**Original Research Article**

# Self-Acceptance and The Environmental Adjustment of Students in Fako Division Southwest Region of Cameroon

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of self-acceptance on the environmental adjustment of students in Fako Division Southwest Region of Cameroon. The study employed the mixed methods approach notably the sequential-explanatory in a triangulation design. In this perspective, typical triangulation instruments which are structured questionnaire for students and interview guides for both students and guidance counsellors were used. The schools and students were selected in the study using the simple random sampling technique in order not to be biased. Equally, all the guidance counsellors within schools were targeted. A total of 380 students were validated for the final data analysis and 20 guidance counsellors. Information from the questionnaires were digitalized with the support of EpiData 3.1 and descriptive and inferential statistical analysis were analysed with the support of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 and findings presented according to the research questions/hypotheses. Descriptively, of the 380 students validated, findings revealed that majority (82.9%) respondents have a positive self-acceptance while few (17.1%) had a negative self-acceptance. This shows that student's self-acceptance influenced their environmental adjustment. Findings from interviews with students and counsellors further indicated that students' feelings of themselves positively affect their self-acceptance and consequently environmental adjustment. Statistically, the variability explained by this model was significant (Omnibus Test of Model Coefficient: $\chi2=688.480$; $df=368$; $P=0.000$). This therefore implies that this predictive component significantly predicts secondary school students' environmental adjustment though with a weak Explanatory Power (EP) / Predictive Power of 5.7% (Nagelkerke R Square=0.057), thus implying that if students improve their self-acceptance, they will adjust better in the environment. Hence, self-acceptance has a significant effect on the environmental adjustment of students. The quantitative data obtained from the field with the aid of copies of questionnaire were analysed using both the descriptive and inferential statistics to present the distribution of subjects between and within subsets. In the Descriptive analysis, the questionnaire was made essentially of categorical variables and data were analysed using counting techniques namely frequency and proportions while Multiple-Responses- Analysis was specifically, used to calculate the aggregate score for conceptual components. As for the qualitative textual data, their abstraction was reduced through the systematic process of thematic analysis. The qualitative data obtained from the field with the aid of an interview guide was analysed with the aid of a well demarcated phase labelled thematic-content analysis and pre-coding. Findings were organized in code-grounding-quotation tables whereby codes were clearly described, followed by their grounding or frequency of occurrence 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 and their descriptions can be subjective to relative error, the quotations are grounded and real and thus help compensate for potential bias. Thematically, self-acceptance enhanced students' environmental adjustment as they feel loved, happy, optimistic, and self-confident, motivated to learn, goal-oriented, improved critical thinking ability, collaborative spirit and social relationships, and enhanced coping strategies, and reduced stress and anxiety. On the other hand, feeling disrespected and frustrated acted as hindering factors. Counselling was a major impetus to students' self-acceptance. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that the self-acceptance of students and related counselling strategies be enhanced as to improve and sustain their environmental adjustment. Also, recommendations were made for consideration by different stakeholders and suggestions for further research were provided. Furthermore, the findings of the study were interpreted within the Behaviour-Constraint, the PERMA Model, and Ryan and Deci Self-Determination theoretical framework*

*Keywords:* *Self-acceptance, Environmental adjustment, Secondary school Students.*

# Introduction

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. Self-acceptance plays a pivotal role in students' psychosocial well-being and overall academic success. It encompasses recognizing and valuing one's strengths and weaknesses, leading to healthier self-esteem and resilience (Lysaker et al., 2013).

Furthermore, self-acceptance as a person's acceptance of their worth and identity irrespective of external conditions or societal pressures, is used to describe a person's overall sense or confidence of self-worth, abilities, self-respect or personal value. Further, it involves 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 behaviours 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 one appreciates and like oneself. It also means accepting oneself for who one is irrespective of the economic, social and political conditions. Hence accepting oneself makes one to like and love oneself just as one is without struggling with complex.

Worthy of note is the fact that self-acceptance is intricately associated with positive mental health outcomes, including reduced anxiety and depression, as well as enhanced motivation and performance in academic contexts (Gomez & Zhang, 2019).

Self-acceptance is considered the prerequisite for change to occur. It can be achieved by stopping criticizing and solving the defects of one's self, and then accepting them to be existing within one's self. That is, tolerating oneself to be imperfect in some parts. A person who scores high on self-acceptance: has a positive self-attitude, acknowledges and accepts all aspects of themselves (including the good and bad), is not self-critical or confused about their identity, and, does not wish they were any different from who they already are (Henriques, Gregg 2014).

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 safe, 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.

# Background to the study

The concept of self-acceptance has evolved significantly over time, influenced by various philosophical, psychological, and sociocultural factors. Philosophical traditions have addressed the concept of self-acceptance in various forms. Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Aristotle, emphasized the importance of self-knowledge. Socrates famously stated, "Know thyself," advocating for a deep understanding of one's own nature (Rosen, 2005). Aristotle introduced concepts of virtue ethics that encourage individuals to accept their nature and strive for personal excellence, which aligns closely with the notion of accepting oneself as part of moral development (Crisp, 2000).

The modern psychological discourse on self-acceptance gained momentum in the 20th century, paralleling the rise of humanistic psychology. Pioneers such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow emphasized the importance of self-acceptance for personal growth and self-actualization. Rogers posited that self-acceptance is critical for fostering a positive self-concept and achieving psychological well-being (Rogers, 1961). Maslow, in his hierarchy of needs, suggested that self-esteem and self-acceptance are fundamental to achieving higher levels of psychological health (Maslow, 1943).

In recent decades, self-acceptance has been framed within the contexts of positive psychology and mindfulness practices. Psychologists like Kristin Neff have defined self-acceptance as an essential aspect of self-compassion, emphasizing its role in mental health (Neff, 2011). Research has increasingly linked self-acceptance with various positive outcomes, including resilience, emotional regulation, and overall life satisfaction (Keng et al., 2011).

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 asocial 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).

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 dead 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, students' secondary school 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, though 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).

Self-acceptance is the act of accepting oneself and all ones' personality traits exactly as they are. One accepts them no matter whether they are positive or negative. This includes individual's physical and mental attributes. Self-acceptance means recognizing that individuals' value goes beyond their personal attributes and actions. This is sometimes known as radical self-acceptance. Self-acceptance gives individuals more confidence in themselves and makes them less vulnerable to criticism. It means to deeply and totally accept every aspect of themselves unconditionally and without exception (Waters, 2021).

It is imperative to note that self-acceptance is crucial to secondary school students' adjustment this is because the absence of the ability to unconditionally accept oneself can lead to a variety of emotional difficulties, including uncontrolled anger and depression (Carson, 2006). The student who is caught up in self-evaluation rather than self-acceptance may also be very needy and may devote considerable attention and personal resources to self-aggrandizement (bragging) in other to compensate for perceived personal deficits.

One of the simplest and most natural methods of reducing self-evaluation and replacing it with acceptance is to assume a mind-set of mindfulness rather than mindlessness (Keyes, 2002). Mindlessness is a flexible cognitive state that results from drawing novel distinctions about the situation and the environment. When one is mindful, one is actively engaged in the present and sensitive to both context and perspective. The mindful condition is both the result of, and the continuing cause of, actively noticing new things, thus stability in mental operation and hence adjustment (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002).

To achieve self-acceptance, individuals must learn to accept the parts of themselves they consider negative or undesirable. It's also important to acknowledge and celebrate their positive qualities and achievements. Reviewing their goals and their progress on them reminds them of their strengths. This is why so many people struggle with self-acceptance. They tend to hide, neglect, and reject the parts of themselves they consider unacceptable. They would rather change them than accept them. Although it might seem counterintuitive, total self-acceptance can actually help individuals change the aspects of themselves that they might be less fond of. A sign of emotional intelligence is having an awareness of individuals' limitations which is the first step on the path of personal growth. This therefore implies that self-acceptance does not just mean accepting individuals' negative qualities and giving up on changing them. Thus, on the contrary, it means being aware of individuals' weaknesses without having any emotional attachment to them. Shonna, (2021) averts that self-awareness can help build better habits and hence improve our behaviour.

Self-acceptance extends beyond mere self-esteem; it involves a comprehensive acknowledgment and appreciation of oneself, including both positive and negative aspects. According to Neff (2011), self-acceptance aligns closely with self-compassion, where individuals treat themselves with kindness during times of suffering or failure rather than self-criticism. This perspective distinguishes self-acceptance from a more superficial notion of self-esteem, which can fluctuate based on external validation and achievements (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

Self-acceptance correlates with various positive outcomes, including lower levels of anxiety and depression and increased resilience (Keng et al., 2011). However, there is critical discourse surrounding the potential pitfalls of self-acceptance. Some scholars argue that excessive self-acceptance might lead to complacency or reduced motivation for self-improvement (Flett et al., 2016). This paradox suggests that while self-acceptance is vital for mental health, it is equally important to balance acceptance with a desire for personal growth. Within the educational domain, the environment significantly influences students' levels of self-acceptance.

Environmental adjustment refers to how effectively students adapt to their surrounding contexts—whether social, cultural, or institutional. This adjustment is crucial for students, particularly those transitioning to new educational settings, as it impacts their ability to thrive academically and socially (Baker & Siryk, 1984). A supportive environment can foster self-acceptance by promoting inclusivity, understanding, and opportunities for self-exploration (Rosenberg, 2014).

Environmental adjustment encompasses the continuous process in which a person varies his behaviour to produce a more harmonious relationship between himself and his environment (Malami, 2017). In synergy with this, Joe et al., (2020), confirmed that environmental adjustment incorporates a student's interaction with his or her environment that fosters the acquisition of may be physical or behavioural competencies, which will help an organism to survive better in the

environment Also, in this study it depicts that 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 behaviour, physical characteristics, or other traits to better fit the environment (Joe et al., 2011).

Research indicates that students who experience positive environmental adjustments reported higher levels of self-acceptance (Schmitt et al., 2016). For instance, when institutions create nurturing environments that encourage open dialogue and peer support, students are more likely to engage in self-reflection and embrace their identities. Conversely, a negative school climate, characterized by bullying or discrimination, can hinder self-acceptance, leading to detrimental effects on mental health and academic performance (Wang et al., 2019).

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.

Self-acceptance is crucial to secondary school students' adjustment in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. The absence of the ability to unconditionally accept oneself can lead to a variety of emotional difficulties, including uncontrolled anger and depression (Carson, 2006). The student who is caught up in self-evaluation rather than self-acceptance may also be very needy and may devote considerable attention and personal resources to self-aggrandizement (bragging) in other to compensate for perceived personal deficits. One of the simplest and most natural methods of reducing self-evaluation and replacing it with acceptance is to assume a mind-set of mindfulness rather than mindlessness (Sarason et al., 1991).

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 and Astin (1984) carried out a study, in which they emphasized incorporating secondary school experiences and other environments into a bioecological 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 6 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 outcome 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 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 behaviour has been labelled by Bandura as 'self-efficacy'. Self-efficacy has been identified as significant factors that are related to secondary school student 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 and colleagues (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).

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 of Cameroon 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 linked to 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: these are just some of the traumas affecting the adjustment of the Cameroonian population as well as secondary school students' living in Fako Division South west 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 Territorial Administration (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. No one ever thinks about adjustment. Nobody takes 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).

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 South West 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.

Furthermore, this study was guided by the Behaviour-Constraint theory by Brehm's (1966), 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.

First, the Behaviour-Constraint theory by Brehm's (1966). The development of the behavioural constraint theory comes from Brehm's (1966) reactance theory which states that there is a basic desire among human beings to maintain their behavioural 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. Behaviour-Constraint Theory is relevant in this study in that it provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding and predicting human behaviour in a variety of contexts.

Second, 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.

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 and 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. Proceeding, the variables to be measured here includes; self-acceptance, social support, self-perception and strategies

From the contextual perspective, it can be inferred that self-acceptance and environmental adjustment are emerging fields in Cameroon. The social context of self-acceptance 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 South West Region. Fako Division South West 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 in diverse ways 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 other 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 in 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 their self-acceptance, 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 concern to study the effect of psychosocial well-being on secondary school students' 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, behaviour, 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 self-acceptance 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 behaviours detrimental and harmful to both the students and the community. Thus, a need for proper self-acceptance 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 self-acceptance on secondary school students' environmental adjustment.

## Research objective

This study aimed at exploring the influence of self-acceptance on the environmental adjustment of secondary school students' in Fako Division Southwest Region of Cameroon.

## Justification of the Study

The concerns on the effects of self-acceptance on the environmental adjustment of students' sand 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 self-acceptance and effects on the environmental adjustment of students have been, as revealed by literature.

However, similar studies such as self- esteem and the mental health in early adolescence: development and gender differences in Switzerland by (Bolognini, 1996), have been carried out in other African countries and the western world. In Cameroon, self- acceptance and environmental adjustment services are still emerging disciplines. Thus, there is a wide gap in this area of self-acceptance 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 mars the teaching learning process.

Equally, because of deficiency in self-acceptance and environmental adjustment, students have been known for manifesting maladaptive behaviours 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 rights 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 south west 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 south west region (Nkeze, 2020). The manifestation of these socially deviant behaviours 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 self-acceptance and environmental adjustment is because their autonomy has been seized from them, their self-acceptance, social support, self-perception and personal social counselling, 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 behaviours harmful to individuals, their families and communities and poor academic performance.

## 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 counsellors.

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 counsellors for clarifying any doubts that crop up.

Second, the study will help guardians /Parents to be sensitive to any behavioural change in their children and try to give choices to children that will help them make informed decisions.

Third, to the teachers it will also help them identify the strength and weaknesses, positive and negative capacities of students and encourage them to improve their faculties. And raise their expectations as to positively impact on their well-being hence performance.

Furthermore, the study will play a positive role in the overall development of students in their community. Organize stress-relieving programmes in schools and the community for students can only be major assets to their well-being and academic performance.

More so, it will provide to the government and counsellors healthy-based counselling for regular monitoring of distressed students.

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 self-acceptance on secondary school students' environmental adjustment which could be used for other related researches in Cameroon.

## Scope of the Study
Geographically, the area of study was Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon.

Content wise, the study is limited to examining the influence of self-acceptance on secondary school students' environmental adjustment.

Theoretically, this study was guided first, by the Behaviour-Constraint theory by Brehm's (1966), the Martin Seligman's PERMA Model (2002), and the Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000).

Methodologically, the study employed the mixed methods approach notably the sequential-explanatory in a triangulation design. In this perspective, typical triangulation instruments which are structured questionnaire for students and interview guides for both students and guidance counsellors were used, whereby qualitative data were collected to substantiate the trend of quantitative data (Creswell & Plano, 2011, Nana, 2018). This view concurs with that of McMillan and Schumacher (2006), who state that in a triangulation design, the researcher simultaneously gathers both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a better understanding of the research problem.

## 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 centre Region of Cameroon and precisely in Fako Division in the Southwest region. The study site constituted the following localities of Fako Division: Buea, Limbe, Idenau, Mutengene and Tiko. These four

localities chosen constituted both urban and semi-urban settlements. This was done in order to ensure that the views of students were gotten from a cross-section of schools in Fako Division. Fako Division 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. The area covers inhabitants of different ethnic groups though the native of the Division are the Bakweri people. All the localities selected for the study share certain common characteristics.

## Population of the study

The population is made up of secondary school students and guidance counsellors. The population as presented on table 1, constituted 38,762 students from public schools. 9,222 students from technical school shared into 11 schools,29,540 from public general shared into 28 schools, 8,975 from confessional schools, shared into 17 schools, and 19,835 from lay private schools shared into 68, making a total of 67,572 secondary school students Fako division shared into 124 schools. As for the guidance counsellors, they were 206 in total.

## Table 1: Population of the Study

| S/N | Type of school | G/C | Males | Females | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Buea** | Public Schools | 93 | 7283 | 9497 | 16780 |
| | Confessional schools | | 2610 | 1764 | 4374 |
| | Lay Private schools | | 2920 | 4562 | 7482 |
| | **Total** | | **12813** | **15823** | **28636** |
| **Limbe** | Public Schools | **68** | 6505 | 6919 | 13424 |
| | Confessional schools | | 591 | 3060 | 3651 |
| | Lay Private schools | | 2431 | 3610 | 6088 |
| | **Total** | | **9527** | **13589** | **23116** |
| **Muyuka** | Public Schools | | 91 | 161 | 252 |
| | Confessional schools | **10** | 00 | 00 | 00 |
| | Lay Private schools | | 00 | 00 | 00 |
| | **Total** | | **91** | **161** | **252** |
| **Tiko** | Public Schools | **30** | 3879 | 3958 | 78+37 |
| | Confessional schools | | 443 | 507 | 950 |
| | Lay Private schools | | 2943 | 2952 | 5895 |
| | **Total** | | **7265** | **7417** | **14682** |
| **West Coast** | Public Schools | **5** | 302 | 167 | 469 |
| | Confessional schools | | 00 | 00 | 00 |
| | Lay Private schools | | 183 | 234 | 417 |
| | **Total** | | **485** | **401** | **886** |
| **Grand Total** | Public Schools | **206** | 18060 | 20702 | 38762 |
| | Confessional schools | | 3644 | 5331 | 8975 |
| | Lay Private schools | | 8477 | 11358 | 19835 |
| | **Total** | | **30181** | **37391** | **67572** |

**Source**: Regional Delegation for Secondary Education of the South West Region, 2024/2025 Academic year.

## 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. It consisted of 66434 students (29605 males 36829 females) as presented on table 2 above. As for the guidance counsellors they are still the 206.

## 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. It consisted of 43146 students (18740 males and 24406 females) as presented on table 2. Again, the population consisted of 27514 students from public schools, 6915 students from confessional schools and 8717 students from lay private schools. As for the guidance counsellors, they were 20 (table 2).

**Table 2: Accessible population of the study**

| Locality | School Type | School | Males | Females | Total | GC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Buea | Public schools | GTHS BUEA | 2078 | 946 | 3024 | 1 |
| | | BGS MOLYKO | 2223 | 3810 | 6033 | 1 |
| | | GHS BUEA | 545 | 855 | 1400 | 1 |
| | | GHS BUEA TOWN | 502 | 862 | 1364 | 1 |
| | | GBHS MUEA | 512 | 800 | 1312 | 1 |
| | | TOTAL | **5860** | **7273** | **13133** | **5** |
| | Confessional | BHS BUEA | 345 | 280 | 625 | 1 |
| | | PCSS BUEA | 388 | 422 | 810 | |
| | | BCHS BUEA | 388 | 514 | 902 | |
| | | BISHOP JULES PETERS | 254 | 303 | 557 | |
| | | **TOAL** | **1375** | **1519** | **2894** | **1** |
| | Lay private | INTER COMP HS BUEA | 381 | 825 | 1206 | |
| | | SUMMERSET BHS BUEA | 620 | 950 | 1570 | |
| | | **ST. THERESE ISS MOLYKO** | **398** | **540** | **938** | |
| | | NABESK CC BUEA | 256 | 478 | 734 | 1 |
| | | TOTAL | **1655** | **2793** | **4448** | **1** |
| | **TOTAL** | **SUB-TOTAL** | **8890** | **11585** | **20475** | |
| Limbe | Public | GBTHS LIMBE | 2482 | 532 | 3014 | 1 |
| | | GHS LIMBE | 1011 | 1650 | 2661 | 1 |
| | | GBHS LIMBE | 1579 | 2712 | 4291 | 1 |
| | | TOTAL | **5072** | **4894** | **9966** | **4** |
| | Confessional | PGSS LIMBE | 0 | 350 | 350 | 1 |
| | | PCHS LIMBE | 141 | 413 | 554 | |
| | | SAKER BAPTIST LIMBE | 0 | 1146 | 1146 | 1 |
| | | ST. ANN HIGH SCHOOL LIMBE | 320 | 701 | 1021 | |
| | | TOTAL | **461** | **2610** | **3071** | **2** |
| | Lay Private | NEW HORIZON INTAL LIMBE | 202 | 343 | 545 | |
| | | UNIC S.S. LIMBE | 134 | 316 | 450 | |
| | | KINGS BILINGUAL. C.C.C. WOTUTU | 422 | 388 | 810 | 1 |
| | | TOTAL | **758** | **1047** | **1805** | **1** |
| | | **SUB-TOTAL** | **6291** | **8551** | **14842** | **14** |
| Tiko | Public | GBHS TIKO | 608 | 1130 | 1738 | 1 |
| | | GTHS TIKO | 916 | 384 | 1300 | 1 |
| | | GBHS MUTENGENE | 378 | 999 | 1377 | 1 |
| | | TOTAL | **1902** | **2513** | **4415** | **3** |
| | Confessional | CKC TIKO | 202 | 248 | 450 | |
| | | REGINA PACIS MUTENGENE | 241 | 259 | 500 | 1 |
| | | TOTAL | **443** | **507** | **950** | **1** |
| | Lay Private | FETCOL MUTENGENE | 472 | 441 | 913 | 1 |
| | | SURE, FOUNDATION TIKO | 360 | 621 | 981 | 1 |
| | | SPOTLIGHT TIKO | 382 | 188 | 570 | |
| | | TOTAL | **1214** | **1250** | **2464** | **2** |
| | | **SUB-TOTAL** | **3559** | **4270** | **7829** | **20** |
| | | PUBLIC SCHOOLS | 12834 | 14680 | 27514 | 13 |
| | | CONFESSIONAL SCHOOLS | 2279 | 4636 | 6915 | 4 |
| | **GRAND TOTAL** | LAY PRIVATE SCHOOLS | 3627 | 5090 | 8717 | 3 |
| | | **TOTAL** | **18740** | **24406** | **43146** | **20** |

TF=Total Female; TM=Total Male; GT; Grand Total; GC=Guidance Counsellors

## 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 disfavour 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 schools were finally drawn and recorded. The students were sampled conveniently while all the guidance counsellors were targeted.

## Sample

Sample size was estimated using sample calculation for one population proportion with the support of Epi Info 6.04d (CDC, 2001) as explained by Nana (2018).

$$n=\frac{NZ^2P(1-P)}{d^2(N-1)+Z^2P(1-P)}$$

Where N=total population, Z= Z value corresponding to the confidence level, d= absolute precision, P=expected proportion in the population, n effective=n*design effect (DEFF).

The following additional parameters were used to estimate the sample size:

d= 5%; d is the precision or margin of error; the smaller the precision, the higher the sample size, the reliability and validity of the data. Higher precision reduces the bias related to sampling effect.

P=50%; this is the probability value and 50% is used for optimal sample size. When the population is homogenous with respect to the characteristics under study, the variability is thus low, therefore implying either high or small probabilistic value. When this value tends toward 100%, the variability expressed in term of Standard Deviation reduces highly, thus the sample size. By taking 50%, that is the medium value of the variability, we have an optimal sample size.

DEFF=1.1. This is the Design Effect; it is greater than 1 because convenience sampling and not simple random sampling is used as to improve the variability. In fact, the only sampling techniques that give equal chance to all individuals in the population to be sampled are simple random sampling and systematic sampling. As for other sampling techniques, to compensate for bias as deriving from the high potential risk of clustering the sampling, higher DEFFs are used as to improve the variability.

Confidence interval=95% giving a $Z_{\alpha/2}$ =level of significance = 1.96.

The sample size estimated based on the parameters above was 423 participants with the lower bound at 360. This sample size was distributed equally to the sampled schools. At the end, 380 students were validated for the study.

## Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using interview guides designed for students and guidance counselors respectively and a structured questionnaire for the students.

## Validity of the instruments and data validation
## 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 *et al.* (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 is used to develop strategies that would introduce standards of quality assurance in the processing and analysis of the data. The five strategies are identified in UNISA (2003). This considers credibility, transferability, comparability, dependability and conformability. The pilot study was conducted in a secondary school in Buea municipality. After the trial-testing phase, no issue was reported with the questionnaire. The reliability for the questionnaires was 0.806, which was quite satisfactory. Generally, any reliability coefficient of 0.5 and above is acceptable as a satisfactory measure of reliability (Amin, 2005; Nana, 2018), but convincing ones should be 0.7 or more on its standard scale of 0-1 (Nana, 2018). According to McMillan & Schumacher, (2001), the more heterogeneous a group is on the traits being measured or the greatest range of scores, the higher and more convincing the reliability. In this study, the sample was diversified in its demographic characteristics. Cronbach Alpha Reliability coefficient enabled the researcher to ascertain whether the internal consistency of the responses was satisfactory to an acceptable level (Cronbach, 1951; Nana, 2018).

## Data validation

The return rate was 89.8% for the students and 100% for the guidance counselors.

## Reliability analysis

As for the pilot study, the internal consistency assumption was not violated with reliability coefficient value of 0.761 for the conceptual component self-acceptance and 0.925 for the conceptual component environmental adjustment. Concerning the final study, Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients were equally very good, 0.795 for the conceptual

component self-acceptance and 0.964 for the conceptual component environmental adjustment. The variance were very close to 0 with values of 0.001 and 0.002 for self-acceptance and environmental adjustment respectively, thus implying that we are more likely to be faced with highly skewed distributions, with viewpoints tilting more toward positive or negative views or perceptions. In the other sense, respondents are more likely to be homogenous in their perceptions of the study indicators.

## Data collection process

An authorization to carry out the study was obtained from the Faculty of Education of the University of Buea. This authorization was presented to the heads of institution for administrative clearance. Learners and counselors were then briefed on the objective of the study, their consent sought, and they were then given the questionnaire for response. A face-to-face approach was used to collect the information.

## Ethical consideration

The protection of human subjects through the application of appropriate ethical principles is important in any research study. The researcher ensured that the subjects were aware of the purpose of the research and the manner in which it would be conducted. Participation in the research was voluntary, and withdrawal was possible at any time. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality. A letter of introduction and authorization was collected from the Faculty of Education, University of Buea, signed by the Vice Dean in charge of Research and Cooperation and addressed to the authorities of the various government and educational institutions to be visited by the researcher in line with the study. Ethical consideration and obligations are very necessary in any research work to respect participants' rights. The researcher sought the ascent and consent of the participants for them to willingly take part in order to give appropriate information for better results.

## Data management and analysis
## Quantitative data

Quantitative data was entered using EpiData Version 3.1 (EpiData Association, Odense Denmark, 2008) and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Standard version, Release 21.0 (IBM Inc. 2012). These structured questions were analyzed using frequency, proportions and multiple-responses analysis to aggregate score within conceptual component (IBM Inc. 2012, Nana, 2018). Statistics were presented in tables and charts. Hypothesis was tested using Binary Logistic Regression.

## Qualitative data analysis

The study employed a sequential exploratory mixed-method approach whereby beside a structured questionnaire dealing essentially with close-ended questions, qualitative information was collected via interviews. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and revised by the statistician. 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 and for frequency of concepts following the positivism principle, but the interpretation of findings was dominantly qualitative. However, the frequency or grounding also reflects how many times a concept emerged and was a major indicator of emphasis. 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-grounding-quotation tables whereby themes or codes were clearly explained or described, followed by their grounding or frequency of occurrence 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 code/concepts/umbrella terms and their descriptions can be subjective to relative error, the quotations are grounded and real and thus help compensate for potential bias (Nana, 2018).

## Demographic characteristics
## Guidance counsellors

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

## Students

This presents the demographic characteristics of the students with respect to their gender, home type, class and age bracket as presented on table 3 below. The sample consisted of majority (60%) females and some (40%) males. Again majority (63.9%) students lived under both parents, some (20.3%) lived with single parents, also few (10.3%) lived with separated parents and very few (5.5%) homes type was broken home. Similarly, majority (59.5%) students were in form 2, some (25.5%) were in form 3 and few (15%) were in form 1. Equally, most (48.4%) respondents were between the ages of 13-14 years, followed by some (20.5%) between the ages of 11-12 years, few (17.6%) between the ages of 15-16 years, very few (9.7%) were between 17-18 years and a minute (3.7%) were between 9-10 years.

**Table 3: Distribution of students by demographic characteristics**

|  | Characteristics | N | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Female | 228 | 60.0 |
|  | Male | 152 | 40.0 |
|  | **Total** | **380** | **100.0** |
| **Home type** | Broken Home | 21 | 5.5 |
|  | Separated parents (by death or divorce) | 39 | 10.3 |
|  | Single Parent | 77 | 20.3 |
|  | Under both Parents | 243 | 63.9 |
|  | **Total** | **380** | **100.0** |
| **Class** | Form 1 | 57 | 15.0 |
|  | Form 2 | 226 | 59.5 |
|  | Form 3 | 97 | 25.5 |
|  | **Total** | **380** | **100.0** |
| **Age group** | 9-10 | 14 | 3.7 |
|  | 11-12 | 78 | 20.5 |
|  | 13-14 | 184 | 48.4 |
|  | 15-16 | 67 | 17.6 |
|  | 17-18 | 37 | 9.7 |
|  | **Total** | **380** | **100.0** |

**Source**: Regional Delegation for Secondary Education of the South West Region, 2023/2024 Academic year

## Findings
## Self-acceptance and environmental adjustment of students'

The findings in this section bring out the influence of self-acceptance on secondary school student's environmental adjustment as presented in the sections below.

Students mostly, in their very strong majority (98.5%) respondents agreed that they are confident of themselves that they can succeed in life while a minute, followed by the 92.3% that agreed that they are always satisfied with the efforts they put to complete task, having the same percentage with those that agreed that they are happy when they are accepted by other people, then comes the (89.2%) respondents approved that they accept difficulties they encounter by thinking of good solutions, followed by the (80.5%) respondents that agreed that they feel comfortable about themselves when they are with other students, 76.9% that accepted that they do not question their worth as a person, 72.1% respondents agreed that they benefit from their strengths in interacting with peers, while 61.3% of respondents approved that they feel secured in the school environment as they play with others been the least in this category of strong lexicography (table 4).

As for the weak lexicography grouping indicators with proportion below majority, thus with prospectively more negative effect, there was no indicator as all was above majority (table 4).

**Table 4: Distribution of students' perceptions of their self-acceptance**

| Statements | Stretched | | | | Collapsed | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | SA | A | D | SD | SA+A | D+SD |
| I am always satisfied with the efforts I put to complete task | 184 (48.4%) | 167 (43.9%) | 17 (04.5%) | 12 (03.2%) | 351 (92.3%) | 29 (07.7%) |
| I don't question my worth as a person, even if I think others do. | 136 (35.8%) | 156 (41.1%) | 61 (16.1%) | 27 (07.1%) | 292 (76.9%) | 88 (23.2%) |
| I am confident of myself that I can succeed in life | 308 (81.1%) | 66 (17.4%) | 02 (0.5%) | 04 (01.1%) | 374 (98.5%) | 06 (01.5%) |
| I accept difficulties I encounter by thinking of good solutions | 165 (43.4%) | 174 (45.8%) | 20 (05.3%) | 21 (05.5%) | 339 (89.2%) | 41 (10.8%) |
| I feel comfortable about myself when I am with other students | 81 (21.3%) | 160 (41.1%) | 46 (12.1%) | 28 (07.4%) | 306 (80.5%) | 74 (19.5%) |
| I feel secured in the school | 91 (23.9%) | 142 | 70 | 56 | 233 | 147 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| environment as I play with others | | (37.4%) | (18.4%) | (14.8%) | (61.3%) | (38.7%) |
| I benefit from my strengths in interacting with peers. | 104 (27.4%) | 170 (44.7%) | 61 (16.1%) | 45 (11.8%) | 274 (72.1%) | 106 (27.9%) |
| I am happy when I am accepted by other people | 219 (57.6%) | 132 (34.7%) | 12 (03.2%) | 17 (04.5%) | 351 (92.3%) | 29 (07.7%) |
| **Multiple Responses Set (MRS)** | **1324 (43.6%)** | **1196 (39.3%)** | **273 (09.0%)** | **247 (08.1%)** | **2520 (82.9%)** | **520 (17.1%)** |

In aggregate, as indicated by multiple-responses-analysis, students were satisfied with their self-acceptance potential at a strong majority weight of 82.9% (table 4, figure 1).
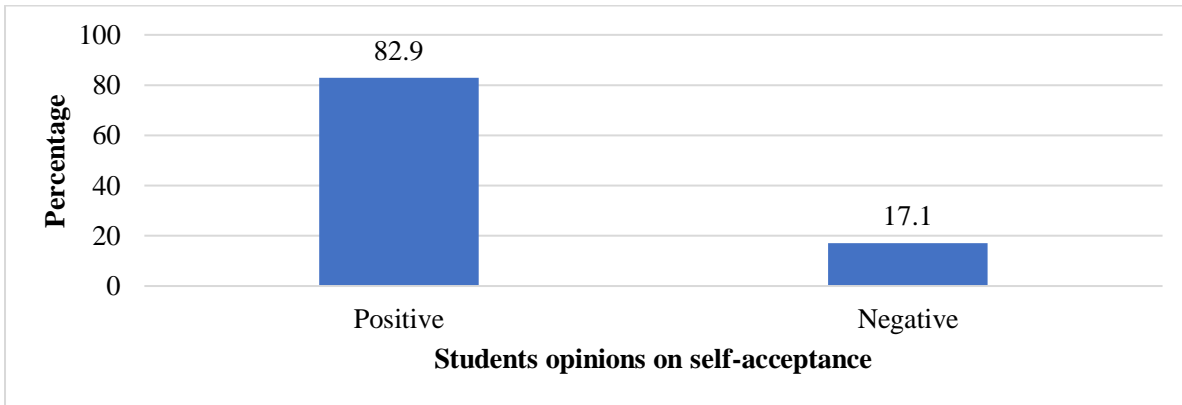


N=380.

**Figure 1: Students opinions on self-acceptance**

## Research hypothesis one: Self-acceptance has no significant effect on the environmental adjustment of students

The effect of self-acceptance on the environmental adjustment of students was further appraised using Logistic Regression Model. The results of the model are found on the table below.

## Table 5: Model fitting information and predictive power for the predictive component self-acceptance on secondary school students' environmental adjustment

| Likelihood Ratio test | Explanatory/predictive power of the model (Pseudo R-Square) based on Nagelkerke R Square |
|---|---|
| $\chi2=688.480$<br>df=368<br>P=0.000 | 0.057 |

*Dependent variable: Secondary school students' environmental adjustment.

The variability explained by this model was significant (Omnibus Test of Model Coefficient: $\chi2=688.480$; df=368; P=0.000). This therefore implies that this predictive component significantly predicts secondary school students' environmental adjustment with a weak Explanatory Power (EP) / Predictive Power of 5.7% (Nagelkerke R Square=0.057). Generally, if students improve on their self-acceptance, they will better adjust in the environment. Thus, the alternative of the hypothesis stated above is then accepted; therefore, implying self-acceptance has a significant effect on the environmental adjustment of students in Fako Division of the Southwest Region of Cameroon (table 5).

**Table 6: How self-acceptance improves on students' environmental adjustment**

| Themes | Groundings | Responses/Quotations |
|---|---|---|
| Builds confidence | 09 | "Helps them confidently fits themselves in their environment"<br>"It helps them not to feel timid or scared, threaten or frightened" |
| Social relationships | 08 | "it builds strong social relationships and It makes them build healthy relationships"<br>"It improves on their social life and good living" |
| Coping strategies | 06 | "It helps them develop coping strategies in their environment" |
| Focused on goals | 06 | "It helps them to focus on their goals." |
| Reduces stress and anxiety | 05 | "It reduces stress and anxiety." |
| Improves participation | 04 | "It increases students' participation in activities" |
| Feel comfortable | 05 | "It makes them feel more comfortable" |
| Respect one another | 04 | "They show respect for one another and to their elders" |
| Collaboration | 04 | "It helps them to collaborate with other people within their environment in their school issues" |

Interviews from counsellors on table 6 reveal that most students' self-acceptance improves as it builds confidence in students as an interviewee reiterated that it "helps them confidently fits themselves in their environment" and another stated that "it helps them not to feel timid or scared, threaten or frightened." Also, interviews indicated it improves social relationships of students as an interviewee pointed out that "it builds strong social relationships and It makes them build healthy relationships." One other stipulated that "It improves on their social life and good living." Furthermore, it improves coping strategies of students as an interviewee emphasised that "it helps them develop coping strategies in their environment." Similarly, counselling helps students to be focused on goals which are evident as an interviewee reiterated that "It helps them to focus on their goals." Likewise, counselling improves self-acceptance as it reduces stress and anxiety clearly seen as an interviewee insisted that "it reduces stress and anxiety." Moreover, it improves participation of students as an interviewee proclaimed that "it increases students' participation in activities." Correspondingly, it makes the students feel comfortable in their environment as an interviewee insisted that "it makes them feel more comfortable." Still, some interviewees stated that it improves respect of students on one another as one reiterated that "they show respect for one another and to their elders." Additionally, interviews pointed out that self-acceptance improve collaboration of students as an interviewee insisted that "it helps them to collaborate with other people within their environment in their school issues."

## Discussion

The findings revealed that there is a significant and positive effect of self-acceptance on the environmental adjustment of students. The findings indicated that students have a positive self-acceptance which influences their environmental adjustment. This is evident as the students indicated that they are always satisfied with the efforts they put to complete task, do not question their worth as a person, even if they think others. Also, they are confident of themselves that they can succeed in life; they accept difficulties they encounter by thinking of good solutions. The findings are in congruence with Garcia & Patel, (2016) who opined that students with higher self-acceptance show improved emotional regulation and adaptability to school environments over time. This is also in line with Ngwa, & Ngu (2022) Cross-sectional study which revealed that higher levels of self-acceptance reported better adaptation to students school environment, including improved relationships with peers and teachers, enhanced academic performance, and greater involvement in school activities. As such students feel comfortable about themselves when they are with other students and feel secured in the school environment as they play with others as they learn and benefit from their strengths in interacting with peers. Correspondingly they are happy when they are accepted by other people. This shows that the students have positive self-acceptance which they use to adjust in their environment. This therefore implies a general trend towards positive mindset and improved locust of control, which are in agreement with Seligman (2002) PERMA Model with five core elements of psychological wellbeing as the author argued that the positive emotion can help people enjoy the daily tasks in their lives and persevered with challenges, they will face by remaining optimistic about eventual outcomes. This highly corroborated qualitative findings. Qualitative findings unfolded social-acceptance a major facilitator to environmental adjustment with related factors 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 revealed 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 as they clearly set forward the synergic effect of self-esteem, locust of control and communication in various aspects as galvanizing dynamism and operationalization of self-acceptance. 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. Qualitative findings equally unfolded school environment as a major facilitator to students'

environmental adjustment with impetuses as friendly peers' interaction, peaceful, focus and careful behaviour, gradual adaptation and openness and confiding to teachers, thus portraying a happy environment. The importance of environmental factors in social adjustment as highlighted by this study is not anodyne. In fact, these findings support Ryan and Deci (2000) model which states that individuals possess autonomy with an innate determination toward psychosocial growth and development and the behavioural constraint theory which states that there is a basic desire among human beings to maintain their behavioural 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 (Nana, 2018). This is supported by Smith & Johnson, (2020) who suggested that if focus and gradual adaptation expressed by students relieve failures or loss of control persists for a longer period of time without any chances of restoration, the individual will cease to make any.

## Conclusion

The findings of research question one revealed that self-acceptance has a significant effect on the environmental adjustment of students. The findings showed that secondary school students have positive self-acceptance which influences their environmental adjustment. In this light secondary school students are well adjusted to their environment because they believe in themselves. Furthermore, the findings stated students' feelings of themselves affect their participation in school as the students get engaged in task, participate actively, get motivated, improve their thinking and set goals to achieve. Also, findings equally showed that counselling improve on self-acceptance of students through building students' self-confidence, improving their communication, addressing mental health issues, improve social life, builds self-esteem and learn coping mechanisms.

## Recommendations

Guidance counsellors should consider the outcome of this study to inform their strategies in enhancing the environmental adjustment of secondary school students. Also, recommendations were made for consideration by different stakeholders and suggestions for further research were provided.

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