



"Teaching, Pedagogical and Modern Tendencies"

## **School Culture as a Determinant of Students' Academic Performance in Public Examinations in Mezam Division, North West Region of Cameroon**

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**Abstract.** This paper is on —School Culture as a determinant of Students' Academic Performance in Public Examinations in Mezam Division, North West, Region Cameroonl was designed to find out the extent to which school culture influences students' academic performance in public secondary grammar schools within Mezam Division. The study had one specific objective, one research question and one hypothesis. Related literature was reviewed, conceptually, theoretically and empirically. This paper adopted a cross-sectional survey research design with mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative approaches) in the collection and analysis of data. The instruments of questionnaire (for quantitative data) and focus group discussions (for qualitative data) were used in gathering information. The purposive sampling technique, simple random sampling technique and the accidental sampling technique were used to determine the area of study, the area for data collection and the respondents for the study respectively. The sample consists of 48 schools, 48 principals, 313 teachers both male and female, from government secondary grammar schools. Analysis of statistical data was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0 with results presented on tables and figures. The technique of content analysis was used to analyze the focus group discussions. The findings revealed that, all the indicators of school culture (Distributive leadership, principal's effective communication, professional staff development, supportive learning environment, teacher collegiality and teacher commitment) significantly affect students' academic performance. Based on the findings, the researcher recommends that there is need for the government to provide organized and systemic training in educational leadership and management for school principals, in order to enable them effectively handle their —roles as instructional leaders within schools, builders of learning communities among teachers, and developers of strong community participation in schools.

**Key words:** School culture, Student's Academic performance and Cameroon.

### Introduction

This paper specifically highlights school culture as determinants of students' academic performance in Public Examinations in Mezam Division, North West Region. Organizational theorists have long reported that paying attention to culture is the most important action that a leader can perform. Organizational culture has been described as overlapping concepts by theorists (Miner 1995).

In this paper, school culture (the independent variable) has been operationalized using principals' distributive leadership, professional staff development, effective communication, supportive learning environment, teacher collegiality, and teacher commitment will be perceived to have greater influence on the academic performance of students.

One of the earliest works addressing school culture was Waller's *The Sociology of Teaching* in which he noted that schools have a culture that is uniquely their own (Waller, 1932). He defined school culture as a set of complex rituals within interpersonal relationships, folk history, mores, and sanctions forming a moral code for a school. The moral code may be directly stated or unconscious. From the 1930's through the 1950's, school culture was viewed from anthropological and sociological perspectives and was defined using Waller's definition. School culture was seen as the set of rituals, folk stories, myths, legends, artifacts, and written and unwritten moral code of behavior and expectations for a school.

In the 1980s, as culture became a major element in studies as of high-performing organizations, the concept of culture became widely recognized as a major factor in the functioning of schools (Deal, 1985; Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Deal & Peterson, 1999 & 2009; Kottkamp, 1984). Over the past decade, researchers have included large-scale surveys and questionnaires to examine the relationship between school culture and school effectiveness or to identify core values and beliefs that guide processes and behaviors of school personnel in high-performing schools. Researchers have attempted to compare characteristics of lowperforming schools with high-performing schools in an effort to identify those variables that can be manipulated to create a high-performing school.

School culture is neither simple nor static. It is a complex entity that is constructed and reshaped as members interact with each other, the students, and the community (Finnan, 2000). It is a reciprocal system in which the culture is shaped by the members of the group, and the behaviors of the group are influenced by the culture. It is a pattern of underlying assumptions, stated values, and artifacts that lie at the conscious and subconscious levels, guiding the behaviors and actions of the members and the organization.

Many laws, for example, Section 2 of law No. 98/004 of April, 1998 to lay down guidelines for education in Cameroon have buttressed this fact by stating among others that —Education shall be the top priority of the nation and the government has entrusted the running of secondary schools into the hands of principals.

According to the handbook —Manual for school Heads (1996), —the principal is responsible for the administrative, financial, pedagogic and social functioning of the schools, with the administrative functions englobing the totality of activities which are brought into play between different available components and resources, so as to maximize the achievements of the objectives of the institution.

The results of these are that, in spite of the evident heavy investments in the secondary educational sector to provide infrastructure and train manpower, students' achievement is not still the best. This can be seen in the allocation of state budget to the sector of Secondary Education which stands at 386,954 million France CFA for the financial year 2021, an 8.29% weight in the general budget and stands second below that of the public works sector with a 9.95% (Cameroon MINFI/DGB, 2021).

The question now is what is responsible for the dismal performance in our secondary schools? Is it the teachers, principals, the parents or the environment? This study will be limited to one main variable; school culture which will be discussed under the following indicators (Principals' distributive leadership, professional staff development, Principals' effective communication, supportive learning environment, teacher collegiality, and teacher commitment).

This paper adheres to the distributive style of school leadership or simply distributed leadership which stresses the mutual influence of principal and teachers on issues of instruction, curriculum and assessment. Elmore further points out that most of the knowledge needed to improve instruction in schools resides more with the people who teach rather than those who manage them. As a logical consequence, school leaders need to work more collaboratively with teachers for school improvement within a paradigm of shared or distributed leadership rather than hierarchical conceptions and practice of leadership.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is an ideal rate of performance of every school to be 100% success rate, but within the last five years (2015 – 2019), the mean performance of students has been 61.6% at the GCE Advanced level which do not match the ideal.

Several factors could be responsible why most schools do not perform to the ideal 100% over the years, amongst which could be the school culture. Not understanding the nature and the importance of school culture to the academic performance of students constitutes a knowledge and practice gap, and the main question so far is to investigate if school culture has a major influence on students' academic performance of secondary education in Cameroon, thus the need of the study.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which school culture do influence students' academic performance in public secondary grammar schools within Mezam division.

Specific Objective.

To determine how school culture influences students' academic performance.

### **Specific Research Question**

To what extend does school culture influences students' academic performance?

### **Research Hypothesis**

The following specific research hypotheses were formulated based on the objectives of the study.

**Ho1:** There is no relationship between school culture and the academic performance of students.

**Ha1:** There is a relationship between school culture and academic performance of students.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will be of great help to Principals, teachers, students, school community and the government or policy makers as it will suggest ways in which school culture can enhance students' academic performance.

### **To Principals**

This study will inform Secondary school principals of their role in creating and maintaining a healthy school culture through distributive leadership, professional staff development, effective communication, supportive learning environment, teacher collegiality and teacher commitment that enhances the academic performance of students.

### **To Teachers**

Through this study, teachers will have a deeper understanding of school culture and school climate variables and work towards maintaining and promoting these values which will enhance better student performance. It will also help teachers contribute to effective teaching and learning which will lead to genuine communication both within and outside the school since they will be valued, cared for and respected.

### **To Students**

This study will help students to be motivated and engage more in studies as well as elevate their psychological well-being which will be a booster to their academic performance.

### **To school community**

This study is significant in that it will offer research -based advice to the members of the community in that, an orderly, supportive and friendly environment fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society. Also, within the community of the school, various partners (individuals, businesses, associations and institutions) should be engaged in mutually beneficial collaborations that will make the schools more effective for better students' performance.

### **To Government/ Policy makers**

Finally, this study is significant in that it will offer practical research - based advice (in the form of recommendations) to the government/ policy makers in Cameroon grappling with the need to ensure a supportive school culture and climate. The policies generated will hopefully lead to actions aimed at ensuring that Principals and teachers have what it takes to guarantee the quality of education. Through this, it will help to increase existing knowledge of practice with the hope that students' academic performance can be improved. The ability to learn can be enhanced in desired directions if policies are based on empirical data and if there is commitment on the part of the stakeholders.

### **Scope and Delimitation of the Study**

This research focuses on school culture as determinant of students' academic performance in public examinations in Mezam Division, North West Region of Cameroon with emphasis on Principals' distributive leadership, professional staff development, effective communication, supportive learning environment, teacher collegiality and teacher commitment as the main variables. Only principals and teachers of the public secondary schools of the English Subsystem within this division were used.

### **Operational definition of terms**

**School Culture:** School culture can be defined as the traditions, beliefs, policies and norms within a school that can be shaped, enhanced, and maintained through the school's principal and teacher-leaders (Short & Greer, 1997).

**Performance:** Meahan (2009) defines performance as cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA) from the scores obtained in an examination. In this study, performance refers to the output of students as evident by their results obtained at the G.C.E Advanced Level examination.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The section that follows is focused on an examination of the concepts of this study: school culture. These concepts are examined in ways to bring out their other aspects not clearly brought out in the discussion so far. With regards to school culture, three main variables namely principal's leadership style, professional staff development and effective communication while school climate discusses these variables: supportive learning environment, teacher collegiality and teacher commitment.

### Importance of Communication as a culture in Secondary School Management

Failure to communicate the school's aims, values and achievements to the staff and students, make school management a mirage. This is why the school must be properly monitored to ensure quality of instruction. Thus, effective communication becomes critical to the process of instruction. In order for the school principal to make a sound and coherent decision, planning, organizing, controlling etc., he must map-out strategies for receiving and passing information from every individual within the school for effective management.

### Communication Flow

Communication flows mainly in three directions namely downward, upward, and horizontal or lateral (Peretomode, 1991, Riches, 1994).

- 1. Downward Communication-** This involves instruction or directives being sent down from the top hierarchy (top management) to the lower levels in formal organization e.g. Principal to teachers, teachers to students. Management directives are building on the staff and are usually taken seriously whether they receive positive or negative responses. It can, however, be marred by increasing complexity of an organization leading to reduced personal contacts and isolation; lack of clearly defined goals resulting in confusion of subordinates.
- 2. Upward Communication:** This involves communication emanating from subordinates to top management or from lower level of hierarchy to the top level. It thrives on the degree of trust and confidence that the top level has on the lower level. It encourages participative management. In a formal organization, both downward and upward communication must follow established routes; for instance, in a school system the teacher cannot write directly to the honourable commissioner without going through the principal.
- 3. Lateral Communication:** This is the type of communication among various managers or officers at the same level or across various divisions. It is the most frequent of the three flows as workers exchange information often whether work related or personal. This encourages team or group work.

Mullins (1993) pointed out that communication is not always a one—line flow as in downward or upward flow. Human communication can be more complex. The complexity is represented in networks.

### Road Blocks to Communication

According to Thomas (2005), there are thousands of messages that we can send to students by how we communicate with them. These can be grouped into twelve categories, each of which tends to show or completely stop existing communication that students need to solve problems and continue in their learning. Some typical responses that communicate unacceptance are: Ordering, commanding, directing, Warning, threatening, for example you had better sit up if you expect to pass my subject. You cannot make it, Moralizing, preaching, giving —should and —ought. For example, —you should leave your personal problems out of the classroom.

In essence, Communication is an important ingredient and vital instrument in any given organization. It is the means by which organized activity is unified. It is the pillar upon which social inputs are fed into the social system. It is also the means by which social behaviour is modified and change is affected. Information is made productive and goals of the educational system are achieved. A good school principal should bear in mind that the success of the school is determined by his effective management of the school. Therefore, communication serves as multi-purpose and multi-dimensional role in improving and achieving the goals of an organization.

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The principal and staff must be a team that works together to create a good learning environment. They should meet regularly to discuss the lesson plans and activities and to air any concern they might have. The principal and teachers can also reach an understanding of different background, experiences, value, culture, religion and other factors which might affect their working relationship.

### **Concept of Supportive Learning Environment**

Creating a positive classroom environment is an important aspect that allows effective teaching and learning to take place and by creating positive learning environments teachers have the chance to develop the classroom policies that help in controlling and managing the students' discipline. A positive classroom environment is very important in that it decreases the students' behaviour problems. It also provides or allows students to have good manners. Positive classroom environments stimulate, promote, and encourage the learning of students in all educational sectors. The researcher raised the point that teachers must involve students and encourage the spirit or culture of sharing ideas among themselves to create a good atmosphere of teaching and learning (Higgins, 2012).

### **Teacher Commitment to Profession**

Blau (1985) defined professional commitment as —one's attitude towards one's profession or vocation. Colarelli and Bishop (1990) defined Commitment to Profession as the advancement of individual vocational goals and the drive and commitment associated with completing these goals. In addition, Teacher Commitment to Profession is important because it enables an individual to develop the needed skills and relationships to have a successful career regardless of the organization within which he or she is employed (Colarelli & Bishop, 1990). According to Meyer, Allen, and Topolnysky (1998), individuals might choose to redirect their emotional energies toward the profession to which they belong. There are at least two implications of this. First, such individuals might be more likely to participate in the work of their professional associations. Second, a focus on the profession might increase the likelihood that employees would improve their professional skills, knowledge, and abilities. As such, Teacher Commitment to Profession is conceptualized as the strength of teacher motivation and involvement to work and to improve professional skills, knowledge, and teaching abilities. Overall, these four dimensions are important in the educational settings and are necessary to accomplish the school objectives, improve teachers' professionalism, and pursue changes in teachers' practice.

Successful school leaders have productive responses to the unique demands of the contexts in which they find themselves. Therefore, Leithwood et al., (2004) suggest the need to develop school leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to choose from that repertoire to handle the circumstances they are facing.

### **Theoretical Framework Situated Cognition and Learning theory**

The theory of situated cognition and learning posits that knowing and learning is a function of the activity, context, and culture in which they occur (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Brown et al., 1989). Putman and Borko (2000, p.4) point out three main ideas underlying this theory:

1. That cognition is situated in particular physical and social contexts;
2. Cognition is distributed across the individual, other persons, and tools in the environment—a phenomenon known as 'distributed cognition' and
3. Learning is social in nature and so interactions with others in one's environment greatly influence the learning process.

Although these new views of cognition and learning are emphasized in current research, they can be traced to the thinking of some earlier great educational scholars (for example,

Dewey, 1902 and Vygotsky, 1978) cited in Murphy (2003), Allal (2001), and Putnam and Borko (2000).

The situative perspective belongs to the sociocultural domain of teaching and learning within the broad learning theory known as *constructivism*. To Rowe (2006), constructivism is based on the premise that the learner is active in the learning process, and builds knowledge based on his/her experiences through various activities, discussions, reflections and the sharing of ideas with other learners with minimal corrective intervention. The role of the teacher is to be a facilitator of learning as well as a provider of opportunities for such learning.

Some major proponents of the situative perspective of learning are: Lave and Wenger (1991) and Brown et al., (1989), Lave and Wenger (1991) conceptualize learning as legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice. This means that new comers learn by gradually engaging in the practices and discourse of the community until they become knowledgeable skillful experts or old-timers. In Greeno's (1997) opinion as cited in Allal (2001), learning is identified with changes in how an individual participates in an evolving community of practice.

Brown et al., (1989) assert that "learning is a process of enculturation in which people observe and practice contextualized competences that are valued in a given cultural community" (p.33). According to Putman and Borko, what is important for teaching-learning is that the learning activity fosters the kinds of thinking and problem-solving skills that will lead to improved teaching practices.

### **Empirical Review**

#### **Distributed leadership linked to school improvement**

Marks and Printy (2003) conducted a quantitative study in which they found out that when transformational and instructional leadership responsibilities are distributed among teachers and leaders in schools, instruction and student achievement tend to improve. They labeled this leadership approach "integrated leadership". The study involved 22 elementary schools and only in seven of them, did the researchers find principals who exercised high levels of both transformation and shared instructional leadership.

#### **Supportive learning environment and student Achievement**

A qualitative study conducted by Brown (2004) to assess classroom management strategies in relation to culturally responsive teaching found that the most significant aspect of classroom management is the nature of the student-teacher relationship. Brown (2004) identified a caring attitude from the teacher as being the most significant factor in a student's social and emotional well-being at school. Through interviews conducted with school students, Brown (2004) discovered that students recognized which teachers cared about them and noted that students wanted to make a more personal connection with their teachers. The research revealed that the primary characteristic valued by the teachers interviewed about their classroom management practices was – providing individualized attention to each student, to develop mutually respectful personal relationship with them.

### **The Research Design**

This study employed a "mixed methods research" design in a cross-sectional survey. The "mixed methods" research design triangulates both quantitative and qualitative approaches in collecting and analyzing data within a study, thereby providing a unified and better understanding of the research problem than either of the approaches alone (Creswell & Garrett, 2008; Johnson & Turner, 2003).

### **Population of the Study**

The population of the study involves Principals and Teachers in secondary grammar schools

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within the Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. The accessible population of Principals and Teachers was distributed as seen in the table below.

**Table 1.** *Distribution of Secondary Grammar Schools, Principals and Teachers in Mezam Division*

Sub-Division	Number of Public Secondary Schools	Principals			Teachers		
		M	F	T	M	F	T
Bafut	9	8	1	09	76	129	205
Bali	04	04	/	04	35	62	97
Bamenda I	03	01	02	03	60	95	155
Bamenda II	10	07	03	09	223	389	612
Bamenda III	02	02	/	02	81	148	229
Santa	13	12	01	13	99	104	203
Tubah	07	06	01	07	125	127	252
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>699</b>	<b>1054</b>	<b>1753</b>

**Source:** North West Regional Delegation for Secondary Education, Cameroon. 2019/2020 Academic year

### Sample Population

According to Krejcie & Morgan (1970) on the determination of sample size from a target population, a target population of 48 principals and 1753 teachers as is the case with this study, produces a sample of 48 principals and 313 teachers. The researcher worked with two focus groups of four teachers each in every Sub-Division.

**Table 2.** *Summary of Sample Population of the Study*

No	Sub-Division	Number of Schools	Principals answering questionnaire	Teachers answering questionnaire	Focus groups
1	Bafut	9	9	50	2
2	Bali	4	4	20	2
3	Bamenda I	3	3	35	2
4	Bamenda II	10	10	65	2
5	Bamenda III	2	2	35	2
6	Santa	13	13	48	2
7	Tubah	7	7	60	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>313</b>	<b>14</b>

**Source:** Adapted from Table 2

### Sampling Techniques

The sampling techniques used for this study was purposive sampling technique, simple random sampling technique and the accidental sampling technique. In purposive sampling, specific elements which satisfy some predetermined criteria are selected while in accidental sampling, only elements which the researcher can reach are included (Nworgu, 2018). The sample of this study was made up of 47 principals and 313 teachers.

The principals and teachers of each school drawn from the container constituted the sample population of principals and teachers for the study.

The researcher met with the principal of each of the selected schools who gave him authorization to administer his questionnaires to the teachers present in school. The teachers



who responded to the questionnaires automatically became the teachers for the sample; hence, accidental sampling. From the accessible population, the sample size of principals and teachers was determined using the Krejcie & Morgan table (1970) in Amin (2005).

**Instrument for Data Collection**

Data were collected through a questionnaire

**Method of Data Analyses**

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0, was used to analyze the quantitative data collected, particularly the close-ended items. Descriptive statistics such as the percentage, mean score, and standard deviation were used to present and describe various aspects of the data (for example, the demographic information of principals and teachers and the close-ended questionnaire items). Howell (2002) as cited in Graham (2007), states that descriptive statistics are appropriate when the purpose is simply to describe a set of data.

**FINDINGS**

**Table 3.** Showing Principals’ Responses on principal’s distributive leadership and school culture (N=48)

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	Strongly agree(SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD
I delegate responsibility for activities critical for achieving school goals to some teachers	15 (31.1%)	29 (60.4%)	1 (1.9%)	3 (5.8%)	44 (91.5%)	4 (8.3%)
I give room for teachers in decision making	14 (29.2%)	32 (66.7%)	5 (9.6%)	8 (15.4%)	45 (95.9%)	2 (4.2%)
Encourage initiative, criticism and discussion	16 (33.3%)	30 (62.5%)	2 (3.8%)	11 (21.2%)	46 (95.8%)	2 (4.2%)
Principal allows opportunities for assessment	26 (54.2%)	19 (39.6%)	1 (1.9%)	3 (5.8%)	45 (93.8%)	3 (6.3%)
<b>Multiple response set</b>	<b>71 (33.3%)</b>	<b>110 (51.6%)</b>	<b>8 (3.8%)</b>	<b>24 (11.3%)</b>	<b>181 (85.0%)</b>	<b>32 (15.0%)</b>

From Table 12, Principal’s opinions were also sampled to find out how distributive leadership affects school culture. Initially the principals were asked if they delegate responsibility for activities critical for achieving school goals to some teacher. Generally, 85.0% of all principals agreed that they delegate responsibilities to other staff while 15.0% of them disagreed. 15 (31.1%) of the principals sampled strongly agreed that they did and 29 (60.4%) agreed that they delegate responsibility for activities critical for achieving school goals to some teachers. The summation of those who agreed and those who strongly disagreed indicates that from the sampled principals in Mezam, majority delegate critical responsibilities to their teachers. On the other hand, 8.3% of the principals disagreed meaning they were not delegating power to the teachers under them.

The next question addressed to principals in this direction was if they give room to teachers in their decision-making process in school; to which 29.2 % (14 principals) strongly agreed and 66.7% agreed that they allow their teachers to participate in decision making in their

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schools. On the other hand, 4.2% disagreed, meaning decision making was exclusively their responsibility as principal.

Furthermore, the sampled principals were asked if they encouraged initiative, welcomed criticism and discussion from the teachers under them. To this question 33.3% (16 principals) strongly agreed and 62.5% (30 principals) agree, giving a sum total of 46 out of the 48 principals from the sample in Mezam, representing 95.8% who encouraged initiatives, welcomed criticism and engaged in discussions with their staff. On the other hand, 4.8% of the principals did not encourage initiative, welcome criticism or engage in discussions with their teachers. This provides insight to the fact that principals in Mezam are more open to their staff members.

In addition, the sampled principals were also asked if they will allow their teachers to assess their leadership. Majority of the principals strongly agreed that they will, representing 54.2% (26) and 36.9% (16) agreed. A total of 93.8% agreed that they were giving room for their teachers to make assessment of their leadership prowess but 6.3% (3) disagreed with this statement.

**Table 4.** *Showing Principals' Responses on Professional staff development and school culture (N=48)*

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	Strongly agree(SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD
I regularly provide opportunity for teacher learning	14 (29.2%)	33 (68.8%)	1 (2.1%)	0 (0%)	47 (98%)	0 (00%)
I discuss new teaching techniques with staff	17 (35.4%)	31 (64.6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	42 (100%)	0 (00%)
I register teachers regularly for pedagogic seminars	13 (27.1%)	31 (64.6%)	4 (8.3%)	0 (0%)	44 (91.7%)	0 (00%)
I encourage teachers for continuing education	20 (41.7%)	22 (45.8%)	6 (12.5%)	0 (0%)	42 (87.5)	0 (00%)
<b>Multiple response set</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>00</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>(33.5%)</b>	<b>(61.5%)</b>	<b>(5.2%)</b>	<b>(00%)</b>	<b>(94.7%)</b>	<b>(6.3%)</b>

Findings on Table 13 show that 94.7% of principals' whose opinions were sought generally agreed that professional staff development affects school culture while 6.3% of them disagree. The first question to the principals in this area was if they regularly provide opportunity for teacher learning, to which 29.2% (14) of the principals strongly agreed, 68.8% (33) agreed while only 2.1% of the principals disagreed. The total of those who agreed are 98% which is far greater than those who disagreed.

The next question addressed to principals in this direction was if they do discuss new teaching techniques with staff; to which 35.4% (17 principals) strongly agreed and 64.6% (31) agreed that they do discuss new teaching techniques with their school staff. On the other hand, 4.2% disagreed, meaning decision making was exclusively their responsibility as principals.

Furthermore, the sampled principals were asked if they register teachers under them regularly for pedagogic seminars. To this question, 13 (27.1%) of the principals strongly agreed and

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64.6% (31 principals) agreed, giving a sum total of 44 out of the 48 principals representing 95.8% who registered teachers under them regularly for pedagogic seminars. On the other hand, 8.3% of the principals disagreed with the fact that they register teachers under them regularly for pedagogic seminars teachers.

Finally, to understand professional development of the staff and school culture, the principals were asked if they encourage teachers to continue education. To answer this question 41.7% (20) strongly agreed and 45.2% (22) agreed with the proposition. On the other hand, only 12.5% (6) of the sample disagreed, while no principal in the sample strongly disagreed. Overall, they were encouraging their teachers to climb the academic ladder to higher levels.

**Table 5.** *Principals' responses on effective communication and school culture (N=48)*

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	Strongly agree(SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD
There is freedom of speech and respect of hierarchy	26 (54.2%)	22 (45.8%)	00 (0%)	00 (0%)	48 (100%)	00 (0%)
There is clear communication of school goals and beliefs between principals and teachers	33 (68.8%)	15 (31.3%)	00 (0%)	00 (0%)	48 (100%)	00 (0%)
There is open feedback between principal, teachers and students	27 (56.3%)	21 (43.8)	00 (0%)	00 (0%)	48 (100%)	00 (0%)
School environment is friendly and there is clarity of goals	43 (89.6%)	5 (10.4%)	00 (0%)	00 (0%)	48 (100%)	00 (0%)
<b>Multiple response set</b>	<b>129 (67.2%)</b>	<b>63 (32.8%)</b>	<b>00 (00%)</b>	<b>00 (00%)</b>	<b>192 (100%)</b>	<b>00 (00%)</b>

Table 14 presents principals' responses on effective communication and school culture, and how it influences the academic performance of students; with 100% of the respondents stating that communication in their schools is effective. The first question raised in this area was whether there was freedom of speech and respect of hierarchy; to which 54.2% (26 principals) strongly agreed that there was freedom of speech and respect of hierarchy in their schools and 45.8% agreed that their staff had freedom of speech and respected them as their hierarchy. This sums up to 100%, meaning none of the principals restricted freedom of speech and there was respect of hierarchy. Furthermore, 68% of the principals strongly agreed with the assertion that there is clear communication of school goals and beliefs between principals and teachers and 31.1 % of the principals strongly agreed.

The next question sought to know if there was open feedback between principal, teachers and students. As answers to the question, 56.3% of the respondents strongly affirmed that there was, and the remaining 43.7% agreed that there was an open feedback mechanism between principal and teachers and then teachers and students.

The last question in this view was to know from the principals if the school environment was friendly, and if there was clarity of goals. To this question, 89.6% of the principals strongly

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agreed that they were providing a school environment that was friendly, while making school goals very clear. Equally, 10.4% agreed that their school environment was friendly and there was clarity of goals. None of the principals sampled assumed a school environment that was not friendly and lacked clarity of goals.

**Table 6.** *Distribution of teachers' responses on supportive learning environment and students' academic performance (N=306)*

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	Strongly agree(SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD
I treat all students with dignity and respect at all times	161 (52.6%)	128 (41.8%)	15 (4.9%)	2 (0.7%)	289 (94.4%)	17 (5.6%)
A high degree of interpersonal relationship between teachers and students	95 (31%)	164 (53.6%)	43 (14.1%)	4 (1.3%)	259 (84.6%)	47 (15.4%)
I provide students with extra help at school, out of regular class	88 (28.8%)	151 (49.3%)	66 (21.6%)	1 (.3%)	239 (78.1%)	67 (21.9)
I provide students with lots of chances to be part of class discussion or activities	188 (61.4%)	113 (36.9%)	4 (1.3%)	1 (0.4%)	301 (98.3%)	5 (1.7%)
<b>Multiple response set</b>	<b>532 (43.8%)</b>	<b>556 (45.4%)</b>	<b>128 (10.5%)</b>	<b>08 (0.7%)</b>	<b>1088 (88.9%)</b>	<b>136 (11.1%)</b>

Table 6 presents opinions of teachers sampled on the effects of the school learning environment on the academic performance of students, which reveals that 88.9% of them agreed that school learning environment affects academic performance. The first issue addressed in this area of learning environment was whether the teachers treat all students with dignity and respect at all times. Majority of the teachers (52%) strongly agreed they were treating all students with dignity and respect. In the same light, 41.8% agreed bringing the total percentage of teachers in the sample who agree to 94.4%. Only a minority of the sampled teachers indicated that they were not treating their students with respect, and they represent 5.6% of the entire sample of teachers from Mezam Division. When teachers were asked if there existed a high degree of interpersonal relationships between them and their students, 31% strongly agreed and 51.6% agreed; bringing us to a total of 83.6%.

On the contrary, 14.1% of the teachers disagreed and 1.3% strongly disagreed that there existed a high degree of interpersonal relationships between them and their students. On the same subject of providing supportive learning to the students, the teachers were asked if they provided students with extra help at school, out of regular class teaching. To this question, 28.8% strongly agreed, and 49.3% agreed; bringing the total of those who agreed they had been providing the students extra help at school to 78.1%. The teachers who disagreed were 21% and those that strongly disagreed were 1.3%, which is a minority to those who agreed they were offering the students extra help.

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The researcher also wanted to know if the teachers sampled provided students with lots of chances to be part of class discussion or activities to which 61.4% strongly agreed and 36.9% agreed. Therefore, a total of 98.3% agreed; while 1.7% represents teachers who did not provide students with chances to be part of class discussions or activities.

**Table 7.** *Distribution of responses on teacher collegiality and students' academic performance (N=306)*

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	Strongly agree(SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly disagree (SD)	SA/A	D/SD
My colleagues and I regularly share ideas and material related to my subject area.	124 (40.5%)	151 (49%)	32 (10.1)	00 (0%)	275 (89.5%)	32 (10.1)
I can easily share my worries and burdens with my colleagues	79 (25.8%)	164 (53.6%)	61 (19.9%)	02 (0.6%)	243 (79.4%)	63 (20.5%)
My colleagues do not hesitate to point out my mistakes concerning work	83 (27.1%)	175 (57.2%)	46 (15.0%)	02 (0.7%)	258 (84.3%)	48 (15.7%)
I interact with my colleagues at the same level irrespective of cultural diversities	158 (51.6%)	99 (32.4%)	44 (14.4%)	05 (1.6%)	257 (84%)	49 (16%)
<b>Multiple response set</b>	<b>444 (36.2%)</b>	<b>589 (48.1%)</b>	<b>183 (14.9%)</b>	<b>09 (0.7%)</b>	<b>1033 (84.3%)</b>	<b>192 (15.7%)</b>

Teacher collegiality and school climate was the next aspect in the study. Findings revealed that 84.3% of the respondents generally agreed that teacher collegiality affects students' academic performance, while 15.7% of them disagreed. The first proposition in this area was: —My colleagues and I regularly share ideas and material related to my subject area. To this statement, 124 (40.5%) strongly agreed, 151 (49%) agreed; bringing the total of those who agreed to 89.5% out of the 307 teachers that were sampled. A minority of 10.1% of the sampled teachers disagreed with the assertion that —My colleagues and I regularly share ideas and material related to my subject area.

Secondly, when asked if they easily share their burdens and worries with their colleagues, 79 (25.8%) strongly agreed and 53.6% (243) agreed. Therefore 79.4% of the teachers agreed that they shared burdens as colleagues, while 19.9% did not agree with this stance. Furthermore, teachers were asked if their colleagues would hesitate to point out their mistakes concerning work. To this question, 27.1% (89 teachers) strongly agreed, 57.2% agreed, bringing the total of those who agreed to 84.3%. Those who hesitated to point out the faults of colleagues were 15.7% of the Mezam teachers sampled. The teachers were further questioned if they interacted with their colleagues at the same level irrespective of cultural diversities; to which 51.6% (158 teachers) strongly agreed and 32.4 % agreed. The summation brings the sum of those who agreed to 84%; while a minority of 16% of the sampled Mezam teachers did not interact with their colleagues.

**Verification of Hypotheses**

**Research hypothesis One**

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no relationship between school culture and academic performance of students.

H<sub>a1</sub>: There is a relationship between school culture and academic performance of students.

This hypothesis was designed to test if there is a significant relationship between school culture and students' academic performance. The independent variable is school culture while the dependent variable is academic performance. The statistical technique used to test this hypothesis is the Pearson Product moment correlation analysis as presented in table 18.

**Table 8.** *Pearson Product moment correlation analysis between Principal's distributive leadership and students' academic performance (N=48)*

		Principals' Distributive leadership	Students' Academic performance
Principals Distributive leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	.761**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	48	48
Students' Academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.761**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	48	48
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 8 clearly reveals that there is a significant relationship between Principal's distributive leadership and students' academic performance at the level of significance of 0.000. The Pearson Product moment correlation coefficient of .76 shows that this relationship is strong and positive. This implies the more school principals distribute leadership, the better the school culture and student's performance.

**Table 9.** *Correlations between professional staff development and students' academic performance (N=48)*

		Professional Staff Development	Students' Academic performance
Professional Staff Development	Pearson Correlation	1	.527**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	48	48
Students' Academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.527**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	48	48
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 9, reveals that there is a significant relationship between professional staff development and students' academic performance at the level of significance of 0.000. The correlation index of .52 shows that the relationship is strong and positive. This implies that, the more there is professional development of staffs, the better the school culture and students' academic performance.

**Table 10.** *Correlations between effective communication and students' academic performance (N=48)*

		Effective Communication	Students' Academic performance
Effective Communication	Pearson Correlation	1	.401**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005
	N	48	48
Students' Academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.401**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
	N	48	48
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

From Table 10, it is seen that there is a significant relationship between Principal's effective communication, and students' academic performance at the level of significance of 0.005. The correlation index of .40 shows that this relation is positive but not strong. This implies that the communication is not effective to enhance a better school culture and students' academic performance.

**Regression analysis**

**Table 11.** *Model Summary showing explanatory power on effective Communication, Professional Staff Development and Principals' Distributive Leadership*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.818 <sup>a</sup>	.669	.646	.80686
a. Predictors: (Constant), Effective Communication, Professional Staff D, Principals' Distributive leadership				

A multiple linear regression was conducted to find out if Principals effective communication, professional staff development and principal's distributive leadership affect the school culture and student's academic performance. The adjusted R Square of .646 shows that 65% of the variance in students academic performance is explained by Principal's effective communication, professional staff development and principal's distributive leadership.

**Discussion of Findings**

There is enough evidence to support the fact that school culture is significant determinants of student's academic performance in Mezam Division, North West Region of Cameroon as reported by findings in this study and significant others conducted by other researchers. These findings were in concordance with some past writings and findings of other authors, as demonstrated below.

From a theoretical standpoint, it should be noted however, that the way principals handle decision-making in schools according to Hughes and Ubben, is based on his or her assumptions about the subordinates. If the principal works with the McGregors' theory X beliefs, then he/she will have a very controlling behavior. Decision-making becomes centralized and group involvement is limited. However, if he or she incorporates the theory Y assumption, then the leader will involve staff more in decision-making resulting in creative leadership from staff.

1. There is a significant relationship between school culture and students' academic performance. This study considered leadership as an aspect of school culture and found that

principal's leadership is an important factor in motivating teachers apply efficiently to their duties.

In a like manner, Flores (2003) reports the findings from broader research which was aimed at investigating the ways in which a cohort of 14 new teachers in elementary and secondary schools in northern Portugal learned and developed over their first two years of teaching. The study identified seven major processes through which the new teachers learned: Learning while doing, learning by trying out strategies devised by themselves, learning by reflecting on practice, learning by reading handbooks and textbooks, learning by observing other colleagues, learning by discussing problems with colleagues, and learning by listening to colleagues, the last three were less frequent ways of teacher learning. This is an indication that if students and teachers alike are given the opportunity to test their hypothesis and try out new ideas, they are more likely to learn better irrespective of their context provided they can take responsibility for their own choices as the existentialists opine.

Furthermore, to Flores (2003), three main, concepts of learning emerged from the teachers' accounts: a) the 'on the job' nature of learning - that is, a view of learning as a practical process taking place in the workplace under the auspices of competent leaders; b) the 'ongoing and gradual' nature of learning which spans career- that is, teachers learn continuously from experience due to the changing nature of teaching; and c) the 'forced' nature of learning. This means that for the most part, teachers learn on their own due to lack of guidance and support from other (senior) colleagues.

These findings are testament that the conditions under which teachers work are essential to their development and this transcends to students learning. Collaboration from teachers and other significant others (leaders) has the potential of maximising the support for learning. Therefore, leadership within an educational institution has the potential of shaping and directing the development of all stakeholders involved in the teaching/learning transaction. Leadership is also a vital component of school climate and school culture as demonstrated by the above findings.

### Recommendations

The following are recommendations that policymakers, school administrators and teachers may want to consider if they wish to make a significant improvement in school culture:

1. Strengthen the leadership capacities of principals. Strengthening the capacities of school leaders complies with one of Elmore's (2000) principles of distributed leadership for largescale improvement in instruction which is that: *the exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity* (p.21). According to Elmore, this means that if school principals are to be held accountable or responsible for some outcome or action, those in formal authority must also ensure that principals have what it takes to do what they are being asked to do. The findings of this study, therefore, suggest the need for the government to provide organized and systemic training in educational leadership and management for school principals, in order to enable them effectively handle their —roles as instructional leaders within schools, builders of learning communities among teachers, and developers of strong community participation in schools (Leu et al., 2005, p.96).

2. Build productive, collaborative schools. According to Glickman et al., (1998), a productive, collaborative school is characterized by substantial dialogue on teaching and learning. In order to build such a school, school leadership needs to create and encourage rich, learning-focused interactions among colleagues; actively participate in teachers' learning activities; and promote trust and respect among colleagues in schools. Research suggests that, building such a school is a responsibility which falls squarely on the shoulders



of the school head (Leu et al., 2005). This responsibility taken by the leadership at the school level also needs support from the inspectorate of education or district support (Metzdorf, 1989), and why not from the divisional and regional levels. They also need to ensure that teachers have the necessary support from resource persons both from within and beyond the school as they participate in professional learning activities. School administrators, with the assistance from their local teachers, develop workshops and professional development courses for building principals, teachers, and parents in improving school culture and school climate. By allowing teachers to assist school administrators in developing workshops and courses it may foster teamwork between school leaders, teachers, and parents. It may improve many factors within culture and climate dimensions. School administrators may consider having parents involved in workshops with building principals and teachers during professional days where all educators are required to be present.

3. Educational policymakers, with the assistance of the Secondary School Principals, identify key indicators for school climate and school culture. Both school climate and school culture play a significant role in student achievement and school performance, but school climate and school culture are different (Denison, 1996; Glisson, 2007; Schein, 2010; Schneider et al., 2013). School culture is what allows schools to build and sustain high student achievement for many years.

### Conclusions

From the findings obtained in this study, it can be seen that there is a significant relationship between school culture and students' academic performance in Mezam Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. School culture according to the findings are primordial to academic viability of a school.

Other indicators of school culture investigated were principal's distributive leadership, effective communication, professional staff development, and teacher commitment and how each of these affected the academic performance of students in Mezam Division. Findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between each of these variables and students' academic performance. This relationship was tested using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis showing all positive and high coefficients. The opinions of teachers and principals were compared using the analysis of variance regarding their opinions vis-à-vis academic performance and a significant deviation was also observed with teachers generally of the opinion that it is the duty of their principals to ensure a conducive school culture and climate for successful teaching and learning.

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