré de la communauté éducative de cette localité avec plus d'appartenance institutionnelle aux enseignements secondaires. Il s'agit des responsables du conseil régional de l'Adamaoua, de la délégation des enseignements secondaires, des chefs d'établissements d'enseignements secondaires technique et professionnel et de quelques acteurs influents du secteur socioéconomique de la région. Ne pouvant porter en collecte d'informations la communauté toute entière, l'étude a fait usage de la méthode boule de neige qui nous a conduit d'un enquêté à un autre à partir du canal relationnel des différents interviewés et du sens du dynamisme employé.

Pour plus de précisions, nous retenons : deux (02) responsables des services de la délégation régionale des enseignements secondaires, un (1) haut responsable du conseil régional de l'Adamaoua, six (06) chefs d'établissements d'enseignement secondaires techniques et donc deux directeurs de CETIC, trois (03) proviseurs de lycées techniques, un (1) directeur de l'ENIET et enfin deux (02) responsables donc l'un de la société de transport ferroviaire et l'autre de la société d'électrification, tous basés dans ladite ville. Ce qui a porté l'échantillon de l'étude à douze (12) participants. Ce petit échantillon est ainsi arrêté

compte tenu du fait que cette recherche est de nature qualitative et anticipe sur la saturation des informations à collecter en lien avec l'objet de l'étude. Nous appuyons également la pertinence de cette nature qualitative par une analyse documentaire issue du cadre normatif et de certains rapports d'activités menés par les CTD au niveau de certains établissements d'enseignement secondaires techniques de la région de l'Adamaoua. Les échanges variaient entre 30 et 35 minutes compte tenu du fait que ces responsables étaient en situation de travail.

Les entrevues ont abordé les thèmes issus des variables indépendantes des hypothèses de recherche. Il s'agissait principalement de : l'effectivité de la stricte cohérence entre l'axe pédagogique structuré et la praxis de gestion ; L'application effective des règles régissant l'implication des entreprises dans la politique de formation et le véhicule de certains principes inhérents au droit à l'éducation. Il faut noter que le processus d'analyse de données des entrevues s'est fait par une transcription intégrale des 11 entrevues réalisées. Une lecture méthodique nous a conduit au repérage et à l'examen minutieux des indices verbaux saillants pour une issue analytique plus logique.

6- Résultats et discussion

6.1. La stricte cohérence entre l'axe pédagogique structuré par les textes réglementaires et la gestion de ETP en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun.

Malgré les réformes structurelles en matière de décentralisation de la compétence éducative au sein des CTD au Cameroun, les rapports entre le service éducatif et les contenus pédagogiques demeurent peu fluides dans la pratique. La réglementation en vigueur au Cameroun en matière de gestion de l'ETP invite à une approche plus collaborative et incitative des différentes parties prenantes. Pour l'enquête #1, qui milite pour une réforme globale entre les services éducatifs et les contenus pédagogiques, se déploie le sentiment suivant : « *décentralisation des compétences, adapter les programmes à nos réalités, mettre de l'accent sur les programmes qui développent le savoir-faire local* ». Selon ce responsable, il faut « *décentraliser effectivement la gestion des établissements d'enseignement secondaire technique et l'accompagner des moyens nécessaires à l'implication* ».

Cette prise de position d'un haut responsable du conseil régional local épouse effectivement l'idée d'une quête de cohérence entre l'axe pédagogique structuré par les textes réglementaires clairs et précis pour une meilleure gestion de l'ETP en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun. Il s'inscrit dans la même logique que certains chefs d'établissements de cet ordre d'enseignement pour lequel, la décentralisation est plus cloîtrée dans les textes qui cachent une idée de ce qu'ils ont appelé « *la main tendue au point fermé* » #5. Ce qui traduit en d'autres termes un vœu inachevé de l'Etat central d'autonomiser et d'impulser le développement local par le bas, mais donc les vestiges de l'extrême contrôle reste manifeste.

Lorsque que vous écumez les textes inhérents au code des CTD, notamment à l'art.271a, ou encore, vous fait référence à loi d'orientation de l'éducation de 98 de l'éducation au Cameroun, vous pouvez-vous même constater que la communauté locale est fortement invitée à influencer les contenus pédagogiques de nos offres de formation mais, vous conviendrez avec moi que dans la pratique, nous continuons d'appliquer par courroie les instructions du pouvoir central. #8.

Les politiques de formations autonomes et de pensée pédagogique locales n'existent pas de façon réelle à en croire cet enquêté. Les régions sur le plan pédagogique restent encore fortement endossées sur la politique de l'Etat central. Par ailleurs, ce locuteur nous informe de ce que, même le peu de contenu réglementaire que l'on retrouve dans l'arsenal juridique en vigueur sur la question n'est pas habillé de la finalité qui a animée l'intention de son élaboration. Pour cette étude, il faudrait plus précisément s'appuyer sur l'alignement des objectifs pédagogiques ; la cohérence entre les profils de formation et les compétences requises ; les méthodes pédagogiques appropriés aux objectifs et la régularité dans l'évaluation du facteur qualité.

6.2. De l'application effective des règles régissant l'implication des parties prenantes dans la politique de formation à l'ETP.

Les données recueillies laissent entrevoir une réelle avancée autour de l'application effective des règles inhérents à la politique de gestion de l'ETP en contexte de Décentralisation au Cameroun. Les collectivités territoriales décentralisées malgré les difficultés observées en matière de goulot d'étranglement d'un Etat central non lâcheur sont mis à pieds d'œuvre contributive à la gestion de l'ETP.

Beaucoup d'initiatives sont prises par le conseil régional en matière d'accompagnement et de pilotage des établissements d'ETP. Non seulement nous participons aux différentes réunions stratégiques de gestion de ces établissements, mais également des dotations importantes tirées du budget squelettique global que nous recevons, sont faites et vous pouvez le vérifier sur le terrain en termes d'équipement des ateliers dans différents secteurs de spécialisation. Enquête #1

D'ici, il en découle un fait assez objectif. Celui du lien entre la réglementation en vigueur à propos de l'implication des CTD dans la politique de gestion de l'ETP au niveau local car, à partir des réunions stratégiques qui impliquent celles-ci, les véritables besoins de l'établissement sont posés. Ce qui permet une construction à partir du modèle bottom-up et top down, qui traduit ici un style de gouvernance dialectique du haut vers le bas et du bas vers le haut. Dans ce sens, un chef d'établissement s'est exprimé en ces termes :

Durant les conseils d'établissement, nous posons clairement nos besoins associés aux objectifs que nous voulons atteindre.

Cette année par exemple, les blocs ateliers ESF, le centre multimédia et le matériel informatique de bureau étaient déjà non seulement obsolète, mais quasi inexistant, nos ateliers avaient déjà des allures d'abandon. L'implication et l'avenue de la décentralisation donnent désormais cette image reluisante que vous voyez. Ce qui

entraîne d'ailleurs un renforcement mental, source de motivation au sein de mon établissement. #4

Le cadre normatif en vigueur dans le sous-secteur de l'ETP donne une place de choix aux entreprises. Celle-ci apparaissent comme le socle de l'insertion, voire de la destination des diplômés dudit ordre d'enseignement. Or les acteurs de ce milieu posent généralement le problème du déphasage théorie/pratique, martelant le fait que, ces derniers, une fois au pied de la tâche en entreprise, mettent en mal le dispositif technologique donc le nouvel ouvrier rencontre parfois pour la première fois de sa vie. Pour l'interviewé #10 ; « Vous recrutez un gars avec son Bac technique et une fois devant vos machines acquises à hauteur de millions de francs il les met en épave à la seconde qui suit » ; Il continue en disant, « vous prenez le soin de le former et le recycler pendant 6 mois, après 1an de service, il vous demande de tripler son salaire et si vous refusez, il s'envole pour le Gabon où il est payé 4 fois plus et vous n'avez que vos yeux pour pleurer ». Pour (UNESCO, 2023), une requalification et une amélioration des compétences nécessite davantage que les entreprises occupent de plus en plus une place de choix dans la gestion desdits établissements. L'interviewé #11 est moins éloigné d'une telle invitation de l'UNESCO à propos de l'ETP. Dans son expérience avec un stagiaire dans le domaine de la télécommunication,

Vraiment ce problème est crucial. J'ai reçu un stagiaire dans la télécom qui ne parvenait pas à faire la différence entre un câble réseau et un pylonne sur le terrain ». « Les politiques de formation devraient davantage favoriser les formations en alternance entre les écoles techniques et les milieux professionnels. Poursuit #11.

Un tel état de faits laisse simplement entrevoir une légèreté, voir une implication insuffisante des entreprises dans la gestion efficace de l'EPT. Non seulement celles-ci restent moins impliquées dans la gestion, mais le processus de formation par alternance reste une réalité utopique en contexte de décentralisation. Comme le souligne cet enquêté, « je ne crois pas que la formation par alternance se résume à la seule action de les recevoir durant les stages, or c'est ce qui est ». #10

6.3. Le véhicule de certains principes inhérents au droit à l'éducation et l'encadrement administratif de L'ETP au Cameroun.

Bien que l'objet de cette étude porte de manière globale sur l'implémentation des usages normatifs en lien avec la Gestion de l'ETP en contexte de décentralisation, il soulève néanmoins une question fondamentale. Celle des principes du droit à l'éducation à partir des indicateurs inhérents à l'équité. En contexte de décentralisation, l'équité dans la distribution des ressources pose encore un réel souci dans certaines régions où, règnent certaines réalités socioculturelles et politiques qui déhanche l'idée d'une politique publique prenantes. Le facteur religieux par exemple joue en défaveur de la prise en compte de certains établissements d'enseignement technique et professionnel dans la région de l'Adamaoua-Cameroun. Pour la catégorie de chefs d'établissements interrogés, le simple fait de ne pas appartenir à la communauté musulmane par exemple vous met ipso-facto en marge de leur implication dans l'appui aux ressources issues des CTD.

Je suis chrétienne, je n'ai jamais bénéficié de l'appui du conseil régional alors que les établissements leurs frères sont des responsables bénéficient des appuis considérables en termes d'équipements des ateliers de formation et autres matériaux adaptés à la formation des apprenants. Je me bats avec l'appui de l'APEE uniquement. #3

Outre le facteur religieux, se pose également l'incidence liée aux chapelles politiques qui handicapent fortement la question d'intégration ou d'inclusion dans l'implémentation de la politique publique en matière de décentralisation au Cameroun. C'est d'ailleurs ce que souligne ce participant

Vous savez que, être d'un bord politique différent de l'équipe de pilotage de la collectivité territoriale décentralisée de votre localité vous complique d'office la tâche puisque celle-ci vous considère d'office comme un adversaire et par conséquent, impossible que cette dernière s'implique dans la politique de gestion malgré que ce soit un enseignement technique aux exigences multiformes #7

L'encadrement desdits établissements au regard de ceci reste et demeure uniquement sous la responsabilité de l'Etat Central. Une centralisation fortement critiquée, mais pourtant inclusive malgré les moyens limités. Or, la projection d'une politique décentralisée de l'éducation est pensée dans le but de mieux cerner les exigences des communautés locales en matière de gestion des structures éducatives et particulièrement dans le sous-secteur de l'ETP, directement en phase avec le monde de l'emplois.

Discussion des résultats

Il faut noter que, la transformation globale de l'ETP est devenue une préoccupation majeure à travers le monde. La stratégie Nationale de Développement en abrégée (SND30) relevait déjà les insuffisances du DSCE en matière de qualité et de compétitivité du Capital humain au Cameroun. Or il ne faut pas le perdre de vue que le développement du capital humain compétitif passe par un enseignement technique et professionnel de qualité à l'heure des grands défis mondiaux en matière de technique, de technologie et d'innovation. La pertinence d'un tel projet repose sur des indicateurs clés à savoir : l'accès, l'équité, la qualité des apprentissages, l'efficacité externe et externe ainsi qu'à son financement et sa gestion stratégique comme le souligne le rapport d'analyse de l'annuaire statistique du secteur de l'éducation et de la formation 2022 au Cameroun.

Pour cette étude, il n'est plus question de philosopher vaguement sur la question de la pertinence du capital humain, mais d'y voir en l'enseignement technique et professionnel, un socle granitique et pratique d'un tel projet éducatif. Parlant de la gestion stratégique de l'enseignement technique comme le souligne ledit rapport, le cadre normatif, réglementaire s'inscrit comme pierre angulaire de l'aboutissement d'une telle intension éducative. Au Cameroun, il s'agit de : La loi d'orientation de l'éducation N° 98/004 du 14 avril 1998, qui s'applique aux ordres d'enseignement en général et particulièrement à l'enseignement technique ; Loi N°2018/010 du 11 juillet 2018 régissant la formation professionnelle qui fixe le cadre juridique général ainsi que les orientations fondamentales de la formation professionnelle au Cameroun. Trois axes majeurs ici nous ont intéressé à savoir : La

pédagogique structurée ; L'implication des entreprises et les principes inhérents au droit à l'éducation.

L'axe de la pédagogie structurée implique l'instauration d'un mécanisme de redynamisation perpétuel des programmes de formation adaptés aux zones d'implantation des ETP. Chez (Ngo Mélha, 2012), il s'agit de mettre en adéquation les objectifs pédagogiques et les besoins du marché du travail ainsi que les compétences requises pour les métiers visés. Lesquels permettent à la fois de satisfaire l'apprenant à la fin de sa formation et sa communauté qui bénéficie de son savoir-faire sur les plans privés et publics. Par ailleurs, les contenus de formation se doivent d'être en cohérence avec les compétences des enseignants et/ou les formateurs des futurs acteurs du monde du travail. C'est d'ailleurs l'avis évoqué par un responsable d'une CTD enquêté qui affirme que : « *L'élaboration préalable des états de besoins basés sur des profils par les CTD pourrait effectivement être un facteur clé pour une gestion efficace de l'ETP* ». A ce propos, (l'UNESCO, 2022) pense que cela passe par une évaluation régulière de la qualité des enseignements qui permet d'assurer la conformité aux attentes et aux besoins exprimés à la fois des apprenants et du marché du travail.

L'implication des entreprises également ressort dans cette étude comme un facteur clé tel que le souligne d'ailleurs une abondante littérature sur la question de l'enseignement technique et professionnelle. Un aspect fondamental inscrit et encadré par le cadre normatif qui structure cet ordre d'enseignement au Cameroun. L'implication des entreprises ici favorise l'alignement des compétences de par la définition des compétences requises et visées par le marché du travail sans oublier les métiers d'avenir. (Ngho Mélha, 2012). Les stages pratiques et innovants, la formation en alternance axée sur les objectifs de formation et le frottement aux dynamiques organisationnelles recouvrent un ensemble de compétences que l'on ne saurait obtenir uniquement auprès de l'organisation scolaire interne. Cela se veut encore plus impératif à l'aune de la décentralisation où les nouveaux enjeux et défis de développement local s'y invitent sur la table de la compétitivité économique et sociale. Selon (Unesco, 2019), l'implication des entreprises dans une approche partenariale ouvre l'accès à un enjeu de forte croissance économique et de transition. Pour cet organisme, un tel mécanisme basé sur la formation d'un capital humain compétitif permet fort aisément de garantir une transition souhaitée vers les métiers d'avenir ou en cours dans les secteurs (numérique, climatique, énergétique, urbanistique, agricole...). La gestion décentralisée de l'ETP à l'invite de cette étude se doit de passer par les quatre types de partenariats consolidés par les organismes internationaux à l'instar de l'Unesco, l'OIF ou encore de l'AFD à savoir : l'information, la consultation, la concertation et la contribution. (Unesco, 2019). Le cadre normatif et réglementaire joue un rôle majeur d'exigence dans les obligations de l'ensemble des parties prenantes. C'est l'expression de la régulation sociale de Crozier et Friedberg (1977).

La gestion décentralisée de l'Enseignement Technique et Professionnel au Cameroun enfin pour ce chapitre implique la question du droit à l'éducation. Le problème des minorités sociales et/ou des zones d'éducation prioritaire (ZEP) motive la prise en compte

significative d'une telle variable dans un contexte d'étude comme celui-ci. L'enjeu social est fort crucial et essentiel quand on évoque la question du droit en éducation. La redistribution qui se veut généralement inégale dans la gestion décentralisée de l'éducation en général et particulièrement dans le sous-secteur de l'enseignement technique. Elle est source de plusieurs facteurs qui peuvent être religieux, politiques, ethniques et économique selon l'appartenance des administrateurs et ou des gestionnaires locaux de la politique publique décentralisée. Pour une meilleure cohésion sociale, les questions d'équité, d'égalité, de clarté et d'inclusion entrent dans le vœu d'une consolidation concertée des acquis locaux formulés par un cadre normatif et réglementaire qui l'encadrent.

Conclusion

Cette étude a eu pour objectif générale de mettre en lien le cadre normatif et la gestion efficace de l'ETP en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun. La théorie de la régulation de Crozier et Friedberg (1977) nous a permis d'opérationnaliser l'hypothèse générale en trois principales variables à savoir : La stricte cohérence entre l'axe pédagogique structuré et son effectivité dans la praxis ; L'application effective de la réglementation régissant l'implication des parties prenantes et le véhicule de certains principes inhérents au droit à l'éducation. A partir d'une méthode qualitative, des entretiens ont été menés auprès d'un échantillon impliquant à la fois des responsables des entreprises, des CTDs et de certains chefs d'établissements de l'ETP au sein du Département de la Vina dans l'Adamaoua-Cameroun. Une analyse de contenu de par la méthode thématique de (Huberman & Miles, 1991) a été mobilisée. D'où la conclusion suivante : L'effectivité de l'usage du cadre normatif dans la praxis de la gestion décentralisée de l'éducation favorise une meilleure structuration de l'ETP en contexte de décentralisation au Cameroun.

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THE IMPACT OF A STEAM-BASED INTERVENTION ON MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT AND GENDER DIFFERENCES AMONG ARTS-ORIENTED SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN TUBAH, MEZAM DIVISION, NORTHWEST REGION, CAMEROON

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Abstract

The paper examined the effect of a STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention on students' numerical fluency and gender differences in secondary schools within Tubah Sub-Division, Mezam Division, North West Region of Cameroon. The study employed a quasi-experimental design, involving 43 students from CCAST Bambili as the experimental group and 34 students from Technical High School Ntigi as the control group. Both groups were pre-tested on a common Form Three mathematics topic in statistics, before the experimental group was exposed to a three-week STEM-oriented instructional treatment. Post-test scores were then collected from both groups. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including mean comparisons, t-tests, and graphical representations. Findings revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group in the post-test means score with an independent sample t-test showing $t(75) = 6.42$, $p < 0.001$, demonstrating that STEAM-integrated instruction improved students' engagement with mathematical tasks. Additionally, gender-based analysis revealed that female students in the experimental group achieved higher mean scores than their male peers, with a significant difference observed ($t(41) = 2.11$, $p < 0.05$). Suggesting that inclusive and context-sensitive STEAM pedagogies foster female learners' achievement in mathematics, thereby challenging traditional gender performance gaps. Relying on these findings, the study concluded that STEAM-based teaching interventions are effective in fostering numerical proficiency among arts-oriented students while also reducing gender disparities in mathematics achievement. It recommended that mathematics teachers should adopt STEAM-oriented approaches to enhance critical thinking and problem-solving, and that educational policymakers should integrate gender-responsive STEAM practices into the curriculum to promote equity and inclusiveness in secondary school mathematics education.

Keywords:

STEAM Based interventions, basic mathematics achievement, gender differences.

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Definition:

CCAST: Cameroon College of Arts Science and Technology

STEM: Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics

STEAM: Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics

Introduction

In many educational systems, students who specialize in arts subjects are stereotyped as being less capable or less interested in mathematics and quantitative reasoning. The advent of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) education offers a promising pathway to challenge this narrative. STEAM-integrated pedagogies emphasize inquiry, real-world problem solving, technology use, and cross-disciplinary connections, which may help bridge gaps in mathematical competence and foster deeper conceptual understanding (Tikly, 2018; Foretia, 2013; Marcela & Alsina 2023). In Cameroon, initiatives to promote STEM education have drawn attention as potential for improving learners' performance and preparing them for a globally competitive environment (Foretia, 2013; Tikly, 2018). In Cameroon specifically, the promotion of STEAM education has gained momentum as mathematics has become compulsory to all students at the secondary education. STEAM initiatives have been proposed as part of a paradigm shift within primary, through secondary to higher education in order to move away from rote learning towards a more integrative and skills-based approach (Foretia, 2013). Within secondary schools in the Region, where resource constraints and teacher preparation challenges persist, the potential of STEAM-based instruction to improve mathematics outcomes and perhaps benefit underrepresented learners is especially attractive to learners, particularly for arts-oriented students (Marja & Namukas 2022). Hence, a carefully designed STEAM-based instructional intervention could significantly improve performance in mathematics for the students of both Science and the Art background in secondary schools.

Literature Review

STEM interventions have been applied mostly to students in the science and engineering fields of specialization (Elliniadou & Sofianopoulou, 2022; Bidita, 2024), less is known about how they impact arts-oriented secondary school students, who may often feel alienated from mathematics content. In addition, there is the perennial issue of gender differences in mathematics achievement. Historically, many studies reported male students outperforming females in mathematics (Hyde, Lindberg, Linn, Ellis, & Williams, 2008), but more recent meta-analyses show that gender differences in mathematics performance are shrinking or even disappearing in many contexts (Tian et al., 2022). Moreover, active learning pedagogies and inclusive STEAM-based methods have shown promise in reducing or reversing gender gaps in mathematics performance. For instance, Di Tommaso et al., (2024) found that an intervention improved girls' mathematics performance by 0.14 standard deviation, narrowing the gap while having no adverse effect on boys.

A core feature of effective STEAM intervention is that it embeds mathematics in real-world, problem-solving contexts (projects, experiments, design tasks), encouraging students to

apply mathematics as a tool rather than merely memorize formulas (Ye, Liang, & Ng, 2023; MDPI, 2022). In a systematic review of computational thinking (CT) in K-12 mathematics, Ye, Liang, Ng, and Chai (2023) found that CT-based mathematics instruction is strongly related to STEM approaches that lead to improved student learning outcomes when lessons included authentic problem-solving and integrated technology. Similarly, a literature review of integrated STEAM education found consensus around several principles: interdisciplinary integration, real-world context, inquiry-based learning, and student-centered design (MDPI, 2022; De Loof et al. 2022; Marja & Namukas, 2022). Review specifically noted that when mathematics is explicitly linked to other STEAM domains and anchored in real problems and student engagement, achievement increases. This therefore suggests that for art-oriented students who sometimes typically view mathematics as abstract and disconnected, STEAM interventions can offer more accessible entry points and richer learning experiences for them within our local secondary schools.

Gender differences in mathematics achievements have also been a called for concerned within our secondary schools today. Arts-oriented students often receive less emphasis in mathematics; curricula and teacher training sometimes assume arts students are less mathematically inclined. However, integrating STEAM-based teaching could address this gap by offering more engaging, relevant, and practice-oriented mathematics instruction. Beyoh (2025) found that male students in Bamenda Municipality exhibited higher overall interest and commitment to mathematics tasks compared to female students, with female students' interest declining by Form 4, this ties with findings from earlier studies which also show male students outperforming females in mathematics, especially on standardized tests, particularly in high-stakes and timed testing environments (Hyde, Lindberg, Linn, Ellis, & Williams, 2008). These findings provide evidence that there is a gender gap in mathematics achievement as a whole within secondary school students, although, more recent work suggests that the gap is narrowing or becoming non-significant in many contexts, particularly when teaching methodologies are more engaging and inclusive (Ye et al., 2023). Frontiers in Education (2025) found that gender gaps are most pronounced among low-performing students, but tend to become negligible at higher achievement levels. This assertion imply that there are possibilities for more attention to mathematics learning if STEAM-based interventions are adopted for mathematic teaching within the secondary schools. Alternatively, Smith et al., (2022) argue that; although teachers universally agree that problem-based learning can enhance problem-solving and reasoning, many seldom use it due to constraints such as time, resources, and preparation, therefore suggesting that while STEM based mathematics interventions are theoretically powerful, implementation challenges can reduce their effectiveness.

Lestari (2021), in a quasi-experimental study among high school science-stream students in West Java, Indonesia, demonstrated that experiential learning grounded in STEM methodologies significantly improved students' ability to plan and describe solutions, with high normalized gains in these problem-solving components. Similarly, Amalina et al. (2022) found that integrating mathematics into scenario-based, science and design-focused contexts for 7th graders in Hungary enhanced students' abilities to represent, evaluate, and

design solutions, suggesting that connecting abstract mathematical concepts to tangible, real-world contexts, deepen understanding and strengthens analytical skills. These findings converge on the argument that STEAM-based interventions can actively engage art students in cognitive processes beyond rote learning, fostering higher-order thinking that is essential for tackling complex mathematical tasks. This also means that situating mathematics within inquiry-driven, project-oriented, or scenario-based STEM activities, students experience mathematics as a tool for problem solving rather than a collection of abstract procedures or a tool for gaining grades (Ye et al., 2023; Frontiers in Education, 2025). This intervention can increase engagement, reduce mathematics anxiety, and motivate, especially art-oriented students who may struggle under traditional lecture-based approaches.

The theoretical underpinnings of STEAM-based intervention were drawn on experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) and constructivist learning theory (Piaget, 1936; Vygotsky, 1978). Experiential learning emphasizes that learner benefits from cycles of action and reflection: concrete experience → reflective observation → abstract conceptualization → active experimentation. In mathematics instruction, this might involve hands-on tasks, modeling real phenomena, reflecting on strategies, and applying what is learned to new situations. When such cycles are embedded in STEAM projects, students are more likely to internalize concepts, develop deeper reasoning skills, and build self-confidence in mathematics (Lestari, 2021). Constructivism complements this by emphasizing that students build knowledge based on prior understanding, peer interaction, and scaffolded exploration. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development suggests that with appropriate support, students can accomplish tasks beyond what they might achieve alone. STEAM-based interventions that incorporates group work, teacher scaffolding, and reflection can thus enable learners especially those who struggle or perceive mathematics as difficult to progress more rapidly.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the implementation of mathematics as compulsory subject for first cycle studies in Cameroon secondary schools, mathematics achievement among secondary school students, particularly for art-oriented students, remains a persistent challenge. Interestingly, most of these students, particularly those inclined toward the arts, are often blinded by their art mentality and tend to develop negative mindset toward the subject. In some cases, this even leads to a form of mathematics phobia, and some students go as far as accepting failure in the subject during exams, believing the subject is too difficult and irrelevant to their future aspirations. Evidence from internal and public examinations in Cameroon continue to show that pass rates in ordinary level mathematics have consistently fallen below 60% (CGCE Board, 2024), reflecting significant variability in performance. Despite these low achievements, in most cases males are often seen performing better than females, posing a gender disparity in mathematics achievement. Although there are possibilities of pedagogical factors contributing to these achievement challenges, it is also possible that the absence of STEAM-based interventions in teaching mathematics such as hands-on learning, project-based tasks, and inquiry-driven activities, in math classrooms can results to these

inconsistencies and gender disparities in mathematics achievement. Over reliance on traditional teacher-centered pedagogical methods, which focuses on rote procedures and drills, often fail to equip the students with the problem-solving skills and zeal to handle complex numerical task. It is on these bases that there is a critical need to examine the contribution of STEAM-based interventions in enhancing mathematics proficiency among art-oriented students and understanding how male and female students respond to such interventions is essential, as gender differences in mathematics achievement have been widely reported.

Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the effect of STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention on students' mathematics achievement.
2. To determine the performance differences between male and female students resulting from the STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention.

Research Questions

1. What is the effect of STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention on students' mathematics achievement?
2. Are there performance differences between male and female students resulting from the STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention?

Research Hypotheses

1. **H₀₁**: There is no significant contribution of the STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention on students' mathematics achievement.
2. **H_{a1}**: There is a significant contribution of the STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention on students' mathematics achievement.
3. **H₀₂**: There is no significant difference in performance between male and female students on STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention.
4. **H_{a2}**: There is a significant difference in performance between male and female students on STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention.

Methodology

Design and Sample

A quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test control group design was used. Two intact Form 3 classes were studied: the *experimental group* (Form 3D at CCAST Bambili, $n = 43$) and the *control group* (Form 3B at NTIGI Technical High School, $n = 34$). The class sizes and gender ratios were set as given: at CCAST the enrollment was 43 with a 40%:60% male-to-female ratio (17 males, 26 females), and at NTIGI Technical High school, 34 students with a 70%:30% (24 males, 10 females) ratio. These classes were purposefully selected and represented typical Form 3 classes in their respective schools where the Cameroon General Certificate of Examination (CGCE) syllabus begins.

Instrumentation

All students took a common pre-test on a statistics topic (*descriptive statistics* described in the Appendix I) to establish baseline scores. Following the pre-test, the experimental class received a STEAM-integrated mathematics teaching module for 3 weeks (involving hands-on and technology-enhanced activities in statistics), whereas the control class continued with conventional instruction on the same topics (no special STEAM treatment). After 3 weeks both classes took the same post-test. Thus, each student had a pre-test and post-test score (out of 10). This design mirrors prior education research on STEAM instruction.

Data Analysis

Test scores were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Group means and standard deviations for pre-test and post-test scores, and for score gains (post-pre) were computed. Figures (bar charts) were used to illustrate mean scores by group (see *Figure 1*, *Figure 2*). For inferential analysis, a standard procedures paired-sample *t*-tests (dependent *t*-tests) was adopted to assess pre-test vs. post-test change within each group, and an independent sample *t*-tests was used to compare (1) score gains between experimental and control groups, and (2) post-test scores between groups. Gender differences were tested by comparing male vs. female scores within each school and overall. All tests used a significance threshold of $\alpha=0.05$. Effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) were noted to gauge practical significance.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) of test scores (out of 10) by group and gender. Gain = (post-test minus pre-test)

Group (n)	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Gain (SD)
CCAST (Total, <i>n</i> =43)	4.42 (2.05)	7.51 (2.13)	3.09 (1.06)
Male (<i>n</i> =17)	4.00 (1.84)	6.71 (1.79)	2.71 (1.10)
Female (<i>n</i> =26)	4.69 (1.69)	8.04 (1.56)	3.35 (0.96)
NTIGI (Total, <i>n</i> =34)	3.56 (1.95)	4.82 (1.76)	1.26 (0.93)
Male (<i>n</i> =24)	3.83 (2.01)	5.17 (2.32)	1.33 (1.02)
Female (<i>n</i> =10)	2.90 (1.60)	4.00 (1.94)	1.10 (0.74)

Table 1, summarizes the results. The experimental group (CCAST) had a higher baseline (pre-test) mean (4.42 points, SD=2.05) than the control group (3.56, SD=1.95), though this difference was not formally tested here. After the 3-week period, the CCAST group's mean

rose to 7.51 (SD=2.13), whereas the NTIGI group's mean rose to only 4.82 (SD=1.76). In terms of mean gain, CCAST students improved by an average of +3.09 points (SD=1.06) versus +1.26 (SD=0.93) for NTIGI. Gender breakdown showed that in CCAST, females (pre-4.69, post 8.04) and males (pre-4.00, post 6.71) both improved, but females ended with higher final scores. In NTIGI, males (pre-3.83, post 5.17) slightly outscored females (pre-2.90, post 4.00) at post-test. Overall (pooling schools), females' final mean was 6.92 vs. males' 5.80. These descriptive results indicate large score gains for the STEAM-treated class relative to the control, and a higher post-test performance by females in the STEAM class.

Charts:

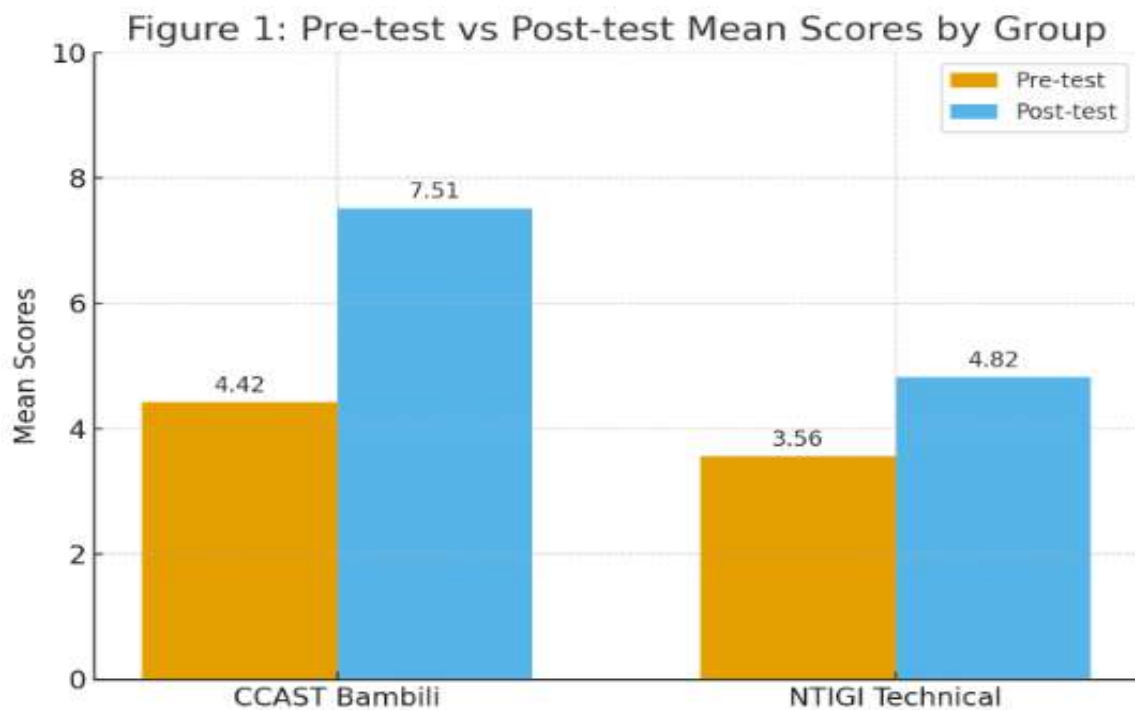


Figure 1: Pre-test vs post-test mean scores for CCAST Bambili (experimental) and NTIGI Technical (control).

Mean pre-test and post-test scores by school group (CCAST Bambili vs NTIGI Technical School). Bars show pre-test (orange) and post-test (blue) means for each group on a 0–10 scale. The experimental group (CCAST Bambili) shows a large gain (from 4.42 to 7.51) versus a smaller gain in the control group (NTIGI, from 3.56 to 4.82). This indicates that the instructional intervention at CCAST substantially improved scores, consistent with prior findings that post-test means often significantly exceed pre-test means when instruction is effective.

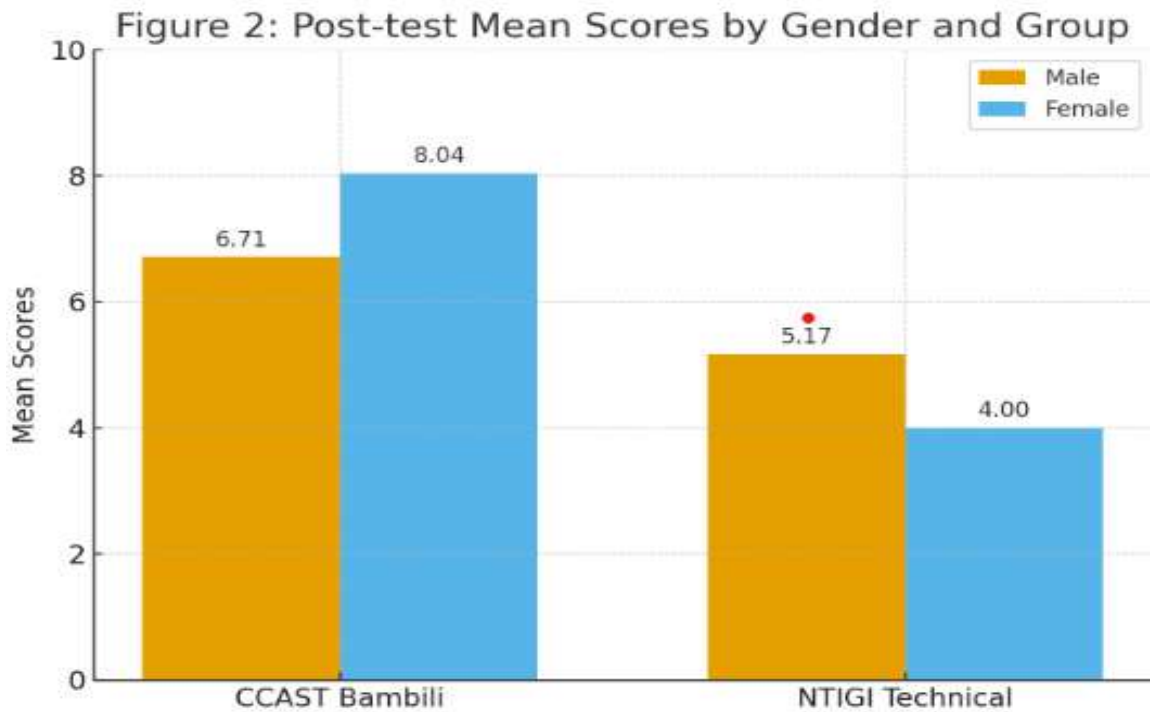


Figure 2: Post-test mean scores by gender (male vs female) within each group (CCAST Bambili and NTIGI Technical)

Post-test mean scores by gender within each school group. For CCAST Bambili, female students scored higher on average (8.04) than male students (6.71). For NTIGI Technical High school, the opposite was seen (males 5.17 vs females 4.00). These patterns reflect a mixed gender trend: the NTIGI result (male > female) aligns with reports that male students often outscore females on STEAM-related assessments, whereas the CCAST data suggest the intervention especially benefited female learners. Bars are color-coded by gender.

Verification of Hypothesis One

H0₁: There is no significant contribution of the STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention on students' mathematics achievement.

Ha₁: STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention has a significant contribution on students' mathematics achievement.

Table 2: Paired Sample t-test (Within Groups: Pre vs Post-test)

Group	N	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
CCAST Bambili (Exp)	43	4.42 (± 1.25)	7.51 (± 1.40)	-12.35	<0.001	Significant improvement
NTIGI Technical (Ctrl)	34	3.56 (± 1.10)	4.82 (± 1.20)	-5.48	<0.001	Moderate improvement

Table 2, presents the results of the paired sample t-test comparing pre-test and post-test scores within each group. For the experimental group (CCAST Bambili), the mean score increased from 4.42 (SD = 1.25) to 7.51 (SD = 1.40), yielding a highly significant t-value of -12.35 ($p < 0.001$). This indicates that the STEAM-based intervention produced a substantial improvement in students' mathematics achievement. In contrast, the control group (NTIGI Technical) also showed a smaller increase from 3.56 (SD = 1.10) to 4.82 (SD = 1.20), with a significant t-value of -5.48 ($p < 0.001$). These results suggest that while traditional teaching methods yielded moderate gains, the STEAM intervention had a much stronger effect.

Table 3: Independent Sample t-test (Post-test between Groups)

Groups Compared	N	Mean Difference	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
CCAST (Exp) vs NTIGI (Ctrl)	77	2.69	8.02	<0.001	Experimental group performed significantly higher

Table 3, compares post-test mean scores between the experimental group (CCAST Bambili) and the control group (NTIGI Technical) in figure 2. The experimental group achieved a mean of 7.51 compared to the control group's 4.82, resulting in a mean difference of 2.69. This difference was statistically significant with a t-value of 8.02 ($p < 0.001$). These findings shows that students exposed to the STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention significantly outperformed those taught using traditional instructional methods.

Verification of Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in performance between male and female students due to STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention.

H_{a2}: There is a significant difference in performance between male and female students due to STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention.

Table 4: Independent Sample t-test: (Gender Differences in Experimental Group)

Gender (CCAST)	N	Mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Male	17	6.71 (± 1.05)	-3.12	0.003	Female students significantly outperformed males
Female	26	8.04 (± 1.10)			

Table 4, analyzes gender-based differences in post-test performance within the experimental group (CCAST Bambili). Female students recorded a higher mean score ($M = 8.04$, $SD = 1.10$) compared to their male counterparts ($M = 6.71$, $SD = 1.05$). The independent samples t-test yielded a t-value of -3.12 with $p = 0.003$, indicating a statistically significant difference in favor of female students. This result suggests that female students may have benefited more from the STEAM-based intervention than males, pointing to a possible gender-related dimension in how students engage with STEAM learning strategies.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that the STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention significantly enhanced students' mathematics achievement, as seen in the experimental group's higher post-test mean scores compared to the control group. This confirms Hypothesis One, rejecting the null and supporting the alternative that STEAM-based teaching contributes positively to mathematics achievement. These results are consistent with prior research indicating that instructional strategies grounded in STEAM/STEM approaches foster deeper conceptual understanding and problem-solving abilities (Beers, 2018; English, 2016; Honey, Pearson, & Schweingruber, 2014). English (2016) observed that integrated STEM activities improved middle school students' fluency in statistical reasoning, while Honey et al. (2014) emphasized that STEAM approaches create engaging, real-world contexts that strengthen computational skills. Similarly, Beers (2018) identified that STEM classrooms promote active engagement, critical thinking, and retention, aligning with the gains seen in CCAST students. The fact that the control group also showed modest improvements explains that traditional instruction is not entirely ineffective; however, the greater magnitude of gains in the experimental group indicates that STEAM strategies provide added value to conventional mathematics learning.

Regarding the second hypothesis, the study found significant gender differences in the experimental group, with female students outperforming males after the STEAM intervention. These findings challenge earlier studies that often reported male dominance in mathematics performance (Hyde, Lindberg, Linn, Ellis, & Williams, 2008; Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Hooper, 2016). Instead, it resonates with more recent research suggesting that well-structured STEAM pedagogies may reduce gender gaps and even enhance female

achievement (Sáinz & Müller, 2018; Blickenstaff, 2005). For instance, Hyde et al. (2008) and Nekang & Cheny (2024) found that when instructional environments were supportive and inclusive, gender differences in mathematics performance became negligible. Similarly, Sáinz and Müller (2018) argued that participatory, problem-centered learning strategies often appeal more to female students, leading to stronger engagement and outcomes. Blickenstaff (2005) further contended that gender-sensitive STEAM instruction counters stereotypes that traditionally disadvantage females. The present study's results thus support the view that innovative teaching approaches can not only raise overall achievement but also foster equitable outcomes across genders.

Conclusion and Implications

The study investigated the impact of a STEAM-based mathematics teaching intervention on students' mathematics achievement and gender differences in selected secondary schools in Tubah, Mezam Division, and North West Region of Cameroon. Based on the key findings, the study concludes that STEAM-integrated instructional approaches significantly improve students' mathematical achievement. The experimental group (CCAST Bambili), which received the STEAM-based intervention, recorded substantial gains in post-test scores compared to the control group (NTIGI Technical), confirming the effectiveness of hands-on, inquiry-driven, and technology-supported pedagogies in enhancing learning outcomes. The results showed that students exposed to STEAM strategies not only demonstrated better computational accuracy but also improved engagement with mathematical concepts, thereby validating evidence from earlier studies on the transformative role of STEAM in education.

Furthermore, the study established significant gender differences in performance, with female students in the experimental group outperforming their male counterparts. This finding contrasts with earlier research that suggested male dominance in mathematics achievement but aligns with emerging evidence that inclusive, participatory, and context-sensitive STEAM pedagogies can reduce gender disparities and enhance female learners' performance. The results suggest that when mathematics is taught using approaches that emphasize real-world application, collaboration, and creativity, female students respond with heightened interest and improved achievement.

The implications of these findings for STEAM education are substantial. Teachers should incorporate STEAM-oriented strategies into mathematics instruction to foster numerical fluency, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, gender-responsive teaching practices should be emphasized to ensure that both male and female students benefit equitably from STEAM interventions. At the policy level, educational stakeholders in Cameroon should prioritize the integration of STEAM pedagogies in secondary school curricula, particularly in arts-oriented classes, to promote inclusiveness, close achievement gaps, and strengthen students' mathematical competencies necessary for higher education and future careers.

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DYNAMICS OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT STRATEGY IN EVALUATING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS FOR PUPILS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS IN FAKO DIVISION, SOUTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of portfolio assessment on evaluating the English language skills of pupils with hearing impairment in Fako Division, Cameroon. Portfolio assessment, as an informal and learner-centred approach, was explored within the framework of inclusive education, where traditional assessment methods often fail to adequately reflect the abilities of learners with hearing loss. The research utilised a quasi-experimental design involving pupils with hearing impairment in selected inclusive primary schools. Data were gathered through English language tests, classroom observations, and interviews with parents, teachers, head teachers, and the divisional delegate. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, and regression analysis, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The results indicated that pupils subjected to portfolio assessment performed significantly better in English language skills than those assessed through conventional methods. Statistical analysis (SPSS t-tests and regression) showed that pupils assessed via portfolios scored notably higher on post-tests (portfolio group mean=12.78 versus control=11.14; $t(38)=2.919$, $p<.05$). Regression analysis demonstrated that portfolio use was a strong predictor of language improvement ($\beta=0.336$, $p<.001$). Classroom observations and interview findings further revealed that portfolio assessment encouraged ongoing learning, increased learner engagement, self-reflection, and heightened teacher awareness of individual progress. The study concludes that portfolio assessment is an effective method for evaluating the English language skills of pupils with hearing impairment and recommends its systematic adoption within inclusive classroom practice.

Keywords:

Portfolio assessment, Evaluation, English Language Skills, Hearing Impairment.

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Résumé

Cette étude a examiné l'impact de l'évaluation par portfolio sur l'évaluation des compétences en anglais d'élèves malentendants dans le département de Fako, au Cameroun. L'évaluation par portfolio, approche informelle et centrée sur l'apprenant, a été explorée dans le cadre de l'éducation inclusive, où les méthodes d'évaluation traditionnelles peinent souvent à refléter adéquatement les capacités des élèves malentendants. La recherche a utilisé un dispositif quasi expérimental auprès d'élèves malentendants scolarisés dans des écoles primaires inclusives sélectionnées. Les données ont été recueillies au moyen de tests d'anglais, d'observations en classe et d'entretiens avec les parents, les enseignants, le chef d'établissement et le délégué de circonscription. Les données quantitatives ont été analysées à l'aide de statistiques descriptives, de tests t et d'une analyse de régression, tandis que les données qualitatives ont fait l'objet d'une analyse thématique. Les résultats indiquent que les élèves évalués par portfolio ont obtenu des résultats significativement meilleurs en anglais que ceux évalués par les méthodes conventionnelles. L'analyse statistique (tests t et régression avec SPSS) a montré que les élèves évalués par portfolio ont obtenu des scores nettement supérieurs aux post-tests (moyenne du groupe portfolio = 12,78 contre 11,14 pour le groupe témoin ; $t(38) = 2,919$, $p < 0,05$). L'analyse de régression a démontré que l'utilisation du portfolio était un prédicteur fiable de l'amélioration linguistique ($\beta = 0,336$, $p < 0,001$). Les observations en classe et les entretiens ont également révélé que l'évaluation par portfolio encourageait l'apprentissage continu, renforçait l'engagement des apprenants, l'autoréflexion et permettait aux enseignants de mieux suivre les progrès individuels. L'étude conclut que l'évaluation par portfolio est une méthode efficace pour évaluer les compétences en anglais des élèves malentendants et recommande son adoption systématique dans le cadre de l'inclusion scolaire.

Mots-clés : Évaluation par portfolio, Évaluation, Compétences en anglais, Déficience.

Introduction

Hearing impairment affects millions of people worldwide and is estimated to affect more than five percent of the global population (Chu & Flores, 2011). For children this condition often alters typical pathways of language development and learning, increasing reliance on visual supports and specialised instruction (Marschark & Spencer, 2010). Accurate evaluation of English language skills is therefore essential because it documents communication ability, guides instruction, and supports participation in school and community life (Tan, 2023). Traditional one-time tests risk overlooking steady or multimodal progress that is typical for pupils with hearing impairment and can undervalue the strategies these learners use to communicate.

This article examines the effects of portfolio assessment on how teachers evaluate English language skills for pupils with hearing impairment in Fako Division, Cameroon. Portfolios collect a range of learner work over time, encourage reflection, and make learning processes visible to teachers, learners, and parents (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991). As a form of assessment for learning, portfolios reveal incremental gains in listening, visual spoken communication, reading, and writing and provide space for multimodal artefacts

such as recorded performances, annotated transcripts, teacher observations, and learner reflections (Black & Wiliam, 1998). In contexts like Fako Division where linguistic diversity, limited specialised resources, and local attitudes shape education, portfolios have the potential to produce fairer, more actionable evaluations and to shift instruction toward the communication strengths of pupils with hearing impairment (Marschark & Spencer, 2010). The study that follows evaluates portfolio design, teacher supports, artefact selection, and practical barriers, with the aim of offering evidence-based recommendations for inclusive assessment practice in Fako Division and similar settings.

Portfolio Assessment

Portfolios have been used in fine arts and architecture for many years to display the work of their owners. (Heywood, 2000). A portfolio is a collection of various evidence of achievement of learning outcomes (Davis et al., 2001). In education, a portfolio is a purposeful collection of a pupil's work that exhibits their efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas (Paulson, Paulson & Meyer, 1991). This concept leads us to portfolio assessment, a method often used in academic and professional fields, where an individual's ability, progress, and achievement are evaluated through a review of a pre-selected collection of work known as a portfolio (Regoniel, 2023). It allows educators to observe and evaluate the pupil's language processing abilities in a variety of contexts, just as the tasks mentioned earlier do. Among the many assessment methods employed, portfolio assessment stands out for its holistic approach that links theory with practice (Regoniel, 2023). A portfolio can include various types of work, such as reports, examinations, projects, and observations. To effectively implement portfolio assessment, certain principles must be followed. These principles include:

Collection of evidence: From multiple sources and throughout time, displaying the breadth and depth of a person's talent or advancement.

Organization and presentation of the collected works: This involves arranging the collected works in a logical and structured manner. The organization could be chronological (from oldest to newest), thematic (grouped by topics or subjects), or based on the type of work (essays, projects, tests, etc.). This is later presented in a way that eases visual appeal, readability, and overall user experience.

Evaluating the portfolio: Multiple reviewers are frequently involved to ensure impartiality and objectivity. Reviews may be based on predetermined criteria or rubrics, or on relative growth and development.

Reflection: The portfolio's structure encourages individuals to reflect on their learning progress and growth opportunities.

Portfolio assessments exist in a variety of formats, each customised to a certain goal. Portfolio assessments are classified into three types: assessment portfolios, work portfolios,

and learning portfolios. Each variety has distinct characteristics that make it appropriate for its intended application.

Assessment portfolio: Assessment portfolios, otherwise known as **evaluative portfolios**, contain work that has been evaluated according to set standards or criteria. These portfolios demonstrate a pupil's ability to meet specific learning standards. They often contain rubrics, test results, pupil reflections, teacher's notes, and graded assignments.

Showcase Portfolio: In contrast, a **showcase portfolio** displays a **student's best work**. Unlike an assessment portfolio, a showcase portfolio allows pupils to choose their best work, showcasing their highest level of learning and success. It may contain final drafts of assignments, projects, or other pieces of work that the pupil is particularly proud of. The purpose of a showcase portfolio is to provide a sense of accomplishment and to display one's best abilities (Regoniel, 2023).

Learning Portfolio: Learning portfolios, also known as process portfolios, captures the pupil's learning process. Unlike other forms of portfolios, which emphasise the finished output, the learning portfolio focuses on the learning process and growth. This could contain drafts, revisions, mistakes, criticism, and thoughts on how the learner overcame obstacles and developed over time

The use of portfolio assessment, specifically the learning portfolio, in the evaluation of English language skills for pupils with hearing impairments is a promising field of research (Smith & Jones, 2020). A portfolio assessment, which is a compilation of pupils' work over time, provides a complete view of a pupil's progress, which is especially useful for pupils with hearing impairments. It enables instructors to assess pupils' understanding and application of English language skills in a variety of circumstances, rather than depending on traditional, often biased, assessment methods. The learning portfolio, which focuses on the process of learning, might be especially useful as it encourages pupils to reflect on their learning experiences, recognize their strengths and areas for progress, and establish personal learning objectives (Brown & Green, 2022). This active involvement in the learning process can boost the learner's motivation and engagement, resulting in better English language skills. Furthermore, the utilisation of learning portfolios can foster inclusivity. Learning portfolios can assist in breaking down barriers and building a more inclusive learning environment by recognising each pupil's learning journey and giving a platform for them to demonstrate their progress and achievements (Miller, 2024).

While portfolio assessment provides a unique platform for pupils to demonstrate their progress, achievements and create an inclusive learning environment, they also have issues and limitations; (portfolio assessment being demanding and time-consuming, listening in difficult conditions, etc.) which may prompt educators to consider alternative forms of informal assessment, such as play-based assessment, that could potentially offer a more comprehensive and holistic assessment of a pupil's language proficiency.

Evaluating English Language Skills

Evaluating English language skills in children with hearing impairment requires an understanding of how linguistic components interact to support listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are built on phonology, lexicon, syntax, and semantics, which do not always develop evenly when auditory access is limited. As a result, assessment must go beyond isolated test scores to examine how pupils perceive, process, and use language in both structured and functional contexts. Language is a cognitive system that enables individuals to construct and interpret meaning, and its evaluation must therefore consider both linguistic form and language use (Lidz & Perkins, 2018; Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Evaluation of Phonological Listening Skills

Phonology forms the basis of listening and spoken language because it involves the recognition and production of sound patterns in English. Phonological evaluation typically includes sound discrimination, phoneme identification, rhyme recognition, and production of consonants and vowels. These tasks indicate how accurately a child perceives and reproduces speech sounds. Children with hearing impairment often experience difficulty perceiving high frequency or low intensity sounds, which can affect phoneme discrimination and speech clarity (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Research shows that early access to hearing technology improves phonological outcomes, but continuous evaluation remains necessary to identify persistent gaps (Marschark & Spencer, 2010). Assessment must therefore attend to both sound perception and production, as phonological skills strongly influence reading and spelling development (Anthony & Francis, 2005).

Evaluation of Lexical Skills

Lexical evaluation focuses on vocabulary knowledge and use across listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Vocabulary assessment typically examines receptive and expressive vocabulary, word retrieval, and understanding of word relationships. Vocabulary growth is closely linked to reading comprehension and overall academic achievement (Nation, 2001; Brown, 2020). Children with hearing impairment often experience slower vocabulary development due to reduced access to incidental language input, particularly for abstract and academic vocabulary (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). Effective evaluation therefore considers not only the number of words a child knows but also how accurately and flexibly those words are used in context (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Evaluation of Syntactic Skills

Syntax refers to the rules governing sentence structure and grammatical relationships. Evaluating syntactic skills involves examining sentence comprehension, sentence production, and the use of grammatical markers such as tense, plurality, and articles. These markers are often acoustically subtle and may be inconsistently perceived by children with hearing loss, leading to omissions or simplified sentence structures (Wicha et al., 2013). Language sample analysis and structured sentence tasks are commonly used to assess

syntactic competence and consistency. Syntactic performance provides important insight into both spoken and written English development (Davis, 2021).

Evaluation of Semantic Skills

Semantic evaluation focuses on meaning, including word knowledge, sentence interpretation, and discourse comprehension. Semantics enables learners to connect linguistic forms to concepts and real world knowledge (Wagner, 2010). For pupils with hearing impairment, assessment must examine understanding of literal and inferential meaning, figurative language, and relationships between ideas. Visual supports have been shown to enhance semantic understanding, particularly for abstract concepts (Hartman et al., 2019). Semantic skills are central to reading comprehension, written expression, and effective participation in conversations (Miller, 2022).

Integrating Linguistic Components in Evaluation

Phonology, lexicon, syntax, and semantics function as an integrated system that supports English language proficiency. Phonological skills support listening and decoding, vocabulary knowledge strengthens comprehension and expression, syntax enables sentence construction, and semantics allows meaning making across spoken and written texts (Johnson & Johnson, 2019; Brown, 2020). For pupils with hearing impairment, comprehensive evaluation must consider how reduced auditory access affects each component and their interaction. Integrating evidence across linguistic domains provides a more accurate and equitable profile of English language skills and supports informed instructional decision making.

Hearing Impairment

Hearing loss can be understood medically, educationally, and culturally. Medically it is described in degrees from slight to profound depending on measured thresholds in decibels (Ravi, n.d.). Educationally it is defined by its impact on learning and classroom performance; for example the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act uses the label hearing impairment to indicate a loss that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Culturally hearing loss can also describe a shared identity and community among people who are deaf or hard of hearing (Schiermer, 2000).

Sound reaches the brain through a chain of mechanical and neural events. Outer ear structures channel sound to the tympanic membrane. Vibrations are transmitted by the middle ear ossicles into fluid motion within the cochlea. Traveling waves in the cochlea stimulate hair cells of the organ of Corti which transduce mechanical energy into nerve impulses carried by the cochlear nerve to the brainstem and on to the primary auditory cortex. Only when this nerve impulses arrive at the cortical auditory area does the listener become consciously aware of sound (Riper & Erickson, 1996).

Hearing loss is commonly classified by degree and by type. Degree is measured in decibels and ranges from mild, which causes difficulty with quiet conversation especially in noisy environments, to profound, where even loud speech is not heard without technology. Typical classification bands commonly used in clinical descriptions include mild, moderate, severe, severe to profound, and profound and are reported as ranges such as 26 to 40 decibels or 41 to 60 decibels depending on the source (Hughes, 2019). Types of hearing loss include conductive, sensorineural, mixed, central, functional, and malingering when feigned loss is suspected (Thaigarajan & Arjunan, 2012).

Causes of hearing loss are varied and include aging, noise exposure, infections, ototoxic medications, genetic factors, trauma, and ear obstruction such as cerumen (Smith, 2005). Treatments range from medical and surgical interventions to hearing aids and cochlear implants, each of which can improve access to sound and support classroom learning when matched to a child's needs.

In Cameroon most documented cases are sensorineural. Recent local data indicate a high prevalence of sensorineural loss with rates reported between 61.7 percent and 94.4 percent in different series and with many affected people living in the Buea area of the Southwest region (Tingang et al., 2020; Regional Delegation of Social Affairs for the South West Region, 2020). The presence of specialist schools such as the Buea School for the Deaf has supported education through sign language and finger spelling, but limited sign language use among the hearing community presents challenges for social inclusion. This context has encouraged efforts to include learners with mild to moderate hearing loss in mainstream classrooms so they can develop both signed and spoken English and improve interaction with the wider community.

Assessment strategies must reflect these realities. Portfolio assessment offers a practical way to document language development over time by collecting work samples, recorded interactions, teacher observations, and learner reflections. Portfolios provide a richer picture of English ability for pupils with hearing loss and help teachers make informed instructional decisions that support inclusion and language access (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991).

Statement of the Problem

In many classrooms, traditional assessments (multiple-choice tests, essays under time limits, etc.) are ill-suited to pupils with hearing impairments. Such one-shot tests often fail to accommodate the unique communication needs of these learners, so their true abilities can be obscured. This situation underscores a need to explore alternative approaches. Informal strategies like portfolio assessment may provide more relevant insights into how deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils develop English skills. By reviewing multiple work samples and reflections, teachers can see ongoing progress rather than a single snapshot. Thus, the central problem is: How does using portfolio assessment alter the evaluation of English language skills among pupils with hearing impairment? This study addresses that question by isolating the portfolio strategy and measuring its impact on learners' performance.

Objective

Determine the effectiveness of portfolio assessment strategy in evaluating the English language skills for pupils with hearing impairments.

Research Question

How effective is portfolio assessment strategy in the evaluation of English language skills for pupils with hearing impairments?

Hypothesis

H₀: Portfolio assessment strategy does not significantly impact the evaluation of English language skills of pupils with hearing impairment.

H_a: Portfolio assessment strategy significantly impacts the evaluation of English language skills of pupils with hearing impairment.

Methodology

The study used a quasi-experimental design involving 39 pupils with varying degrees of hearing loss, 8 teachers and 2 headteachers in inclusive primary classrooms, 10 parents and 1 Divisional Delegate. One cohort experienced instruction with portfolio-based assessment, while a control cohort continued with standard evaluation methods. Data collection included classroom observations and structured interviews with classroom teachers, headteachers, parents, and the divisional delegate for basic education, focusing on assessment practices and pupil engagement. Teachers kept portfolios of each pupil's English work throughout the intervention period. Learner artefacts and portfolios were analysed for evidence of language development.

Quantitative data (scores from pre- and post-intervention English tests) were analysed with SPSS. Independent-samples *t*-tests compared experimental (portfolio) and control groups, and multiple regression assessed the predictive strength of the portfolio intervention. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analysed thematically to identify how the portfolio approach influenced teaching practices and learner behaviour. The methodology ensured triangulation of results by combining numerical achievement data with rich narrative accounts from teachers and parents about portfolio use.

Findings

Table 1

Observations to Determine Learners with Hearing Impairments in the Different Categories

S/N	Categories	Description	Frequency	Percentage
1	Mild Hearing	Difficulty hearing faint or distant speech. Can manage with minimal support.	29	74.4
2	Moderate Hearing	Difficulty hearing conversational speech without amplification.	4	10.3
3	Severe hearing	Can hear loud sounds but not conversational speech: Often requires assistive devices sign language.	2	5.1
4	Profound Hearing	Relies entirely on visual communication (sign language, lip reading) or written text.	2	5.1
5	Mixed and additional needs	Hearing loss and other challenges (e.g. hearing disabilities, physical impairments)	2	5.1
			39	100.0

Results in Table 1 reflect the observations made by the researcher to determine learners with hearing impairments in their various degrees. Learners with mild hearing impairment dominated the sample (74.4%), followed by those with moderate hearing impairment (10.3%). The other categories of severe, profound, and mixed additional needs were each represented by 5.1%.

Table 2

Observations on Areas and Indicators Communication Skills

Aspects	Observation Notes	Possible Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Response to spoken language	Learners respond when spoken to directly	Mild to moderate hearing loss if inconsistent.	23	59.0
Use of sign language	Learners use or rely on sign language	Severe or profound hearing loss	2	5.1
Lip-reading	Learners focus on the speaker's lips	Moderate to profound hearing	8	20.5

Use of amplification devices	Learner wearing hearing aids or cochlear implants	Device-dependent hearing	6	15.4
Total			39	100.0%

Table 2 above is based on observations on communication skills. Most of those identified with hearing impairments (59.0%) are related to responses to spoken language, 20.5% are associated with lip reading, 15.4% involve the use of amplification devices, and 5.1% involve the use of sign language. Each of these aspects is detailed in observation notes and possible indicators.

Table 3

Listening Behaviours

Aspects	Observation Notes	Possible Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Attention to sound	Learners react to sounds (e.g. doorbell)	Mild to moderate hearing	23	59.00
Difficulty following oral instructions	They need repeated instructions	Moderate to severe hearing	16	41.00
Total			39	100.0%

Table 3 above is based on observations of listening behaviours. Most of learners with hearing impairments (59.0%) fall under the aspect of attention to sound. 41.00% were classified under the aspect of difficulty following oral instructions. Each of these aspects had observation notes and possible indicators.

Table 4

Classroom Participation

Aspects	Observation Notes	Possible Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Group interaction	The learners find it difficult to interact with peers	Difficulty may indicate communication barriers	11	28.2
Ability to ask/answer questions	They are either hesitant or confident in responding	Communication or auditory challenges	17	43.6
Engagement in discussions	The learner appears	This may indicate difficulty in	11	28.2

	disengaged	understanding speech		
Total			39	100.0%

Table 4 above is based on observations on classroom participation. Under the aspect of ability to ask/answer questions, we have 43.6% of learners identified with hearing impairments. Group interactions and engagements in discussions each registered 28.2%.

Table 5

Academic Performance

Aspects	Observation Notes	Possible Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Reading and writing skills	They are on with peers	Severe hearing loss may impact literacy skills	13	33.33
Understanding of verbal instructions	They perform tasks correctly with clarification	Issues may signal auditory processing problems	13	33.33
Use of technology	The learner use text-based tools effectively	Profound hearing loss. Learners often excel here	13	33.33
Total			39	100.0%

Results in Table 5 above is based on observations of Academic Performance: Under the various aspects considered viz, reading and writing skills, understanding of verbal instructions and the use of technology, each registered 33.33% of observed cases of pupils with hearing impairments. Each of the aspects was described with observations notes and possible indicators.

Table 6

Behavioural and Social Indicators

Aspects	Observation Notes	Possible Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Frustration or withdrawal	The learner avoids participation	Difficulty in communication or understanding.	11	28.2
Peer interaction style	They are isolated or actively engaged	May indicate comfort with current supports	16	41.0
Use of assistive resources	They do request or use additional support tools	Indicates awareness and adaptation needs	12	30.8
Total			39	100.0%

Table 6 above is based on the observations on behavioural and social indicators; 41.0% of learners with hearing impairments were classified under peer interaction style, 30.8%

under the assistive resources while 28.2% fell under frustration or withdrawal. Each of these aspects has observation notes and possible indicators which describe the behaviour.

Table 7

Additional Notes for Observation

Aspects	Observation Notes	Frequency %		Frequency %	
		Yes	Consistent	No	Consistent
Environmental factors	The classroom is acoustically friendly (minimal echo or noise)	39	100.0	—	—
Support mechanisms	Are hearing aids accessible to all learners?	6	15.4	33	84.6
	Were learners observed on how they respond to provided supports like interpreters, captioning, or amplification devices?	2	5.1	37	94.9
Parental input	Did the observer consult parents or guardians for additional insights about the learner's hearing history and preferred communication mode?	20	51.3	19	49.7

Table 7 above is based on some additional notes for observations. Under environmental factors, specifically the friendly nature of the classroom, 100.0% indicated "yes".

For support mechanisms, specifically accessibility to hearing aids, 15.4% registered "Yes" while 84.6% registered "No". Observation on supports like interpreters, amplification devices, and captioning, "yes" registered 5.1% while "No" registered 94.9%. This means that there is an acute lack of support. For parental inputs and particularly consultations with parents, 51.3% said "Yes" while 49.7% said "No". This means that the researcher consulted more than half of the parents of children with hearing impairments.

Table 8

Observation Checklist

Category	Frequency of "Yes"	Percentage	Frequency of "No"	Percentage
Responds to verbal instructions without assistance	23	59.0	16	41.0
Uses amplification devices effectively	6	15.4	33	84.6
Relies on sign language or visual aids	16	41.0%	23	54
Engages in group activities confidently	9	23.1	30	76.9

Based on the observation results on Table 8, above, most were seen to be able to respond to verbal instructions (59.0%). A very large portion (%) does not use amplification devices effectively. 41% rely on sign language or visual aids, and 76.9% do not engage in group activities confidently.

Results of the Interview Conducted with Parents of Pupils with Hearing Impairments

Table 9

Awareness of Informal Assessment strategies

Response Option	Freq.	Percentage
No	7	70.0
Yes	3	30.0
Total	10	100.0

Most parents (70%) are not aware of how their children are being assessed in school.

Table 10

Parents Awareness of the Four Assessment Strategies Being Studied

Assessment Strategies	Freq.	Percentage
Not aware of Portfolio,	6	60.0
Aware of Portfolio,	4	40.0
Total	10	100.0

Results on table 10 show that, 60% of parents are not aware of any informal assessment strategies, 40% of them are aware of some informal assessment strategies like portfolio. This means that, in a large scale, parents are not aware of the informal assessment strategies for pupils with hearing impairments.

Results of the Interview Conducted with Head teachers of Inclusive Schools with Pupils with Hearing Impairments

Support for informal Assessment strategies

Table 11

Responses on Whether or not School Teachers are encouraged to Use Informal Assessment strategies

Response Options	Freq.	Percentage
Yes	5	100.0
No	---	0.0
Total	5	100.0

All the headteachers (100%) admitted that their schools encourage the use of informal assessment approaches as seen in the Table 11

Table 12*Responses on How Helpful the Various Assessment strategies are*

Assessment Approaches	Scale of Response							
	Very helpful		Moderately helpful		Slightly Helpful		Not Helpful	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%
Portfolio	4	80.0	----	----	1	20.0	----	---

Results on Table 12 show that 80% of interviewees said that portfolio assessment is very helpful, while 20% believed that it is slightly helpful. Translating the results above into a table...by using a weighting scale of very helpful = 4pts, moderately helpful = 3pts, slightly helpful = 2pts, and not helpful = 1pt, the following is arrived at.

Table 13:

Evaluating the Results on Table 12

Assessment Approach	Scale and Ratings								Total
	Very helpful		Moderately helpful		Slightly helpful		Not helpful		
	F	Weight	F	Weight	f	Weight	F	Weight	
Portfolio	4	16	---	---	1	2	---	---	18
Dynamic	1	4	4	12	---	---	---	---	16
Real life language task	---	---	1	3	---	---	4	4	7

The results on table 13 above show that portfolio assessment is evaluated at 18 points. This means that portfolio was rated as very helpful informal assessment strategy.

Summary findings on the Interview with Head Teachers

The results show that,

- Teachers are encouraged to use portfolio assessment for pupils with hearing impairments.
- Head teachers support the use of the following assessment strategies: Portfolios in evaluating English Language skills for learners with hearing impairment.

Findings of the Interview Conducted with the Divisional Delegate of Basic Education, Fako

Table 14*Impressions of the Divisional Delegate on Informal Assessment Strategies*

Major Theme	Sub-Themes	Response
Awareness and policy	Awareness of inclusive schools implementing informal assessment strategies	Yes
	Availability of policies encouraging the use of the following assessment strategies? -Portfolio	Yes for Portfolio
Observed Outcomes	Effectiveness of informal assessment strategies in English language skills for hearing impairments	Effective
	Observed challenges in schools	Lack of teacher training, limited resources, lack of monitoring and evaluation

Results in table 14 show that there is awareness and a policy document on the implementation of informal assessment strategies in inclusive schools. Despite several challenges, the outcomes of these strategies are effective.

Results of the interview conducted with classroom teachers

Table 15*Usage of Informal Assessment Strategies in Classroom*

Assessment Strategies	Frequency	Percentages
We do not use the portfolio assessment strategies	7	70.0
1 use portfolio strategies	3	30.0
TOTAL	10	100.0

Results in table 15 show that most teachers (70%) do not use any of the four informal assessment strategies. 30% use the portfolio assessment strategy.

Table 16*Effectiveness on the Use of Informal Assessment Strategies*

Assessment Strategy	Level of Effectiveness										Missing	Data
	Very Effective		Effective		Ineffective		Ineffective		Very Ineffective			
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Portfolio	1	10.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
None	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	60.0

Since this assessment strategy is never used by the classroom teachers as demonstrated by results on table...., most of them (60%) could not determine their effectiveness as then on table.... above.

Table 17
Degree of Impact

Statement	Magnitude of Impact					
	Always		Sometimes		Never	
	f	%	F	%	F	%
Reviewing portfolios help me assess English language progress of pupils with hearing impairment	-	-	6	60.0	4	40.0

Although most classroom teachers do not use portfolio assessment as seen in Table 16 and could not assess their effectiveness as seen in Table 16, after the researcher described the activities involved in each strategy, they could say the degree of impact as seen in Table 16. Most interviewees admitted that portfolio assessment strategy examined in this research will always or sometimes significantly aid in evaluating pupils with hearing impairments. The respondents to the interview stated the following as challenges they will face in implementing informal assessment strategies:

- 1) Lack of sufficient knowledge
- 2) Lack of resources
- 3) Time constraints
- 4) Difficulties in engaging pupils

Research Question: How effective is portfolio assessment strategy in the evaluation of English language skills for pupils with hearing impairments?

Table 18
Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes Generated from the Responses to Research Question 2

S/N	Themes	Sub-Themes
1	Improved instructions	-Eases teaching and learning. -Teachers can follow up and determine improved English skills among learners with hearing impairments. -Capture expressive language growth amongst pupils with hearing impairments. -Facilitates complex instructional strategies amongst pupils with hearing impairments.
2.	Improves motivation	-Pupils' thoughts about their learning is easily seen and followed up. -Motivates learners with hearing impairments to learn better when pictures and videos are used -Encourages self-reflection which can boost confidence and give the child a view of English ability.
3.	Enhanced Quality assessment by teachers	-Helps teachers evaluate flexibility due to multiple context (videos, pictures etc). -Pictures and videos help assess the speaking skills of

		learners with hearing impairments. -Tracks progress amongst learners with hearing impairments overtime. -Shows diverse skills of learners.
4.	Learning autonomy is encouraged	-Promotes pupils with hearing impairment ownership of their scores during assessment. -Provides evidence of strength and accountability -Individual progress amongst pupils with hearing impairments is easily determined.

Response to Research Question

From the summary table 18 above, portfolio assessment strategies with pupils suffering from hearing impairments significantly affect the evaluation of English language skills through the following major themes:

Improved instructions and subsequently improved assessment strategies
 Improved motivation to learn amongst the testees.
 Enhanced quality assessment by teachers.
 Learning autonomy by the pupils is encouraged, followed by their assessment.

These major themes generated several sub-themes, amongst which the researcher detected the following ones:

Facilities complex instructional strategies against pupils with hearing impairments.
 Encourages self-reflection, which can boost confidence and give children with hearing impairments a view of their English ability.
 Helps teachers' assessments to be more flexible among pupils with hearing impairments due to multiple contexts (pictures, videos, etc.)
 Provides evidence of strength and accountability.

Recommendation to Render Portfolio Assessment Strategy More Effective

The portfolios should be updated regularly.
 Let the portfolios look interactive and interesting.
 Modern technology should be used in producing portfolios. This will make them attractive.
 Video recordings could be used and incorporated as part of the portfolios.
 Training of teachers in inclusive schools on how to produce and use portfolios is paramount for effective assessment of pupils with hearing impairments.
 Training of teachers to integrate multiple subjects like science, mathematics, drawing on portfolios will ease their assessment strategy.

Testing Hypothesis

H₀: Portfolio assessment strategy does not significantly impact the evaluation of English language skills of pupils with hearing impairment.

H_a: Portfolio assessment strategy significantly impacts the evaluation of English language skills of pupils with hearing impairment.

Table 19

Summary of Student t-test Analyses for Hypothesis : SPSS version 30, Atlanta Computation on the Performance of Pupils in the Experimental and Control Groups

School Class	Grp	N	Mean (X)	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	df	t-com p.	t-crit	Conf.	Direction
GS Bota Level 2 pupils	Exptal	18	12.780	0.0717	0.148	38	2.919	1.686	95%	One tailed
GS Upper Costain Level 2 pupils	Control	21	11.142	0.0936	0.235					

α -level = 0.05

Verification of Hypothesis

At a confidence level of 0.95% with degree of freedom 38, for the experimental and control groups, the t-computed value (2.919) is greater than the t-critical value (1.686) for a one-tailed hypothesis. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0), following the decision rule and the retention of the alternative hypothesis. Inferences made led to the conclusion that pupils with hearing impairments exposed to portfolio assessment strategies perform significantly better than their peers who are exposed to the normal assessment strategies in class.

Multiple Regression Analyses

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the effects of the predictors (informal strategies) on the assessment of pupils with hearing impairment.

Treatment of Raw Data

Table 20

Response Format and Weighting Scale

Type of Statement	Response Always	Options and Association Scores	
		Sometimes	Never
Positive	3	2	1
Negative	1	2	3

The response format above was used to convert the responses to the items related to the response options above into scores before establishing them into Excel data sheets.

Any respondent to a positive statement who ticked "Always", scored 3 points, "Sometimes" scored 2 points, and "Never" scored 1 point. The reverse was true for negative statements with "Always" attracting 1 point, "Sometimes" scoring 2 points and "Never" scoring 3 points. The total score for the variable (portfolio), which is the predictor, was converted on 20, establishing the Excel data sheet before subjecting to multiple regression analysis. The coefficients for the prediction in the regression model are presented in the table that follows.

Table 21*Coefficients of Predictors in a Multiple Regression Analyses*

Predictor	'B	Std Error	Beta	P
• Portfolio informal strategy	0.241	0.010	0.336	<.001

The unstandardized coefficient (**B.**) indicates the amount of change in the dependent variable (assessment of pupils with hearing impairments) for a one unit change in the predictor variable (portfolio strategies) holding the other predictor constant. The standardised coefficients (**Beta**) provide a measure of the strength of the relationship between each predictor and the dependent variable.

The coefficient for portfolio is $B = 0.241$, $P < .001$. This shows that, for each one-unit increase in portfolio informal strategy, the assessment of pupils with hearing impairments reflected in their performance at the post-test level increases by 0.241 units, holding other predictors constant.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that portfolio assessment strategies fostered continuous tracking of individual progress, promoted self-reflection, and enhanced teacher feedback loops. Thematic summaries show that portfolios improved instruction and learner engagement. Teachers emphasized that portfolios made teaching and learning more effective by organizing pupils' work over time: they could "follow up and determine improved English skills" through pictures and writing samples. Seeing their own progress in a portfolio encouraged pupils. This approach also gave teachers richer evidence to assess speaking, writing, and comprehension in context. As one sub-theme noted, portfolios "capture expressive language growth" and help track diverse skills. In practice, learners took ownership of their work and enjoyed including creative projects, which translated into greater confidence and participation compared to the static formats of traditional tests.

The statistical data confirm that portfolios yield tangible gains. The portfolio group attained a mean score of 12.780, significantly higher than the control group's mean of 11.142. The t-test yielded $t = 2.919$ ($p < .05$), leading to the conclusion that portfolio-based learners performed significantly better than peers assessed by normal methods. This nearly 1.64-point gain highlights the practical impact of portfolios. Pupils were not only more engaged, but this engagement translated into higher English achievement than pupils evaluated in standard ways. The consistent improvement is further supported by regression results: the portfolio strategy had $\beta = 0.336$ ($p < .001$), indicating a strong unique contribution to language outcomes. Overall, the convergence of interview themes and quantitative evidence suggests that portfolios by integrating multimedia and self-reflection significantly elevate both the engagement and measured proficiency of hearing-impaired English learners versus traditional tests.

It is supported by Rostami, Jahandar & Khodabandehlou (2012), who state that by gathering multiple samples of work over time, the portfolio provides a more holistic and formative picture of each pupil's development than a one-off test. This approach not only allows for the collection of diverse evidence of a pupil's abilities and progress but also highlights the evolution of their skills across various contexts. A portfolio, as opposed to a single assessment, captures the nuances of learning experiences and can reflect a pupil's creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving aptitude. Furthermore, it encourages self-reflection and ongoing assessment, enabling teachers to tailor their strategies to meet individual needs effectively. Thus, a portfolio serves as a dynamic tool for both pupils and educators, facilitating a deeper understanding of learning trajectories over time rather than relying solely on the snapshot provided by a single test. It is further supported by Vygotsky's Social Constructivism theory, which emphasizes the importance of collaborative learning for people. It shows that knowledge isn't just something we gain alone; it's built through conversations and interactions with others and our environment. When portfolios are used in the classroom, they create a space for meaningful discussions between teachers and pupils. By reviewing work together, pupils receive support that helps them think more deeply about their learning. The process of pupils collecting their work, revisiting, and revising it aligns closely with Vygotsky's idea of mediated learning.

This approach encourages pupils to reflect on their thoughts and express their ideas in a safe environment. Through this dialogue and revision, pupils aren't just improving what they know; they're also developing their language skills as they explain their thoughts and engage in conversations that challenge and expand their understanding. Overall, this teamwork between teachers and pupils creates a positive learning environment that fosters growth, reflection, and connection. The findings are consistent with Marschark & Spencer (2015), who conducted research highlighting the importance of portfolios in educational settings, particularly for deaf pupils, their findings indicate that portfolios are effective tools for tracking the progressive development of vocabulary, grammar, and literacy skills over time. This is further supported by Katz & Schery (2006), who emphasised that portfolios' ability helps to document milestones in multimodal communication. By capturing a diverse array of formats such as written pieces, visual artefacts, and digital media, portfolios create a comprehensive narrative of an individual's learning journey and progress. Our findings align with these studies because teachers used portfolios to identify patterns in mistakes, support their teaching, and celebrate small language successes.

Recommendations

- **Regular Updates and Multimedia Integration:** Teachers should ensure that portfolios are maintained regularly and kept engaging. Including pictures, audio or video recordings, and interactive elements will make portfolios more attractive and representative of each pupil's strengths. For example, incorporating short sign-language video reflections or digital storytelling can showcase students' English use in ways traditional tests cannot.

- **Use of Technology:** Modern educational technology should be leveraged to create dynamic, interactive portfolios. Tools like tablets or presentation software can allow pupils to include multimedia projects. Video recordings of classroom presentations or group discussions should be added to portfolios, as recommended by participants.
- **Teacher Training:** Schools must train teachers in inclusive portfolio use. Workshops and collaborative planning sessions can help teachers learn how to design, manage, and interpret portfolios for deaf learners. Emphasis should be on selecting diverse tasks (across subjects like science, math, art) for inclusion, so that portfolios reflect all aspects of a pupil's learning.
- **Curricular Integration:** Portfolios should be integrated across subjects. Teachers can coordinate so that a single portfolio contains work from English, science, drawing, etc., providing a comprehensive view of a pupil's abilities. This cross-disciplinary approach can reduce redundancy and highlight transferable skills.

By following these recommendations, educators can make portfolio assessment a powerful, student-centred component of instruction, ensuring hearing-impaired pupils' English skills are evaluated more effectively and fairly.

Conclusion

Portfolio assessment had a clear positive impact on evaluating English skills of pupils with hearing impairments in Fako Division. Pupils assessed via portfolios showed significantly greater gains and confidence than those with traditional testing. By incorporating multimedia work and student self-reflection, portfolios functioned as dynamic tools that revealed learners' progress over time. They complemented formal testing by providing rich, longitudinal evidence of ability. In essence, portfolios did not merely produce higher test scores, they transformed the evaluation process to be more inclusive and reflective of individual learning journeys. These results suggest that embracing portfolio assessment can lead to more equitable and effective English language instruction in inclusive schools. Going forward, schools should view portfolios as an integral part of curriculum planning and reporting, since our study found that portfolio use "significantly elevates both engagement and measured proficiency" in deaf learners.

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Teacher Burnout: Causes, Consequences, and Insights from Science Teachers

Ulas Kubat

Abstract

Teaching is a demanding profession characterized by challenging working conditions and high stress levels. Within the school environment, various factors significantly contribute to teacher burnout syndrome. These include excessive workload, restrictive school policies and an unsupportive school climate, conflicts between teachers and administration, a lack of teacher involvement in decision-making processes, insufficient recognition, and student behavioral and disciplinary problems. Teachers can experience burnout syndrome irrespective of demographic factors such as age, years of service, or gender. Therefore, understanding the causes and consequences of burnout is critical for both teacher performance and student achievement. In other words, comprehending teacher burnout and implementing preventive measures is essential for fostering a healthy educational environment. A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study. The findings indicate that the primary causes of teacher burnout are excessive workload, lack of administrative support, and disrespect from students and parents. Furthermore, the most prevalent negative consequences of burnout identified were attrition from the profession, high stress levels, and physical and emotional exhaustion.

Keywords:

Science Teacher, Teacher Burnout, Emotional Exhaustion, Lack of Support, Student Misbehavior.

Literature Review

Teaching is a profession characterized by high levels of stress. Consequently, many teachers today experience physical and emotional problems due to occupational stress. Occupational burnout among teachers is a prevalent and highly complex condition that can have adverse emotional, physical, and psychological effects on educators. Regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, or years of service, many teachers can experience burnout syndrome, which is profoundly debilitating. Burnout is a syndrome characterized by emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. It manifests as a insensitivity towards the



people individuals encounter in their professional duties, a feeling of emotional depletion, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment and competence. Burnout is primarily observed in professions that require extensive face-to-face interaction with people (Amigo et al., 2014; Günay & Demiralay, 2016).

Occupational burnout is a widespread issue affecting professionals across various sectors globally (Kostev et al., 2024). Burnout emerges as a critical problem that impacts teachers' lives, psychological well-being, and mental health. Teachers experiencing burnout syndrome often report not receiving necessary support from their administrators, being excluded from school decision-making processes, lacking the desire to prepare for lessons, and feeling disconnected from their colleagues at the same school. Therefore, understanding the causes and consequences of burnout is crucial for both teacher performance and student achievement. In other words, comprehending and taking preventive measures against teacher burnout is essential for fostering a healthy educational environment.

Burnout is a complex phenomenon with significant implications for both individuals and organizations (Maslach & Leiter, 2021). Teachers' exposure to stress, feelings of depersonalization, and emotional exhaustion are indicators that they may be experiencing burnout syndrome. Teachers suffering from burnout have a significantly increased risk of developing health-related issues, experiencing higher stress levels, and reporting extreme job dissatisfaction. Due to these adverse conditions, teachers may leave the profession (Hester et al., 2020). Approximately half of all teachers leave the profession within the first five years, often due to job stress. In the United States, about 25% of new teachers leave within three years, and nearly 50% leave within the first five years. Not only students but society as a whole has much to lose from teacher burnout, making it imperative to find solutions to this problem (Wong et al., 2017).

The quality of education provided by teachers who are burned out or emotionally exhausted is often very low. When teachers are under high stress and struggle to cope, their relationships with students are highly likely to be negatively affected, leading to adverse academic and behavioral outcomes for students. Similarly, burned-out teachers create an inefficient teaching and learning process, which can result in lower student achievement. Teacher burnout can reduce students' intrinsic motivation, thereby diminishing their learning and engagement in the educational process.

The primary causes of teacher burnout are suggested to include excessive working hours, student disrespect, a demotivating school environment, lack of administrative support, being pressured to perform extra tasks outside their duties, and poor relationships among colleagues (Bousquet, 2012). Teacher burnout generates significant negative effects on the education system, including rising teacher attrition rates, consequent declines in instructional quality, low student achievement, and diminished student motivation (Madigan & Kim, 2021). In this context, various factors within the school environment, such as excessive workload, student disciplinary issues, school policies, negative conflicts

between teachers and administration, lack of teacher involvement in decision-making, and a lack of recognition, are highly influential in causing teachers to experience burnout syndrome.

This study, which aims to reveal the views of Science teachers on teacher burnout, sought answers to the following questions posed to them:

What is teacher burnout? What causes teacher burnout?

What are the consequences of teacher burnout?

What can be done to eliminate teacher burnout?

Research Model

This study employed a qualitative research method, which "involves a process aimed at presenting perceptions and events in a realistic and holistic manner in their natural setting" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005, p. [Please add page number]). Among qualitative research designs, a phenomenological approach was adopted. Phenomenological research seeks to uncover and convey the hidden meanings of everyday life experiences (Robson, 2002). The main objective of the phenomenological approach in qualitative research is to describe the essence of all participants' experiences regarding a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Study Group

The study group consisted of 22 Science teachers working in the province of Muğla during the 2020-2021 academic year spring semester. Convenience sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used in the research. This sampling method provides speed and practicality to the research while being less costly (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). According to this sampling method, respondents are selected based on their proximity and availability (Robson, 2002).

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form, developed by the researcher based on a literature review, was used as the data collection instrument. For this purpose, a literature review was conducted initially. In the second stage, opinions were sought from four science education specialists and four assessment and evaluation faculty members to ensure content validity. The interview form consisted of a total of four questions designed to determine Science teachers' views on teacher burnout. The interviews conducted for the research were recorded using an audio recorder. The data were collected in April and May 2021.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques. The transcripts were initially coded independently by the researcher and another science educator. The analyses were then combined to reach a consensus. The researchers subsequently met to discuss and reconcile any discrepant codes until full agreement was achieved. The inter-coder reliability

was calculated as 92.44%. A reliability coefficient above 70% is considered acceptable for research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula was used for this calculation: $P = [Na \text{ (Agreement)} / (Na \text{ (Agreement)} + Nd \text{ (Disagreement)})] \times 100$.

The participating teachers were coded as ST1, ST2, ST3, ... ST21, ST22 (e.g., ST1 refers to the first science teacher, ST7 to the seventh, and ST12 to the twelfth).

Findings

This section presents the findings related to the four research questions, organized thematically with supporting direct quotations from the participants.

1. What is teacher burnout?

The codes and frequencies obtained for the question "What is teacher burnout?" are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Codes and Frequencies for the Definition of Teacher Burnout

Code	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Alienation from the Profession	13	ST2, ST3, ST4, ST7, ST8, ST10, ST11, ST13, ST17, ST19, ST21, ST22
Lack of Support	8	ST4, ST6, ST8, ST12, ST14, ST18, ST20, ST21
Feeling Unappreciated	6	ST3, ST9, ST15, ST17, ST18, ST20
Student/Parent Disrespect	4	ST7, ST12, ST16, ST19

Science teachers expressed their views as follows:

"I don't feel that I am valued as a teacher at the school." (ST3)

"Because of all this stress I experience, I have become increasingly detached from my profession." (ST7)

2. What causes teacher burnout?

The codes and frequencies for the causes of teacher burnout are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Codes and Frequencies for the Causes of Teacher Burnout

Code	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Excessive Workload	16	ST1, ST3, ST4, ST7, ST8, ST9, ST10, ST11, ST12, ST14, ST15, ST18, ST19, ST20, ST21, ST22
Lack of Administrative Support	11	ST4, ST5, ST7, ST8, ST9, ST11, ST12, ST14, ST18, ST20, ST21
Student Indiscipline	10	ST4, ST7, ST9, ST10, ST12, ST14, ST16, ST18, ST20, ST22
Parental Disrespect	8	ST1, ST7, ST8, ST9, ST12, ST15, ST19, ST22
Exclusion from Decision-Making Processes	8	ST4, ST7, ST9, ST10, ST11, ST14, ST15, ST20

Science teachers expressed their views as follows:

“When we face problems, we cannot receive adequate support from the administration.” (ST4)

“I believe student disrespect primarily stems from the family environment in which they were raised. Therefore, the student's family background is crucial for discipline and respect.” (ST16).

3. What are the consequences of teacher burnout?

Table 4 Codes and Frequencies for the Consequences of Teacher Burnout

Code	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Leaving the Profession	16	ST2, ST3, ST4, ST5, ST7, ST8, ST10, ST11, ST12, ST13, ST14, ST16, ST18, ST19, ST21, ST22
Stress	15	ST1, ST3, ST4, ST5, ST6, ST8, ST10, ST11, ST12, ST13, ST14, ST18, ST19, ST20, ST21
Physical/Emotional Exhaustion	12	ST3, ST5, ST6, ST7, ST8, ST10, ST12, ST13, ST15, ST17, ST19, ST22
Loss of Interest in the Profession	11	ST1, ST3, ST5, ST7, ST10, ST13, ST14, ST16, ST19, ST21, ST22
Low Student Academic Achievement	11	ST2, ST3, ST5, ST6, ST10, ST13, ST14, ST16, ST19, ST21, ST22
Conflict with Administration	8	ST1, ST3, ST8, ST13, ST14, ST16, ST19, ST21
Depersonalization & Emotional Exhaustion	6	ST5, ST7, ST10, ST13, ST14, ST19

Science teachers expressed their views as follows:

"I can say that I often experience communication problems with my fellow teachers, especially with those in administrative positions. I haven't been able to find solutions to many of these problems I encounter." (ST8)

"We are dealing with tasks that are unrelated to our primary duties. The administration's unreasonable demands, students' disrespectful behaviors, and parents' constant, unnecessary complaints... Despite all these adversities, we are trying to cover the curriculum." (ST19).

4. What can be done to eliminate teacher burnout?

Suggested solutions for eliminating teacher burnout are presented in Table 5

Table 5 Codes and Frequencies for Solutions to Eliminate Teacher Burnout

Code	Frequency	Teacher Participants
Balancing Workload	5	ST7, ST10, ST15, ST20, ST22
Involvement in Decision-Making Processes	5	ST3, ST5, ST9, ST11, ST19
Treating Teachers with Respect	3	ST7, ST12, ST15
Receiving Recognition from Administration	3	ST5, ST8, ST17
Emotional and Psychological Support	3	ST6, ST13, ST18
Supportive Work Environment	2	ST13, ST16
Healthy Communication with Parents	2	ST7, ST21

Science teachers expressed their views as follows:

"There is too much responsibility on teachers... Administrative pressures, parents, and students... All these negative pressures need to be eliminated." (ST13)

"We do not receive any recognition from the administration for our work. At the very least, a word of praise would be appreciated by all teachers." (ST17)

Discussion and Conclusion

Teachers fulfill numerous and diverse roles, including lesson preparation and planning, managing student disciplinary issues, collaborating with colleagues, and assessing and grading student work. Given this complex and intense workload, it is not surprising that teachers frequently experience "burnout" and leave the profession. Therefore, eliminating teacher burnout is critically important from multiple perspectives.

The findings regarding the consequences of teacher burnout highlighted depersonalization, low student academic achievement, stress, and emotional exhaustion.

Depersonalization can be attributed to factors such as excessive teaching load, administrative pressure, and a lack of communication among staff.

Leaving the profession emerged as the most frequently cited consequence of teacher burnout. These results underscore the multifaceted nature of the challenges teachers face. Among the most significant consequences is stress, physical, and emotional fatigue. Similarly, Akman et al. (2010) found that, depending on certain variables, teachers experience burnout with varying intensities across the dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. These findings reveal the necessity of improving teachers' coping strategies for work-related stress and their working conditions.

Enhancing teachers' working conditions and creating supportive physical and social environments can positively impact teacher burnout. A comfortable and safe work environment can increase teacher motivation. Factors such as course load, administrative pressure, high expectations, and stress are prominent contributors to the emergence of burnout. It is well-established that professions requiring intensive interpersonal communication carry a higher risk of burnout. Teaching is inherently a high-stress profession. The research results indicated that half of the teachers ($f=11$) reported experiencing stress and physical and emotional exhaustion, confirming the high-stress nature of the teaching profession.

Consequently, providing teachers with emotional and psychological support is essential. This support can aid them in coping with stress and managing emotional difficulties. Offering counseling services in schools could be instrumental in this regard.

When teachers are exposed to stress-induced factors like burnout and physical and emotional fatigue, it can lead to feelings of alienation towards their school and the teaching profession itself. Eliminating these factors, which severely reduce professional motivation and cause burnout, is vital for several reasons. The results from this research help us understand the challenges, physical strain, and emotional weariness teacher's encounter in their professional lives. Psychosocial stressors in the workplace that cause burnout include increased workloads, long working hours, extra duties, and ambiguous roles (Jugdev et al., 2018).

Low student academic achievement was identified as another consequence of teacher burnout. A teacher experiencing burnout will likely be less motivated to prepare lessons effectively, leading to student disinterest and apathy towards the class. This vicious cycle has a high potential to lower both student and teacher motivation, further exacerbating the feeling of burnout among teachers. Significant correlations have been reported between teachers' emotional exhaustion and students' evaluations of teaching quality (Klusmann et al., 2008). Compared to their less burned-out colleagues, teachers with low emotional exhaustion are more likely to excel in classroom management and have students with higher academic achievement.

The findings from this research reveal that excessive workload, lack of necessary administrative support, and disrespectful behaviors from students and parents are the most significant difficulties contributing to teacher burnout. Student disrespect and apathy can diminish teacher motivation and increase feelings of burnout. Therefore, students' insensitive and undisciplined behaviors play a crucial role in triggering burnout among teachers. To address these issues, it is necessary to strengthen the authority of school disciplinary boards, ensure that administrators respect teachers, and value the opinions of schools and teachers. Similarly, being subjected to conflicts with administration and a lack of support can reduce teachers' job satisfaction and is associated with emotional exhaustion. The research finding on emotional exhaustion and depersonalization aligns with the results of the study conducted by Aksu and Baysal (2005).

An examination of the results related to reducing burnout points primarily to measures that need to be taken by school administrators. It is crucial for school leaders to take steps to minimize their negative impact on teachers. Practices such as assigning excessive workloads and meaningless extra tasks, which can sometimes amount to mobbing, must be stopped immediately by school administrators. An excessive teaching load can increase burnout; therefore, curricula should be reviewed. School administrators should foster positive communication with teachers rather than conflict, balance high expectations placed on them, and address processes that cause emotional problems, such as mobbing. Thus, establishing a supportive school environment could be highly effective in preventing teacher burnout. Parents should also support their children's education and collaborate with teachers. In cases of student disciplinary issues, the teacher should work with the parent to understand the causes and find solutions together.

School administrators must support teachers and address their emotional and professional needs. They should listen to teachers' problems and strive to find solutions. Issues should be discussed with teachers, and their ideas and suggestions should be valued. A thorough understanding of the causes and consequences of burnout and taking preventive measures based on this understanding are essential for reducing the risk of burnout. Furthermore, identifying ways to eradicate teacher burnout could help retain qualified teachers in the profession longer and prevent them from leaving altogether. The long-term retention of qualified teachers is a significant factor in enhancing the quality of education.

In conclusion, the development of healthy societies is possible with healthy teachers. Reducing burnout among teachers and creating a healthy work environment are of paramount importance.

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The Alienation of Science Teachers from Their Profession and Its Impact on the Teaching-Learning Process

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Abstract

The investigation of teacher alienation and its ensuing effects is of critical importance across all educational tiers, including secondary and high school levels. Elucidating the causes and consequences of alienation specifically among secondary and high school teachers is paramount for the enhancement of educational quality. The concept of alienation reflects an individual's sense of isolation and, given its prominence in related research, can be characterized as a socio-psychological construct. Fundamentally, alienation denotes an individual's withdrawal from their society or, put differently, a state of disconnection from the community. This study aims to identify the causes of professional alienation among science teachers in Mugla and to determine its subsequent impacts. This study employed a qualitative research methodology, utilizing a semi-structured interview form for data collection. The sample group consisted of 30 Science teachers employed in Mugla during the 2021-2022 academic year. The analysis of the collected data revealed that the most predominant factor leading to professional alienation was the escalating issues within the education system. Consequently, this alienation manifested in the emergence of an unproductive learning environment and a growing disaffection with the teaching profession.

Keywords:

Alienation, Self estrangement, Isolation, Powerlessness, Science Education, Science Teacher.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid technological transformation of our era contrasts sharply with the growing prominence of the crisis in human relationships with nature, other people, and society at large, and the accompanying unhappiness. Alienation can be described as an individual leading a lifestyle contrary to their essence or incongruent with human nature.



Alienation can be categorized into four primary groups:

1. Alienation stemming from economic factors.
2. Alienation resulting from technological developments. The individual adjusts their life according to technology, which in turn creates a sense of alienation.
3. Alienation induced in the individual by changes in the social structure.
4. Alienation arising from distancing oneself from society, philosophy, all branches of fine arts, music, and, in essence, the cultural accumulation of humanity (Kır, 2002).

1.1. Problem statement

Drawing on the relevant literature, this study aims to determine the reasons for professional alienation and its effects among 30 Science teachers working in Mugla during the 2021-2022 Spring academic year.

1.2. Research Questions

A review of the relevant literature reveals the significant importance of the concept of teacher alienation from an educational perspective. This study, therefore, seeks answers to the following questions based on the concept of teacher professional alienation:

Guided by the aim of determining the reasons for professional alienation among Science teachers and its effects, as expressed through their views, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are the reasons for professional alienation among Science teachers?
2. What are the effects of professional alienation among Science teachers on the educational process?
3. What recommendations could be made to prevent professional alienation among Science teachers?

1.3. Literature Review

Despite its benefits, technology can be argued to have negative repercussions on human socialization. Although technology undergoes rapid change and transformation, some individuals struggle to adapt to this new dynamic. When this process becomes a negative cycle, it can result in a diminished capacity to interpret events and a negative transformation in individuals. It can be posited that the number of people "alienated" by the changing social dynamics and lifestyles caused by technology is increasing daily, and a significant majority of these individuals are young university students (Oerlemans & Jenkins, 1998).

The concept of alienation is depicted as a detachment and distancing from society, values, and oneself (Yadav & Nagle, 2012). Teacher alienation from their profession can be expressed as teachers feeling excluded and discriminated against in the school, leading to a sense of estrangement from their colleagues and, subsequently, from themselves (Eryilmaz & Burgaz, 2011).

Melvin Seeman (1959) conceptualized alienation across five distinct dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, and self-estrangement. The concept of alienation can signify individuals' inability to interpret social events or their misinterpretation, loss of belonging to their society, loss of faith in them and society, and distancing from themselves and their environment. Alienation denotes the distancing of one thing from another or the severance of ties with another person. It can also be defined as an individual's feeling of detachment or separation from their environment, work, and self. Similarly, it can be described as a decrease in the individual's adaptation to their social, cultural, and natural environment, a process that gradually leads to loneliness and helplessness. From another perspective, alienation involves individuals disregarding or being unaware of their own and society's characteristics, adopting the conditions, values, lifestyles, and beliefs of the society (Tezcan, 1995). Likewise, it is defined as an individual distancing from themselves and society, remaining indifferent to the process (Bademci, 2001). The concept of alienation is also described as an individual's indifference to problems within themselves and their environment (Püsküllüoğlu, 2012).

The concept of alienation was later utilized by Karl Marx. Marx interpreted alienation as "the process whereby the products of human labor subjugate the human being, ultimately transforming the human into a non-human" (Şimşek et al., 2016), thereby paving the way for the concept's recognition.

Occupational alienation is one of the issues observed in the teaching profession, similar to other professions. In today's educational system, the increase in problems, despite teachers' struggles with these numerous issues and the eventual belief that the problems are unsolvable, alienates teachers from their profession (Şimşek et al., 2012).

There are numerous reasons for teachers' professional alienation. These can be listed as follows: the exclusion of teachers from the decision-making process within the organization, a conflict between their personal needs and the school's objectives, the pressure felt from the curriculum despite the obligation to complete it within a set timeframe, as well as the school's circulars and regulations (Yapıcı, 2004). Similarly, school culture and content, school administration and communication, work pressure, low salary, workload, lack of educational materials, and poorly planned programs can be cited as reasons for teachers experiencing alienation from their profession (Oshagbemi, 2000).

Teachers experiencing alienation from their profession view their job merely as a source of income. This prevents them from deriving satisfaction from their teaching profession. A teacher who has not internalized their profession and is alienated from their work finds the educational process boring and joyless and offers little benefit to the student. An alienated teacher does not believe they can be successful and avoids taking responsibility at school (Gülören, 2011). Consequently, high academic success cannot be expected from the students taught by such a teacher. In this context, an alienated teacher does not prioritize professional development, and their belief, enthusiasm, and passion for

the profession diminish (Erjem, 2005). As they reach a point of emotional and physical exhaustion, they develop a negative attitude towards the people they serve and themselves. Therefore, regardless of the job, they find it difficult to meet the required expectations, and their sense of personal competence gradually decreases (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

As the teacher distances themselves from their passion for teaching, they lose their ideals and enthusiasm for it. Consequently, it has been stated that when teachers feel inadequate in their profession, occupational burnout emerges (Friedman, 2000). Teachers' cognitive, affective, or behavioral withdrawal from educational processes, and the increasing meaninglessness of these processes to them, can lead to teachers perceiving their profession as boring and unenjoyable (Kurtulmuş & Karabıyık, 2016).

The alienation of teachers from their profession negatively impacts their professional motivation. In this context, teacher alienation can manifest negatively in the workplace as follows: absenteeism, inability to think creatively, failure to communicate with colleagues, indifference to work, and a lack of willingness and effort. Teachers, as the primary actors of the learning-teaching process, require high motivation to create a productive learning-teaching environment for their students. This is because individuals who work with high motivation will experience lower levels of alienation (Shantz et al., 2015). Teachers who do not experience alienation towards school prepare and implement better lesson plans and are more skilled at engaging their students in discussions (Kaner, 2010). Furthermore, they exhibit distinct and observable behaviors such as confidence, diligence, persistence, and effort (Telef, 2011).

2. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative research method. The findings resulting from qualitative research are highly explanatory. To support the research findings, excerpts from documents, field notes, and participant interviews are incorporated. These excerpts contribute to and enrich the explanatory nature of the study (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research aims to examine phenomena in depth and detail; it typically uses interviews, observation, field notes, and open-ended questions as data collection tools, and the results are based on descriptive narratives and direct quotations from participants rather than statistical reports (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). This study attempts to reveal the reasons for Science teachers' professional alienation and its effects in a multifaceted and in-depth manner.

2.1. Population and Sample

The study group consists of twenty-four Science teachers working in the province of Muğla during the 2022-2023 academic year. For the qualitative data of the research, 30 Science teachers were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows for in-depth research by selecting information-rich cases relevant to the purpose of the study (Büyükoztürk et al., 2009).

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Study Group Participants

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=30)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Kadin	15	50
	Erkek	15	50
Age	21-25	-	
	26-30	3	10
	31-35	12	40
	36-40	12	40
	41-45	3	10
Professional Seniority (Years)	6-10	3	10
	11-15	6	20
	16-20	6	20
	21-25	9	30
	26+	6	20
Level of Education	Bachelor's Degree	21	70
	Master's Degree	9	30
Faculty of Graduation	Faculty of Education	24	80
	Faculty of Science	6	20

2.2. Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured interview form was prepared to gather qualitative data for the study. The interview questions were developed based on a review of the literature and in consultation with experts in curriculum development, assessment and evaluation, and science teachers. The data obtained from interviews with 30 science teachers were transcribed, and categories and codes were derived from these texts. The data were analyzed independently by the researcher and another science educator using descriptive analysis techniques. The inter-coder reliability was calculated at 86.14%. Reliability scores above 70% are considered acceptable for research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this context, the study's reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) reliability formula: $P = [Na \text{ (Agreement)} / (Na \text{ (Agreement)} + Nd \text{ (Disagreement)})] \times 100$.

The participating science teachers were coded as ST1, ST2,... ST29, ST30 (e.g., ST2 represents the second teacher, ST16 the sixteenth, and ST28 the twenty-eighth).

3. RESULTS

The codes derived from the teachers' responses to the question, "What are the reasons for science teachers' professional alienation?" are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Reasons for Professional Alienation

Codes	Frequency	Teacher Participants	
Workload	13	ST1, ST3, ST6, ST9, ST11, ST13, ST15, ST21, ST22, ST24, ST27, ST29, ST30	
Low Salary	11	ST2, ST5, ST9, ST12, ST13, ST15, ST19, ST22, ST24, ST27, ST30	
Exclusion from Processes	6	ST4, ST7, ST14, ST17, ST25, ST28	
Pressure from Administrators & Parents	4	ST6, ST14, ST19, ST27	
Student Disrespect	4	ST9, ST18, ST22, ST25	
Classroom Management Difficulties	3	ST14, ST23, ST30	
Constantly Changing Education Policies	2	ST5, ST17	

As seen in Table 2, workload emerged as the most frequently cited reason for alienation, while constantly changing education policies was the least emphasized. Teachers expressed their views on the reasons for alienation as follows:

"I love my teaching profession very much, but the disrespectful behavior of students has made me disheartened with my job." (ST18)

"There is a huge disparity between the workload expected of me and the salary I receive. This negatively affects my motivation to work." (ST9)

"Our opinions are not sought in the decision-making processes for the school. It's as if we don't exist here." (ST4).

Table 3. Effects of Professional Alienation

Codes	Frequency	Teacher Participants	
Loss of Motivation	15	ST3, ST5, ST6, ST8, ST11, ST15, ST17, ST18, ST21, ST23, ST25, ST26, ST28, ST29, ST30	
Professional Dissatisfaction	11	ST2, ST7, ST12, ST13, ST16, ST18, ST20, ST22, ST24, ST27, ST29	
Breakdown in Communication	8	ST6, ST11, ST18, ST21, ST23, ST26, ST27, ST30	
Decline in Student Academic Achievement	6	ST7, ST13, ST17, ST24, ST26, ST28	
Decreased Productivity	5	ST4, ST16, ST18, ST25, ST28	
Stress	4	ST8, ST11, ST18, ST24	
Feeling of Isolation	3	ST2, ST13, ST15	

Table 3 indicates that loss of motivation was the most frequently reported effect of alienation, while feeling isolated was the least cited. Teachers described the effects as follows:

"As a result of all these processes, my motivation has gradually decreased. There are days when I don't even want to come to school." (ST5).

"Since I, as a teacher, am not working productively, this negatively affects my students' academic success." (ST17).

"Alienation from their profession causes stress for these teachers. This stress negatively impacts their entire professional life, leading to adverse effects such as a breakdown in communication with other teacher colleagues." (ST11)

Table 4. Recommendations to Prevent Alienation

Codes	Frequency	Teacher Participants	
Collaboration Among Teachers	10	ST2, ST6, ST8, ST10, ST13, ST17, ST21, ST25, ST27, ST30	
Administrator-Teacher Collaboration	9	ST3, ST5, ST9, ST13, ST18, ST24, ST26, ST27, ST29	
Social Cohesion Activities	8	ST5, ST9, ST12, ST14, ST17, ST18, ST22, ST30	
Teacher Inclusion in Decision-Making	6	ST8, ST14, ST16, ST23, ST27, ST29	
Fair and Equitable Treatment by Administrators	5	ST8, ST16, ST19, ST25, ST28	
Reward and Incentive System	3	ST3, ST15, ST22	

Table 4 shows that collaboration among teachers was the most suggested recommendation to prevent alienation, while a reward and incentive system was the least mentioned. Teachers offered the following recommendations:

"Collaboration with our other colleagues and administrators will be positive for everyone in the school environment." (ST13)

"If teachers are the cornerstone of education, why are we not consulted when a decision is made? I believe teachers must be included in decision-making processes." (ST14)

"It is very important for administrators to be fair and equitable. Otherwise, significant negative issues arise among teachers." (ST28).

4. DISCUSSION

Teachers are influenced by a multitude of physical, material, social, and psychological factors within the school environment. Furthermore, the specific qualities, type, structure, and management of the school in which they work are significant determinants of teacher alienation (Eryilmaz & Burgaz, 2011). A sense of isolation from teaching and learning processes can gradually erode a teacher's connection to the school climate. Feelings of being undervalued, inadequate, and lacking an environment to utilize their skills can lead to significant pressure.

Alienation from their work can cause teachers to develop negative attitudes towards colleagues, students, parents, and administrators. It can also result in a loss of interest,

enthusiasm, and passion for the teaching profession. An alienated teacher will likely struggle to fulfill expected duties. Ultimately, the teacher's inability to find meaning in their profession can precipitate numerous adverse effects on the educational process. Common behaviors observed in alienated teachers include indifference to student academic failure and diminished commitment to the school and profession (Elma, 2003). The findings of this study corroborate this, indicating that teacher alienation leads to a decline in student academic achievement, primarily due to reduced professional commitment and its negative impact on motivation.

A decline in focus on school goals among teachers and administrators, and their resulting lack of professional engagement, transforms them into participants in an environment where they find no satisfaction in their work (Şeren, 2019). Professional alienation is characterized by a teacher's inability to derive pleasure from their work and a sense that their profession holds no personal meaning (Halaçoğlu, 2008). In other words, it is the perception of teaching as a monotonous and unfulfilling endeavor, leading to gradual disengagement and a sense of meaninglessness (Kurtulmuş & Yiğit, 2016). This effect can be generalized, suggesting that teacher alienation negatively impacts not only the school environment but all echelons of society.

Alienation within educational institutions can have repercussions that extend beyond the individual or the institution to affect the entire nation (Bowen, 1980). The results of this study align with this perspective, revealing that alienated teachers experience a lack of motivation and an inability to find satisfaction in their profession. The study also found that finding the profession meaningless leads to professional dissatisfaction. Similar research supports this outcome. A highly motivated teacher performs their duties willingly, which contributes to both their professional development and organizational productivity (Özerten, 2018).

Teaching is a profession that demands robust knowledge in both the subject area and pedagogy. Additionally, due to the stress inherent in the work environment, teaching is a high-risk profession for negative impacts on mental health. The adverse effects of stress can diminish a teacher's interest in their profession and their students, thereby reducing their effectiveness in fulfilling professional responsibilities. Both excessive and insufficient workload can induce stress (Maslach & Leiter, 1997); workload significantly affects a teacher's commitment by increasing their intention to leave the profession (Jones et al., 2007). Indeed, teaching is a leading stress-inducing profession because it imposes diverse and numerous responsibilities (Stoeber & Rennert, 2008). Consistent with these findings, Table 2 of this study identifies workload as the most frequently cited cause of alienation. Therefore, alleviating teacher workload is one of the most crucial factors in preventing professional alienation. Teachers generally experience higher stress levels compared to individuals in other professions (Baltas, 1998). Contributing factors include student-teacher and school-parent conflicts, student disciplinary issues, excessive bureaucracy, difficulties in advancement, public criticism, lack of community support, and pressures from social and

political forces on educational institutions, as well as inadequate reward systems and participation in decision-making (Campbell & Lloyd, 1983). Teacher stress levels are influenced by various factors, including salary, social benefits, school administration, student characteristics, and job responsibilities and intensity. These factors can negatively affect teachers through low motivation and performance, difficulty adapting, communication breakdowns with colleagues, and physical and psychological ailments, stress, and exhaustion.

While negative stress leads to low performance and productivity, a certain level of stress can keep an individual active and alert, thereby fostering success. In fact, a moderate amount of stress can be considered a prerequisite for achievement. Failure to provide adequate support in the work environment will negatively impact teacher job satisfaction and attitudes toward the profession. Teachers lacking necessary support will experience burnout, unhappiness, and associated stress (Kıralp & Bolkan, 2017). Stress has been shown to cause professional deformation in teachers, leading to frustration, anxiety, and depression (Dick & Wagner, 2001). The stress resulting from alienation, as identified in this study, has adverse effects on all teachers to varying degrees. Within the same school, some teachers are less affected by stressful conditions, while others are more significantly impacted (Wonzy et al., 2015). Therefore, when analyzing and seeking solutions for occupational stress, the multidimensional nature of the problem must be emphasized, considering organizational structure, societal conditions, and teachers' individual characteristics and coping skills.

Reasons for teacher alienation can be personal, institutional, economic, or related to centralized systems and bureaucratic structures (Gülören, 2011). Supporting this, the present study identified factors such as exclusion from decision-making and low pay as contributors to alienation. To counter this, teachers should be given responsibilities aligned with their preferences and involved in decision-making to foster a sense of commitment to the school. Teacher burnout is a chronic phenomenon causing high attrition rates in education. If solutions to teacher alienation are not found, the result will be increased inefficiency in education and a negative impact on student learning quality. Attrition rates in teaching are higher than in many other professions (Rumschlag, 2017). Therefore, it is imperative to thoroughly analyze the causes and consequences of alienation in teaching and develop effective solutions.

5. CONCLUSION

The negative impact of alienated teachers can manifest in student alienation. Sidorkin (2004) defined student alienation as disengagement from the learning process, a growing perception of the process as meaningless, and the transformation of learning into a boring and unenjoyable activity.

As shown in Table 4, findings indicate that, from the teachers' perspective, administrators must be fair and equitable. Consequently, school administrators should

demonstrate a management style based on justice and democratic principles. Assignments of non-instructional duties should follow a fair and equitable approach, considering teacher preferences. To enhance teachers' sense of school belonging, responsibilities should be assigned according to their preferences and skills. Teacher participation in decision-making should be ensured, and structural changes to curricula should be developed through broad participation and in-depth analysis. It is crucial for school administrators to adopt a collaborative approach involving all stakeholders, motivating teachers by considering their individual traits and skills, and including them in decision-making processes, all based on a foundation of justice and equality.

As also seen in Table 4, a reward and incentive system can positively counter professional alienation. Therefore, recognizing and rewarding teachers' efforts and achievements by colleagues and administrators can boost motivation. Opportunities should be provided for teachers to demonstrate creativity and realize their professional ideals. Diverse motivational tools and an effective reward system should be utilized to enhance job satisfaction and institutional commitment.

Organizing various activities such as regular meetings, meals, trips, and picnics can promote harmony and unity, positively impacting communication among teachers and maintaining high motivation. This can prevent teacher alienation from the school, leading to a more productive teaching and learning environment and, consequently, positively contributing to students' academic achievement.

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ASSISTANT LECTURERS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE TWO ENGLISH SPEAKING STATE UNIVERSITIES IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

This study investigated the attitude of Assistant Lecturers towards the education of students with disabilities in English-speaking Universities in Cameroon. A descriptive survey design was used to collect data from 125 Assistant Lecturers at the University of Bamenda and University of Buea. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Data was collected by adapting a tool (questionnaire) that was designed by Sniatecki, Perry and Snell in 2015. Data was analysed by measuring all indicators of the study on a four-point Likert scales with the response options of “strongly disagree” equalled one and “strongly agree” equalled four. The researcher presented data and provided the mean, median, standard deviation, and percentage agreement. Percentage agreements were calculated by adding strongly disagree and disagree to strongly agree and agree. The findings reveal that Assistant Lecturers generally hold positive attitudes towards the education of students with disabilities. However, factors such as lack of training and resources, as well as inadequate infrastructure, can hinder the effective inclusion of students with disabilities in Higher Institutions of Learning. The study therefore recommends that universities provide training and resources to support Assistant Lecturers in promoting Inclusive Education.

Keywords:

Assistant Lecturers, Attitude, Assistant Lecturers Attitude, Education, Education of Students with Disabilities, English-Speaking Universities.

Résumé

Cette étude a examiné l'attitude des assistants d'enseignement envers l'éducation des étudiants en situation de handicap dans les universités anglophones du Cameroun. Une enquête descriptive a été menée auprès de 125 assistants d'enseignement des universités de Bamenda et de Buéa. Les données ont été recueillies à l'aide d'un questionnaire adapté, conçu par Sniatecki, Perry et Snell en 2015. L'analyse des données a été réalisée en



mesurant tous les indicateurs de l'étude sur une échelle de Likert à quatre points, allant de « tout à fait en désaccord » (1) à « tout à fait d'accord » (4). Les données ont été présentées sous forme de moyenne, médiane, écart-type et pourcentage d'accord. Ce dernier a été calculé en additionnant les réponses « tout à fait en désaccord » et « en désaccord » aux réponses « tout à fait d'accord » et « d'accord ». Les résultats montrent que les assistants d'enseignement ont généralement une attitude positive envers l'éducation des étudiants en situation de handicap. Cependant, des facteurs tels que le manque de formation et de ressources, ainsi que des infrastructures inadéquates, peuvent entraver l'inclusion effective des étudiants en situation de handicap dans les établissements d'enseignement supérieur. L'étude recommande donc que les universités fournissent une formation et des ressources aux assistants d'enseignement afin de les aider à promouvoir une éducation inclusive.

Mots-clés : Assistants d'enseignement, Attitude, Attitude des assistants d'enseignement, Éducation, Éducation des étudiants en situation de handicap, Universités anglophones.

Introduction

Students with disabilities are those who have a restriction or inability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being, mostly resulting from impairment (Barbotte & Chau, 2001). The Civil Rights legislations promoted the awareness of the human rights of people with disabilities and opened new options for inclusion in higher education. In Israel, several factors came into play to promote this trend: growing public awareness, increasing high school achievements of students with disabilities, economic considerations of the institutions and the expansion of the higher education system in Israel (Leyser et al, 2011).

The concept of attitude arises from attempts to account for observed regularities in the behaviour of individual peers (Hogg, 2018). The quality of one's attitudes is judged from observable, evaluative responses that are made. While one might consult one's inner experiences as evidence of one's own attitude. An attitude concerns something that really matters to us. Hence it is far more resistant to change than an opinion. Wood (2000) saw attitude as a relatively stable evaluation of a person, object, situation or issue. According to him, attitude has three components; cognitive, affective or emotional and behavioral components.

Assistant lecturer's attitudes towards students with disabilities are determined by several factors (Silva & Morgado, 2004). Educational preparation is seen as a powerful predictor of attitudes of teachers towards students with disabilities, yet most assistant lecturers receive little training in teaching this population (Rust & Sinelnikov, 2010). Bouck (2005), saw that pre-service special education training is very important to all lecturers in every field in preparation of teaching students with disabilities. He explored pre-service special education training and the level of satisfaction special education teachers have with their programmes. He reported that, although they were varied responses to program satisfaction, there may be a connection between experience working with students with disabilities in teacher

preparation programmes and teachers' sense of effectiveness in teaching students with disabilities.

Situating the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of inclusive education in Cameroon, students with disabilities in English-Speaking universities continue to face significant barriers in accessing quality education. One critical factor contributing to this challenge is the attitude of assistant lecturers towards the education of students with disabilities. Research suggest that assistant lecturers' attitudes can either facilitate or hinder the learning experiences of students with disabilities. While previous research has highlighted the importance of teacher attitudes in promoting inclusive education in Cameroon, there is no dearth of empirical evidence on the attitudes of assistant lecturers towards the education of students with disabilities in English-Speaking Universities in Cameroon. This knowledge gap hinders the development of effective strategies for promoting inclusive education and supporting students with disabilities in Higher Education Institutions.

The lack of understanding of assistant lecturers' attitude towards the education of students with disabilities in Higher Education Institutions has significantly affected the academic support students with disabilities received from their institutions. This has also made students with disabilities to face barriers in accessing education at this level which limits their opportunities for social and economic mobility. By investigating the attitudes of assistant lecturers, this study aims to contribute to the development of evidence-based policies and practices that promotes inclusive education and support the academic success of students with disabilities in Higher Institutions of Learning.

Literature Review

Zinbardo, 1998 claimed that attitude could be explained as learned judgements about actions appropriate towards certain types of people or issues. Attitudes are relatively stable but they could be modified. According to Kegan, Havemann & Segal (1994), as individuals grow up, acquire strong beliefs and feelings or attitudes towards members of various ethnic groups, foreigners, rich people, poor people, males, females. Individuals develop strong attitudes towards political parties, disabled persons, national security and all other issues in the society. Attitude tend to influence us throughout life. People are very much against things of a negative attitude. The concept of attitude arises from attempts to account for observed regularities in the behaviour of individual persons. The quality of one's attitude is judged from the observable, evaluative responses that are made. While one might consult one's inner experiences as evidence of one's own attitudes. An attitude concerns something that really matters to us. Hence it is far more resistant to change than an opinion (Segal, 1994).

According to them, attitude has three components; cognitive, affective or emotional and behavioural components. The first cognitive components constitute thoughts and beliefs about the attitudinal object. In other words, the cognitive component of attitude represents

a person's knowledge held with varying degrees of certainty about what is true or false, good or bad, desirable or undesirable. The second component of attitude; the emotional component makes up one's feelings towards the attitudinal objects. It is also called the affective component because under suitable conditions, the belief is capable of arousing effect of varying intensity centered on the object of the belief. The third component of attitude is the behavioural component it deals with how we are predisposed to act towards the attitudinal object. It is called the behavioural component because the belief being a response, predisposition of varying threshold must lead to some actions when it is suitably activated.

According to Baudi, 2000 attitude was portrayed as normally focusing on an object or a situation, which may either be concrete or abstract and that attitude would certainly lead to a preferential response. It is pertinent to say that attitude is an important antecedent of action. Attitude could be used to predict, control and modify human actions towards a person, object, issue, situation or abstract entity. Recognizing the importance of teacher attitudes to inclusion is crucial for understanding the effectiveness of inclusive education in schools and community. It has been reported that teachers who are more positive to inclusion have more controlled learning environments compared to teachers/lecturers with more negative attitudes to inclusion (Monsen & Federickson, 2004).

It is important to understand the vital roles of teachers in fostering inclusive classrooms and imperative that teachers/ lecturers themselves are supported by the education system through success to appropriate resources. Attitudes although drawn from cognitions, can pervasively impact teachers/lecturers affective and behavioural intentions. While lecturers' attitude towards students with disabilities may be a product of their broader value system, as well as symptomatic of the societal and work environment that one is subjected to, negative attitudes can be unfavorable for the students in their educational charge. Negative attitudes may engender views such as some students do not have the capacity to learn, lecturers do not need to teach students with varying needs, there is no time to individualize the curriculum.

It would be difficult to argue that any lecturer/teacher who holds these types of views is able to provide a nurturing and engaging learning environment for all students with disabilities, (Boyle, 2020). If negative attitudes to inclusion prevail, it can affect the perception of students with additional support needs as being able to be educated within a mainstreamed environment. According to UNICEF (2011) if children or young people with disabilities are 'othered', they can become marginalized which can lead to bullying and ultimately being socially ostracized. Negative attitudes after all have been learnt and can therefore be similarly unlearned. Positively changing prospective lecturers/teachers' attitude to inclusion during university training is an important preventive way of fostering progressive teaching (Boyle, 2014).

Studies of assistant lecturers' attitudes toward the education and inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools have produced varied results. Some researchers' have reported negative attitudes (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003) while (Smith & Smith, 2000) have emphasized positive attitudes towards inclusion. In general researchers have asserted that the way lecturers deal with students with disabilities in their classroom is of utmost importance (Zonipu-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006), and attitudes can help shape the students with disabilities and willingness to allow differences in the classroom, positively and effectively influence and widely affect both the attitudes of their colleagues, of parents and children without disabilities as well as the success of inclusion (Koster et al, 2009).

It is essential for assistant lecturers to be aware of their attitudes and how they may affect students with disabilities. According to (Bouck, 2005), to effectively support students with disabilities, assistant lecturers must receive appropriate training and professional development. This may include workshops on disability awareness, strategies for inclusive teaching and the use of assistive technologies. By investing in the professional development of assistant lecturers, educational institutions can ensure that all students receive the support they need to succeed. Also, collaboration among all members of the educational team, including assistant lecturers, is essential for the successful education of students with disabilities. By working together and sharing expertise, professionals can develop comprehensive and effective support plans that address each student's unique needs (Fazio, 2000). They play a crucial role in the education of students, particularly those with disabilities. They are responsible for supporting them. This includes ensuring that students with disabilities have accesses to the same level of education as their peers, providing additional support when necessary and working closely with other professionals to ensure that students' needs are met.

Method

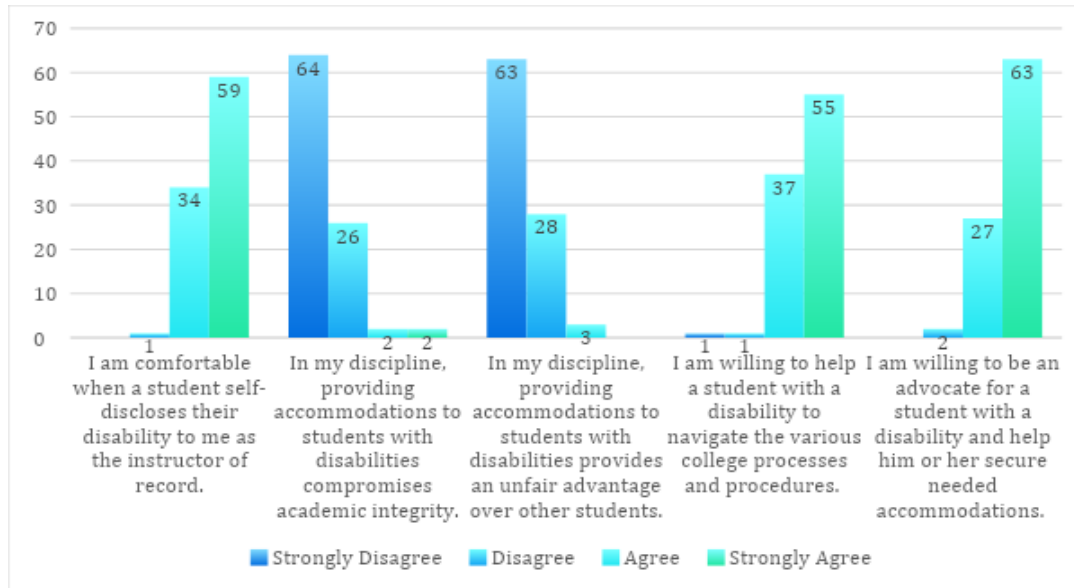
Quantitative research method was employed for this study. Through this method, numbers were gathered by the researcher to explain the data gotten from the field. The design used for this study was the survey research design. This design was employed to address the research questions. This design was also used in order to obtain systematic and generalizable findings that can be replicated in the future by others. The type of survey design used in this study was the descriptive survey design. This design was used because it provided a rich and detailed account that helped in understanding, categorizing, and interpreting assistant lecturers' perception of the education of students with disabilities in the English-Speaking State Universities in Cameroon.

The institutional sample of this study was made up of the two (2) English Speaking State Universities (University of Bamenda (Uba) and University of Buea (UB) in Cameroon with eleven (11) establishments selected for the study. The human sample was one hundred and twenty-five (125) assistant lecturers selected from eleven establishments in the two English-Speaking State Universities in Cameroon.

Findings

Figure 1:

Assistant Lecturers' attitude towards the education of students with disabilities in the two English-Speaking State Universities in Cameroon



The first five statements in the series related to assistant lecturers' comfort level when students self-disclosed their disability status to them as university teachers. The first statement provided for rating was, "I am comfortable when a student discloses their disability to me as a teacher." On average most participants answered between a three, which is agreed, and a four, strongly agree, yielding an average of ($M = 3.61$). The median was reported as strongly in agreement, which was four. The standard deviation score ($SD = .510$) indicates a broader range of variability of answers. The percentage agreement is 98%, which revealed a strong consensus among participants.

The next item in the series dealt with accommodations for students with disabilities and academic integrity issues. The level of agreement with the statement, "In my discipline, providing accommodations to students with disabilities comprises academic integrity" was rated by respondents. The mean response of ($M = 1.38$) indicated most participants selected ratings between strongly disagree (one) and disagree (two), with the median being strongly disagree (one). The standard deviation score ($SD = .641$) and the percentage agreement was 42%, indicating most participants did not feel giving accommodations to students with a disability was compromising academic integrity.

Next, respondents were asked to express their attitudes about whether they thought students with disabilities were given unfair advantages. The statement provided for rating was: "In my discipline, providing accommodations to students with disabilities provides an unfair advantage over other students." The mean response of ($M = 1.36$) indicated participant ratings between strongly disagree (one) and disagree (two), and the median

was reported as strongly disagreed (one). The standard deviation score ($SD = .545$) and the percentage agreement was 3%. Only a very small percentage of respondents felt accommodations created an unfair advantage.

This data showed strong disagreement with the notion that providing accommodations to students with disabilities provides an unfair advantage over other students. Next, participants were asked to express their willingness to help a student with a disability navigate various college processes and procedures. The statement rated was: “I am willing to help a student with a disability to navigate the various college processes and procedures.” As depicted in Table 7, the mean response of ($M = 3.55$) indicated participant ratings between strongly agree (four) and agree (three), with the median reported as strongly agree (four). The standard deviation score was ($SD = .579$), and 97% of participants indicated they felt comfortable helping when a student with a disability.

Respondents were asked about their willingness to advocate for a student with a disability and help him or her secure needed accommodations. The statement was: “I am willing to be an advocate for a student with a disability and help him or her secure needed accommodations.” As depicted in Figure 4, the mean response of ($M = 3.66$) indicated participant ratings between strongly agree (four) and agree (three), and the median was reported as strongly agree (four). The standard deviation was ($SD = .519$), and the percentage of agreement indicated that 97% of participants were willing to advocate for a student with a disability.

Finally, the last set of five attitude questions related to specific disability categories. Participants were asked to respond to statements made about each of the thirteen disability categories. For example, respondents were asked to respond to statements such as: “I would like more information about students with specific disabilities” and “I believe students with specific disabilities could be successful at the college level” for each disability category.

Table 1:
Attitudes Towards Specific Disability Categories N= 100

Disability Category	Mean score	Median	Standard Deviation	Percent Agreement
Traumatic Brain Injury	3.38	3.4	.423	91
Autism	3.51	3.6	.395	93
Intellectual Disability	3.38	3.4	.436	86
Other Health Impairments	3.49	3.6	.372	96
Hearing Impairments	3.54	3.6	.350	97
Visual Impairments	3.53	3.6	.350	98
Speech or Language	3.51	3.6	.394	94
Emotional Disturbance	3.46	3.6	.415	96
Orthopedic Impairments	3.52	3.6	.378	94

In Table 1 above, the disability categories are presented along with the mean scores, median, standard deviation of the responses, percent of agree and strongly agree, and missing responses. The researcher chose to focus the following discussion on the three disability categories with the highest percent agreement and the three disability categories with the lowest percent agreement, although all data are presented in (Table 1 above). The ranking was based on the highest and lowest percent agreement of responses by assistant lecturers; these data indicated positive attitudes towards these disability categories. Although all responses were positive in nature, there was a difference in the attitudes of assistant lecturers' beliefs about which type of disabilities would most affect the success of students in higher education. There was a 12% difference between the highest percent and the lowest percent agreement. In addition, focusing on the percent agreement data rather than descriptive statistics is more easily understood. The discussion below focuses on the top three and bottom three disability categories in terms of percent of agreement with statements.

The highest percent of agreement regarding specific types of disabilities was regarding Visual Impairment, with 98% agreement among graduate assistant lecturers' responses and a mean response of ($M = 3.53$). This indicated that most participant ratings were between strongly agree (four) and agree (three). Also, the median was reported as 3.6, and the standard deviation score was ($SD = .350$). This standard deviation is a close representation of the mean because it is tightly distributed by the mean. The disability category of Hearing Impaired had the second- highest percent agreement at 97% among assistant lecturers' responses. The mean response of ($M = 3.54$), indicates that most participant ratings were between strongly agree (four) and agree (three). Also, the median was reported as 3.6, and the standard deviation score was ($SD = .350$) indicating the agreement was tightly distributed by the mean. The categories of Other Health Impairments and Emotional Disturbance both had an agreement of 96% among respondents and had the same median of 3.6, yielding the third- highest ranking. However, each consisted of different means and standard deviations. The mean score for Other Health Impairment was ($M = 3.49$) which indicated most participant ratings were between strongly agree (four) and agree (three), and the standard deviation was reported at ($SD = .372$), which indicated the agreement was tightly distributed by the mean. The mean score for Emotional Disturbance was ($M = 3.46$), which indicated most participant ratings were between strongly agree (four) and agree (three). The standard deviation was reported at ($SD = .415$), which indicated the agreement was loosely distributed by the mean.

Furthermore, the disability categories with the least percentage agreement were as follows: Intellectual Disability, followed by Autism, and Traumatic Brain Injury. The category with the least percent agreement was Intellectual Disability, with 86% agreement from respondents, and the mean response of ($M = 3.38$) indicated most participant ratings were between strongly agree (four) and agree (three). The median score was reported as 3.4, and the standard deviation score was ($SD = .436$), which indicated the agreement was loosely distributed by the mean. The percentage of agreement for Autism was 91% among assistant

lecturers' responses, with the mean response of ($M = 3.51$), indicating most participant ratings were between strongly agree (four) and agree (three). The median score was reported as 3.6, and the standard deviation score was ($SD = .395$), which indicated the agreement was tightly distributed by the mean. The percent agreement was higher for Traumatic Brain Injury with 93% among assistant lecturers' responses, and the mean response of ($M = 3.38$) indicated most participant ratings were between strongly agree (four) and agree (three). The median score was reported at 3.4, and the standard deviation score was ($SD = .423$), which indicated the agreement was loosely distributed by the mean. The mean ranged from ($M = 3.52$) to ($M = 3.38$), with just a small difference between the top and bottom means. The overall data on attitudes of assistant lecturers towards students with disabilities from the two English-Speaking State Universities in Cameroon was positive. The statements were averaged from the responses to create a summary of the data for research question one.

Statements one, four, and five were framed as positive and supportive of students with a disability. The average mean response for these statements was 3.6. The mean indicates respondents chose ratings between agree and strongly agree in support of students with a disability. For statements framed in the negative, the average mean response was 1.37. This means respondents rated strongly disagree and disagree for statements that did not support students with a disability, with a tendency towards a strong disagreement of negative attitudes. As far as disability categories, in general, assistant lecturers expressed positive attitudes towards students with disabilities across categories of disability. There was a 12% percent difference between the top highest percent agreement and the lowest percent agreement.

Discussion

The study addressed assistant lecturers' attitudes toward students with disabilities. In alignment with the social model of disability (Oliver, 2004), it explored the educational barrier of negative attitudes toward students with disabilities. Austin and Peña (2017), and Wynants and Dennis (2017) looked at faculty attitudes towards students with disabilities using surveys. Similarly, this study sought to uncover the attitudes of assistant lecturers. Findings from this study indicate that assistant lecturers felt comfortable when a student self-disclosed a disability, and most respondents shared they believed giving students' accommodations would not affect the integrity of the class.

They felt that providing accommodations to students with disabilities did not create an unfair advantage and they were willing to help a student with a disability navigate various university processes and procedures. These responses reveal that overall, assistant lecturers who participated in this study had positive attitudes towards students with disabilities in higher education and agreed that students with disabilities need their accommodations. Further, respondents were asked how willing they were to advocate for students with disabilities and help them secure needed accommodations. The majority strongly agreed to be advocates for students with disabilities.

Next, related to attitudes toward students with disabilities, assistant lecturers were asked about students with specific categories of disability. Respondents expressed the most positive attitudes regarding students with Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment and Other Health Impairment, and the least favorable attitudes toward students with Intellectual Disability, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Autism.

In alignment with the social model of disability (Oliver, 2004), this study also explored the educational barrier of negative attitudes toward students with disabilities. The social model of disability is applicable in higher education as this model highlights negative societal attitudes that hinder inclusivity (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017). Higher education can be seen as a microcosm of society in which those outside the norm are treated as “others” (Goodley, 2016). Often in higher education, students with disabilities are not given accommodations with fidelity, and the environment is at times, unwelcoming.

Responses from assistant lecturers showed they had positive attitudes about trying to limit any environmental, cultural, and educational barriers for students with disabilities. Oliver and Barnes (2012) discussed the limitation of creating barriers for people with disabilities to social inclusion by limiting people’s attitudes in this case. They refute the notion that a person with a disability needs to be “fixed,” rather they contend that the environment needs to be welcoming for all individuals. Edou and Shey, (2025) in their model are clear with their call to remove cultural barriers from the school system for the benefit of all. Oliver (2004) stated that the cultural environment in our society depicts impairments as unattractive or unwanted. Additionally, the cultural environment perceives the impairment as a tragedy. Thus, individuals do not know how to interact with a person with a disability.

In this study, participant responses are consistent with some previous studies which found that higher education faculty had positive attitudes towards students with disabilities (Wynants & Dennis, 2017). On the contrary, studies such as Becker and Palladino (2016) and Sniatecki et al. (2015) indicated faculty had negative attitudes toward students with disabilities, and possessed limited knowledge. The trend in each of the studies is the amount of knowledge of students with disabilities correlates with attitudes, whether positive or negative. Becker and Palladino (2016) and Sniatecki et al. (2015) collected data from professors in academia, however in this present study, participants were assistant lecturers.

Responses regarding attitudes towards students with disabilities from assistant lecturers in this study were more favorable than those reported in the literature from surveys of faculty members. Assistant lecturers reported feeling comfortable when a student self-disclosed that they had a disability and were willing to help them navigate the various university processes and procedures. In addition, they were willing to advocate for a student with a disability to secure needed accommodations. This contrasts with findings by Murray et al. (2008) who surveyed faculty and found they did not invite students to self-disclose if they had a disability.

In addition, respondents in the current study seemed to understand that accommodations were based on the principle of equity. For example, they did not believe that providing accommodations to a student with a disability would compromise academic integrity or that providing accommodations would create an unfair advantage over other students. This contrasts with findings from two studies where faculty felt students with disabilities were more challenging to work with, and that they tend to get an unfair advantage (Black et al., 2014; Stevens et al., 2018). However, Lomdardi et al. (2013) found that instructors were willing to provide significant accommodations for students with disabilities but lacked sufficient knowledge of students with disabilities, which led to a stronger negative association of provision of accommodations.

Although the attitudes expressed by respondents toward students with disabilities across categories were positive, there was some variability depending on the disability category.

Students with Visual Impairments were viewed the most positively, and students with Intellectual Disability the least. The researcher found this data interesting because of the nature of the disability type, one being visible and the other being generally invisible. Dirth and Branscombe (2017) stated that the social model of disability is the catalyst for supporting a larger community of diverse physical and mental abilities to push aside the traditional narratives of disability as tragic, inferior, or incapable of contributing to the community. According to Zeedyk et al. (2019), respondents indicated they had limited knowledge about invisible disabilities versus visible disabilities. Assistant lecturers may be more willing to work with a student who has a visible disability versus one that is invisible, although further study of this topic is needed to explore why this may be the case.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the findings reflect a positive shift in attitudes among assistant lecturers toward students with disabilities. The study also indicates that both students and faculty could benefit from inclusion practices that promote deeper interactions with students with disabilities, which could, through direct experience, increase knowledge and understanding of disabilities. This also speaks to the formation of teachers' attitudes through their college education curricula, which prepares them for the classroom.

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School Decision-making Process and Teachers Participation in Educational Policy Implementation in Meme Division, South West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract

Our research study is titled "School decision- making Processes and Teachers' Participation in Educational Policy Implementation." The full participation of teachers in school decision making process, will boost their spirit just for the fact that their ideas also count. These will also bring about teachers' job satisfaction since the school climate is conducive for them to teach and implement all the school policies handed to them by their Principal. Teachers are Nation Builders and they are those to easily and effectively implement all the educational rules and regulations. Given that they have direct contact with the students, they are in the best position to know on what to suggest, which will be of help to the educational sector in general and the students in particular. The principal research question is as follows: "To what extent does school decision- making process influence the participation of teachers in implementing educational policy?". The specific research question are: To find out the extent to which teachers' participation in school meetings influences their implementation of educational policy, to investigate the extent to which teachers' consultations during school meetings influences their implementation of educational policy and lastly, to verify the extent to which delegation of responsibility to teachers during school meetings influences their implementation of educational policy. These questions were then transformed to hypothesis. The methodology adopted a sample survey design with an accessible population of 525 teachers who have taught for at least three years. The sample size was made up of 350 teachers. 350 questionnaires were administered to 20 randomly selected Secondary schools in the Kumba municipality of Meme Division, South West Region of Cameroon. Also, interview guides were administered as the second research instrument to four principals representing the three schools in order to confirm the quantitative data. The data collected was analyzed using the Spearman Correlation Index and multiple regressions. The result obtained shows that there is a positively high relationship between school decision-making process (teachers' participation in school meetings, teachers' consultations during school meetings and delegation of responsibility to teachers during school meetings) and teachers' participation in educational policy implementation; as a determinant from the correlation



index of 0,863. From the above, we conclude that the research maintains the view that the full participation of teachers in school decision-making process will significantly influence the implementation of educational policy. A good number of recommendations were given to the Ministry of Secondary Education, Principals and Teachers. Principals should encourage their teachers by fully involving them in school decision making.

Keywords:

School decision-making Process, Teacher's Participation, Policy Implementation, teachers' participation in school meetings, teachers' consultations during school meetings and delegation of responsibility to teachers during school meetings.

Introduction

School decision-making process is one of the sensitive areas in the school administrative processes. Fonkeng and Tamajong (2009), holds that decision-making is the very heart of the administrative process and leadership. Whatever the leadership behaviour, it involves decision-making, despite whatever the decision is. Effective administration requires rational decision-making which leads to the selection of the best way to reach an anticipated goal. Generally speaking, decision-making involves the process of choosing from among alternative ways of achieving an objective or providing a solution to a problem. It involves choice and entails cost. In fact, decision making is not an end in itself, but a means of achieving organizational goals and objectives. This brings about organizational responses to problems. Decision-making is a major or central responsibility of all administrators, but until decisions are converted into action, they are only good intentions.

Every organization (the school) must make provisions for decision-making. Decisions must be made concerning what goals, purposes, objectives, policies and programmes that will be accepted by the organization as legitimate (Morphet, Johns and Reller, 1982). Decisions need to be rendered continuously with respect to the implementation of policies and programmes. Therefore, every organization, in order to be effective, must have the ability to make decisions. These decisions may be made by the leader, by the group, by the authorities external to the group, or by a combination of methods. Regardless of how decisions are made or who makes them, an organization cannot operate unless decisions are rendered

According to Simon (1976), the effectiveness of organizational decisions could be maximized by increasing the rationality of such decisions. He assumed that there are limits to human rationality and that this creates a need for administrative theory. In the words of Peretomote (1992), the systematic analysis of decision-making is referred to as decision theory. Simon continued to say that two persons, given the same possible alternatives, the same values and the same knowledge, can rationally reach only the same decision". Hence, administrative theory must be concerned with the limits of rationality and the manner in which organization affects these limits for the person making the decision.

Jewell (1998) summed up participative decision making as an effort to avoid the "nobody asked" syndrome. He further explained it to mean soliciting employee's idea for turning the situation in an organization around. He further opined that along with the expectation that asking, will improve the quality of organizational decision making, it is an expectation that people who participate in decisions that affect them will understand the issues better and accept the decisions more readily. Ndu and Anogbo (2007) noted that where teachers are not involved in governance, it results to teachers behaving as if they are strangers within the school environment. Thus, most teachers do not put in their best to have full sense of commitment and dedication to the school.

Mullins (2005) is of the opinion that many people believed that staff participation in decision making leads to higher performance and is necessary for survival in an increasingly competitive world. Welfson (1998) reiterated that boredom and frustration at work is often the result of an employee's lack of involvement in decision making processes with the organization's goals and a feeling that their ideas are not wanted or listened to. He further expatiated that staff turnover increases as employee's walkout of the door for more interesting jobs. Wilkinson (1999), saw involvement of employees in decision making as empowerment while a neglect of employees in decision making was seen as an assumption that workers are untapped resources with knowledge and experience and an interest in becoming involved, employers need to provide opportunities and structures for their involvement. He also assumed that participative decision making is likely to lead to job satisfaction and better-quality decisions and that gains are available both to employers and workers.

Staff cooperation is believed to be an indisputable asset to the school principals while involvement in decision making process by the teachers could ease the principal's mounting problems as many heads would be put together to intellectually solve problems that could have remained unsolved by the principals alone. Shaw (1971) said involving teachers in the decision- making process is like when two men cooperate to roll a stone that neither could have rolled alone. Many administrators express a belief that involvement of teachers in decision making will improve the quality of teacher's decision making in the institution (Collins, 1986). In contrast, where teachers lack motivation and involvement in decision making, truancy, excessive excuses, abstention and complaints usually emerge leading to general ineffectiveness, inefficiency, low productivity and non-achievement of goals of the organization (Awotua-Efebo, 1999).

Okoye (1999), said that workers should be involved in decisions that concern them like general working conditions, fringe benefits and staff development programs as this adds to the attractiveness of the organization climate. Short (1991), emphasized that the kind of school climate that encourages involvement in decision making is characterized by openness and risk taking. This environment encourages teachers to try new ideas and approaches. However, it should be noted that teachers were less willing to participate in decision making if they perceive that their principals sought their opinions but want to

make the final decision rather than allowing teachers that opportunity. Luthans (2005), supported this view that if managers claim to want participation from their people but never let them become intellectually and emotionally involved and never use their suggestions, the result may be negative. Still in line with this view, Emeneke (2004) buttressed the fact that when people are part of decision-making process, there is greater opportunity of the expression of mind, ideas, existing disputes and more occasions for disagreements and agreements.

In some establishments, they are gender biased that women are marginalized in decision making process. United Nations Department of Public information (2006) reported in international women's day that women's participation in high-level economic decision making remains low even in the developed countries, despite educational advances for women in many parts of the world, while women participation in decisions in parliament was said to be 10.99%. It was further reported by the international federation of journalist that although a third of journalists today are women, less than 3% of senior media executives and decision makers are women. Ashton and Webb (1986) found out that those teachers (both male and female) expressed dismay and frustration over their inability to influence the process of decision making. They felt that they were not consulted, irrespective of their ages experience and qualifications and they were made to feel that they could not make good decision. They further reiterated that teachers' self-esteem grows when they feel they are involved in decision making which is something worthwhile and they doing it in a competent manner and that they are recognized for their accomplishment.

Ibukun (1989) observed that teachers in Africa expressed a desire for more involvement in decision making process irrespective of age, experience and qualifications. He further said that agitation by the teachers could reduce conflict in school administration and cause harmony to reign. Teachers feel ownership and commitment of the process when involved in decision making process (Rosenholtz, 1985). Nevertheless, the process of decision making and taking to Law and Glover (2000), seems to be problematic for many managers particularly when they are new to the post. While this strategy of making decision taking a shared process may help to promote a stronger sense of 'ownership' and enhance the nature of organizational development, problems can also arise with collective rather than individual manager-led decision making. First, the process can take up much valuable time, and second, issues which in some cases should be settled on a one-to-one basis becomes a collective responsibility- often to the detriment of more important activities. The nature of the decision to be taken is, therefore, important.

It is sometimes suggested that one strategy for resolving such difficulties might be to characterize various decision-types with a typology of decision making. The argument goes that specific procedures could then be applied to assist with the process. The minutes of the staff meetings are typical of the messiness than can arise-leading to a misplaced 'hierarchy of decision making'. For example, there may well be massive concern over small changes to, say, lunch hour arrangements or arrangements for a social function, while highly significant

curriculum delivery arrangements pass by either unchanged or with minimum discussion. Vroom (1974) has stressed the variation in the types of decision made and the need for information systems to back up effective decision-making processes. Although his proposed system appears complex, it is based on assessing the nature or type of decision needed and an awareness of a set of rules. Among the attributes which can be identified in any problem, Vroom includes: the importance of the quality of the decision for organizational development, the extent to which sufficient information is available, the extent to which the problem is structured, the extent to which acceptance by others is critical for success, and the extent to which others will follow a leader. He also contends that the quality of the outcome will depend upon: the rationality of the decision and the acceptability of the decision to others (subordinates').

Teachers participation in school meetings

To Gillett-Swan & Baroutsis (2023) participation of teachers' in school meetings is not just reporting opinions, but is about positioning teachers as empowered participants in shaping educational practice, policy, and decisions that affect their work and students' learning. They argue that valuing teachers' experiential expertise in school discussions such as meetings and committees contribute to meaningful participation beyond token consultations. Their main idea is that teacher participation should be empowering and agentic rather than symbolic. According to Musengamana (2024) teachers generally want meaningful involvement in school decisions especially those affecting classroom practice and school administration and see participation as enhancing collaboration and motivation. However, low participation levels often stem from structural issues like limited opportunities, leadership style, and unclear roles for teachers in meetings and committees. Also, according to the author, teachers value participation in decision-making but face practical barriers.

Moreover, to Macha & Mhagama (2022) teachers' participation in decision-making through meetings and collaborative forums, positively influences their work performance, accountability, commitment, and indirectly student performance. Also, challenges like lack of time, resources, and leadership training can limit teachers' ability to participate effectively. Their key idea is that teacher participation boosts performance but requires supportive conditions. Teachers' participation can dominate the conversation whereas in whole-group settings, researchers or administrators may control the dialogue. This highlights how structure, facilitation, and power dynamics in meetings directly affect teacher participation and voice. (Power & Voice in Research-Practice Partnerships, 2025). A recent policy document emphasises that "teacher voices" are the active participation and influence teachers exert in shaping policies, practices, and decisions that affect their profession. It argues that teacher participation should be recognised formally in governance, curriculum, and school improvement processes to make education systems more responsive and equitable. Teacher participation should be formalized as part of policy and governance (Teacher Task Force Report, 2024)

To Musengamana et al. (2024) teachers are invited to participate in meetings where decisions are made, but actual engagement is limited, teachers sometimes remain silent or are not fully willing to participate. School leaders invite teachers to discuss teaching and learning issues, but teachers are not always integrated meaningfully into conversations about administrative or managerial decisions. More so, Teachers express a desire to be included in decision discussions, especially on issues that affect their professional lives. There is a belief that including teacher perspectives in meetings can produce higher-quality decisions and enhance teacher motivation and satisfaction. However, actual participation varies due to leadership styles and teachers' willingness to speak in meetings.

According to Abonyi (2024) teachers moderately participate in school decision-making through meetings and consultative processes. They are consulted on curriculum, instruction, and school operations, but not consulted on matters such as staffing and financial decisions. Also, teachers are consulted through staff meetings, committees, and school governance structures where they can voice their opinions. Their consultation in meetings is linked to higher organisational commitment and job satisfaction. However, consultation is limited to specific domains, and key areas like finances or admissions are often left to administrators. He emphasizes that consultation is real but selective, often excluding teachers from strategic areas even while involving them in instructional and operational decisions. DeFouw et al (2024) emphasizes that structured consultation with colleagues and specialists, often occurring in school-level meetings, helps teachers express challenges and receive feedback. Informal consultation (such as brief discussions before/after meetings) often yields greater comfort and openness than formal team meetings alone. Teachers, especially less experienced ones, often lack meaningful consultation in planning and policy meetings (Teacher Task Force, 2024).

Delegation of responsibility to teachers during school meetings.

To Kanshabe, Tibanyendera & Tutegyereize (2025) effective delegation by head teachers across administrative and instructional tasks (including meeting-related roles and committee responsibilities) was strongly associated with increased job effectiveness, shared responsibilities, and greater teacher participation in school activity planning and execution. Head teachers delegated tasks such as staff coordination, co-curricular activities, and mentorship, which in turn heightened teacher involvement in school governance and contributed positively to school functioning. Zamudio & Carbonell (2025) in their findings, investigated that although structured delegation of instructional and policy responsibilities remains limited in many schools, where it does occur (e.g., assigning teachers to lead specific decision-making groups or project teams), it tends to support organizational performance, teacher engagement, and shared responsibility in school administration.

Teachers' participation in educational policy implementation.

The reality is that teachers are street-level bureaucrats or front-line implementers that attempt to capture the reality that what teachers and other local implementers ultimately turns out to be when policy is involved. Our understanding of the work of teachers has

become highly nuanced, with teachers viewed not as isolated individuals but as being firmly nested within a complex organization that shapes perceptions, norms and behaviours. Membership in a school community helps develop specific shared ways of making sense of the policies that have to be put into practice, the views held of these policies and the changes that are required (Coburn & Stein, 2006). While some opinions were heard during the peer learning visits presented, teachers as naturally prone to maintaining the status in pursuit of their own interests, other accounts and focus group interviews with teachers helped to highlight the extent to which some teachers implemented policies, particularly when they were given the opportunity to participate in the formulation of reforms or at least give feedback on them.

According to Ronald (2008), in many respects, one can be confident that much talked about policy are having at least some impact at the school level when teachers claim as in one school in Peja (Kosovo) that, compared to the past, they now make more use of project-based and student-centred pedagogies (even if this gave rise to disciplinary problems at times), that they have a better mix between theory and practice, that they feel closer to students, that they use portfolios and other forms of formative assessment strategies, that they plan their teaching more closely with colleagues in subject-based teacher councils, and that rapport with parents has been strengthened. Also, teachers have just a little say in shaping the educational agenda, and their voices are not taken much into account at all, leaving the policy field open to other forces. Lack of consultation with teachers in the reform process is generally detrimental to implementation: ignoring teachers' leads to ignorance about the contexts and conditions in which implementation has to unfold. As a result, even when teachers are positive about change, they end up feeling unsupported when and where it matters most.

More so, teachers interviewed in Kosovo, for instance, noted that while they were all for reform, they were being expected to implement modular curricula without being given the relevant textbooks (Ronald, 2008). They were also expected to take on new curriculum development responsibilities which they had not been previously equipped and resourced to handle and for which they had insufficient time or inadequate rewards. Some teachers were teaching as many as six to nine different curricular programmes in one year. When teacher voices are not heard at the various stages of the policy-making process, anomalies such as these are the order of the day and can spell the death knell of any innovation.

Sabuncuoğlu and Tüz, (1996), the idea behind participation of teachers in educational policy implementation is that in the administration of schools, if principals should involve teachers in the school administrative processes, they will adopt and support the decisions when they actively take part. The goal here is to affect the decisions of the subordinate. On the other hand, there are some factors that limit participation which can be considered as a motivating tool (Eren, 1993). Some of these factors are: Inadequacy of the participants, lack of interest towards the problem, unfair and unsuitable participation of some individuals, and lack of incentives provided by the superiors can be mentioned among these factors

(Bursaloğlu, 1982). Participation in a school environment is both compulsory and more difficult since there are various groups at schools. An administrator who can manage to encourage participation among these groups can regard himself/herself as successful in many regards.

To Motowidlo (1996), participation in school administrative processes by individual teachers in educational institutions may affect many of their behaviours positively and their effectiveness in carrying out their duties. Research has shown that a much higher impact is gained in terms of teaching when the number of teachers participating in the decision-making mechanism at schools is high (Moore & Esselman, 1992). Participation in school administration means extending and anonymizing the authority to make and implement decisions on a specified scale (Eren, 2001), sharing of tasks by the subordinate related to the administration and operation of the institution (Dicle, 1980) and making use of the experiences and professional knowledge of the teacher (Başaran, 1996)

Also, to Bursaloğlu (1982), participation in school administration is also "the undertaking of delegated tasks by each member according to their capacity in relation with the other tasks in an institution composed of interrelated actions". In this sense, participation in school administration gives the teacher the right to participate in the school decision making process, this will increase their zeal to implement the educational policies without any waste of time. Moreover, according to Eren (1993), the full participation of teachers in the school decision making processes will bring about a proper implementation of all the educational policies disposed to them. Teachers' participation in school administration has advantages such as motivating individuals, changing teachers' attitudes and habits, creating a balance between personal goals and institutional goals, generating morale and decreasing resistance and opposition. While full participating in school planning and school decision making processes, will enable teachers to play active roles in decisions that affect themselves and will see to it that such decisions are executed

More so, to Eren (2001), teachers' participation in school decision making, should be undertaken as an activity in which the teachers participating in a decision are valued themselves and their ideas are respected. When teachers believe that they are respected they can express their sincere feelings about innovations and in this way, teachers will feel happy working in the school with their principal while executing their duties for the achievement of the school goals. The act of teachers participating in school decision making processes cannot go beyond a psychological deception used by the administration to enforce feelings and ideas on the subordinate.

According to Friedman (1991), the process of school decision making, planning, directing and organizing should be conducted very carefully and candidly. As a matter of fact, including teachers in making decisions that are related to them may contribute to making healthier decisions. Individuals who participate in decision making in schools are expected to make more sincere efforts to implement those decisions. At the same time, the

administrator aims to affect the decisions of the subordinate by involving them in the process.

The improper implementations of planned activities have been attributed to why there are failures instead of the planning process itself in most circles. Often schools are stripped of funds, basic infrastructures, lack of instructional facilities and even salaries for education staffers are not promptly paid in most developing countries. Strike actions are common phenomenon in these countries. Obviously position of teachers and other staffers are not considered (Chima, 2012). Lack of material and financial resources have jeopardized the education sector that government and philanthropic supports are no more seen, with all these how do we expect the implementation of educational policies to be efficient and effective by teachers who are seen as the sole implementers of all educational policies especially when their voice is not heard and also they are ignored in the planning and decision making processes in the administration of schools in Cameroon.

Lester and John (1948), conducted a classic study on the effects of participation in decision - making, using a series of field experiments at the hardwood manufacturing corporation. The results were clear that subordinate participation in decision- making improved productivity. Hoy and Miskel (1996) supported the desirability and influence of participation of teachers in educational organizations. To these researchers, the opportunity of teachers sharing in formulating policies is an important factor which increases their morale and enthusiasm in the school organization. Participation of teachers in decision- making positively relates to the individual teacher's satisfaction within the teaching profession. Teachers prefer principals who involve them in decision- making and other school administrative processes such as planning, directing and organizing. At times, decisions fail because of poor quality or because they are not accepted by subordinates. The roles and functions of both teachers and administrators in decisions -making needs to be varied according to the nature of the problem.

Nevertheless, according to DiPaola (2007), teachers' levels of participation in school administration (decision making process), should be increased and supported in order to increase the voluntary tasks and altruistic behaviors that go beyond the roles and responsibilities specified in the school organization if really school administrators want teachers to be effective and efficient in implementing their duties in school. Investigation of the relationship between teachers' participation in school administration and the implementation of educational policy shows that the higher the levels of participating in school administration, the higher their implementing behaviours or vice versa.

Ertenü (2008), emphasizes the positive effects of consistency, harmony and integrity in administrative implementations on both empowerment and organizational behaviours. Öz (2008) identified a strong relationship between empowerment and organizational commitment and organizational behaviour. Atalay (2005) suggests that providing teachers with opportunities and a positive climate to work in and appreciating them have a direct

effect on their behaviour in the school institution such as their self-competency and seniority levels and also this will affect their implementation behavior positively. To Ağaoğlu (2002), the role of the school administration defined as the implementation of educational administration in a limited field is to ensure the wellbeing of the school in accordance with its goals by utilizing all available human and material resources at the school effectively. As is the case in all sectors and institutions, the administrators of education and schools who use and ensure the use of all human and material resources are the symbols of productivity and effectiveness processes (Balci, 1993). Therefore, it can be argued that the degree of teachers' involvement in school administrative plan and decisions encouraged by the administrator will show the degree of effectiveness (Moore & Esselman, 1992) and will result in selfless input by the teacher in school.

The implementation of educational policy by teachers will be made very effective if certain opportunities are given to them such as delegating duties to teachers who merit it, consulting them when need be and lastly, involving them in school administrative processes such as school planning process, school decision-making process school organizing process and school directing process since they are the ones who help to facilitate the achievement of good performance and discipline in school. Joint participation of principal and teachers in certain activities within the school organization facilitates the execution of the task easy. Ukeje (1992) opined that "participatory decision-making" improves the quality of decisions, increases the understanding of the group, and also their commitment to the decision. It is very obvious that teacher full participation in school administrative processes will lead to proper implementation of policies and their satisfaction to an extent as they will find the teaching profession prestigious too. The powerful positive results of implementing policies are always hardly achieved. The participation of subordinates in the development and implementation of educational policies, helps to ensure that changes take place faster. Below, we will be laying more emphasis on the teacher, some of his quality and roles.

Teacher

Roe (1989), says that "the quality or effectiveness of a teacher is considered to be associated with his satisfaction towards his profession and his satisfaction with his values". If the teacher is too rigid or has a doctrinaire belief of that his methods are right and those of any one who disagrees with him are wrong, then he will be depriving his children of a range of possible learning experiences, to their disadvantage and to his own. Thus, it is clear that an effective and competent teacher will achieve the desired learning outcome, provided he is satisfied with his profession. But no significant efforts are found to study the competency in relation to job satisfaction among teachers. To Evan (1992), when teachers are motivated not only do the pupils do better in school, but they become motivated about the process of learning, repeating a positive cycle. Lumsden (1998) cited by Evan also state that "when teachers are provided with what they need to remain inspired and enthusiastic in the classroom pupils as well as teachers' will be the beneficiaries". High levels of morale also tend to "motivate, stimulate, encourage, and energize" staff members to do a better job.

Tambo (2012) posits that a teacher is a decision maker since he is the one who carries out planning, implementation, evaluation and feedback. He distinguished two types of teachers which are the effective and the ineffective teachers. An effective teacher is one who uses praise judiciously, he asks questions or gives exercises to ensure that students or pupils follow up the lesson, helps students or pupils apply learning to real life situations. Effective teachers are task oriented and cover the required learning or syllabus more fully than the ineffective teacher. Also, effective teachers use a variety of teaching materials. These include print, graphic audio-visual, electronic materials, as well as models and specimens. Students in effective teachers' classrooms initiate more interactions with teachers than students in the classrooms of ineffective teachers. An Ineffective teacher gives much praises, does not often ask questions and hardly gives exercises to students, that ties with what he is teaching or real life situation and so on. According to Silcock (1993), effective teachers are those that provide students with maximum opportunities.

More so, to Cooper (1986), cited by Smith an effective teacher is seen as one who is able to bring about intended learning outcome or results. If a teacher shows good qualities such as kindness, warmth, enthusiasm, steadiness, alertness, sympathy, but is not able to help students or pupils achieve desirable results he or she cannot be considered effective. In other words, although it is important for teachers to possess such good qualities, it is even more important that they be able to achieve the intended learning results. For teachers to be effective they must acquire and be able to demonstrate certain competencies. Although there is no general agreement about what these competencies are, most authorities in teacher education would agree with the four general competencies listed and explained below (Smith, 1969)

- 1) Command of theoretical knowledge about learning and human behavior
- 2) Display of attitudes that foster learning and good human relation.
- 3) Command of knowledge in the subject matter to be taught.
- 4) Control of technical skills of teaching that facilitate student learning.

Ideal, teacher should be emotionally mature people. However, teachers are human and certainly have their own weakness. It is hoped that with training, they can move ahead from a situation of Immaturity to optimum mental health and maturity. Teachers have four important qualities which are; personal qualities, professional qualities, qualities in relation to children, lastly qualities in relation to the public and children's parents.

The first deals with personal qualities such as being neat, properly dressed, has personality, maintain good health, sincere, patient, honest, impartial, self-confident, courageous, self-control in speech, self-control in emotions, tolerant but consistent, firm, decisive, spontaneous realistic, flexible creative, adaptable to various situations, cooperative, submissive, intelligent, a man of good character, principles, sympathetic, a man with high moral standards, enthusiastic, and kind. Secondly, we talk of professional qualities. In this cases: the individual is supposed to be happy as a trained teacher, has faith in his profession as a teacher, should respect authority, and hierarchy, accept professional evaluation, criticism, be a member of a professional organization, show professional consciousness,

loyalty, be knowledgeable, a good listener, always willing to learn, know his assert, his limitations, strive for competences or excellence, not guilty of very serious speed defects, resourceful, and manifest a love for research

Also, we will talk of the third quality which is the quality in relation to child. The teacher is supposed to love children, respect them, have an unconditional regard for them as individuals, be a disciplinarian, provoke healthy curiosity, be knowledgeable, be able to act in loco parent, be able to get down to the level of the children but yet maintain his self-respect, has the capacity to explain, be able to rise up to the intellectual demands of the children, challenge them even further and beyond, should be a good model, should have interest or excitement in working with children and should be a good story teller. The last quality of a teacher deals with qualities in relation to the public and the children's parents. This quality includes respect for children's parents, should have a good human relation with the public and parents of children, is likeable and is a good citizen (Luma, 1983). From the qualities of a teacher, the next paragraph will be talking about the role of a teacher according to Mbua (2003) and the extensive role of the teacher by Fonkeng and Tamajong (2009).

Theories

Three theories will be used in this work. These theories include; theory Z by William Ouchi (1981), Participative Leadership theory by Likert (1967) and theory of policy implementation by Fullan (2000, 2007, and 2009). Theory Z in School Administration by William Ouchi (1981). According to this theory, decision- making is one of the essential aspects in school administration. This theory recommends the participative and collective approach to school decision-making has it yields more effective implementation than individual decision-making process. Participative decision-making process is one of the mechanisms that provide a broad dissemination of information and values within the organization or institution. Participation of teachers in school decision-making processes in the institution shows a sign of trust and belonging and also involves opinion consideration, communication that is vertical and horizontal means of communication and lastly delegation of responsibilities to those that are willing and deserved it.

Furthermore, there also exist the participative leadership theory by Likert (1967). This theory formulated by Likert suggests that the ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others into account. Principals are called upon to take into consideration the good ideas of teachers and also allow them to take part in decision making process. These leaders encourage participation and contributions from group members and help group members feel more relevant and committed to the school decision-making process. In participative theories, however, the leader retains the right to allow the input of others. Participative leaders consult others and involve them in the decision- making process. They may make the final decision but in consulting others they are demonstrating consideration, respect for others and the ability to listen. The assumption behind this approach is that it tends to be appreciated by followers who return the favour by being loyal and committed. Participative

leadership also develops other people and builds support for the overall direction, leading to a shared vision and common goals. Participative leaders often also adopt a facilitative leadership style. That is, they empower and encourage others to take and make decisions, take action and act with authority, normally within defined boundaries. Below are some of the assumptions.

- 1) Teachers' involvement in school decision-making improves the understanding of the issues involved by teachers who must carry out the decisions.
- 2) Teachers will be more committed to actions where they are involved in the relevant school decision-making.
- 3) Teachers will be less competitive and more collaborative when they are working on joint goals.
- 4) When the principal and teachers make decisions together, the social commitment to one another is greater and thus increases their commitment to the decision.
- 5) When the principal and teachers decide together, they make better decisions than when the principal decides alone. From the above assumption of this theory it is very clear that if the principal could allow teachers to participate in school decision making: there will be commitment, understanding, collaboration and so forth.

Also, the theory of policy implementation by Fullan (2000, 2007, and 2009). To Fullan, implementation is characterized by complexity, which can create both benefits and risks. Teachers being part and parcel of the decision made know the essence of putting the decision in place and with this; the implementation process becomes easier without any time wastage. According to the implementation theory, one of the conditions for effective implementation to take place is involvement and commitment of staff to decision taken. The theory also made mention of three factors affecting policy implementation which are; characteristics of change, local characteristics which took in to consideration other factors including the principal and teacher and finally we have external factors.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers, especially secondary school teachers have always been guidance to students as far as their success and mastery of concepts is concern. No matter who we become in future, each and every one of us will pass through the hands of teachers' So teachers' participation in school administrative processes and the implementation of educational policy will be a major concern to all, as it increases teachers' morale, satisfaction and the academic performance of students. Teachers' participation in school administrative processes and policy implementation is an essential aspect that is not supposed to be reckoned with, if quality output has to be achieved. Their participation in school planning, school decision making, school organization, and school directing processes will bring about their satisfaction and the achievement of educational goal which is that of good performance of students at all level.

Our observation that motivated this research study is that teachers are the sole implementers of educational policies. This made the researcher to embark into research, so as to know if these policies are well implemented or not and the cause. We later discovered the inadequate implementation of educational policies as a result of the passive participation of teachers in key areas in the school administrative processes such as school decision making process. However, it was revealed in the Kumba municipality that the neglect or passive participation of teachers in school decision making process, will affect policy implementation to a larger extent. Carl (2002) and Gauteng Department of Education (1996), affirmed that the "voice" of the teachers is to a large extent ignored or not heard. Teachers are better placed to know what to suggest as far as the educational growth of their students is concerned. From the survey carried out in the Kumba municipality in Meme Division South West Region of Cameroon, out of the 350 teachers used as sample population at the level of school decision making process, majority of the respondent 146(42%) and 10(3%) disagreed and strongly disagreed with the fact that teachers' opinions count in all areas of the school decision making process. All these aspects will make the implementation of educational policies slow and ineffective. Yigzaw's (1982) carried out a study which indicates that 85% of 110 subjects stated that teachers' had not been involved in the development of curricula. That even at implementation, 63% reported that the most serious problem in this area was that materials were usually not sent on time or that they were not informed of the innovation beforehand.

More so, teachers are the sole implementers of the curricula change but many times they receive little or no orientation on innovation for example today, the world is becoming more computerized than before. So teachers are forced to register student examination marks on the computer, where as many do not know how to operate the computer and so they are liable to make errors in the filling of students' marks in their report cards. In most seminars, the inspectors are to implement innovations without all the necessary equipment needed for a proper implementation to take place (Schnidt and Pramwat, 2006). It is in this light that the study carried out by Özcan's (2010) shows that teachers do not participate in decisions taken and planning process at schools as much as they would like to. The majority of the teachers state that they participate in school decisions and school planning at a lower level however they would like to participate more. Olorunsola (2011) added that for quality and effective implementation of educational policies to occur, it needs the joint effort of both the principal and staff to part take fully in the school administrative processes. Results of the study carried by Sivri's (2010) display that if administrators could allow teachers to participate in budgetary issues in their institution, this will increase institutional commitment. This is not the case with our secondary school administrators today because budgetary or financial issues are seen as their sole responsibilities that teachers have no say. However, the relationship between institutional behaviour and institutional commitment is not statistically meaningful. Finally, teachers are not happy executing all the duties given to them by their principal due to the period that some of the duties are given that increases their work load.

Research Questions

Main Research Question

To verify to what extent does school decision making process influences Teachers' participation in educational policy implementation?

Specific Research Questions

To find out the extent to which teachers' participation in school meetings influences their implementation of educational policy.

To investigate the extent to which teachers' consultations during school meetings influences their implementation of educational policy.

To verify the extent to which delegation of responsibility to teachers during school meetings influences their implementation of educational policy.

Justification of the study

The inadequate implementation of educational policies by teachers as a result of their passive involvement in school administrative processes simply means that teachers are not fully allowed to participate in the processes of school decision making. Principals' do not allowed teachers to participate fully in school decision making process. The full involvement of teachers in school decision making process will bring about efficient and effective implementation of educational policy in schools as they are part and parcel of the decision made. This will also in turn bring about job satisfaction of teachers in the institution given the fact that they are given the opportunity or the room to contribute their ideas for the growth of the school. This will eventually boost their morals. Participation in school decision making process has advantages such as motivating teachers, changing teachers' attitudes and habits, creating a balance between personal goals and institutional goals, generating morale and decreasing resistance and opposition (Eren, 1993). If teachers are allowed to participate in school decision making, they will play active roles in decisions that affect them and will try their possible best to execute this decision for the good of the institution. The idea behind participation is that individual teachers will adopt and support the decisions when they actively take part in decision making (Sabuncuoğlu andTüz, 1996; Eren, 1993).

The role of school administrator defined as the implementer of educational administration is to ensure the wellbeing of the school in accordance with its goals by utilizing all available human and material resources at the school effectively (Ağağlu,2002). As is the case in all sectors, any educational administrator who ensure the use of all human and material resources brings about an increase in productivity and effectiveness in his teachers (Balci, 1993). Therefore, it can be argued that the degree of teachers' involvement in administrative decisions encouraged by the administrator will improve on the implementation level (Moore & Esselman, 1992) as it will result in selfless input by the staff at school. Emeneke (2004), opined that when teachers are part of the decision- making process, there is greater opportunity for them to express their minds, ideas, existing

disputes and more occasions for disagreements and agreements. Ashton and Webb (1986) found out that teachers expressed dismay and frustration over their inability to influence the process of decision making. Short et al. (1991) said the kind of school climate that encourages involvement in school administrative processes such as decision making and the other processes is characterized by openness and risk taking. This environment encourages teachers to try new ideas and approaches. However, it should be noted that teachers will be less willing to participate in decision making if they perceive that their principals sought their opinions but want to make the final decision rather than allowing them that opportunity.

Also, Luthans (2005), supported the view that if administrators claim to want participation from their people but never let them become intellectually and emotionally involved and never use their suggestions, the result may be negative meaning they will not like to be part and parcel of the school administrative process and also they will execute their duties the way they like. Teachers like any other employee will like challenging opportunities in order to easily grow. Udo and Akpa (2007) asserted that where teachers are adequately involved in decision making process and others school processes, there will be greater commitment and these teachers will adequately support their principal and the realization of the school goal will be made easier. Opposition within the school will be minimized

Glew et al. (1995) called the system participative decision making and sees it as "higher level individual's effort to provide those at a lower level with a greater voice in institutional performance. Ukeje (1992) opined that "participatory decision-making" improves the quality of decisions, increases the understanding of the group, and also their commitment to the decision. Lastly, the implementation process is a collaborative process and it is a call for leaders to fully involve their subordinates in all school processes. More so, the success of teachers in influencing decisions and the substance of these decisions may be crucial in having teachers actually become leaders in schools. Due to this, principals are afraid of allowing teachers to participate fully in key areas in the administration of schools. Teachers influencing the decision-making process for instance shift their participation in the direction of teacher leadership. Benson and Malone (1987) argued that "teachers experienced a high degree of powerlessness which often develop to a high degree of alienation which predisposes them to locate the source of student learning difficulties in the students themselves, or their home background rather than school methodology."

Benson and Malone (1987) believed that research asking about teacher participation in school administrative processes such as decision-making could be improved by asking teachers "about their influence in school decision-making, rather than involvement in school decision-making". While teachers participate in decision-making, their actual influence may be low, or high, that is there is a qualitative difference in participation, which may affect their sense of efficacy, empowerment or alienation. The fact is that even in the small areas that teachers are allowed to partake in decision making, they have little or no influence in certain issues.

Finally, Participation in school administration means extending and anonymizing the authority to make and implement decisions on a specified scale (Eren, 2001), sharing of tasks by the subordinate related to the administration and operation of the institution (Dicle, 1980) and making use of the experiences and professional knowledge of the teacher (Başaran, 1996). Participation in administration is "the undertaking of delegated tasks by each member according to their capacity in relation with the other tasks in an organization composed of interrelated actions" (Bursalioglu, 1982). In this sense, participation in administration gives the staff the right to participate in the decision- making process. Full participation of teachers in school processes will lead to their empowerment and a sense of belonging. This will eventually foster their desires to be efficient in the implementation process and vice versa. Teachers are humans which if stimulated positively will respond positively and will produce good results and if stimulated negatively will also respond negatively to the given situation.

Methodology

This study is based in the Kumba municipality in Meme division, South west Region of Cameroon. Kumba is made up of three councils and each of the councils is found under a sub-division that is (Kumba 1, II and III. The researcher decided to work in all the three sub-divisions while randomly choosing 20 schools out of the 31 English Secondary Schools in the Kumba municipality. The reason being that the researcher required a particular population of teachers in the area which could easily be gotten only by involving all the three sub- division. The sample survey design was used. This design was chosen and used because one can easily collect data on important ideas about people, their opinion, attitudes, behaviour and lastly their beliefs. It is also concerned with the administering of questionnaire to chosen population of the study who are teachers.

The population of this study comprises of 554 secondary school teachers in the Kumba municipality who have taught for at least three years and above plus four secondary school principals who were interviewed. All giving a population of 558. The sample population of 350 secondary school teachers was gotten from the target population and this sample population comprises of some selected public, private and confessional secondary schools' teachers in kumba. Here, the researcher worked on 20 schools out of 31 secondary schools in the Kumba municipality and a total number of 350 questionnaires were issued to the 20 schools which comprise of public, lay- private and confessional secondary schools in kumba municipality. The schools were; (C.C.C.H.S Kumba, C.C.A.S, Kumba G.B.H.S Kumba, G.B.H.S Mabanda, G.B.H.S Kosala, G.H.S Kake, P.H.S, B.H.S, St J.C.C, D. B.A, Clabic, GEBICOL, V.C.C, G.H.S Malende, G.H.S Kumba-mbeng, G.H.S Nkanilikum, G.S.S Fiango, G.S.S Kang Barombi, J. S.S. and St F.C.). The sampling technique used was the simple random sampling technique. observation, questionnaires and interview guide were used as instruments for data collection. The questionnaires were administered to the teachers while interviews were done to some of the principals within the selected schools in the area.

Table 1. Sample Population (Number of teachers involved in each school).

Name of school	Sample number of teacher	Number of questionnaires given out	Number of questionnaires returned	% returned
C.C.A.S	40	40	40	100
G.B.H.S Kumba	40	40	40	100
G.B.H.S Mabande	20	20	20	100
G.B.H.S Kosala	30	30	30	100
G.H.S Kake	15	15	15	100
G.H.S Malende	10	10	10	100
G.H.S Kumba-Mbeng	20	20	20	100
G.H.S Nkanilikum	15	15	15	100
G.S.S Fiango	10	10	10	100
G.S.S Kang Barombi	10	10	10	100
P.H.S	20	20	20	100
B.H.S	12	12	12	100
St F.C	16	16	16	100
St John	15	15	15	100
V.C.C	12	12	12	100
D.B.A	20	20	20	100
Clabic	10	10	10	100
Gebicol	10	10	10	100
Jemea. C	8	8	8	100
C.C.C.H.S	07	07	07	100
Total:	350	350	350	100

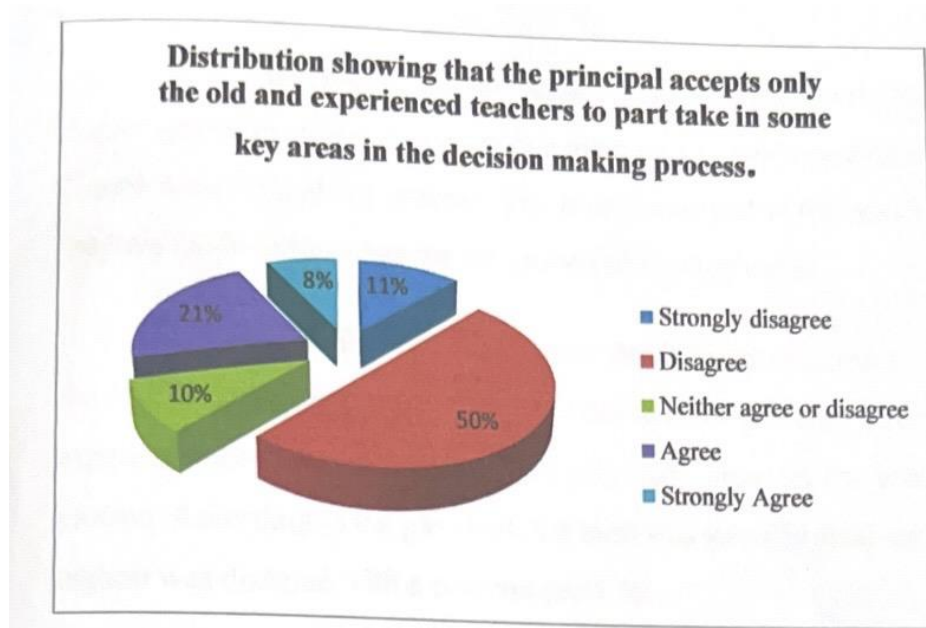
SOURCE: Field work 2025

From the table above, it is observed that 350 questionnaires were distributed and all recollected. This gave a hundred percent rate of return as seen below:

$$350/350 \times 100/1=100\%.$$

Presentation of Data

Figure 1: Distribution showing that the principal accepts only the old and experienced teachers to part take in some key areas in the decision- making process.



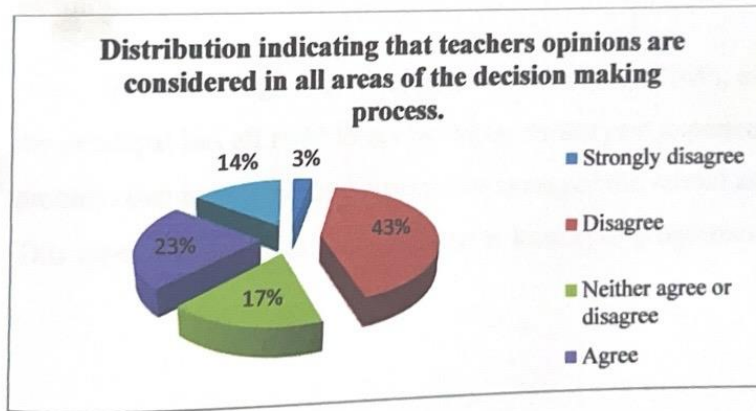
Source: Field work, 2025

Participation of teachers in school meetings.

According to the distribution chart above, majority of the respondents 175(50%) and 39(11.1% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively to the item on the questionnaire while 75(21.4%) and 27(7.7%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that it is only old and experience teachers who are involved in some key areas in school decision making. Those that were uncertain made up a percentage of 10.

It is in this light, talking about participation in school decision making, to Macha & Mhagama (2022) teachers' participation in decision-making through meetings and collaborative forums, positively influences their work performance, accountability, commitment, and indirectly student performance. Lastly, a teacher may be new in a school but that does not mean he or she is not experience in the teaching profession. Most often, the so called old and experience teachers bring more confusion in the institution due to familiarity and longevity. There are some old teachers who think they know more that the principal and so, to them they are accountable to nobody in the institution not even the principal. Some of them are bad examples to the new ones. This is mostly witness in public secondary schools. The fact that majority of the respondents were against this view, it simply means that longevity in an institution is not a guarantee to participate in some key areas in the school decision making process. The most important is the person's commitment and the love the individual has for the growth of the institution.

Figure 2 Distribution indicating that teachers' opinions are considered in all areas of the school decision making process.



Source: Field work, 2025

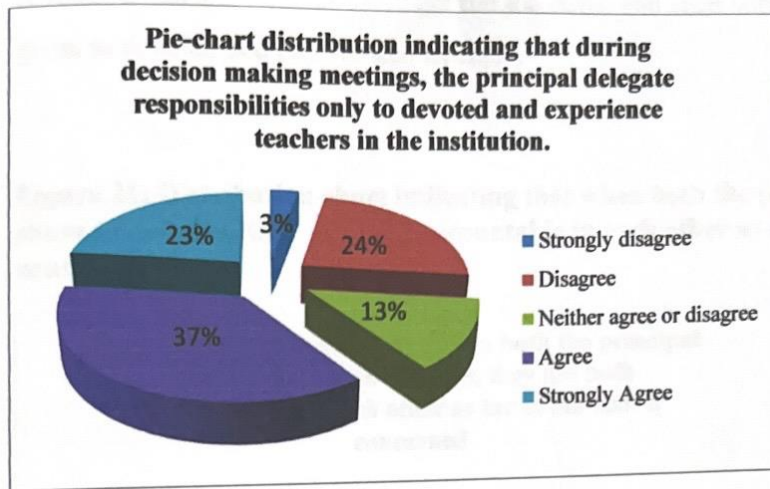
Teachers' opinions

The pie-chart above shows that 6(1.7%) of the respondents miss the item in the questionnaire. This simply means that the frequency of all the respondent was 344 instead of 350. The respondents who were uncertain made up (17.1%). Minority of the respondent 80(22.9%) and 48(13.7), agreed and strongly agreed respectively to the fact that teachers' opinions are considered in all areas of the school decision making process. Majority of the respondent 146(41.7%) and 10(2.9%) disagreed and strongly disagreed to the item on the questionnaire. To the researcher, it is not in all situations or all area of the school decision making process that the idea of the teacher will count for the simple reason that there are times that due to the nature of the problem at hand it may cause the principal to assemble a meeting or he or she takes the decision alone. For instance, in a case of a recalcitrant student who is of bad influence to others and also the case of staff discipline when a teacher fail to live up to expectation, the principal immediately acts before informing others so as to bring order in the school making it conducive for teaching and learning.

It is in this light that Fonkeng and Tamajong (2009), said that in such a situation, the principal has all right to act by using his/her past experience to solve the immediate problem that may impede the smooth running of the school as an institution of learning. This type of decision falls under what is known as programmed decision.

Figure 3: Distribution chart indicating that during school decision making teachers in the institution meetings, the principal delegate responsibilities only to devoted and experience

Pie-chart distribution indicating that during decision making meetings, the principal delegate responsibilities only to devoted and experience teachers in the institution.



Source: Field work, 2025

Delegation of responsibility by principals.

From the above chart, the respondents agreed with the point of view that the principal delegates responsibilities only to devoted and experience teachers in the institution during school decision making meetings and they had a percentage of 37. Those that disagreed to the above fact had a percentage of 24 being the second highest. The third highest were those that strongly agreed to the statement. Those that either agreed or disagreed to the above statement made up a percentage of 13 while those that strongly disagreed had just 3%. Finally, summing the percentages of agree and strongly agree, we had a percentage of 60 meaning that more than half of the respondents were in support of the fact or statement that during school decision making meetings, the principal delegates responsibilities only to devoted and experience teachers in the institution. To Kanshabe, Tibanyendera & Tutegyeize (2025) effective delegation by head teachers across administrative and instructional tasks (including meeting-related roles and committee responsibilities) was strongly associated with increased job effectiveness, shared responsibilities, and greater teacher participation in school activity planning and execution. principals should not only delegate tasks but also delegate responsibility and commensurate authority in the management of schools to other staff in order to get the job done, and such opportunities can only be given to devoted and experienced teachers.

Inferential Statistics

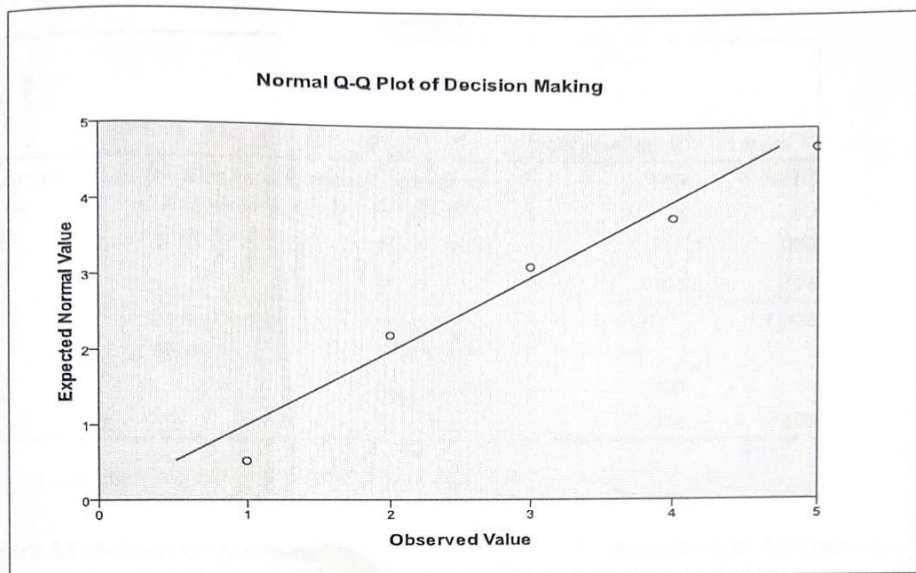
Research Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between school decision making process and Teachers' participation in Educational Policy Implementation.

			Teachers participation in Educational policy implementation	School decision Making process.
Spearman's rho	Teachers participation in Educational policy implementation	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,863**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
		N	304	304
	School decision Making process	Correlation Coefficient	,863**	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
		N	304	344

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations

Looking at the correlation coefficient of 0.8 we discover that this index is closer to 1 thus



indicating that there is a significant relationship between the variables that are under study. Alternatively, the p-value of 0.00 is less than 0.05 which is the alpha. The results reveal that the null hypothesis is rejected while the research hypothesis accepted. Based on this we move forward to conclude that there is a significant relationship between school decision making process and teachers' participation in educational policy implementation in the secondary school. Looking at the plot above, we discover that a linear presentation shows observed points around the line thus denoting an association.

Discussion of findings

There is a positively high relationship between school decision-making process (participation of teachers' in school meetings, consideration of teachers' opinion and delegation of responsibilities by principals) and teachers' participation in educational policy implementation. The findings of this work is linked to theory Z by William Ouchi (1981), Participative Leadership theory by Likert (1967) and theory of Policy implementation by Fullan (2000, 2007, and 2009).

This finding gives credence to the view of Gillett-Swan & Baroutsis (2023) who opined that participation of teachers' in school meetings is not just reporting opinions, but is about positioning teachers as empowered participants in shaping educational practice, policy, and decisions that affect their work and students' learning. The more teachers are committed to a particular decision made or taken due to their participation in the decision, the more efficient and accountable they become as far as the implementation of the decision is concern. The findings further confirm the view of Fonkeng and Tamajong (2009), to these authors decision-making is the very heart of the administrative process and leadership. Whatever the leadership behaviour, it involves decision-making, despite whatever the decision is. Effective administration requires rational decision-making which leads to the selection of the best way to reach an anticipated goal. This is made effective through joint participation of teachers and their principal Generally speaking, school decision-making involves the process of choosing from among alternative ways of achieving and objective or providing a solution to a problem. It involves choice and entails cost. In fact, it is not an end in itself, but a means of achieving organizational goals and objectives. This brings about organizational responses to problems. Decision-making is a major or central responsibility of all administrators, but until decisions are converted into action, they are only good intentions. Teachers are the facilitators of all decision made in any institution of learning. Their participation in school decision-making processes will bring about effective implementation of the decision made.

This finding is in line with the views of DeFouw et al (2024) who emphasizes that structured consultation with colleagues and specialists, often occurring in school-level meetings, helps teachers express challenges and receive feedback. Informal consultation (such as brief discussions before/after meetings) often yields greater comfort and openness than formal team meetings alone. Teachers, especially less experienced ones, often lack meaningful consultation in planning and policy meetings (Teacher Task Force, 2024).

Furthermore, the findings hold the point of view of Kanshabe, Tibanyendera & Tutegyeize (2025) who said that effective delegation by head teachers across administrative and instructional tasks (including meeting-related roles and committee responsibilities) was strongly associated with increased job effectiveness, shared responsibilities, and greater teacher participation in school activity planning and execution. Head teachers delegated tasks such as staff coordination, co-curricular activities, and mentorship, which in turn heightened teacher involvement in school governance and contributed positively to school functioning. Also this findings aligns with Zamudio & Carbonell (2025) in their findings, they investigated that although structured delegation of instructional and policy responsibilities remains limited in many schools, where it does occur (e.g., assigning teachers to lead specific decision-making groups or project teams), it tends to support organizational performance, teacher engagement, and shared responsibility in school administration.

Findings according to Ndu and Anogbo (2007) noted that where teachers are not involved in governance, result to teachers behaving as if they are strangers within the school environment. Thus, most teachers do not put in their best to have full sense of commitment and dedication to the school. It is a call for principals to make teachers participate in all the school activities so as to put in their best and have a sense of commitment and belonging to the school. Mullins (2005) is of the opinion that many people believed that staff participation in decision making leads to higher performance which is necessary for survival in an increasingly competitive world. Teachers are in the best position to give suggestions that will help improve on the academic performance of the institution. They interact with student more than any other individual in the school. Teachers' participation in decision making will eventually make the implementation process easier and faster since the implementers who are the teachers are all aware of the policies to be implemented and the necessity of implementing the decisions.

This finding goes in line with Sivri's (2010) study which display that if administrators should include teachers' participation in budgetary matters, this will automatically increase organizational commitment. In our secondary schools in the Kumba municipality and the entire nation in general, principals see budgetary issues as their sole responsibility that need not to be shared with subordinates. From our field work in 2025, it was realized that the operation of human and financial resources in the institutions was looked into by the principal alone but if they can try to make the teachers know the financial aspects of the institution, this will boost teachers' spirit and increase their commitment in so many aspects in the school.

Below are some of the interviews conducted on some principals on the aspect of school decision making process. The different principals A, B, C, and D from the different schools gave their point of view on questions asked on decision-making process. Based on the questions below which states: who are those involve in school decision-making process? Are they old and experienced teachers or devoted and experienced teachers? And whose

opinions are considered during decision-making process? Below are the responses of the various principal.

Principal "A" said most of the decision taken in the class counsel for example is cases of dismiss and stubbornness that are discussed there. He continued by saying that we have administrative meetings where only the principals and the administrators take the decision. There are situations that the principal takes personal or instant decisions for instant situations of violet in school. For instance, when a student fights a teacher. Lastly, they are situations that the decisions are made by the disciplinary counsel. According to principal "B" I involve only devoted and experienced teachers during school decision- making process for the simple reason that they have the love of the establishment at heart. It is not in all areas in the decision-making process that teachers are involved because there are situations that I as the principal personally take decisions or act alone in order to facilitate things.

Still on the same questions on school decision-making process, principal "C" said that involvement in school decision-making is a voluntary process, so everybody can be involved. To me, it is an open process. Most often, new teachers are involved and encourage due to the fact that being new in the school does not mean the individual is new in the field or he or she is not experienced. He added by saying that "the administration is always vigilant with the type of proposals and ideas teachers give. The ideas and proposals given are first of all weighed depending on their objectives before taken them into consideration". Lastly, the ideas of principal "D" were in line with the ideas of the orders.

Conclusion

According to research question one, not only old and experience teachers who are involved in some key areas in school decision making process but all staff. To research question two, teachers' opinion does not count in all aspects of the school decision- making process. Lastly, to research question three, the principal should delegate responsibilities only to devote and experience teachers in the institution during school decision meeting who will be able to do the execution on time.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made: In regards to research question one, the principals should not totally neglect the less experienced teachers in decision making as they also need to be developed on the job. Principals should also attend more workshops and seminars to know how to manage the younger teachers so as to build them up since they will eventually take up the mantle from them later. Furthermore, the principal should make sure that a teacher should not teach a particular class and level for more than 3 years in order to stop the problem of mastering the material of that class and to enable them to carryout research and write their lessons frequently. The reason is this, if teachers are always in the same class, they will see lesson preparation has

waste of time and so continue to give the same notes and knowledge to student year in and year out without any innovation. Teachers should be born and effective teachers, not ineffective teachers and teachers of circumstance. This simply means that they should love their teaching profession and also try to put in their best to improve on the falling standards. Teachers especially old public secondary school teachers should learn to continue giving their principals the respect they deserve, when allowed to be part and parcel of some decision-making meetings in schools. Lastly, teachers should be serious, disciplined and committed to their teaching job and moreover, they should have the growth and the welfare of the students at heart if really they want to partake in school decision making process. In fact, honour should be given to whom honour is due or required

According to research question two, The Ministry of education should organize meetings at least once a year especially at the beginning of the academic year to allow all the teachers' representatives to be part and parcel of the meeting held with inspectors and delegates in order that they can contribute their point of views for the smooth running of the academic year.

Finally, in respect to research question three, Institutional duties should be assigned to all teachers whether new or old and not concentrating on those teachers who are effective and efficient. There are individuals that is only when a task is given to them to perform that they are easily identified or discovered though there are some teachers who always like to hinder themselves. Another reason of attributing a task to all is that some teachers will turn to learn things they never knew at first and this will force them to learn things they never knew at first and this will help improve on their errors. Teachers' involvement in key areas in the school decision making process by principals requires that teachers should be effectively present in school, teachers should respect the school hierarchy as far as the implementation of decision is concerned. Teachers should endeavor to effectively put in place all the decisions taken by the principal before the date limit. Teacher should constantly and effectively prepare their lesson notes. Also, teachers should ensure that they complete their teaching programme each academic year without necessarily rushing over the programme.

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Societal Expectations Of Exemplary Behavior As Role Models And Its Influences On The Identity Formation On Some Selected Clergy Children In The Mezam Division Of The North West Region Of Cameroon

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to examine the societal expectations of exemplary behaviour as role models and its influence on identity formation on some selected clergy's children of the Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. The study aimed at examining the influence of societal expectations of exemplary behaviour as role models on identity formation of clergy's children.

Materials and Methods

The convergent mixed-methods design was used in conducting this study. To collect quantitative data, the cross-sectional survey design with the aid of a questionnaire made up of closed ended items was used. Qualitative data was collected through the phenomenological approach with the aid of an interview guide made up of open-ended questions. A sample of 60 purposefully selected clergy's children were recruited for this study.

Findings

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools; frequency counts, graphs, percentages and the Pearson test and regression analysis was used to test hypotheses. Thematic analysis with the aid of themes and quotations was used for qualitative data. The association between identity formation (IF) and the pressure of being a role model (PRM) is strong and negative ($r = -0.608$, $p < 0.00001$). This means that as the pressure on clergy's children to always be perfect role models increases, their capacity for developing a stable and clear personal identity diminishes.

Keywords:

Societal expectations, identity formation, exemplary role models, clergy's children.



Introduction

Jankowski et al (2020) state that societal expectations, refer to the explicit and implicit behavioral and moral standards imposed by religious communities, extended family systems, and peers on children of clergy, due to their association with pastoral leadership. Jorge & Maropa (2016) assert that people who hold high-profile status live under much scrutiny as they are always in the public eye. A study done by McRobbie (2021) also states that when one thinks of high-profile individuals, images of royalty, politicians, celebrities, athletes, successful entrepreneurs, socialites, religious leaders, and acclaimed intellectuals often come to mind. In the context of this study, clergy's children, otherwise pastors' children are expected to live a life that is different from other children. Smith (2023), states that some of these expectations may include holiness, moral uprightness, high achieving, talented, exemplary to their peers and active members of the church, any deviation from the perceived expectations is frowned upon and deemed a disappointment even failure.

Adams et al (2023), ascertain that when they cannot live up to such expectations, it can lead to internalized pressure among clergy's children to conform to roles that may not reflect their personal developmental stage, interests, or struggles. For example, clergy's children are often expected to demonstrate a higher standard of behavior than their peers, leaving little room for vulnerability or failure. When they fail to meet these expectations, they may experience psychological strain, self-doubt, and fear of disappointing their families or church members, which may ultimately affect how they perceive and construct their identities (Wright, 2023).

Erikson (1968) postulated that identity formation is the process through which individuals develop a coherent sense of self around personal values, beliefs, and social roles. According to Erikson, adolescents, particularly, go through a critical period of exploration and commitment in developing their identities. When societal expectations clash with personal values or experiences, it can lead to identity confusion a state Erikson termed "identity crisis". Marcia (1993) further emphasized that unresolved societal pressures can result in identity foreclosure, where individuals prematurely adopt externally imposed roles without personal exploration.

In pastoral families, children often find their sense of self overshadowed by the need to live up to the spiritual image of their parents (Benjamin et al, 2021). Fowler (1981) states that constant exposure to moral scrutiny and the expectation to embody religious values may prevent authentic self-expression and delay identity consolidation. Furthermore, Fowler (1981) explained that this is especially evident in the areas of autonomy, social belonging, and emotional expression. The result is often a fragile sense of identity heavily shaped by the demands of others rather than by internal convictions. This study seeks to examine the influence of societal expectations of exemplary behavior on identity formation by clergy's children.

Background

Historically, the expectations and norms that are set by society play the biggest role in shaping a person's character and affect their behavior, choices, and opinions about self-worth and their sense of belonging (Amna, 2024). Durkheim (1982) claimed that society is held together by a shared system of norms and values that individuals come to internalize from early childhood. He maintained that these norms function as the invisible glue that binds members of a community, ensuring a collective consciousness that guides behavior. Durkheim's perspective, rooted in his earlier work from the late 19th century, establishes that societal expectations are not arbitrary; rather, they emerge from centuries of cultural evolution and are embedded in the rituals, institutions, and everyday practices of a community. Furthermore, Durkheim's insights remind us that these expectations provide structure and meaning, ultimately facilitating social order and cohesion (Durkheim, 1982).

Weber (2001) offered a complementary view by exploring how religious beliefs and ethics significantly contribute to the formation of societal expectations. He specifically highlighted the concept of the "Protestant ethic," which posited that the spirit of capitalism and the emergent norms concerning hard work, discipline, and rationality were intrinsically linked to Protestant religious values. Weber's analysis illustrates that societal expectations are deeply intertwined with historical and religious contexts, meaning that the moral codes governing behavior are, in part, a legacy of past ideological developments. This work laid the groundwork for understanding how historical narratives and religious ideologies serve to influence the expectations imposed on social groups, setting a precedent for future explorations into how these expectations are inherited and transformed over time (Weber, 2001).

Mead (1934) further expanded on these ideas by examining the development of the self through social interactions. He contended that identity and the sense of self are constructed through the process of internalizing societal expectations via face-to-face interactions. According to Mead, the "I" and the "me" are born in these interactions, with the "me" representing the internalized attitudes of the generalized other the collective norms and values of society. Through this process, individuals learn to modify their behavior to align with what is expected of them, thus perpetuating the cycle of societal expectation. Mead's work underscores that not only do societal expectations shape external behavior, but they also fundamentally influence the internal process of identity formation (Mead, 1934).

Goffman (1959) introduced the dramaturgical perspective, emphasizing that everyday social interactions are akin to performances where individuals manage their presentation of self. He argued that people, much like actors on a stage, perform roles that are prescribed by societal expectations. This performance is not merely incidental; rather, it is a strategic effort to align with the unspoken norms and values held by one's community. Goffman's analysis highlights that the pressure to conform to societal expectations is ever-present in daily life, dictating how one should behave, speak, and even dress in different social contexts. By viewing social life as a series of staged performances, Goffman provided a vivid

illustration of how deeply ingrained societal expectations operate to regulate individual behavior and maintain social order (Goffman, 1959).

Berger and Luckmann (1966) took these discussions a step further by conceiving of societal expectations as a product of the social construction of reality. They posited that reality itself is formed through social processes in which language, communication, and everyday interactions play critical roles. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the norms and expectations of society are constructed, maintained, and evolved through continuous social negotiations. Their work suggests that while societal expectations may appear fixed, they are, in fact, subject to change as collective understandings are renegotiated in light of new information and shifting cultural landscapes. This perspective is crucial in understanding that societal expectations are dynamic and contextually bound, a concept that influences contemporary views on identity formation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

As the study of societal expectations evolved, scholars have increasingly recognized that these expectations are not static but are continually reshaped by historical forces and leadership dynamics. Acemoglu and Jackson (2011) demonstrated that historical events and prominent leadership could actively influence the emergence and transformation of social norms. In their analysis, they provided evidence that societal expectations are subject to recalibration in response to key historical shifts and the actions of influential figures. They argued that prominent leaders could, through visible and symbolic actions, signal a transformation in societal expectations, thereby altering the collective mindset and behavior of large social groups. This dynamic perspective is especially relevant in settings where historical legacies and charismatic authority intersect, illuminating the adaptive nature of societal expectations over time (Acemoglu & Jackson, 2011).

Adding to this contemporary discourse, Drewelies, Huxhold, and Gerstorf (2019) explored the role of historical change in shaping individual development, particularly as it relates to evolving societal expectations. They proposed that as historical conditions shift be it through technological advancement, economic change, or cultural transformation so too do the expectations that society imposes on its members. Their framework, which examines how contextual changes influence personal development, underscores the fact that societal expectations are both reflections of historical realities and catalysts for future behaviors. In doing so, their work bridges the gap between historical analysis and contemporary developmental theory, offering insights into how dynamic societal conditions continue to influence identity formation in the present day (Drewelies, Huxhold, & Gerstorf, 2019).

Jointly, the historical background of societal expectations is characterized by a rich dialogue among foundational theorists and contemporary scholars. Durkheim (1982) laid the groundwork by emphasizing the role of shared norms in fostering social order, while Weber (2001) illuminated the powerful influence of religious ideologies on shaping modern expectations. Mead (1934) and Goffman (1959) then brought attention to the micro-level processes in which these societal expectations are internalized and enacted in everyday life. Berger and Luckmann (1966) expanded the discussion by framing societal expectations as part of a continually reconstructed social reality, and Acemoglu and Jackson (2011)

provided empirical evidence of how leadership and historical events drive shifts in these norms. Finally, Drewelies, Huxhold, and Gerstorf (2019) affirmed that the transformations of societal expectations are integral components of both historical change and individual development.

This rich historical background provides a foundational context for understanding how societal expectations may influence the identity formation of specific groups, such as pastors' children in Mezam. By recognizing the historical depth and evolution of these expectations, researchers can better appreciate the multifaceted ways in which they influence personal development and social integration, particularly in environments steeped in tradition and moral precision.

Conceptually, Durkheim (1982) stated that societal expectations are the set of collective norms, values, and rules that guide individual behavior and maintain social order. According to him, these expectations emerge from long-established cultural traditions that continuously shape how individuals perceive their role in society. Weber (2001) extended this understanding by illustrating that religious ideologies such as those embedded within the Protestant ethic serve as a prominent source for many of these expectations. He showed that the virtues of diligence, frugality, and discipline are not innate traits but are promoted by broader societal mandates influenced by historical religious developments. Berger and Luckmann (1966) further maintained that societal expectations are socially constructed and continuously reproduced through everyday interactions, making them dynamic rather than static. Society often views clergy's children as role models and expects them to embody spiritual maturity, uprightness and leadership qualities beyond their developmental stage. (Smith and Denton, 2005)

Identity formation, particularly in adolescence and early adulthood, is a complex psychological process through which individuals develop a coherent sense of self by integrating personal experiences with social roles and expectations (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2017). For clergy's children, identity development occurs within the dual context of family and church, where they must navigate personal identity alongside a pre-assigned religious identity. These children often internalize societal and parental expectations, which may either reinforce or conflict with their personal aspirations, leading to tension or confusion in identity development (Hardy et al., 2010)

In summary societal expectations, significantly influence the identity formation of clergy's children by placing them under continuous moral scrutiny and religious pressure. While these expectations may offer structure and guidance, they can also contribute to internal conflict and identity challenges, particularly when personal experiences do not align with imposed ideals.

According to Lockwood and Kunda (2000), role models are individuals who embody exemplary conduct and achievements to such a degree that they serve both as aspirational figures and as benchmarks for personal success. They contended that these role models are influential only when individuals see them as relevant to their own lives. Morgenroth, Ryan,

and Peters (2015) expanded this explanation by proposing a motivational theory of role modeling. According to their work, role models influence the goals and aspirations of observers by acting as behavioral exemplars, representing attainable ideals, and inspiring motivation. They emphasized that the impact of a role model is contingent upon whether their success appears attainable to the aspirant; if it seems out of reach, the influence may become demoralizing rather than inspirational. In this light, perfect role models are not perfect in an absolute sense but idealized figures against which individuals measure both their progress and potential. Such figures, especially in high-expectation environments, set standards that can both spur and challenge personal development, highlighting the dual-edged nature of idealized exemplars.

Empirical studies show that clergy's children are often subject to the "perfect child syndrome" where they are expected to be models of Christian virtues academically successful, actively involved in church activities (Lee & Iverson-Gilbert, 2003). These expectations, while well intended can lead to a performative identity, where clergy's children act out the roles expected of them rather than developing an authentic sense of self (Lowe, 2012). When their personal struggles or beliefs do not align with the public image imposed upon them, clergy's children may experience identity confusion, guilt, or rebellion as coping responses (Kay & Francis, 1996).

According to Francis and Robbins (2012), clergy's children often struggle with the need to meet high spiritual standards while trying to establish an independent identity, this tension can hinder emotional well-being and result in long term effects on self-perception, self-worth, and career or relationship choices. Therefore societal expectations serve not only as external pressure but also as formative agents in shaping how clergy's children negotiate their personal and spiritual identities.

Theoretically, Carl Rogers, a leading figure in humanistic psychology, proposed the Person-Centered Theory (1959), which emphasizes the importance of self-concept, unconditional positive regard, and congruence between the real self and ideal self for healthy psychological development.

Clergy's children are often viewed by society as moral and spiritual role models. This external labeling can create pressure for them to meet idealized standards that conflict with their personal desires or struggles. Rogers' concept of incongruence a misalignment between one's self-image and actual experiences helps to explain how trying to meet these role-model expectations may lead to internal identity conflict.

Rogers' theory provides a framework for understanding how societal idealization of clergy's children as role models may hinder authentic self-expression and identity development. It explains why some PKs may feel the need to mask their true selves in order to meet societal expectations, which could result in suppressed emotions, self-alienation, or rebellion.

Erik Erikson (1968) developed the Psychosocial Theory of Development, which posits that human development occurs in stages. The fifth stage Identity vs. Role Confusion is

especially critical during adolescence and young adulthood, where individuals seek to explore and consolidate their identity.

Contextually, Cameroon is a culturally and religiously diverse nation in Central Africa, where Christianity plays a dominant role in shaping societal values and behaviors. According to the Pew Research Center (2010), approximately 70% of the population identifies as Christian, with significant denominational representation from Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Pentecostalism. Religious institutions in Cameroon do not merely function as centers of worship; they serve as educational, moral, and socio-cultural pillars within communities (Konings, 2009). Over the years, pastoral leadership has gained increasing influence in shaping both public and private life, with pastors often regarded as moral authorities and community gatekeepers.

Within this national framework, the North West Region, and specifically Mezam Division stands out as one of the most religiously vibrant and community-oriented regions. Predominantly inhabited by the Ngemba, Widikum, Meta, and Kom ethnic groups, Mezam is known for its strong communal values and high religious participation (Nkwi, 2015). Churches such as the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC), the Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC), and Full Gospel Mission (FGM) are deeply embedded in the social fabric of communities within the Division. These churches not only shape theological perspectives but also reinforce moral norms, youth behavior, and family expectations.

In this context, pastors and their families, particularly their children, are treated as visible extensions of spiritual leadership. While most children in Cameroon grow up under some form of societal expectation, pastors' children in Mezam are subjected to uniquely elevated communal standards. They are expected to exhibit maturity, spiritual leadership, academic excellence, and exemplary behavior. These expectations are both explicit and implicit, often reinforced through sermons, church programmes, peer interactions, and informal community surveillance (Agbiji & Swart, 2015). As one study in Nigeria (a culturally similar context) noted, "the children of clergy are seen as mini-pastors, whether or not they have a calling or interest in ministry" (Adewale, 2019).

Mezam Division's communal orientation further intensifies these pressures. Communalism in this region implies that identity is not solely an individual construct but a reflection of family, clan, and church reputation. As such, the conduct of a pastor's child is frequently interpreted as an indicator of pastoral effectiveness and spiritual discipline within the household. This makes the clergy's children behavior and choices not just personal, but collective concerns. In such a setting, deviation from community expectations is met with public scrutiny, often placing a burden on the clergy's children to conform and suppress aspects of their emerging identity (Nche, 2020).

Despite the visibility of pastoral families and the communal pressures within which they operate, there is a notable gap in empirical research on how these societal expectations influence the identity formation of clergy's children in Cameroon. Most existing literature on clergy's children is based in western contexts, where identity development is studied in

more individualistic settings. These studies rarely account for the socio-cultural and religious nuances that shape identity formation in collectivist African communities.

Therefore, Mezam Division offers a fertile and contextually rich setting for examining how societal expectations, particularly those related to being exemplary role models, shape the evolving identities of clergy's children. This contextual background not only justifies the geographic and cultural focus of this study but also underscores its contribution to closing a critical gap in African-based identity and pastoral family research.

Objective

To investigate how the expectation of exemplary behavior as role models influences the identity formation of clergy's children.

How does the expectation of exemplary behavior as role models affect the identity formation of clergys' children?

Research Hypothesis

Ho: The expectation of exemplary behavior as role models has no significant influence on identity formation of clergy's children.

Ha: The expectation of exemplary behavior as role models has a significant influence on identity formation of clergy's children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The convergent mixed-methods design was used in conducting this study. To collect quantitative data, the cross-sectional survey design with the aid of a questionnaire made up of closed ended items was used. Qualitative data was collected through the phenomenological approach with the aid of an interview guide made up of open-ended questions. This study was carried out in Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. Specifically data was collected from some selected clergy's children of this division.

The population of this study consisted of all clergy's children residing within the Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. This broad population included those who have grown up and continued to live in environments where the societal expectations linked to pastoral families are prevalent. The target population was clergy's children within the Mezam Division who were within the age range of 18years and above. This group was selected because their experiences were most likely to reflect the interplay between societal expectations and identity formation that the study aimed to explore. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the participants met the inclusion criteria and were willing to provide detailed data either through structured questionnaires or in-depth interviews. This approach helped in ensuring that the data collected were both representative of and specific to the group of interest (Table 1).

Table 1: The Population of the Study

Division	Target Population	Accessible Population	Sample size
Mezam	180	70	60
Total	180	70	60

Source: Tantoh, (2025)

The sample for this study consisted of clergy's children residing in the Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. To which a power of 0.80 with an alpha of 0.05, an estimated sample size of approximately 59 participants was anticipated. This number was expected to provide sufficient data to perform reliable descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, and regression analyses while allowing for subgroup examination (like variations by age or denominational affiliation).

Firstly, the Initial Sample Size (n_0) was calculated using Cochran's (1977) formula for determining the sample size for an infinite population was used as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times (1 - p)}{d^2}$$

(Cochran, 1977)

Where:

Z is the Z-score corresponding to the desired confidence level (for 95% confidence, $Z=1.96$),

p is the estimated proportion of the attribute present in the population ($p=0.5$),

d is the desired margin of error (set at 0.05).

Using these values:

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1 - 0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384.16$$

The second step was to adjust for finite population (n). When the total population (N) is small (less than 10), the initial sample size must be adjusted using the finite population correction (FPC) formula:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}}$$

Assume that the total number of pastors' children in the accessible population of the Mezam Division is approximately $N=70$. Then,

$$n = \frac{384.16}{1 + \frac{(384.16 - 1)}{70}} = 59.34$$

After rounding, the required sample size was $n = 60$.

Table 2: Distribution of Sample Size

S/N	CP Accessible population	Number of clergy's Kids
1	CC in Santa (Purposive sampling)	8
2	CC in Bamenda I, II and III (Purposive)	22
3	CC in Tubah (Purposive)	17
4	Referrals (snow ball sampling)	13
	Total	60

Source: Tantoh, (2025)

Given the specificity of the study population, a non-probability (non-random) sampling strategy was used. The study employed a multi-step non-probabilistic sampling approach as follows: Purposive Sampling was used to select participants specifically based on the inclusion criterion that they are children of clergy's children residing in the Mezam Division. This was done by inviting them to fill the questionnaire and links (to the questionnaire) were sent to those who could not be reached directly. This targeted approach ensured that the sample reflected the individuals who have experienced the societal, familial, and religious expectations central to the study. By focusing on those who met these criteria, the research aimed to enhance the relevance and validity of the findings regarding identity formation under high societal expectations.

In addition, snowball sampling was used to reach a wider segment of the accessible population, particularly those who may not be in the Mezam clergy's children WhatsApp forum. Initially, clergy's children identified through the WhatsApp forum were invited to participate. As they filled the researchers pleaded with participants to share the link with other eligible individuals (Clergy's children). This technique helped to expand the sample and ensured that various subgroups within the target population were represented.

The research instruments used were a self-constructed questionnaire and an interview guide. The Chi-square test was used to analyse distributions and variations of demographic data from which variables such as gender, educational level, occupation and age were coded as dummy variables (0 or 1). A test of normality was carried to verify if the residual of the model meets the normality assumption. Items on identity formation were summed and a cut-off point of greater than or equals to 25.5 on 30 was used to distinguish those with a high level of identity formation over those with a low identity formation (total score <25.5/30). The Pearson Correlation coefficient was calculated from the multivariate linear regression and used to examine the relationships between societal expectations of clergy's children (independent variables) and identity formation (dependent variable). Correlation coefficients (r) near +1 or -1 indicated a very strong relationship (either positive or negative). SPSS version 27 and MS Excel 2019 were used for these statistical analyses and charts respectively. Statistical significant level was set at $p\text{-value} < 0.05$. The quantitative results were presented on tables, and pie charts.

The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. This process involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

MS Word and Excel were used to code and organize themes for qualitative analysis. The qualitative table listing themes alongside illustrative quotes and frequencies or intensities of the theme were used to present thematically analyzed data.

FINDINGS

Six structured items were used to measure clergy's children opinion about expectation to demonstrate exemplary behavior as role models and its influence on identity formation and the findings are presented on Table 3 below where: SD/D: Strongly disagree/disagree, SA/A: Strongly agree/agree, N: Neutral.

Table 3: Respondents opinion on demonstrating Exemplary Behavior as Role Models.

Items	SD/D	N	SA/A
I feel that people expect me to always behave perfectly because I am a clergy's child.	4 (6.7%)	2 (3.3%)	54 (90.0%)
I often feel like my parent's job depends on how well I behave.	16 (26.7%)	16 (26.7%)	28 (46.7%)
I often try to act spiritually mature in public, even when I am struggling with my faith inside.	14 (23.3%)	16 (26.7%)	30 (46.7%)
I find it hard to be myself because of the high expectations placed on me.	18 (30.0%)	10 (16.7%)	32 (53.3%)
I High expectations sometimes make me feel stressed	14 (23.3%)	6 (10.0%)	40 (66.7%)
Being treated like a role model has changed how I view myself	6 (10.0%)	10 (16.7%)	44 (73.3%)

Source: Tantoh, (2025)

Most of clergy's children (90.0%) agreed that people expect them to always behave perfectly because of their status. Only a very small fraction (6.7%) disagreed, while 3.3% remained neutral. When asked if they felt that their parents' job success depended on how well they behaved, the responses were more mixed. About 46.7% agreed or strongly agreed, whereas 26.7% disagreed and another 26.7% remained neutral. Regarding the effort to portray spiritual maturity in public even when personally struggling with faith, 46.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this sentiment. Meanwhile, 26.7% were neutral and 23.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. More than half (53.3%) of the clergy's children acknowledged that it is hard for them to be themselves because of the high expectations placed on them, with only 30.0% disagreeing. A significant two-thirds (66.7%) of

respondents agreed or strongly agreed that high expectations make them feel stressed. With regards to the statement “Being treated like a role model has changed how I view myself,” 73.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it. Only 10.0% disagreed. Table 4 below shows the deductive thematic analysis of clergy’s children as role model.

Table 4: Deductive Thematic Analysis of CC’s Role Model Construct

Theme	CC1	CC2	CC3	CC4	CC5
Idealized Behavior and Perfection	Expected to be a “saint”, always polite, spiritual, and appropriately dressed; any deviation was magnified because of the symbolic role.	Expected to be perfect, never angry or weak (e.g., couldn’t show sadness over academic failures) because his behavior is held to a higher standard.	Expected to be respectful, holy, and flawless; even minor mistakes (like tiredness during a youth program) become “big things” due to the pastor’s daughter label.	Previously noted (in other sections) that CC4 was expected to be disciplined, spiritually strong, and a role model at all times even when struggling internally.	Expected to be almost perfect, always kind, prayerful, respectful, and mature; deviations (laughing too loudly, choosing non church friends) immediately invite scrutiny.

Source: Tantoh, (2025)

The deductive thematic analysis on Table 4 displays the “idealized behavior and perfection” subtheme from the role model construct. All five respondents described feeling compelled to embody an idealized image: CC1 reported being expected to “be a saint,” with any lapse magnified by her role, CC2 noted he could “never get angry or weak,” even in academic failure. CC3 described minor mistakes such as fatigue during ministry work as “big things.” She reported “Even when I yawned during farm work at a youth program, it became a big thing.” CC4 was held to a standard of constant discipline and spiritual strength and CC5 recounted scrutiny for ordinary social behaviors like laughing loudly (Table 4).

Association between IF and PRM

Table 5: Correlation coefficient between societal expectation and Identity formation

Correlations			
		IF	PRM
Pearson Correlation (r)	IF	1.000	
	PRM	-0.608	1.000
p-values	IF	--	
	PRM	0.00001	--

Source: Tantoh, (2025)

IF: Identity formation, PRM: Pressure being a role model.

The association between identity formation (IF) and the pressure of being a role model (PRM) is strong and negative ($r = -0.608$, $p < 0.00001$). This means that as the pressure on pastors' children to always be perfect role models increases, their capacity for developing a stable and clear personal identity diminishes.

Table 6: Revised Thematic Matrix showing Themes Affecting Identity Formation

Influence Area	Key Themes	Frequency Across CCs (n=5)	Effects on Identity Formation
Societal Expectations	• Pressure to be morally perfect, emotionally composed, and viewed as a “spiritual symbol” rather than a full human. • Heightened scrutiny means that any deviation or vulnerability is quickly noticed and criticized.	5/5 (All five respondents)	Consistently leads to emotional suppression, self-doubt, and challenges in authentic self-expression.

Source: Tantoh, (2025)

Table 6 demonstrates four core influences on clergy's children identity formation, their proportions across all five participants, and their primary effects. Clergy's children generally contend with three pervasive pressures namely moral “perfection,” mandated church service, and family legacy that fuel self-doubt and suppress authenticity. In

response, most adopt reflective coping (journaling, prayer, mentorship) to reclaim personal values and move toward a self-authored identity (Table 6).

Discussions

The study revealed that 90% of respondents felt intense pressure to always behave perfectly due to their identity as clergy's children. This aligns with what Cameron Lee (1995) described as the "fishbowl effect," where clergy's children live under constant scrutiny, expected to maintain flawless public personas. The negative correlation between identity formation and role model pressure ($r = -0.608$, $p < 0.001$) highlights how overwhelming societal demands can distort self-perception and hinder authentic identity development.

This supports Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory that adolescents must resolve the conflict between personal identity and imposed roles. The pressure to represent moral perfection impedes the process of self-discovery, often leading to identity confusion. Carl Rogers (1959) adds that when acceptance is conditional based on compliance with idealized behavior young people may experience incongruence, a gap between the true self and the "ideal" self-imposed by others.

Qualitative data supported this, with all participants expressing the need to project a "spiritual" image, often at the cost of emotional honesty. This aligns with Doe (2021) and Hileman (2008) who describe the emotional suppression and internal conflict that arise when children feel forced to become symbols of religious virtue rather than individuals. Berne's (1961) concept of the Parent ego state is also relevant here, as participants often acted from learned religious scripts instead of from authentic awareness.

In sum, the expectation to be perfect role models contributes to stress, emotional suppression, and ultimately delays the development of a grounded self-concept.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Findings reveal that the expectation to model ideal Christian behavior exerts a strong influence, contributing significantly to emotional distress, self-monitoring, and identity conflict among clergy's children. This pressure leads many to suppress authentic thoughts and feelings in favor of maintaining an image that aligns with communal ideals, thus delaying or complicating the process of genuine self-discovery.

Overall, the study concludes that identity formation among clergy's children in Mezam Division is significantly shaped by societal and religious expectations particularly in the areas of moral performance and church involvement. These findings call for increased awareness among parents, churches, and mental health practitioners about the psychosocial burden placed on clergy's children, and the need to support them in developing a balanced and authentic sense of self.

Recommendations

Parents and church leaders should create safe environments where clergy's children are allowed to express themselves honestly without fear of judgment. Emphasizing unconditional love and acceptance over moral perfection can help reduce identity conflict.

Furthermore, instead of projecting idealized standards, parents should prioritize open communication and provide emotional support that acknowledges their children's individual struggles and aspirations.

Also, church members should be educated to understand that clergy's children are individuals with unique journeys, not replicas of their parents. This can be done through workshops or youth programs that celebrate diversity of identity and calling.

In addition, counsellors should offer individual or group counselling sessions specifically designed for pastors' children, helping them explore their identity, manage stress, and navigate conflicting expectations. Support groups for clergy's children will be very necessary.

Moreover, integrate faith-sensitive counselling approaches. Mental health services provided to clergy's children should respect their religious backgrounds while promoting autonomy, emotional intelligence, and self-awareness.

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CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

This article explores Cameroon higher education landscape, a sector crucial to the socio-economic development of the country. In the past, Cameroon higher education was directed by various political and economic considerations that have generated its current structure. Areas of concern in the institutions of learning, include structural problems that weakens its effectiveness, governance, the quality of education, professionalization, accessibility to facilities, state of the art infrastructures, digital technology, financial constraints and matching training and degrees with the exigencies of the job market. The two research questions that guided the study, were to what extent does effective Strategic Planning Influence Quality teaching in Higher Education in Cameroon and to what extent does good governance promote quality teaching in higher Education. The statement problem according to observation states in Cameroon, the situation is access to education is a fundamental concept that refers to the possibility for higher education students to benefit from quality education, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical origin (Amartya Sen, 1999). This article uses a literature review and methodology, supporting its analyses with the core-periphery theory to analyze the historical evolution and contemporary challenges facing the sustainable development of higher education in Cameroon. The study proposes innovative reforms to improve governance and quality assurance, which is an indispensable resource for policymakers, educators, and all stakeholders interested in the future of higher education in Cameroon. Policymakers, scholars, and employers must collaborate to recreate curricula to keep up with the demand of the job market and aligning the teaching-learning processes with digital technology.

Key words:

Higher Education, Challenges, Governance, Cameroon, Contemporary.



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Introduction

Access to education is a fundamental concept that refers to the possibility for Higher Education students to benefit from quality education, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical origin (Amartya Sen, 1999). According to Martha Nussbaum (2011), access to education is essential for the development of individual capabilities and participation in economic, social, and political life. For Sabina Alkire (2002), access to education is a key factor in human development and poverty reduction. Higher Education students are students who face significant obstacles in accessing education due to their contemporary challenges such as, governance, economic, professionalization geographical origin, or family situation (UNICEF, 2020). According to Paul Glewwe (2002) Poverty is a factor that can limit access to education for students, as poor families may struggle to pay tuition fees and school supplies (World Bank, 2018).

The factors of contemporary challenges that hinders access to quality Higher Education are multiple and complex. Poverty is one of the main obstacles, as poor families often struggle to pay school certain amount of tuition fees. Higher education in Cameroon has undergone significant evolution since the country's independence in 1960. At that time, the education system was largely influenced by colonial models, but it has progressively transformed to meet the needs of a changing society. The expansion of higher education institutions in Cameroon over the past decade demonstrates a concerted effort by the government to enhance educational access and quality across different regions as well as developing the third mission of the university which is making the university entrepreneurial and a catalyst to socioeconomic development of the country. The establishment of new universities, coupled with an increase in student numbers and diversification of academic programs, illustrates a positive trend towards improving higher education infrastructure and opportunities within the country. According to a study conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education in 2024, the number of higher education institutions has increased by 400% since 2000, from 20 to over 400 institutions. The most significant recent change in the legal framework governing higher education in Cameroon is the promulgation of Law No. 2023/007 on July 25, 2023. This law replaces the previous Law No. 005 of April 16, 2001, marking a critical evolution in the legislative approach to higher education. Objectives of Law No. 2023/007: The primary aim of this new law is to adapt the higher education system to meet contemporary socio-economic realities within Cameroon. This adaptation is crucial as it seeks to address challenges such as access to quality education, relevance of curricula to job markets, and integration of technology in teaching and learning processes. The governance of higher education in Cameroon is marked by structural challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Research by scholars such as Nguefang (2022) highlights that problems related to administrative management, insufficient funding, and teacher training are widespread. Indeed, a survey conducted by the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF) in 2023 reveals that only 45% of graduates find employment in their field of study within two years of graduating. This finding highlights an alarming mismatch between the skills acquired by students and the requirements of the labor market, which directly questions the relevance of the diplomas awarded.

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In the face of these challenges, it is imperative to adopt a proactive approach to reforming the higher education system in Cameroon. Experts like Tchouassi (2024) recommend strengthened collaboration between universities and the private sector to ensure that academic programs are aligned with current economic needs. Furthermore, according to a report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2025, investing in research and development could also play a key role in improving educational quality. "The Governance of Higher Education in Cameroon and the Relevance of Diplomas" aims to be a call to rethink not only how we train our students but also how we value their qualifications in a globalized world.

Statement Problem

The Research Problem on Contemporary Challenges to Higher Education in Cameroon, according to Sen's capability approach theory (1999), education is considered a key factor in human development, as it enables individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of their community. In an ideal context, all Higher Education students should have access to quality education, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographical origin. However, statistics collected in the field show that reality is far from meeting this standard. According to a study by the Directorate of Studies and Statistics from the Ministry of Higher Education (2017), 45% of students who drop out of school do so due to poverty and bad governance while 30% do so due to distance to school, according to the National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon (2015). Lack of family support is also an important factor, also according to Teshome Yizengaw, (2008), higher education institutions in Africa have seen little or no infrastructure improvements for the last few decades. Learning infrastructure is widely deficient due to insufficient budget and overdependence on public financing. Infrastructure, such as internet access, library, textbooks, equipment, laboratories and classroom space are critical bottlenecks resulting in deterioration of quality of education and learning. The poor state of facilities also affects the quality of research and its ability to contribute to societal development and progress. Africa's higher education institutions face a decline in quality of education, learning and research. Universities operate with overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, insufficient equipment and instructional materials, the contrast between theory and observed facts in the field shows that there is indeed a research problem of contemporary challenges of Higher Education to

be solved. Reason the researcher sought to find out the contemporary challenges of Higher Education in Cameroon.

Specific Research Question

To what extent does Effective Strategic Planning Influence Quality learning in Higher Education in Cameroon.

To what extent does good governance promote quality teaching in higher Education.in Cameroon.

Review of Literature

Today, Cameroon has 11 State Universities with 9200 permanent teachers who teach over 500,000 students enrolled regularly, (MINESUP, 2024). From the socio-economic context of the last two decades and the perspective of an emerging national economy by 2035, these universities operate in the face of challenges which inhibit their development and reconstitute an evaluation and a continued renewal of mechanisms of the governance of the system. Governance in Higher Education has four axes (managerial, financial, academic and social) based on the 1993 university reforms which were influenced by professionalization, globalization, information and communication, technology, and the liberation and growth of societal knowledge. The reform of University Governance forms part of the mission of the Ministry of Higher Education.

This implies the redefinition of the relation between the university and the state and the relations between the different universities. For example, in 2008, the government presented an embodiment of fundamental reforms fixing the new university orientation towards 2020. This concept called the new university governance program which aim at revolutionizing Higher Education, had 07 priority programs among which figured the reinforcement of the national system on teaching and learning. However, students, such as children from poor families, displaced or refugee children, children living in remote rural areas, or children with special educational needs, face significant challenges in accessing education (UNICEF, 2020). Financial constrain is an important factor that can limit access to education for vulnerable students. According to the World Bank (2018), poverty is the main cause of school dropout in many developing countries. Poor families may struggle to pay tuition fees and school supplies, which can prevent students from accessing education (Sabina Alkire, 2002). Distance to school is also an important factor that can limit access to education for vulnerable students, particularly in remote rural areas (National Institute of Statistics of Cameroon, 2015). According to Martha Nussbaum (2011), education is essential for the development of individual capabilities and participation in economic, social, and political life. However, vulnerable students may need special support to access education and succeed in school (Julian Schweisfurth, 2013).

Effective Strategic Planning Influence on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Cameroon

According to Teshome Yizengaw, (2008), higher education institutions in Africa have seen little or no infrastructure improvements for the last few decades. Learning infrastructure is widely deficient due to insufficient budget and overdependence on public financing. Infrastructure, such as internet access, library, textbooks, equipment, laboratories and classroom space are critical bottlenecks resulting in deterioration of quality of education and learning. The poor state of facilities also affects the quality of research and its ability to contribute to societal development and progress. Africa's higher education institutions face a decline in quality of education, learning and research. Universities operate with overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, insufficient equipment and instructional materials,

According to the MINESUP 2015 Document "University Standards" Universities must maintain a constructive interaction in their areas of concentration and must have enough structures for lectures, tutorials and practical works as well as sufficient secured laboratories/workshops that meet the required technical standard.

Universities offering training in medicine, pharmacy and dentistry among others must; have a clinical teaching site which has an adequate number of patients and materials necessary for clinical teaching. Have a University teaching hospital, have a pharmacy.

establish, with teaching hospitals, conventions, define their respective roles: and include in the resources for clinical training, first aid services, secondary and tertiary hospital services, emergency services, ambulatory structures and structures for basic treatments as well as health centers, and others. The current context of globalization, socio-linguistic disparities and socio-economic vulnerability of many necessitates HEIs in Cameroon, anxious to be part of the modernity, certain requirements of social governance. A HEI should have at least a university hall of residence, which is functional, with enough capacity as regards enrolment. Every school should define a policy for housing students which encourages agreements and conventions with private operators.

A HEI should make available a quota of the rooms of their Halls of Residence to vulnerable students (physically and socially challenged students, foreign students...). A HEI should have at least a restaurant which is functional and ensures strict respect for hygiene and cleanliness. Investment in teaching personnel (Human resources) is very important for any effective student centered teaching to take place. Astin (1984) asserts that one resource measure that is particularly popular is the student-faculty ratio. Many administrators believe that the lower the ratio the greater the learning and personal development that will occur. Without sufficient teachers, Graduate Assistants and non-academic staff, it is likely that the class sizes may be large, the teacher overworked and lectures becomes the predominant teaching method. Gibbs (1992) argues that one of the reasons why university lecturers use lecture is because they are overworked. This is confirmed by the findings on teaching methods and activities where teachers say they use lectures most of the time due to time constraints and overcrowded halls. In such an environment, student-centred learning may be compromised, critical thinking and creativity necessary for the workplace may not be achieved and the goal of professionalization may not be attained.

In the review of contemporary human resources management (HRM) literature, there are method and procedures traditionally used in the context of employment situations that may be applied to improve the experiences of those serving in a voluntary governance role at a not-for-profit organization. The goals of HRM are four-fold: attracting qualified applicants to an organization; motivating the individual to commit themselves to a contributing role; creating meaningful opportunities whereby the person may maximize their professional talents; and retaining experienced members for a sufficient period of time in order to capitalize on their competencies and experiences. If done well, such HRM programming may stimulate strategic applications for the organization where such efforts are aligned with the mission, values and goals of the institution (Dessler, Rekar-Munro and Cole, 2011).

Good Governance Promote Quality Teaching and Learning in Higher Education in Cameroon

Transformative education in Cameroon also involves strengthening institutional governance to enhance accountability within universities. The establishment of three Deputy Vice-Chancellor positions across all public universities has streamlined decision-making processes and encouraged consultation and engagement with all institutional stakeholders. Notably, the institutionalization of monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) tools facilitates improved planning and timely adjustments, ultimately reducing financial losses and aligning budgets with available resources. Additionally, universities are increasingly generating revenue through various business ventures; for instance, the University of Buea operates a microfinance institution, while the University of Dschang has established a cooperative society. Such economic activities facilitate the translation of research outputs into marketable products and ease graduates' transition into the workforce.

Transformative education necessitates reimagining teaching and learning processes and fostering stakeholder participation in curriculum reviews. Traditional models where the teacher is the sole authority must evolve into collaborative environments where teachers guide and learners actively engage. The adoption of the Bachelor-Master-Doctorate scheme has shifted focus towards a student-centered approach. Currently, approximately 30% of the curriculum at UBa is delivered online via its dedicated Learning Management System (LMS), which has increased enrollment in certain programs and enabled the use of online laboratories and simulations from partner institutions. These advancements require staff retraining and the establishment of robust industrial partnerships to enhance experiential learning, initiatives that public universities in Cameroon are actively pursuing. For example, a recent course on data analysis using R attracted significant interest from postgraduate students, reflecting a growing enthusiasm for digital tools in education. Campus internationalization is another critical component of transformative education embraced by public universities in Cameroon. Credit mobility and transferability are essential for enhancing internationalization efforts. All public universities participate in the Pan African Quality Assurance Alliance (PAQAA), with some engaging through CAMES and others

through the AAU, ensuring their credit systems facilitate comparability. This engagement invites external evaluations that improve institutional performance and competitiveness. The implications are significant, as clearly defined learning outcomes translate into measurable skills. Increased diversity in the student population fosters cross-cultural learning experiences. For instance, the Universities of Maroua and Ngaoundéré host substantial foreign student populations from neighboring Chad and the Central African Republic, who pay the same registration fees as local students. Additionally, UBa hosts PhD students from South Sudan under the RUFORUM GTA scheme, benefiting from tuition waivers.

A potential barrier to internationalization is the language barrier. To address this, UBa has established a Language Centre to assist foreign students with language challenges, exemplifying efforts to foster robust international exchanges and partnerships. A pertinent question arises: Has higher education always been accessible to all? In Cameroon, as in many other nations, certain segments of the population—such as internally displaced persons, refugees, individuals with disabilities, and those from marginalized backgrounds are often inadvertently excluded from higher education. Thus, true transformative education must be inclusive and provide safeguards for these underserved groups. Prime Ministerial directives exist to support these individuals' access to universities. While universities waive fees for qualified individuals, there is a pressing need for more intentional efforts to promote inclusion and safeguard vulnerable populations on campuses. Collaborating with the Cameroon Baptist Convention as a technical partner, UBa has initiated programs to raise awareness among university staff regarding the needs of these individuals. Supported by the TAGDev 2.0 Program, this campaign for inclusion has extended to private higher education institutions under UBa's mentorship. Notably, a recent workshop attracted over 40 students with disabilities, several of whom applied for the inaugural cohort of TAGDev 2.0 scholarships. There also exists a mutual partnership between Cameroon Baptist Convention (CBC) and the University of Maroua that succeeded to open an academic laboratory for inclusive Education under the Department of Sciences of Education in the Higher Teachers Training College of the University of Maroua. This is to incorporate the inclusive education and learners in the teaching-learning programmes in the said University. Furthermore, partnerships between UBa and organizations like the Cameroon Muslim Development Association aim to enhance training in Islamic banking and engage with small farmers from this demographic.

Explanatory theory of the study

The capability approach theory of Amartya Sen (1999) provides a theoretical framework for understanding the obstacles faced by students of Higher Education in accessing education. According to this theory, education is a key factor in human development, as it enables individuals to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of their community. Individual capabilities are defined as the ability of individuals to act and make decisions that enable them to achieve their goals and improve their well-being. In the context of contemporary challenges of Higher Education, individual challenges may include the limited access to quality teaching.

The capability approach theory suggests that students may have difficulty developing their individual capabilities due to various obstacles, or contemporary challenges faced by Higher Education such as poverty, distance to school, special educational needs, Governance, Professionalization, Digitalization of the teaching-learning process. etc. These obstacles can limit their access to education and other development opportunities, which can in turn limit their ability to fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of their community. The capability approach theory can be used to explain the results of the study on contemporary challenges of Higher Education in Cameroon. According to this theory, Higher Education students who have access to quality educational opportunities and receive special support to develop their individual capabilities are more likely to succeed in school and fully participate in the economic, social, and political life of their community compared with students who studied in Universities with challenges. The results of the study can be used to inform educational policies and programs aimed at improving access to Higher Education.

Methodology

Research Design

The design used for this study was a mixed method design. This was because the approach was both quantitative and qualitative. A quantitative research is one in which it tries to bring out an understanding of the problem in terms of quantity. This means that it quantified the problem by way of generating numerical data or data that can be transformed into usable statistics. Qualitative research is used to get an in-depth understanding of the opinions, and reason of respondent. The research design is suitable for this study because the research involved seeking opinion of contemporary challenges to Higher Education in Cameroon. The data collection technique used is a questionnaire, which was administered to the selected Higher Education students.

Target Population

Table 1: Showing the Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Information of Staate Universities

Variable	Sub Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Name of HI	University of Buea	50	27.8
	University of Douala	40	22.2
	University of Bamenda	40	22.2
	University of Yaounde 1	50	27.8
Gender	Male	81	45.0
	Female	99	55.0
Age range	20 – 25	43	23.9
	26 – 31	100	57.2
	31 – 36	15	8.3
	36+	21	16

The table above shows that 180 respondents, 50 (27.8%) were from University of Buea, 40(22.2%) University of Douala, 40(22.2%) from University of Bamenda and University of Yaounde 1 50(27.8) Majority of the respondents were from ages 26-31 years who provided the responses on the Contemporary problems on Higher Education.

Sample and sampling technique

The sampling random sampling technique was used to select the sample. Simple random sampling was one in which each member in the sample has equal chance of being selected. A ballot method of selection was carried out to determined students who will participate. Following the rules of ballot, the student who picked yes were eligible. This was done to give the students equal chances to participate in the study.

The demographic characteristics of respondents included students from four state Universities all in level 400 final year.

The questionnaire includes questions on the sociodemographic characteristics of the students, their school experience, the obstacles they face in accessing education, as well as their needs and expectations regarding education. Data were also collected through interviews with some stakeholders and administrators who provided information on the educational policies and challenges faced by students. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The data were entered and analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. The study results were presented in the form of tables, figures, and graphs, which allow for visualizing trends and relationships between the contemporary challenges and quality access of teaching and learning.

Target Population

The target population of this study was made up of all state Universities in Cameroon.

Results of Findings

Table 1: Effective Strategic Planning and Access to Quality Education

Item	$\bar{X}$	S	Dec
	3.09	0.80	A
1. Poverty and access to quality education	2.89	0.92	A
2. Distance to school and access to quality education	2.97	0.84	A
3. Special educational needs and access to quality education	3.14	0.80	A
4. School support and access to education	3.49	0.67	A
5. Educational professionalization and policies and access to education.	3.08	0.77	A
MRS	3.11	0.80	A

The data analyzed in the table above shows that effective strategic planning is a means to improved quality access to education to hinder some obstacles of quality education and poverty play a significant setback to quality education. Firsthand information about the school helps them to become wiser given at the beginning of the school year; poverty might limit the access to quality education. Distance from home to school also influence the access to quality education and majority of the respondents' accepted to the fact distance always hinders their performance of some students. Educational support needs and Educational policy and orientation gives them knowledge on time management and punctuality; and the knowledge gotten from educational policies and governance improve their access to quality education. Conclusively, there is a better understanding to the significant impact of contemporary challenges to quality Education

The interview excerpts with participants provided valuable information on the experiences of students. A student stated: "I couldn't go to school for several years because my family couldn't afford to pay the school fees." Another student emphasized the importance of school support: "School support really helped me succeed in school. I was able to get better grades and I feel more confident." A teacher also emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive and welcoming school environment for vulnerable students.

These qualitative results can be used to develop strategies to promote access to education for vulnerable students. The study highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to address the barriers faced by students in accessing education. By understanding the specific needs and experiences of these students, educators and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to support their educational success. The findings of this study can inform the development of policies and programs that promote inclusive and equitable education for all students, particularly those who are most vulnerable. Furthermore, the study's results suggest that educational policies and school governance programs can play an important role in promoting the quality access of students learning. This is consistent with Sen's theory, which highlights the importance of education as a means of promoting individual capabilities and human development. The study's results can be interpreted as an illustration of Sen's capability approach theory, which emphasizes the importance of taking into account the specific needs of individuals to promote their human development and well-being. The study's findings highlight the need for policymakers and educators to prioritize the needs of students and to develop targeted interventions to support their educational success.

Discussion of Findings

Effective Strategic Planning on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

The results of the study highlight the importance of taking into account the specific challenges faced by students of Higher Education and human development. According to Amartya Sen (1999), education is a key factor in promoting individual capabilities and human development challenges promotes hindrance to the capabilities. Other authors such as Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Jonathan Kozol (2005) have also emphasized the importance of education in promoting social justice and equal opportunities. These

institutions were strategically created to cater to various academic disciplines and regional needs, thereby expanding the educational landscape across Cameroon. The University of Buea, for instance, became particularly notable for its focus on social sciences and management programs, which attracted a diverse student body from different parts of the country. By the early 1990s, the total enrollment in higher education institutions across Cameroon had reached approximately 30,000 students.

This figure reflects not only the establishment of new universities but also an increasing recognition among Cameroonians regarding the importance of higher education for personal and professional development. The growth in student numbers indicated a rising aspiration among youth for advanced learning opportunities that could lead to better employment prospects and contribute to national development. The introduction of these universities played a crucial role in enhancing both the quality and accessibility of higher education in Cameroon. With more institutions available, students had greater choices regarding their fields of study and could pursue specialized programs that aligned with their career aspirations. Additionally, this expansion helped alleviate some pressure from existing universities, which were often overcrowded and struggling to accommodate growing student populations. Furthermore, these developments coincided with broader socio-political changes within Cameroon during this period, including calls for democratization and increased public participation in governance. The establishment of new universities was seen as part of a larger effort to promote educational equity and empower citizens through knowledge. The creation of public universities in Cameroon during the 1990s represented a pivotal shift towards improving access to higher education while also diversifying academic offerings tailored to meet national needs. The results of the study are also consistent with Paulo Freire's (1970) theories on education as a means of liberation and emancipation of marginalized groups. According to Teshome Yizengaw, (2008), higher education institutions in Africa have seen little or no infrastructure improvements for the last few decades. Learning infrastructure is widely deficient due to insufficient budget and overdependence on public financing. Infrastructure, such as internet access, library, textbooks, equipment, laboratories and classroom space are critical bottlenecks resulting in deterioration of quality of education and learning.

Good Governance and Quality Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

The poor state of facilities also affects the quality of research and its ability to contribute to societal development and progress. The governance of higher education in Cameroon is marked by structural challenges that hinder its effectiveness. Research by scholars such as Nguefang (2022) highlights that problems related to administrative management, insufficient funding, and teacher training are widespread. Indeed, a survey conducted by the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF) in 2023 reveals that only 45% of graduates find employment in their field of study within two years of graduating. This finding highlights an alarming mismatch between the skills acquired by students and the requirements of the labor market, which directly questions the relevance of the diplomas awarded. In the face of these challenges, it is imperative to adopt a proactive approach to

reforming the higher education system in Cameroon. Experts like Tchouassi (2024) recommend strengthened collaboration between universities and the private sector to ensure that academic programs are aligned with current economic needs. Furthermore, according to a report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2025, investing in research and development could also play a key role in improving educational quality. "The Governance of Higher Education in Cameroon and the Relevance of Diplomas" aims to be a call to rethink not only how we train our students but also how we value their qualifications in a globalized world. Africa's higher education institutions face a decline in quality of education, learning and research. Universities operate with overcrowded and deteriorating physical facilities, limited and obsolete library resources, insufficient equipment and instructional materials, according to the MINESUP 2015 Document "University Standards" Universities must maintain a constructive interaction in their areas of concentration and must have enough structures for lectures, tutorials and practical works as well as sufficient secured laboratories/workshops that meet the required technical standard.

Conclusion

This study focused on contemporary challenges to Higher Education, a crucial topic for promoting social justice and equal opportunities in the education system. The research problem was to understand the obstacles that prevent students from accessing education and succeeding in their studies. Two research questions were formulated to guide the study. The results of the study showed that contemporary challenges of Higher Education hinder students access to quality teaching and learning.

Recommendations

- Effective school management should be encouraging among Higher Education Stakeholders
- Encourage horizontal accountability and facilitate integration of school stakeholders in accountability structures.
- Help decentralized levels to identify and integrate local stakeholders in accountability processes. Promote inclusiveness so that diversity of stakeholders reflects all relevant perspectives.
- Avoid competing accountability demands between different governance levels and policy programmes by employing a whole of system approach.
- Build capacity to manage competing demands between horizontal and vertical accountability mechanisms in school administration.

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