

Violence in Secondary Schools in Cameroon: School Administrators Perspectives and Envisaged Solutions

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ABSTRACT

This paper is to bring out clear understanding of what school violence entails with particular reference to violence in secondary schools in Cameroon. Violence in schools had been existing but in recent years have gone to extreme with loss of lives recorded. Methodology shall be analytical using secondary information from texts and articles from online publications. Also, the paper shall use qualitative information sorted from school administrators from some selected secondary schools all over the Republic of Cameroon. Random sampling methodology was used to select seven regions from the ten regions. Regions selected were: littoral, south west, North, Adamawa, Far north, Centre and East regions. From each region two schools were selected using convenient and purposeful sampling methodology. Meaning we had fourteen schools and fourteen principals to respond to the unique question. The principals were asked a unique question thus: WHAT IN YOUR OPINION IS SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND WHA T ARE THE CAUSES. PLEASE HOW DO YOU THINK THE PHENOMENON CAN BE ERADICATED? The main outcome of this analytical and qualitative work reveals variety of views to eradicate violence. Central are emphasis be placed on morality courses, aspects of philosophy that allows students to take thoughtful actions, secondly, secondary education authorities should elevate the coefficient of citizenship education which will allow students who are more and more interested in civic education courses. Also PTA Assembly should take central stage in playing a key role. Remembering parents that the school cannot do the magic without the effort of home upbringing. Parents have to be involved in the process of educating children to be citizens morally upright.

INTRODUCTION

School violence refers to violence that takes place in a school setting. This involves physical, psychological, sexual, and bullying and cyber bullying violence. Physical attacks are common and recurrent on school property, attacks on teachers, students or any stakeholder of the school setting. Google.com makes us to know that an estimated 246 million children experience school violence every year; however girls and gender non- conformity people are disproportionately affected. School violence maybe committed by students, teachers, or other members of the school staff; however

violence by fellow students is the most common.

Aimee Daramus a licensed clinical psychologist, author of the book “understanding bipolar disorder” says if someone is deliberately harming someone or acting in a way that leaves someone feeling threatened, is school violence. In other words school violence illustrate a crisis in school which if not well managed could make a school a different environment. A school crisis (violence) needs a response. school administrators are not trained crisis administrators and to work well, and achieve better results in times of crises, needs planned actions set aside to preempt any eventual crisis in our schools. Normally, we cannot manage a school as usual when crisis hit. School administrators need special moves to handle schools when there is a crisis; it will not be business as usual. “violence situations disrupt routinized patterns, create an atmosphere of ambiguity, and cause leadership uncertainty” (Scott Morris, 2017). Due to the fact that school administrators are not trained to handle school violence, they inadvertently misstep in their response hence complicating the situation and prolonging the recovery. In a PhD research titled: “ leading during a crisis: are school leaders prepared?” the research student Carol Young wondered aloud if school leaders have perfect knowledge of running schools in times of crisis and propose special training for school leaders through in service training and also through pre- service training for school leaders appointed and lack the required crisis management skills.

According to Lori, I.(2010) school leaders carry great responsibility when a crisis occurs. Useful in all schools according to Lori, is to put in place school crisis management team to act in response or to preempt any crisis to occur.

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN CAMEROON SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Violence in secondary schools in Cameroon seems to be a pervasive problem which all stakeholders particularly students, teachers and school administrators have the daily task of dealing with it. They also have to unravel the complex dynamics of the different causes and effects of violence.

Some Cameroonians, have argued that the absence of corporal punishment enshrined in the 1998 orientation law on education is behind the rise of school violence in schools. In recent years in Cameroon secondary schools several cases abound; some leading to death. On the 17th November 2020, a student in Mouko high school centre region of Cameroon stabbed his fellow student to death. Still in the centre region (2020) a 15 year old student stabbed his mathematics teacher Njoni Tchakounte Maurice to death. This incident caused a lot of outrage in Cameroon education family as many teachers asked for the institution of corporal punishment.

Back in march 2019, a form 4 student of government bilingual high school, GBHS Deido Douala littoral region murdered his fellow form 4 student with a knife because he was mocked after performing poorly in an exam.

Clinical psychologist, Dr. Mireille Ndjie Ndjie blames this phenomenon to what she calls “ a society that allows everything “. He says “violence is as old as the world; it’s just that our society had a code of conduct, a set of rules and prohibitions that were well respected and that prevented actions. But today, we are in a society where everything is allowed. We no longer respect anyone; the roles are confused. It is also a society where parents no longer have the time to insist on the education of values and respect. It is a society where children are educated by television, by the street and by peers who have negative influence. We are in a society where drugs circulate everywhere and the drinking outlets rub shoulders with educational establishments. We are in a society where adults do not lead by example----where teachers can have a beer with their students ----a society that authorizes delinquency”.

The steady rise in school violence in Cameroon is not only a worrying concern but Cameroon authorities must act decisively to stamp out the ill.

It is worth noting that before 2020 there have also been several cases recorded of physical, psychological, bullying and sexual violence.

PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

School violence has eaten deep into the education system particularly the secondary education sub sector. This paper is to unravel the understanding of school violence and delve into what school administrators think manifest itself and also bring out ways of eradicating the phenomenon which is having enormous consequences on the educational system.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PAPER

All academic writing has as major role to help develop humanity. Its findings shall assist policy makers and educational planners to put in place structures and legislation that will reduce or eradicate violence in schools.

METHODOLOGY

The paper was analytical using secondary information from texts and articles from online publications. Random, purposeful and convenient sampling technique was used to select seven regions out of ten regions. Also qualitative unique question was asked the fourteen principals and their responses were presented indicating findings.

RESPONSES / FINDINGS WHICH THE FOURTEEN PRINCIPALS PRESENTED

UNIQUE QUALITATIVE QUESTION: what in your opinion is school violence and what are the causes and how do you think the phenomenon can be eradicated?

RESPONSES/FINDING ON WHAT IN THEIR OPINION IS THE MEANING OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE.

Responses in this domain were similar. Synthesizing their responses “school violence is deliberate attack by students, teachers or other personnel on the school environment that causes the school to be dysfunctional for a period of time. However, a principal opined that school violence is also a planned activity which mature after some days or weeks or even months. According to this principal when planned, its effects are well felt because its target or targets are touched effectively.

RESPONSES/FINDINGS REGARDING CAUSES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

The principals outlined varied causes as follows:

- poor academic performance: students who feel irritated due to poor academic results are like time bomb says a principal from the east region. He explained that they are ready to explode on any slight challenge in class.
- mental health condition: that some students have recurrent cerebral malaria and often unconsciously attack other students and teachers.
- absence of corporal punishment in school: argued that since this was removed in the school setting(1998 orientation law) students fear no one and act abnormally.
- bad peer influence: many principals were of the view that fairly good students join bad groups and make friends who influence their behavior.
- guidance counselors who partially do their job: some principals explained that guidance counselors do not do their job effectively especially regarding the moral upbringing of children. According to them guidance counselors in recent years concentrate on advising students on subject combination and how to pass exams.
- discipline masters who do not consider the plight of some children complain and circumstances. Some discipline masters create fear and rancor in school.

- some teachers who do not handle students professionally leading to poor student /teacher relationship hence tension in class and school.
- consumption of drugs, alcohol and tobacco by students leading to negative consequences.
- subjects which can lead to change of mind set and positive reflections not given heavier coefficients in the report cards. For example philosophy, citizenship education and moral /religious studies.

RESPONSES/FINDINGS ON HOW PRINCIPALS THOUGHT VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS CAN BE ERADICATED

- discipline masters must be well trained especially in psychology to handle students varied complaints. Many principals indicated that the minister of secondary education is already doing a good thing by appointing guidance counselors as discipline masters.
- having PTA meeting specifically on parental upbringing of children. In this regard principals said during this meeting, guidance counselors and some resource persons will be invited to present papers.
- seminars/workshops be organized to train teachers on professionalism so as to have knowledge on how to handle students professionally.
- security agents be recruited and placed in all corners of the school. Their role being to check all students bags, their pockets who may carry many unwanted items such as knives, drugs, and other items which may cause havoc in school.
- Some principals talk of vigilante committee others talk of crisis management committee to be in place at the beginning of each school year to preempt any unwanted situation or to act immediately when a crisis hit.
- reintroduction of corporal punishment. This point was echoed by many principals even though some where silent on it.
- increasing the coefficient of some subjects that could instill core values and discipline in students. As at now only compulsory subjects have high coefficients. The subjects include citizenship education, philosophy, and religious studies/moral instruction.
- some principals said the educational system where marks and certificate dominate should be restructured and focuses on a system were acquisition of skills to avoid the issue of failure which could be disappointing to some students.

DISCUSSION ON RESPONSES / FINDINGS

On the 21/9/2022, the ministry of secondary education announced an international conference to take place from the 20th to the 23rd of December 2022 on how to eradicate violence in secondary schools in Cameroon. This lofty idea was supported by the United Nations. And being prepared in a context where violence in schools is increasing. Over the past few years in Cameroon, the educational community has witnessed scenes that show the gravity of the situation.

One of the ways principals indicated to eradicate violence in schools was the formation of a crisis committee. This has been developed many years ago in the United States of America (USA). In the Jefferson county school board, a crisis management planning was instituted where crisis management team was put in place. Its purpose was to implement and adopt appropriate action from the crisis management plan to address specific events of a crisis.

William, A. and cheantel, M. (2006) wrote on: “an analysis of secondary schools ‘ crisis management preparedness; national implication “. In their presentation, they said failure to prepare for a crisis situation lead to failure to effectively manage the immediate response. According to them, crisis management is a continuous process in which all phases of the plan are being reviewed and revised. Good plans are never finished they said. They can always be updated based on experience, research

and changing vulnerabilities Kennedy, (2004). For the interest of a school, it is imperative for the administration of the school to always be proactive and put in place a body that will always be at standby to handle a school crisis. Such a body could be titled “crisis management committee” with specific duties outlined.

Principals indicated that corporal punishment which was prohibited in schools in the 1998 law on education be repealed. This position by some principals is debatable as there are many causes of school violence. Students who have a history of being abused either by family members or other members of society are likely to become violent towards others, more especially if they are teenagers. Substance abuses also contribute to persons becoming violent towards others.

Organization of PTA meetings was one of the solutions to regulating violence in schools. School authorities are working alongside parents at home to fight against violence in the school milieu. In order to live a valuable life within any given community and contribute towards the social, economic, and political development of the nation, the appropriate skills, values, attitudes, knowledge, and competences must be impacted into the individual. Stakeholders have experienced substantial increase in violence in secondary schools in the country by students. It is within this backdrop that school authorities are setting up partnership between parents and other stakeholders within the school communities to fight against unruliness in schools.

Several tragic school violence incidents have occurred in Cameroon schools particularly the secondary school sector and it will serve a great deal if the policy makers start thinking out of the box. Legislation in crisis management teams and plans has to be inserted in our education policy documents. Scenarios have occurred in the United States of America in the 1990s and sent Americans in search of answers as to why these events occurred, how to better manage such incidents which are unpreventable (Trump, 2000, P.1).

CONCLUSION

Violence in schools is an old phenomenon. However, in recent years in Cameroon, it has been deadly. Government has been trying to fight this ugly phenomenon nationally and internationally. The fight must involve all stakeholders in the education sector especially the ministries of education, school administrators, and parents. Parents in particular must know that the school cannot do the magic without the effort of home upbringing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Legislation regarding schools in Cameroon be revisited. Emphasis should be placed on crisis/violence as part of the legal framework of Cameroon school system.
2. Well trained school be posted in schools. However, if not trained in the domain of school crisis/violence, in service and pre service training should be regular practice when appointments of school leaders are made. In this same domain, the curriculum of teacher training institutions be revised to include crisis management courses.
3. Security operatives implanted in schools must synergize with crisis management committees for better results when crisis hit.
4. The 1998 orientation law banning corporal punishment in schools be revisited. This responsibility could be left only in the hands of the school administrators.
5. Parents teachers association (PTA), meetings have to intervene in the sense that during such meetings parents have to be reminded that some violence in schools are caused by their children who are not well handled by parents. Reminding them of the daunting task they have to play for the proper upbringing of their children.

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