Psychosocial Well-Being and Environmental Adjustment of Secondary School Students in Fako Division Southwest Region of Cameroon: Implication for Counselling

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of psychosocial well-being on environmental adjustment of secondary school students in Fako Division Southwest Region of Cameroon, considering the implication for counseling. Psychological well-being was appraised from the perspective of self-acceptance, social support, self-perception and personal social counseling. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design with a qualitative approach. In this perspective, typical survey instruments which are interview guides for both students and guidance counselors were used. Schools were involved in the study using simple random sampling, while students were sampled conveniently and all the guidance counselors within schools targeted. A total of 20 students and 20 guidance counselors were involved in the study. The abstraction of the qualitative textual data was reduced through the systematic process of thematic analysis. It was induced that school environment, psychosocial wellbeing, self-acceptance, social support, self-perception and personal social counseling affect environmental adjustment of secondary school students. The findings equally highlighted facilitators and barriers to environmental adjustment. It was recommended that guidance counselors consider these barriers and facilitators in their counseling strategies as to enhance environmental adjustment of secondary school students.

KEYWORDS: Psychosocial well-being, Self-acceptance, Social support, Self-perception, Personal social counseling, Environmental adjustment, Secondary school, Students, Counseling

INTRODUCTION

The process of environmental adjustment to the Secondary school environment can be frustrating and overwhelming for many students, leading to emotional maladjustment, depression, and poor academic outcomes (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Equally, protracted crises affect millions of students around the world with severe consequences on their ability to learn, grow and develop. In 2019, 420 million students, nearly one-fifth of students worldwide, were living in a conflict zone (Save the Children, 2019). Students' experiences have a lasting impact on their physical, mental, social and emotional development. Students in conflict zones are especially vulnerable, as the combination of exposure to chronic adversity, great violations of their human rights, insecurity and deprivation can lead to poor adjustment and psychosocial outcomes. Students under extreme stress over long periods may show a range of environmental-adjustment challenges such as regression to earlier behaviours, self-harm and suicide, depression, anxiety, aggression and withdrawal, and may experience educational difficulties later in life as well as barriers in accessing opportunities into adulthood (UNHCR, 2015). Students living in conflict settings face a unique set of challenges that put their health, education and wellbeing at risk (Plan International, 2018).To create a safe an quality learning environments that are responsive to the adjustment and psychosocial needs of students, there must be a paradigm shift away from traditional education systems that rely on rote learning to more holistic learning methods that teach

social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies and promote and protect wellbeing (Purgato et al., 2018). The system of secondary school education in Fako division is rapidly expanding, amid numerous challenges. Multiple and complex problems facing secondary school students, with their adverse effects on educational outcomes, are not getting scholarly attention. Also, the changes in the 21st century continue to accelerate and intensify, forcing students to cope with the impact of these changes on their lives. Several reported incidents regarding secondary school students leave some concerns to study the effect of psychosocial well-being on secondary school student environmental adjustment.

Background to the Study

Historically, although the compound noun, 'psychosocial', first emerges in the 1890s and was first used by academic psychologists it was only in the interwar period that psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers began to develop detailed models of the psychosocial domain. In early descriptions, the word 'psychosocial' had two connotations. In the writings of ethnologists and criminologists, it described a complex of factors which exist on the boundary of psychology and sociology, such as religious rituals and sexual mores (Fleming et al., 2005). On a second, more complex level, in the writings of early psychologists such as J. M Baldwin and G. Stanley Hall, the term was used to describe the developmental stage around adolescence in which childish individualism is replaced by a sense of communal duty and integration, part of that moment in adolescence when the individual entered into the life of the race (UNESCO, 2020). Such approaches, in the hands of later psychological commentators such as Freud and William McDougall, left social life dependent upon the play of biological instincts. Left wing psychoanalysts led the resistance to the prioritising of the biological over the sociological in the explanation of individual and social behaviour. In the United States, Trigant Burrow, Karen Horney and Frankwood Williams used psychodynamic theories to sustain a radical critique of contemporary forms of social organisation (UNESCO, 2020). In a move that would anticipate the arguments of the Frankfurt School, they sought to demonstrate the psychopathological consequences of modern capitalism while demonstrating the foundational role of social life in the constitution of the psyche. In Britain, these arguments received their clearest articulation in the work of the heterodox Glaswegian psychoanalyst, Ian Suttie. Indeed, it is Suttie who established the term in British psychological discourse (Hayward, 2012).

Adjustment was initially a biological one and was a corner stone in Darwin's theory of evolution (1859). In Biology, the term usually employed was an adaptation. Darwin maintained that only those organisms most fitted to adapt to the hazards of the physical world survived. Biologists have continued to be concerned with the problem of biological adaptations, and much of human illness is based on transformation to the stress of life. Environmental adjustment is that condition of a person who is able to adapt to changes in their physical, occupational, and social environment (Reichenberg & Friedman, 1996). According to Darwin (1959), these species which adapt fully to the demands of living, survived, multiplied, while others who did not died out. Therefore, the adaptation or changing of oneself or one's surroundings according to their demands of the external environment becomes the basic need for our survival. It is as true today to all of us as it was with Darwin's primitive species. Those who can adapt or adjust to the needs of changing conditions can live happily and successfully while other either vanishes, lead miserable lives or prove a nuisance to society. However, the concept of adjustment is not as simple as adaptation. Authorities in psychology and scholars differ considerably in interpreting its meaning and nature as can be deduced from source of definitions; environmental adjustment means the modification to compensate for or meet special condition (Drever, 1952). Crow & Crow (1956) opined that, an individual's adjustment is adequate, wholesome or healthful to the extent that he has established harmonious relationship between himself and the conditions, situations and persons who comprise his physical and social environment. Equally, Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that each person's actions are defined by multiple layers of influences, and such influences operate as different systems. The adjustment to secondary school environment occurs in the context of a person's background-characteristics, personal variables, interactions with the immediate environments and the more distant environments. Hence, secondary school students' experiences may vary significantly due to differences in the impact of these levels. The process of transition, which leads to adjustment to secondary school environment, has been explored by various scholars. Incoming students face a number of challenges, which include greater academic demands, greater autonomy, and less academic structure as compared with their high school experiences. The adjustment to the new environment has been identified as an important outcome in its own as well as an important predictor of educational outcomes. Through a review of the existing literature, Crede &

Niehorster (2012) found that environmental adjustment is predictive of environmental academic performance and a very good predictor of environmental retention. The relationship between environmental adjustment and environmental retention has been identified by others as well (e.g., Robbins, Oh, Le & Button, 2009). The studies of environmental adjustment utilize various foci regarding the meaning of environmental adjustment. Adopted in 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) established a legal and ethical framework to guide the international community in working with children during times of stability as well as during emergencies. Convention articles address, for example, family separation and reunification efforts and the protection and care of children affected by armed conflict. Consistent with the CRC, many international and national governmental and nongovernmental organizations now consider the psychological and social aspects of humanitarian assistance to children and their families as necessary components in responding to the overall developmental needs of children in complex emergency situations. Furthermore, there has been an interest in the psychosocial effects of crisis experiences on people ever since World War I, when British doctors discovered the shell-shock syndrome in soldiers who survived the horrors of the trenches in France. But it has not been until the past decades, especially since the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia Herzegovina and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, that there has been an upsurge in psychosocial interventions for students' in crisis-affected areas. More and more, the base assumption was taking root that students who experience killings, fighting, and upheaval, have to suffer from some form of psychosocial distress and are therefore in need of, not only psychological rehabilitation (like food, medical aid, construction of houses, schools, etc), but also in need of forms of psychosocial support.

To add, these models marked a significant departure from earlier ideas of the relationship between society and human nature, thus, a metaphysical insistence on a deep and mutually constitutive connection between personality and social life had been a commonplace throughout the nineteenth century as well as the 21st century as cited in Hayward, (2007). Victorian moralists drew from the philosophies of Plato and Hegel an organic vision of society that emphasized the close involvement of self and community. This vision was upheld by a broad swathe of cultural commentators, from radical socialists through to Liberal Anglicans, who agreed that working practices and social relationships were constitutive of human personality. Although they differed over the precise nature of this process of constitution, these proponents held up the experience of fellowship with friends, family or nation as the essential and defining aspect of human kind (Douglas-Fairhust, 2002). In many parts of the world, wars, epidemics, natural disasters, humanitarian and other socio-political crisis have resulted in complex emergencies causing wide-ranging, multifaceted, sustained negative impact. These emergency situations lead to a series of psychological, psychosocial, emotional and social changes which affects the lives of the individuals, the family and the community. Such emergencies impose heavy emotional, social, and spiritual burdens on students' and their families that are associated with death, separation and loss of parents and caregivers, disruption of organized patterns of living and meaning, attack and victimization, destruction of homes, and economic ruin. In crises situations, an increase in social problems (social breakdown, increase in gender-based violence, etc.), psychological distress (such as grief, etc.), mental health issues (such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis, etc.) and individual difficulties in conducting daily activities is often noticed. In these situations, student's holistic development is disrupted; security and trust in humankind threatened, and a sense of hope for the future undermined hence deficiency in adjustment.

Conceptually, psychosocial well-being is a super-ordinate construct that includes emotional or psychological well-being, as well as social and collective well-being. The term "quality of life" is similar to psychosocial well-being in that it involves emotional, social and physical components. Implying, it involves the psychological, cognitive, social and physical functioning and capabilities that students need to adjust in the secondary school environment, live a happy and fulfilling life (Martikainen, 2000). This definition of psychosocial well-being combines a "student's rights approach", that emphasizes the right of all students to have a happy life "here and now", with a "development approach", that underscores the importance of students developing the skills to improve their well-being in the present and in the future (Ben-Arieh et al., 2013). The evaluation of psychosocial well-being must be sensitive to students' actual states and achievements ("functioning") and the freedom they have ("capabilities") to pursue what they value in life.

Further, the term 'psychosocial well-being' refers to the dynamic relationship between the psychological dimension of a person and the social dimension of a person. The psychological dimension includes the internal, emotional and thought processes, feelings

and reactions, and the social dimension includes relationships, family and community network, social values and cultural practices. Psychosocial well-being is dependent on the capacity to use resources from these three core domains which are (Human capacity, social ecology and psychosocial well-being) since it is a multidimensional construct consisting of psychological, social, and subjective components which influence the overall functionality of individuals in achieving their true potentials as members of the society. Psychosocial well-being incorporates the physical, economic, social, mental, emotional, cultural, and spiritual determinants of health. The psychosocial well-being of an individual includes coping with the various stresses of everyday living and realization of the full potential of an individual as a productive member of the society (Martikainen, 2000).

Taking the person-in-context perspective, psychosocial well-being represents whether the student can function effectively to act in response to the demands of the school and whether the school can accommodate to students' needs and expectations optimally, involving a balance between the strengths of the students for effective functioning and the school resources for healthy growth. Hence, well-being comprises eudemonic indicators, such as fully functioning and positive development, and hedonic indicators of subjective well-being, such as presence of positive affect, absence of negative affect, and life satisfaction. This is because welling generally is said to be a state of psychological, intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and spiritual wellness (Adams, Bezner, Drabbs, Zambarano & Steinhardt, 2000).

The concept of environmental adjustment is as old as human race on earth. Systematic emergence of this concept starts from Darwin. In those days the concept was purely biological and he used the term adaptation. Insects and germs, in comparison to human beings, cannot withstand the hazards of changing conditions in the environment and as the season changes, they die. Hundreds of species of insects and germs perish as soon as the winter begins. Man, among the living beings, has the highest capacities to adapt to new situations. Man as a social animal not only adapts to physical demands but he also adjusts to social pressures in the society. Biologists used the term adaptation strictly for physical demands of the environment but psychologists use the term adjustment for varying conditions of social or inter-personal relations in the society (Samar, 2022). People strive to be comfortable in their surroundings and to have their psychological needs (such as love or affirmation) met

through the social networks they inhabit. When needs arise, especially in new or changed surroundings, they impel interpersonal activity meant to satisfy those needs. In this way, people increase their familiarity and comfort with their environments, and they come to expect that their needs will be met in the future through their social networks. Ongoing difficulties in environmental adjustment may be accompanied by anxiety or depression (Adam et al., 2023).

In other words, environmental adjustment refers to the behavioural process of balancing conflicting needs, or needs challenged by obstacles in the environment. Humans regularly adjust to their environment. For example, when their physiological state stimulates them to seek food, they eat (if possible) to reduce their hunger and adapt to the hunger stimulus. Environmental adjustment disorder occurs when there is an inability to make a standard adjustment to some need or stress in the environment. Successful environmental adjustment is crucial to having a high quality of life. Those who are unable to adjust well are more likely to have clinical anxiety or depression, as well as experience feelings of hopelessness, difficulty concentrating, sleeping problems and reckless behaviour (Bisson, Sakhuja & Divya, 2006).

The academic adjustment subscale assesses students' success in coping with various academic demands of secondary school, such as their academic performance, seeking academic support when needed, and their motivation and confidence to do well. The social adjustment subscale assessed 4 students' demands with interpersonal-societal demands of secondary school, such as developing satisfying relationships with others in secondary school and involvement in social activities. The Personal-emotional adjustment subscale assessed students' internal; psychosocial state and level of distress experienced during adjustment to secondary school, and may include depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and self-esteem. The final subscale, institutional adjustment, assessed the level of attachment to the institution as well as commitment to personal academic and institutional goals, such as feeling connected and sharing views aligning with the institution's mission.

Theoretical orientation based on the complexity of the environmental adjustment concept and the process of adjusting, is crucial to incorporate various levels of influences to gain a valid understanding of this process. According to the bio-ecological model of human development, an individual develops and changes over time as a result of being influenced by environmental powers (Bronfenbrenner & Morris,

2006). The combination of biology and environment has been thought to greatly contribute to intrapersonal and interpersonal differences among young adults at various points in their lives, including starting secondary school. However, an individual's internal characteristics may be defined prior to entering secondary school. In this regard, characteristics are not static and continuously interact with the environment. Therefore, environmental adjustment is influenced by a person's internal and external forces.

Although environmental adjustment may be affected by numerous influences, intrapersonal characteristics, which can be referred to as psychosocial resources, serve a fundamental role in a person's ability to adjust to various situations. Among such resources are self-confidence, motivation, and ability to cope with stress. Based on the dynamic nature of individuals, their adjustment to various situations will also be affected by external influences. In reference to 5 environmental adjustments, the external influences are those present in an individual's environment, including those within and outside of the secondary school. The impact of the higher education environment has been emphasized by secondary school retention theorists (Tinto, 1982 and Astin, 1984). Both theorists accounted for the individuals' personal and background characteristics, and secondary school experiences as related to secondary school commitment. However, they failed to recognize the dynamic nature of person-environment interplay.

Tinto & Astin (1984) carried out a study, in which they emphasized incorporating secondary school experiences and other environments into a bio-ecological model of development to explore the process of secondary school adjustment. They asserted that mediation based on a continuous and changing nature of a student, intrapersonal characteristics may be directly and indirectly related to a student's environmental adjustment. In a direct relationship, an individual's characteristics may be directly linked to the outcome, environmental adjustment, defining the direct effect. However, the relationship may be affected by external forces. When an intervening or process variable is introduced, it is referred to as the mediator. The introduction of mediation in a relationship between two variables may completely or partially alter their relationship. When a relationship between personal characteristics and environmental adjustment is weakened by the introduction of external variables, partial mediation takes place. However, in cases where a relationship between two variables, intrapersonal characteristics and environmental adjustment, can no longer be detected after the introduction of a mediator (external variables), complete mediation takes place (Kenny, 2012).

It is worth noting that personal and psychosocial resources at the immediate level enhance environmental adjustment. Each person possesses personal characteristics that impact the ability to function and thrive in a variety of settings. Past research identified a link between students' past academic performances, such as secondary school GPA (Grade point average), and scores on standardized secondary school achievement tests, with their academic performance in secondary school (Friedman & Mandel, 2009). Further, secondary school academic performance has been identified as one of the strongest predictors of secondary school graduation (Robbins et al., 2009).

However, several other factors have been identified as important for successful adjustment to secondary school environment, such as a positive outlook on secondary school success (Solberg, Evans & Segerstone, 2009), a high level of motivation (Robbins, et. al., 2009), personal characteristics, such as high levels of self-efficacy (DeWitz, Woolsey & Walsh, 2009), and high levels of support (DeBerard, Spielmans & Julka, 2004). Gender differences regarding secondary school outcomes also exist, with men being more likely to drop out of secondary school than women. Even when controlling for other variables, females are twice as likely to graduate in four years as their male counterparts (Noble et al., 2007). Consistent with the importance of socialization in academic achievement, girls are more social with others in a secondary school setting, which may lead to more successful adaptation to secondary school. Easier adaptation to secondary school life may also lead to greater 'identification with school'. Noble et al. (2007) also found that sex and race had strong influences on academic performance. Consistent with other research, they found that women tend to have higher GPAs than men. However, this difference was present only when controlling for other variables.

Expectation for success and self-confidence as well as individuals' confidence in their ability to succeed has been shown to affect their performance in various areas. The belief that one has the capacity to achieve a desired goal or behavior has been labeled by Bandura as 'self-efficacy'. Self-efficacy has been identified as significant factors that are related to secondary school students' academic outcomes and retention (DeWitz et al., 2009). Low self-efficacy can lead to developing feelings of isolation and helplessness, which may dampen one's chances of utilizing peer supports. Strong self-efficacy can

enhance performance and problem-solving skills in certain areas, including academic achievement. DeWitz et al, (2009) found a strong relationship between one's sense of self-efficacy and students' subjective purpose in life, which has been associated with increased chances of continuing enrolment at school. In addition, a high level of self-efficacy can enhance one's level of motivation (Leszczynska, Gutierez,-Donna & Schwartzer, 2005).

According to the classic stress and coping theory, coping strategies/tactics play a crucial role in the adjustment process in the face of stress (Crockett, Iturbide, Torres Stone, McGinley & Calo, 2007). Coping skills include cognitive and behavioral components. More specifically, efforts can be made and behavior can be altered based on the emotional appraisal of the situation. Crockett et al. (2007) described active coping strategy as cognitive or behavioral management of a stressor leading to decreased effects of stress. In the case of environmental and social adjustment, active coping may take the form of active social support seeking, such as taking part in campus life through participation in clubs, activities, and events offered by the educational institution. In basic terms, active coping implies taking action to address the problems.

Furthermore, an individual's level of motivation to succeed in secondary school has been perceived as an important aspect of academic success (Trapmann, Hell, Hirn & Schuler, 2007). Achievement orientation can be defined, influenced, and characterized by behaviors such as time commitment, effort, and engaging in support seeking behaviors (Trapmann et al., 2007). Solberg et al. (2009) found a positive relationship between academic optimism, higher chances of school retention, increased motivation, and decreased distress. The authors explained that optimists are more motivated to perform well in secondary school because they expect a positive outcome (Solberg et al, 2009). An expectation for positive academic outcome can be also linked to academic self-efficacy.

More so, certain aspects of secondary school adjustment are related to students' living arrangements. Noble et al. (2007) evaluated the ESSENCE (Entering Students at South Engaging in New College Experiences) program, which was a program for resident first-year students. The program included seven components: Residential component, orientation component, structured-group activities, relationship-building activities, peer advising and tutoring. The underlying assumption was that social integration into the campus life will promote student success. Noble et al. (2007) found that living on

campus, regardless of participation in new student programs, was associated with higher GPAs as compared with GPAs of commuter students. Further, they found that, even when controlling for other variables, students who reside on campus had one-tenth of a point higher GPAs than those who reside off-campus. Further, those who participated in ESSENCE, which required on-campus residence, had even higher GPAs, 0.15 points higher than students who resided on campus, but did not participate in ESSENCE. Importantly, on campus living appeared to have positive effects for all student groups, including those more susceptible for dropping out, as well as men and minorities. Students who participated in ESSENCE also had higher rates of graduation than other student groups. The difference was a staggering 50 to 60%, even when controlling for ACT scores and GPA (Noble et al., 2007).

An adjusted student therefore is the one who seems to have established some reasonable goals in line with his interest and abilities and who has settled down to work towards those goals seriously and steadily but without tension (Aggarwal, 1994). Environmental adjustment in the case of an individual should consist of personal as well as environmental competent. These two aspects of adjustments can be further subdivided into smaller aspects of personal environmental factors. Adjust, although seeming to be a universal characteristic may have different aspects and dimensions. In this way, environmental adjustment of a person is based on the harmony between his personal characteristics and the demands of the environment of which he is part.

The incidence of environmental adjustment challenges is increasing daily in Cameroon and most especially in Fako Division Southwest region as a result of the on-going crisis, and the world at large, and a number of students are affected, due to the high exposure to environmental adjustment challenges caused by the attacks on schools and continued violence by armed groups, which have effects on the successful adjustment of the students as well as the population (Dina, 2019). Depression, anxiety, abandonment, withdrawal, fear, and suicidal thought, and schizophrenia, feelings of isolation are just some of the traumas affecting the adjustment of the Cameroonian population as well as secondary school students' living in Fako Division Southwest region of the country. These individuals are often forced to flee from village to village, seeking shelter from the relentless attacks and constant threats from the armed groups present in the area (INTERSOS Cameroon, 2021). To continue, since September 2017, the civilian population in the Southwest Region of

Cameroon has been trapped in the ongoing confrontation among the different non-state armed groups fighting for hegemony over the territory, and the government forces trying to maintain political control of the area. According to data from the Ministry of Administration of the Territory (MINAT) of Cameroon, there are 130,000 internally displaced people in the Northwest Region, 90,000 in the Southwest Region and 105,000 returnees. The civilian population is in the midst of years-long conflicts which have consistently produced repeated violations perpetrated by all parties, including physical violence, child abuse, child marriage, rape, death threats, and destruction of property, illegal arrests, and torture. This fosters a climate of extreme and protracted insecurity that produced not only physical but also psychological and psychosocial injuries. Adequate consideration is not paid to adjustment and care of the psychosocial state of these people, and the void to fill is enormous since its affect all aspects of live as well as human rights (Andrea, 2021).

Personal-social counseling is an area that covers the personal psychological and social problems of individuals. The problems are said to be personal for the fact that they are private in nature and may deserve individualized counseling (Blum et al., 2012). Denga (2008) gave examples of psychological and social problems to include intra-personal/interpersonal relationship, family upheavals, marital incompatibility, broken homes, sexual problems, emotional instability, fear of tomorrow, inferiority, and superiority complexes, loss of job, unemployment, drug abuse, and adult delinquencies and more.

Denga (1998) asserted that, African countries especially Nigeria and Cameroon as well are in a psychosocial state meaning that, many youths and adults find themselves in emotional state. This lead many to diverse maladjustment behaviours like moral decadence, marital instability, educational malpractice, child abuse and corruption in various faces of life. Fako Division Southwest Region of Cameroon has also found herself a highly competitive Region where unemployment is surging and sending many to a state of helplessness and hopelessness. In many cases some youths and adults who find themselves in such predicaments resolve to sex working in order to make ends meet.

Counseling is to verbally share one's philosophy of life and values of life. This exercise will help individuals to be alert and develop interest in knowing their persons more to be sure of whom they are and tools to work with if they must succeed in life. Without self-knowledge, it will lead to making wrong choices in life, choice of career, friends, where to live, life style to mention but a few. Counseling therefore, plays an important role in developing student's personal-social counseling. They also need to be able to make guidance and counseling service program to handle students' problems both intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and socially (Dina, 2019). One area of guidance that helps students develop psycho-social abilities is the field of personal social counseling. Through personal social counseling programs, family, community and school teachers are expected to be drivers for students to be able to show their emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and social wellness. Yusuf et al. (2017) as cited in Mamat & Dina (2019) formulates personal social counseling as individual assistance that solves problems related to psychological situations, atmosphere and etiquette of life in the family, and social, so that individuals strengthen protection and develop while coping with their own problems. The field of personal social counseling itself can be interpreted as assistance to participants to overcome social problems that tend to occur to individuals. Support can be a person who is independent and sensitive to the surrounding environment. The field of personal social counseling includes the aspects of family, community and school through social-personal guidance programs (National Open University of Nigeria, 2016).

Self-perception is the process of observing and interpreting one's own behaviors, thoughts, and feelings, and using those observations and interpretations to define oneself (Robak, 2001). It is the view we have about ourselves, our characteristics, and the judgments we make about the traits we have. Self-perception includes our self-concept (the image we have in our heads of who we are) and our self-esteem (how we judge the characteristics we possess). Thus, it is a person's image of themselves, including their physical, mental, or social attributes; all this is what makes up self-perception (Bem, 2010). Self-perception is equally influenced by social, family, culture, and the media and all play a role in shaping who we think we are and how we feel about ourselves. Although these are powerful socializing forces, there are ways to maintain some control over our self-perception. Various forces help socializing us into our respective social and cultural groups and play a powerful role in presenting us with options about who we can be. While we may like to think that our self-perception starts with a blank canvas, our perceptions are limited by our experiences and various social and cultural contexts (Critcher & Gilovich, 2010). It is imperative to note that parents and peers shape our self-perceptions in positive and

negative ways. Feedback that we get from significant others, which includes close family, can lead to positive views of self (Guadagno et al., 2010)

Theoretically, this study was guided by the Behaviour-Constraint theory by Brehm's (1966), Adaptation- Level Theory by Harry Helson (1898-1977), Schlosberg's Transition Theory by Nancy K. Schlosberg (1981), Person Centred Theory by Carl Rogers (1902-1987) and the Martin Seligman's PERMA Model (2002), and Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000). The reasons for choosing these theories stem from the fact that there are humanistic in nature and all the views of the theorist hint on psychosocial well-being and environmental adjustment which are the core concepts of the study.

From the contextual perspective, it can be inferred that psychosocial well-being and environmental adjustment are emerging fields in Cameroon. The social context of psychosocial well-being and environmental adjustment in Cameroon provides vital background information for understanding the context in which students with adjustment issues seek help and the factors shaping their access to, and the quantity of existing environmental adjustment services (Halonen, 2013). Equally, recently, Cameroon has been plagued with insecurity in Fako Division Southwest Region. Fako Division Southwest Region like any other region has its peace but it is being threatened by this insecurity and violence which is generally regarded as very distressful and traumatic for students. Many of these students have been affected psychosocially as many of them have become victims of the crisis where many of them have become orphans, homeless; others are even being abducted and raped resulting to unwanted pregnancies and depression. Some of them have resulted to rubbery and addictions as a means of survival and hiding the trauma within them. As such they find themselves in new school environment with demands of adjustment in order to transit smoothly. The Anglophone crisis as well has heavily impacted different strata of the Cameroonian society. Cameroon, a country previously known for its stability has faced violence and serious human rights abuses since October 2016. A Human Rights Watch report documented a range of abuses by both sides in the Anglophone regions, including arson attacks on homes and schools (WHO, 2019).

Secondary school students in Cameroon face a number of challenges, including developing psychosocial well-being, environmental adjustments issues, keeping up with different educational demands, and manage interpersonal and societal demands which are part of secondary school experience. This process can be frustrating and overwhelming for many students, leading to emotional maladjustment, depression, and poor academic outcomes (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). The system of secondary school education in Fako division is rapidly expanding, amid numerous challenges. Multiple and complex problems facing secondary school students, with their adverse effects on educational outcomes, are not getting scholarly attention. Several reported incidents regarding secondary school students leave some concerns, thus the need to study the effect of psychosocial well-being on their environmental adjustment.

Statement of the Problem
For survival and a smooth transition, every secondary school student must adjust and adapt to the changing and new environment they find themselves in. Adjusting in the adverse surrounding environment is an evolutionary process which students change or adjust their characteristics, behavior, or physiology to better suit their environment since it is a key mechanism through which students can survive and thrive in different habitats and conditions. This is needful because proper environmental adjustment enhances and fosters students' psychosocial well-being and hence helps them to be autonomous, focused, determined, resilient and above all smooth transition void of psychosocial issues and thus excellent academic performance.

However, the process of adjustment to the secondary school environment can be very frustrating and overwhelming for many students, leading to emotional maladjustment, depression, poor academic outcomes, high rate in school dropout resulting to negative effects on the psychosocial well-being as well as the holistic development of secondary school student's in Fako Division Southwest Region of Cameroon, hence poor academic performance and productivity, increase crime wave, manifestation of anti-social behaviors detrimental and harmful to both the students and the community. Thus, a need for proper psychosocial well-being to aid in smooth environmental adjustment which of course might be a gradual process expected to result into an acceptable or satisfactory adaptation. As a gradual dynamism, environmental adjustment becomes a more challenging process to deal with. To that end, this study is envisioned to investigate the effect of psychosocial well-being on secondary school students' environmental adjustment. Equally, to understand, describe and to formulate guidelines for an intervention in order to enable students to cope with life challenges and build capacities that will

enable them transit smoothly in different phases of life.

Research Objective
This study aimed at exploring the effect of psychosocial well-being on secondary school students' environmental adjustment.

Justification of the Study
The concerns on the effects of psychosocial well-being on secondary school students' environmental adjustment and in our society at large are critical. The inability to take the concerns as such by educational stakeholders' affects secondary school students and the society psychologically, socially, emotionally, economically and physically (Amani, 2010). Additionally, this problem is worth investigating because little or no research specifically on psychosocial well-being and effect on secondary school students' environmental adjustment has been done, as revealed by literature. However, similar studies such as self-esteem and the mental health in early adolescence, development and gender differences in Switzerland (Bolognini, 1996), have been carried out in other African countries and the western world. In Cameroon, psychosocial well-being and environmental adjustment services are still emerging disciplines. Thus, there is a wide gap in this area of psychosocial well-being and environmental adjustment as affirmed by BIMEHC (2013).

Statistics from the delegation of secondary education and delegation of Social Affairs for Southwest Regions (2019) indicated that over the years and coupled with the current crisis in the Region, they have recorded a higher number of crime waves, violence and so on in schools and in the community. Some officials have attributed this to the lack of psychosocial well-being and environmental adjustment awareness of these students by their parents, teachers and the community at large. The student, with all of his or her personal characteristics and character strengths, interacts first and foremost with his or her family, teachers and peers, but also with a range of other actors in his or her proximal community.

The material and social resources that the student obtains from the family and closer community are, in turn, influenced by the macro-economic social and cultural environment and by economic, social and education policies. In a well-functioning system, these three levels, the student's self, his or her close networks and resources, and the macro / policy level are interdependent and influence each other as they evolve over time. For example, students' perceptions of their quality of life at school (at the micro level) should not just be influenced by education policies (at the macro / policy level) but should also inform the design of policy reforms void of adequate knowledge on how imperative all of these are on psychosocial well-being and environmental adjustment of students and mars the teaching-learning process.

Equally, because of deficiency in psychosocial well-being and environmental adjustment, students have been known to portray maladaptive behaviors harmful to self and others. For example, due to years-long armed conflicts in these regions, students, teachers, citizens are repeatedly killed. Also, the armed conflict consistently has produced repeated human right violations perpetrated by all parties, including physical violence, child abuse, child marriage, rape, death threats, and destruction of property, illegal arrests, and torture. This has fostered a climate of extreme and protracted insecurity that produced not only physical but also psychosocial injuries. Also, a case was reported on July 31st, 2020 of a student who killed the friend by cutting the friend's neck. Equally, around mid-June 2020, a first-year law student was assassinated by the friend in the southwest region and as if that was not enough the friend also, stabbed himself.

Impulsivity, conflicts with authority, hostility, opposition and aggression and several cases of murder, defiance of authority and of the rights of others, deceitfulness, reckless regard for self and others, repeated violation of social rules, cheating, theft, substance abuse, violence, tantrums, truancy, gambling, are reported daily in secondary schools in the southwest region (Nkeze, 2020). The manifestation of these socially deviant behaviors that go against socially acceptable and established rules may be as a result of a state of anomie, which is social instability arising from an absence of clear social norms and values. Maybe the deficiency in psychosocial well-being and environmental adjustment is because their autonomy has been seized from them, their self-acceptance, social support, self-perception and personal social counseling, is problematic (Brown, 1990). Thus, the reason why they have problems accepting and believing in themselves, resulting to the consistent exhibition of abnormal and anti-social behaviors harmful to individuals, their families and communities and poor academic performance. On this premise, this study wishes to investigate the place of psychosocial well-being on secondary school students' environmental adjustment in the Southwest Region of Cameroon.

Significance of the Study
It is hoped that the findings of the study will be beneficial to students, teachers, parents, school

administrators, community, the government and counselors.

First, students will be able to identify strategies to develop effective habits and a positive attitude towards all. They will perceive the need to involve themselves in extra-curricular activities, which will help them in developing positive attitude and a sense of confidence and dismiss any negative influence. It will also help them involve themselves in healthy peering interaction for developing better academic and co-circular atmosphere. To add, it will help students inculcate a sense of dignity in themselves by rational thinking and positive attitudes, organize their activities in such a manner which is useful for doing away any stresses. They develop a habit of positive questioning among themselves, with parents, teachers, and counselors for clarifying any doubts that crop up.

Second, the study will help guardians **/ p**arents to be sensitive to any behavioral change in their children and try to give choices to children that will help them make informed decisions. Equally, it will help parents to be able to provide assistance and support to their children during tough times. Help parents to know when to intervene in the lives of their children in case of any awkward situation.

Third, from this study teachers will be conscious of being friendly and positive while interacting with students, foster a relaxed atmosphere or classroom environment and be precise and clear on the kind of expectations from students. Communicate with students in such a way that they feel free and comfortable to question and discuss any kind of issue with them and also treat students as individuals rather than a generalized whole. It will also help them identify the strength and weaknesses, positive and negative capacities of students and encourage them to improve their faculties. They will help raise the level of expectations, act as friends, guide and counsel for improving an overall development of their students and render positive advice periodically to help students improve their well-being hence performance.

Furthermore, the study will play a positive role in the holistic / overall development of students in their community. This study will permit the encouragement of a positive interaction between the achievers and underachievers by infusing a sense of propriety and belonging among them. Help in identifying weak areas not only in students but their parents and suggest measures to improve on these weaknesses. It will instill the organization of stress-relieving programs in schools and the community for students, the involvement of students in various activities of the community, so that they feel a part of it and become confident.

More so, it will provide to the government and counselors healthy-based counseling for regular monitoring of stress, the academic capacities of counselors and encourage improvement, pay special attention to the programs being implemented in different secondary schools. Also, counselors will know the best therapeutic intervention and psychosocial support strategies appropriate to rehabilitate and help students adapt and adjust when need be.

With this study, there will be increasingly incorporation of the findings into education policy, interest will keep growing in comparing how well different education systems promote students' development and quality of life. To add, this study is vital to the ministry of education in that problems identified and recommendations made can go a long way to help it develop and implement strategies and policies that can improve students' psychosocial well-being and their environmental adjustment.

Equally, NGOs and other organizations will benefit from the findings of this study to lay strategies and interventions for students. Furthermore, it was difficult to get empirical data on these research variables in Cameroon. Therefore, the findings of this study will put forth data on the impact of psychosocial well-being on secondary school students' environmental adjustment which could be used for other related researches in Cameroon and worldwide.

Scope of the Study
Geographically the area of study is Fako Division of the Southwest Region of Cameroon. As for the participants, the study is limited to form one to three (1-3) students and counselors in secondary schools. Content wise, the researcher aimed at examining the effects psychosocial well-being on secondary school students' environmental adjustment as well as the indicators which include self-acceptance, self-perception, social support and personal social counseling. The questionnaire, after construction were presented to the supervisor of the thesis to check the content of the items by evaluating them in terms of their relevance to the variables, research questions and the objectives of the study.

Theoretically, this study was guided first, by the Behavior-Constraint theory by Brehm's (1966), Adaptation- Level Theory by Harry Helson (1898-1977), Schlosberg's Transition Theory by Nancy K. Schlosberg (1981), Person Centered Theory by Carl Rogers (1902-1987), the Martin Seligman's PERMA

Model (2002), and Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000). First, the Behavior-Constraint theory by Brehm's (1966); the development of the behavioral constraint theory comes from Brehm's (1966) reactance theory which states that there is a basic desire among human beings to maintain their behavioral freedom. An environment is constraining when something is limiting or preventing an individual from achieving his intentions. Certain environmental conditions like noise, crowding, temperature, location or specific features such as bad weather, barriers, objective experiences such as control may be perceived as constraining by the individual. In such a situation, the person feels as being out of his / her control. This feeling of not being able to control the situation produces psychosocial reactance (Brehm, 1966). Wortman & Brehm (1975) suggest that if failures or loss of control persist for a longer period of time without any chances of restoration, the individual will cease to make any instrumental efforts and thus enter into a helplessness state. Behavior-Constraint Theory is relevant in this study in that it provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding and predicting human behavior in a variety of contexts. Second, Adaptation-Level Theory by Harry Helson (1898-1977), which assumes that each of us have a minimum threshold for a certain level of environmental stimulus. A slight rise or fall in this threshold is a focus of arousal, overload, under load or stress. Variations in behavior will therefore occur if the stimulus load is outside our experienced adaptation levels. Major proponents of this position include Helson (1964) and Wohlwill (1974). While all environmental psychologists emphasized the interrelationship of humans to their environment, adaptation-level theorists speak specifically of two processes that make up this relationship which include the processes of adaptation and change.

Third, Schlosberg's Transition Theory by Nancy K. Schlosberg (1981); the theory was created because a "need existed to develop a framework that would facilitate an understanding of adults in transition and aid them in connecting to the help they needed to cope with the 'ordinary and extraordinary process of living' (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, Renn, 2010). Fourth, the Humanistic Person Centered Theory by Carl Rogers (1902-1987) which allows the client to investigate who they are at their core; here the therapist creates an environment of empathy, acceptance and genuineness for positive environmental adjustment. Now the Martin Seligman's PERMA Model (2002); Martin put forth five important building blocks of well-being and happiness which are positive emotions, engagement,

relations, meaning and achievement. The awareness of PERMA can help students increase their psychosocial well-being by focusing on the combinations of feeling good, living meaningfully, establishing supportive and friendly relationships, accomplishing goals, and being fully engaged with life. Further nurturing these experiences in students can help them go beyond "surviving" to really "thriving" in life. Finally, the study adopted the Self-Determination Theory by Ryan & Deci (2000) which begins with the assumption that individuals possess autonomy, with an innate determination toward psychological growth and development, and strives to be competent in facing ongoing challenges and in integrating their experiences into a coherent sense of self. This natural human tendency requires ongoing support from the social environment toward active engagement and psychological growth. In proceeding, the variables to be measured here include self-acceptance, social support, self-perception and strategies.

Methodologically, the study employed a cross-sectional survey design with essentially qualitative approach.

Definition of Terms
Psychosocial well-being refers to the development of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual strengths among individuals, families and communities which creates overall positive social relationships among them (East African Community, 2019). Huppert (2009) defines psychosocial well-being as feeling good and functioning effectively. It refers to how people evaluate their lives. These evaluations may be in the form of cognitions or in the form of affect. The cognitive part is an information-based appraisal of one's life that is when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about one's satisfaction with life as a whole. The affective part is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings such as frequency with which people experience pleasant / unpleasant moods in reaction to their lives. The assumption behind this is that most people evaluate their life as either good or bad, so they are normally able to offer judgments. In the context of this study, psychosocial well-being emphasizes the right of all students to have a happy life "here and now", with a "development approach", which underscores the importance of students developing the skills to improve their well-being in the present and in the future (Ben-Arieh et al., 2013).

Effect refers to a change that is caused in a person or thing by another person or thing" (Coombe, 2007).

Effect refers to a change that results when something is done or happens: an event, condition, or state of

affairs that is produced by a cause (Wahed, A. & Hsu, Y. 2010). Effect in this context refers to a result, consequence or outcome of some action, event, agent, influence or cause.

Environment refers to the spaces humans occupy, the objects they use, the people with whom they interact, and the possibilities and meanings for doing that which exists in the human collective of which they are part (Taylor & Kielhofner, 2017).

Environment is a term used to describe, in the aggregate, all the external forces, influences and conditions which affect the life, nature, behavior and the growth, development and maturity of living organisms (Dougla et al. 2004). In this study environment is the entire range of external influence acting on an organism, both the physical, biological and other organisms that are forces of nature surrounding an individual. Thus, the sum total of all conditions which surround man at a given point in space and time (Supardi, 2003), the social and cultural conditions that affect an individual or community (Cunningham et al. 2004)

Adjustment is defined as coping with the problems of normal, everyday life (Halonen & Santrock, 1997; Weiten, Dunn & Hammer, 2015).

Adjustment refers to the degree to which an individual engages in competent social behavior and adapts to the immediate social context (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

Adjustment here is the process in which an individual balance the needs and the circumstances that affect the fulfillment of these needs. Successful balancing leads to success in adjustment, finding meaning and purpose, and learning the necessary skills that enables an individual to engage in competent social behavior and adapts to the immediate social context (Crick & Dodge, 1994).

Environmental adjustment refers to the continuous process in which a person varies his behavior to produce a more harmonious relationship between himself and his environment (Malami, 2017). Environmental adjustment refers to a student's interaction with his or her environment that fosters the acquisition of may be physical or behavioral competencies, which will help an organism to survive better in the environment (Joe et al., 2020 and Abdullah, Elias, Mahyuddin & Uli, 2009). Environmental adjustment is a method that changes the demands from the environment according to the capacities of an individual so that the individual's psychosocial aspects are not burdened (Shoko & Masayoshi, 2021). Here environmental adjustment is, to fit, make suitable, adapt, arrange, modify,

harmonize or make correspondent. In some situation, one of the factors may not be changeable and so the one which is, has to be modified in some way to suit the other. Also, adjusting to an environment means adapting to the conditions and demands of a particular situation or setting. Equally, it is the adjustment of organisms to their environment in order to improve their chances at survival in that environment. This can involve changes in behavior, physical characteristics, or other traits to better fit the environment (Joe et al., 2011).

Self-acceptance refers to what we think about the self, hence an individual's subjective (positive or negative) evaluations of the self, as in how we feel about it. It is an individual's satisfaction or happiness with oneself, and is thought to be necessary for good environmental adjustment (Sherpard, 1979). Self-acceptance refers to the ability to a positive attitude toward the self; acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad qualities; feels positive about past life. It is used to describe a person's overall sense or confidence of self-worth, abilities, self-respect or personal value. Often it is seen as a personality trait, which means that it tends to be stable and enduring. It also, refers to the awareness of one's strength and weaknesses, the realistic appraisal of one's talents, capabilities and general worth and feelings of satisfaction with one's self despite deficiencies and regardless of past behaviors and choices (Keyes, 2002). Self-acceptance in this context is an attitude or view that an individual has about him or herself; in other words, how much you appreciate and like yourself. It also means accepting yourself for who you are irrespective of the economic, social and political conditions. Hence accepting yourself makes you to like and love yourself just as you are without struggling with complex, thus a personality of dignity and pride.

Social support: Cao et al., (2010) purport that Social support is commonly conceptualized as the social resources on which an individual can rely when dealing with life problems and stressors. Cobb (1976) defines social support as information leading the subject to believe that he is cared for and loved, esteemed and valued and as well as belonging to a network of communication and mutual obligation. Social support here is a broad construct that describes the network of social resources that an individual perceives. This social network is rooted in the concepts of mutual assistance, guidance, and validation about life experiences and decisions. This social system plays a role in providing a number of forms of support, including informational,

instrumental, and emotional support (Wills & Fegan, 2001).

Self-perception is the process of observing and interpreting one's own behaviors, thoughts, and feelings, and using those observations and interpretations to define oneself (Robak, 2001). Self-perception an introspective personality view and of any mental or physical attribute that makes up the self. Self-perception here is the view we have about ourselves, our characteristics, and the judgments we make about the traits we have. Self-perception includes our self-concept (the image we have in our heads of who we are) and our self-esteem (how we judge the characteristics we possess).

Personal social counseling: According to Winkel & Hastuti (2004), personal social counseling refers to counseling services provided to assist students in dealing with the state of their own mind and to overcome many struggles in their own mind. Yusuf & Nurihsan (2006) asserted that personal social counseling is guidance to assist individuals in solving personal social problems. Social problems include problematic or questionable relationship with their peers, with school, and staff, understanding the nature and capability of self, and adjustment to the educational environment and the communities in which they live. Here, personal social counseling is a program to help students understand and respect themselves and others, acquire effective interpersonal skills, understand safety and survival skills, and be able to transit smoothly as well as contribute objectively in the community.

Methodology
Research Design
The study employed a cross-sectional survey design with essentially qualitative approach whereby data were collected using interview guides which are typical survey instrument. Survey consists essentially of collecting people's opinions or viewpoints on a given issue (Nana, 2018). The study is cross-sectional because it makes just an appraisal of the current situation.

Area of study
This study was carried out in Cameroon, a country located at the boundary of central and West Africa. More specifically, the study took place in the Southwest Region of Cameroon, and precisely in Fako Division. Fako Division is located on the slopes of Mount Cameroon and is bounded to the South by the Atlantic Ocean, to the East by the Littoral Region and to the West by the Atlantic Ocean as well as the Ndian and Meme Divisions at the West Coast District. It is made of five Sub-Divisions including

Buea, Limbe, Tiko, Muyuka and West Coast. Fako is host to major cities like Buea, Tiko and Limbe which are some of the fastest growing towns in Cameroon today with a mixed cosmopolitan setting. English and French are the two official languages used for general interaction while pidgin is the lingua franca. The Bakweri language spoken by the natives is equally written and documented. The increase in migrants leads to a diversity of children from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, high demand in lodging, social amenities, training institutions as well as socio-economic challenges. This therefore prompts not only to improve on the number training institutions, but on the number of teachers while considering their skills in adapting in conflict context faced with highly cosmopolitan population and IDP learners. Fako division in the Southwest region has schools of all strata. These schools range from the tertiary to kindergarten. The division has one state owned university situated in Buea run by state authorities and a good number of private universities. There are other specialized training institutions such the school of public work and National School of Local Administration (NASLA) formerly CEFAM. There are public and private secondary schools located in all the sub-divisions. The division equally has public and private primary schools. Amongst special schools found in the division, are Arabic schools, schools for the deaf and dumb, a rehabilitation center for the blind, a reformatory school for young delinquents. However, given the importance of technical education in the region, there are panoply of technical schools ranging from secondary to university levels. These technical schools are public, confessional and lay private dotted all over the region. The division also host several teacher training institutions, both public and private.

Population of the Study
The population is made up of secondary school students and guidance counselors.

Target Population
The study targets Form 1, 2 & 3 students assuming that these first years in secondary school get them through the warming phase of their environmental adjustment.

Accessible Population
The division is faced with socio-political crisis, making all the schools not accessible. Only school safe for access during the study period were involved in the study.

Sample
The sample size of the study consisted of 20 students and 20 guidance counselors.

Sampling Technique

The simple random sampling technique was used in selecting the schools for the study in order not to be biased. With the simple random sampling, all the individuals or subjects in the defined population had an equal and independent chance of being selected on its merit rather than some pre-determined criteria which may disfavor some. By this method, the researcher wrote the names of all the secondary schools in the different categories of public, confessional and lay private schools in the study area on slips of papers with other blank sheets of papers folded and shuffled together. The folded papers were put in a basket for picking after shuffling. The name of the first school was registered after being chosen, and the process was repeated until all the ten schools were finally drawn and recorded. The students were sampled purposively and conveniently targeting form 1, 2 or 3 while stratifying by school type. As for the guidance counselors, all of them in sampled schools were targeted. However, their consent was equally sought before their involvement in the data collection process.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using interview guides designed for students and guidance counselors respectively.

Validity of the Instrument

Mugenda & Mugenda (2003) opined that a major concern in research is the validity of the procedures and conclusions. Nana (2018), Amin (2005) and Gay & Airasian (2000) further explained that validity is the quality of a data gathering instrument or procedure that enables it to measure what it is supposed to measure. A valid research finding is one in which there is similarity between the reality that exists in the world and the research results. Content validity, construct validity, face validity, internal validity and external validity were given prime attention. Guba's model for trustworthiness addresses ways for warding off biases in the results of qualitative analysis (Mohlokoane, 2004). In this study, however, the model was used to develop strategies that introduced standards of quality assurance in the qualitative analysis. The five strategies are identified in UNISA (2003). They consider credibility, transferability, comparability, dependability and conformability. The panel of judge method of reliability was employed. The method is a palliative to most of test-pretest methods' problems. Rather than submitting people to the same instrument in two different occasions, this method allow two or more judges to appraise the data collection instrument, the indicators or the codes and then check for level of agreement. Content and construct validity earlier serve this purpose, though informally.

Ethical Considerations

In all research with human subjects, certain ethical principles must be observed and informed consent must be negotiated. This is particularly important in research with powerless groups such as students. Although ethical guidelines and codes do not give us the answers to address all possible challenges or risks that occur when doing research with students, however, they can lead to asking the right kinds of questions while respecting their personality and dignity. Because of how important and special students are in the society, it is necessary to seek their consent. The consent of an adult alone is not sufficient, and researchers must ask students themselves and not rely on a parent or a teacher telling them that consent has been granted. Informed consent means that a respondent has been informed of and understands the research aims, methods and processes, topics, what the data will be used for, the full implication of what they are being asked to do. No respondent should be cajoled, persuaded or intimidated into giving informed consent or withdrawing dissent. This study employed the above principles. As for learners aged below 16 years the assent form requested the approval of their parents or guardian. Furthermore, ethical considerations were first ensured by collecting a formal and legal permission from the Department of Educational Psychology in the University of Buea which carried the name of the researcher and the purpose of the research. Also, the cover page of the questionnaire carried information on the department and name of the researcher which enabled the respondents to know her such that they were confident of who the researcher was. The anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed in order to get honest and truthful responses. Permission to issue questionnaire to participants was sought from the school authorities of the various respondents. Prospective participants and their authorities gave their consent before the questionnaire was administered. In the information sheet that requested participants to take part in this study, participants were duly informed of the purpose of the study. Bias on the part of the research is unethical and Kumar (2014) says that bias is a deliberate attempt to either hide what one has found in their study, or to highlight something disproportionately to its true existence. According to Burns (1982) biases distort the findings from the expected true picture. Potential sources of bias were dealt with. Measures to minimize such relative errors ranged from the various validity stages as earlier clarified, the pilot study, up to the approach of data collection. In this vein, the interviews were conducted privately in a friendly environment that was free from

any suggestion of victimization (UNISA, 2003; Polit & Beck, 2004).

Data Management and Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and revised by two other promoters. Each interview was prepared as a single primary document and assigned for coding and analysis using the thematic approach. The primary documents of textual data were coded for every independent idea as it emerged from the data with the support of Atlas Ti 5.2. As for the interpretation of findings, the theoretical perspective was dominantly qualitative. Precautions were taken to clearly determine the meaning of themes or umbrella term and what they stand for. In the context of this study, to satisfy this requirement, findings were organized in code-quotation tables whereby themes or codes were clearly explained or described, and at the same time backed by their related quotations; the code-quotation table ensures the objectivity and reliability of qualitative analysis in the sense that, if codes / concepts /umbrella terms and their descriptions can be subjective to relative error, the

quotations are grounded and real, thus help compensate for potential bias (Nana, 2018). A conceptual diagram concluded the analytical stage which consists in relating concepts or ideas in a meaningful and logical manner, what is termed concept-building in qualitative analysis (Nana, 2018).

## Demographic Characteristics
Students

The sample was shared equally between male and female, and quite closely among form 1, 2 & 3. They were 20 of them among which 10 males and 10 females.

Guidance Counselors

They were 20 of them among which 5 males and 15 females.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The conceptual diagram below depicts the environmental adjustment dynamism of secondary school students as unfold by the empirical data that were gathered.
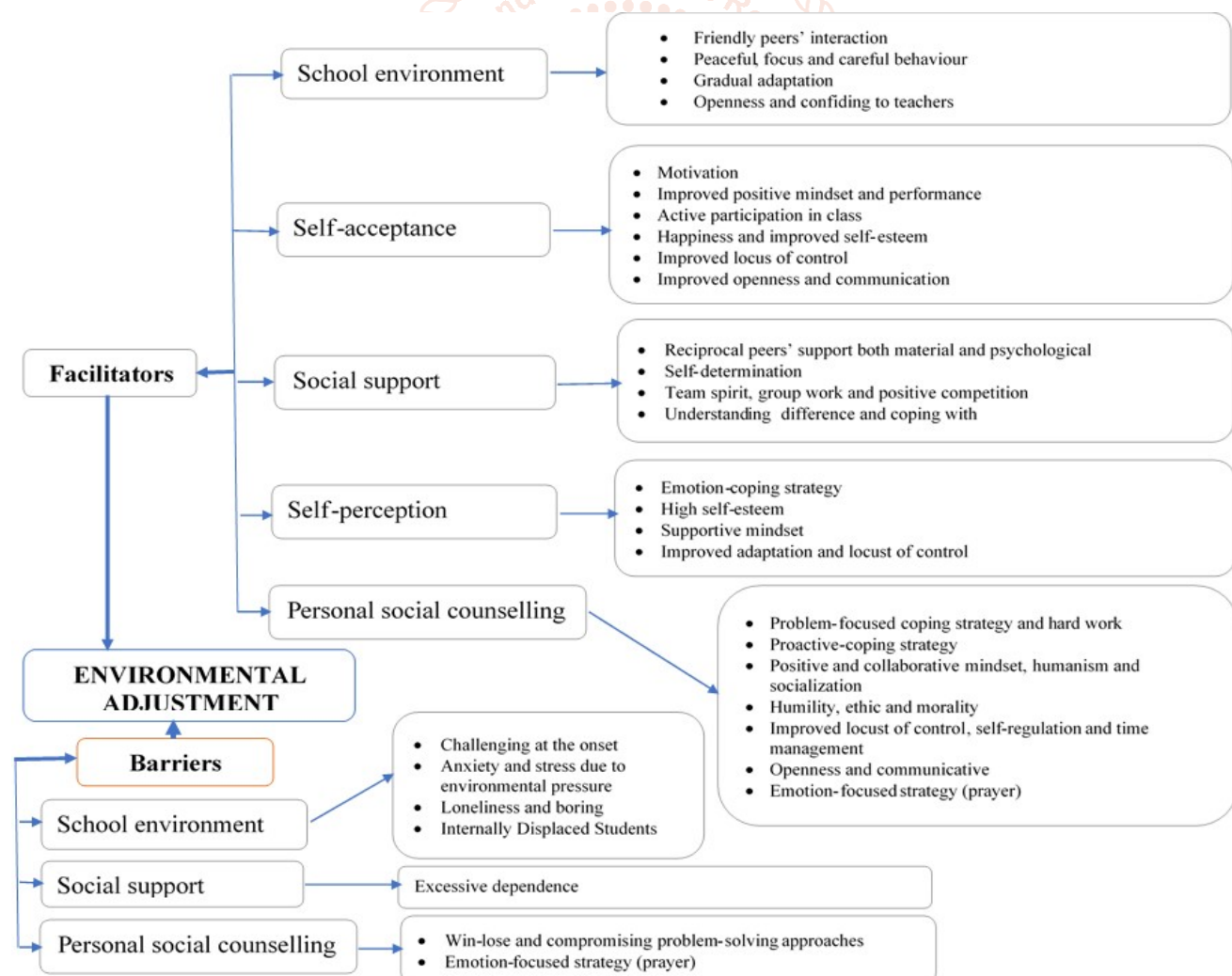
Figure 1: Conceptual diagram depicting environmental adjustment dynamism of secondary school students

References
School Environment

These qualitative findings unfolded school environment as a major facilitator to students' environmental adjustment with impetuses as friendly peers' interaction, peaceful, focus and careful behavior, gradual adaptation and openness and confiding to teachers, thus portraying a happy environment, and by so doing corroborating the views of Ryan, Richard, Huta, Veronika; Deci, & Edward (2006) who revealed that self-acceptance, as a component of eudemonic well-being (EWB), is an indicator and a measure of psychosocial wellbeing. The importance of environmental factors in social adjustment as highlighted by this study is not anodyne. In fact, these findings support Brehm's (1966) behavioral constraint theory which states that there is a basic desire among human beings to maintain their behavioral freedom. As such, an environment is constraining when something is limiting or preventing an individual from achieving his intentions. Certain environmental conditions like noise, crowding, temperature, location or specific features such as bad weather, barriers, objective experiences such as control may be perceived as constraining by the individual. In such a situation, the person feels as being out of his / her control. This feeling of not being able to control the situation produces psychosocial reactance (Brehm, 1966). Focus and gradual adaptation expressed by students in this study context relieve Wortman & Brehm (1975) as they suggested that if failures or loss of control persist for a longer period of time without any chances of restoration, the individual will cease to make any instrumental efforts and thus enter into a helplessness state and become a social burden.

Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance surfaced as major facilitator to environmental adjustment with related features such as motivation, improved positive mindset and performance, active participation in class, happiness and improved self-esteem, improved locus of control, improved openness and communication. Popov, Miklos & Biro (2016) by revealing a significant three-way interaction between the level of unconditional self-esteem, the type of feedback and the satisfaction with feedback while examining the effects of unconditional self-acceptance on adjustment, align with the findings of the current study. By clearly setting forward the synergic effect of self-esteem, locust of control and communication in various aspects as galvanizing dynamism and operationalization of self-acceptance, Popov et al (2016) further corroborate these findings. The findings of this study highlighted positive mindset as

an important characteristic of self-acceptance thus supporting the work of Henriques & Gregg (2014) who stated that a person who scores high on self-acceptance has a positive self-attitude.

Social Support

Reciprocal peers' support both material and psychological, self-determination, team spirit and group work, positive competition, and understanding difference and coping with were major manifestations of social support in this study context. Most of these indicators were also highlighted by Bama (2019) who revealed that educational factors, emotional factors and self-concept have a significant effect on adjustment among secondary school students, though a moderate correlation was appreciated between social support and adjustment. In a nutshell, by stressing more psychosocial factors associated with social support, Bama (2019) strongly corroborates the findings of this study. Team spirit and group work, positive competition, and understanding difference and coping with, and gradual adjustment were major virtues that surfaced in this study context, thus supporting the theory Schlosberg's (1981) Transition Theory which fosters our understanding of a typical existential dynamism whereby people moved through life and continuously experience change and these changes often result in new networks of relationships, new behaviors and new self-perceptions. There is need to understand individuals, their personalities, culture and context, social interactions and relationships shared. Secondary school students continuously do not experience transactions which do not usually occur in a defined or prescribed order nor does everyone experience this transaction in same manner. That is why the success of transition is dependent on the support individuals receive from the different stakeholders in the process of transition in other to adjust smoothly, thus the consequential relativeness. Understanding difference and coping with was an obvious manifestation of adaptive mindset by students, thus supporting the Adaptation-Level Theory by Helson (1964) which presents an active and dynamic relation of the student with his / her environment. The theory emphasized the interrelationship of humans to their environment. Adaptation-level theorists speak specifically of two processes that make up this relationship; the processes of adaptation and change whereby organisms either adapt (i.e., change their response to the environment) or they adjust (i.e., change the environment with which they are interacting). Self-determination was another quality depicted by findings of this study, thus establishing a coherent with Brehm's (1966) behavioral constraint theory which states that there is a basic desire among human

beings to maintain their behavioral freedom. As such an environment is constraining when something is limiting or preventing an individual from achieving his intentions. Furthermore, the study supports Brehm's (1966) Behavior Constraint Theory by considering the student's internal characteristics and the external environment, BCT offers insight into the ways in which behavior is shaped and constrained. This theory holds the promise of helping researchers and practitioners to better understand and predict behavior in a variety of contexts. School environment also acted a barrier in this study context in various ways; challenging at the onset, anxiety and stress due to environmental pressure, loneliness and boring, and the specificity of Internally Displaced Students. In line with a major indicator highlighted here, Teresa and Brown (2010) who investigated the apparent significance of perceived social support for emotional health and well-being reported a clear inverse association between social support and depression.

Self-Perception

The findings depicted emotion-coping strategy, high self-esteem, supportive mindset, improved adaptation and locust of control, thus corroborating with Kathy et al., (1991) who established relationships between self-perception, social skills, overall adjustment, and social inhibition. By establishing high self-esteem as a virtue and major impetus of environmental adjustment, this study is in line with the view offered by Pershey (2010), who noted that students who do not perceive themselves as able, who lack confidence, or who have diminished school satisfaction may be at risk for school disengagement. In this very perspective, the study is in line with Stringer & Heath (2008) who pointed out that self-perception of student environmental adjustment and academic competence cannot play a simple, causal role in academic achievement. By highlighting self-esteem as major supportive factor to environmental adjustment, the findings support Rogers (1942, 1959) Person-Centred Theory which emphasized that we want to feel experience and behave in ways which are consistent with our self-image and which reflect what we would like to be like, our ideal-self. The closer our self-image and ideal-self are to each other, the more consistent or congruent we are and the higher our sense of self-worth. Still to Rogers (1959), persons are said to be in a state of incongruence if some of the totality of their experience is unacceptable to them and is denied or distorted in the self-image. Incongruence is "a discrepancy between the actual experience of the organism and the self-picture of the individual insofar as it represents that experience. As we prefer to see ourselves in ways that are consistent with our self-image, we may use defense mechanisms

like denial or repression in order to feel less threatened by some of what we consider to be our undesirable feelings (Rogers, 1959).

Personal Social Counseling

Problem-focused coping strategy, hardworking spirit, proactive-coping strategy, positive and collaborative mindset, humanism and socialization, humility and ethic and morality, improved locust of control, self-regulation and time management, openness, communicative, and emotion-focused strategy (prayer) surfaced as supportive factors to environmental adjustment, though emotion-focused strategy (prayer) added to win-lose and compromising problem-solving approaches positioned themselves more as setbacks or barriers to environmental adjustment. By highlighting more proactive and problem-focused or problem-solving strategy coupled with sustained effort for adaptation, this study context portrays high discrepancy with that of Nazir and Özçiçek (2023) who studied the adjustment challenges and personal counseling of Arab female international secondary school students in Türkiye. The findings of their study revealed that although their pre-arrival expectations were almost met, they encountered various problems, ranging from cultural differences in daily activities to discrimination. It was also found that many of them were reluctant to ask for help, and to cope with adjustment problems, they usually used maladaptive or dysfunctional coping strategies such as avoidance and isolation. However, emotion-focused strategy (prayer) added to win-lose and compromising problem-solving approaches were equally considered maladaptive or dysfunctional coping strategies in this study context, thus aligning with the findings of Nazir and Özçiçek (2023). In fact, emotion-focused strategy with prayer as its main manifestation in this study context is generally considered an avoidant coping approach more likely to suppress inherent human potentials such as self-esteem, determinism and pragmatism and much more essential problem-focused coping strategy. Counseling however becomes crucial in such context where win-lose and compromising problem-solving approaches might prevail, in order to promote more reconciling approach to problem or conflict resolution without suppressing the self-esteem of students, for a more peaceful and collaborative learning environment. This study depicted proactive-coping strategy, improved locust of control and self-regulation as major assets to environmental adjustment, thus supporting the Schlosberg's (1981) Transition Theory. There is need to understand individuals, their personalities, culture and context, social interactions and relationships shared. Again,

the findings support Brehm's (1966) behavioral constraint theory.

Conclusion

As depicted by the model of figure 1, school environment, psychosocial wellbeing, self-acceptance, social support, self-perception and personal social counseling affect environmental adjustment of secondary school students. The findings highlighted facilitators and barriers to environmental adjustment. Facilitating factors related to school environment ranged from friendly peers' interaction, peaceful, focus and careful behavior, gradual adaptation, openness and confiding to teachers. As for self-acceptance, they were motivation, improved positive mindset and performance, active participation in class, happiness and improved self-esteem, improved locus of control, and improved openness and communication. With respect to social support, they were reciprocal peers' support both material and psychological, self-determination, team spirit, group work and positive competition, understanding difference and coping with. As for self-perception, they ranged from emotion-coping strategy, high self-esteem, supportive mindset, and improved adaptation and locust of control. Concerning personal social counseling, they were problem-focused coping strategy and hard work, proactive-coping strategy, positive and collaborative mindset, humanism and socialization, humility, ethic and morality, improved locust of control, self-regulation and time management, openness and communicative, emotion-focused strategy (prayer). As for the barriers related to social environment, they were challenging at the onset, with anxiety and stress due to environmental pressure, loneliness and boring with the obvious issues related to internally displaced students equally set forward. The challenge linked to social support was excessive dependence in some cases. As for personal social counseling, win-lose and compromising problem-solving approaches coupled with emotion-focused strategy (prayer) could be detrimental.

Recommendations

As for the implications for counseling, counselors should consider and contextualize these barriers and facilitators in their counseling strategies as to enhance environmental adjustment of students.

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