Original Research Article

Students' Alienation from School and Dynamics of Academic Aspirations in Secondary Schools within Buea Municipality, Fako Division of the South West Region of Cameroon

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Abstract

The study examined the causes of students' alienation from school and its effects on their academic aspirations in the Buea municipality. The study sort to know the things that scare students away from school (or those that attract them out of the school) and the impact that this has on their academic aspirations. The study was carried out in some selected secondary schools in the Buea Municipality of the Fako division of the South West Region of Cameroon; and was informed by the following theories: Keniston's (1965) Theory of Youth Alienation; Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Social cognitive theory by Bandura (1997). The research design used was the survey research design. The sample size was 130 students from Forms 3 and 4. Students were selected using the purposive sampling technique. The instrument used for collecting data was a questionnaire. The results of the study revealed that the prevalence of alienation was manifested by 42% of the participants of the study and it was also found that Students who have high academic aspiration perform well academically, while those with low academic aspiration do not perform well academically. Based on the results of the findings, it was recommended that counsellors should be trained and provided in schools; and the counsellors should give counselling sessions to students and their parents, especially students who have manifested signs of alienation.

Keywords: Academic Aspiration, Buea Municipality, Fako Division and Cameroon, Secondary school, Students Alienation

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent alienation is a difficult problem facing many of our Cameroonian youths in general and those in the Buea municipality in particular. A better understanding of the things that scare students away from school and or those that attract them out of school can help provide useful information concerning needed school modifications. Some adolescents engage in behaviours such as gang activities, violence, vandalism, absenteeism, truancy, drug abuse, and other forms of deviant behaviour, which negatively affects their academic performance. Because adolescents spend a significant portion of their time at school, it is the role of the school to ensure that they are prepared to function responsibly in society. Yet, many students are intermittently disengaging from or completely dropping out of school before they have been adequately prepared for society or future employment (Zack, 2003). This state of affairs is worrisome as one begins to wonder who then become the leaders of tomorrow.

The problem of students not wanting to stay in school is not new, and educators, administrators, and teachers are aware that such students are in their schools and classrooms. These students come in many forms: Some just sit in class and stare, some stay away from class,

while others disrupt class, and when they are fed – up, they drop out. Some leave for a little while; others leave forever. These adolescents are alienated from a system that purports to educate them (Zack, 2003). There are others who feel that they have no means of achieving their desires or aspirations. They see social rules as either ineffective or unrealistic. Mackey (1977) says that, the root fact is the adolescent's feeling that the rules of conduct have collapsed or too ideal for them to follow or live by. The guideless adolescent feels resentment toward the society that fails to provide him with sufficient opportunity to satisfy his desires.

Most early adolescents feel incompetent under certain circumstances, though the feelings are more intense in students with higher sense of personal incapability. Adolescents place a lot of importance on competence. The idols of adolescents are always highly skilled individuals such as football and music stars. The importance that competence plays in adolescents' lives is illustrated by the comment that, a youngster who does not know what he is good at will not know what he is good for; he must know what he can do in order to know who he is (Mackey, 1977). Adolescents are sometimes not satisfied with what is going on in school. For example, they demand for relevance of the curriculum, teaching methods and some of the learning materials.

Students can be alienated due to several factors such as too many rules and regulations, unattractive school environment, etc all related to the individual, the school environment, the family or the community. The individual may have low perception about school, either hating the teacher's attitude, school environment, or may be having low expectations for school. If a child does not see why he/she should go to school, he/she would not work hard, and as such he/she will become alienated. A child who is experiencing continuous failure would soon be distressed and frustrated and would find no reason to stay in school.

Understanding Students Alienation in Context

Alienation is estrangement from other people, society, school, or work. When a student does not feel that he/she belongs to the school community, that is, lacks that sense of belonging, the student is said to be alienated. Alienation is one of the most frequently encountered concepts in the social sciences. Mackey and Ahlgren (1975) say that indeed, the amorphous, global concept of alienation has been used as a catch word to explain nearly every kind of aberrant behaviour from drug abuse to political demonstrations. Although many scholars have discussed constructs that can be loosely grouped as alienation, few have attempted to measure it. Clark (1959), Gamson (1961) and Horton and Thompson (1962) defined alienation as a feeling of powerlessness. Nettler (1957) and Keniston (1965) conceptualised alienation as the feeling of estrangement from the

American society and culture. Olsen (1969) subsumed all the descriptions of alienation under three dimensions: social isolation, normlessness and powerlessness which are all indicative signs of alienation.

Powerlessness is the feeling of being unable to influence the forces that affect the adolescent's chances for success in life. It refers to a lack of influence over social institutions and forces. Students who experience these feelings do not want to identify with the school. Other students do not derive joy from the role they fulfil in the society. They feel that they are not valued for who they are but for what they do. They suffer from role estrangement. Some young people find it difficult to predict what will happen to them because they do not have adequate knowledge about their world. They question the meaning of life.

According to Mary and Molesy (2021), it is difficult to decide exactly when adolescence begins or ends, as both boundaries are subject to individual variation. Is a person an adolescent when he or she reaches a particular age – say, the teens? For these reasons, psychologists working on adolescence tend to define the period broadly, as a time of transition between child-hood and adulthood, acknowledging that the timing and pace of development is subject to considerable variation. It is generally considered to begin with the onset of puberty, which marks the end of childhood (Mary and Molesy, 2021). It is generally considered it as the stage of maturation between childhood and adulthood. The term denotes the period from the beginning of puberty to maturity; it usually starts at about age 14 in males and 12 in females and ends around the age 21. This transition to adulthood varies among cultures, but it is defined in this work as the time when individuals begin to feel the urge to function independently of their parents, teachers or guardians.

Aspirations refer to an individual 's desire to obtain a status, objective or goal such as a particular occupation or level of education (Tefere, 2010 in Zinkeng and Molesy, 2019).In the domain of education, it is referred to as educational aspiration. Brian and Tamara (2010) referred to it as the educational expectations that an individual has for the self or for others. And Bandura (1991) regarded it to be an individual's 'self-appraisal of ability translated into school attainment. Educational or academic aspiration is therefore considered as the academic dream that one has for himself/herself: how far one intends to climb up the academic ladder. It refers to the different levels of education that one wishes to attain for himself/herself: primary, secondary, high school and university education (Molesy, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The research design considered most appropriate for this study was the Descriptive survey research design. This is

because information or data was collected from many participants.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire was the main data collection instrument that sought information from students concerning their attitude towards school and the possible causes of alienation. The students' questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A sought to collect general information about the respondents and the school. Section B sought information concerning the possible causes of alienation; Section B2 sought information on self – esteem and academics and Section C investigated the impact of alienation on academic performance and aspiration. The questionnaire comprised of close ended and open-ended items. The close ended questions were to facilitate the categorisation and coding of responses with the same alternative answers out of which they were required to make a choice. The open-ended questions were to allow the respondents to express themselves as much as possible.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented according to the research questions of the work.

Research question one: What are the causes of student alienation from schools in Buea Sub – Division?
This table 1 presents information obtained from an open – ended question to find out some of the things that students don't like about their school (which will undoubtedly cause them to be alienated from the school). Since the information was obtained from an open ended item, the researcher decided to group the responses under six headings for easy coding and categorisation of the responses. It is in this light that the researcher had the following 6 headings: discipline and pedagogy; social interaction; co – curricula activities; infrastructures and aesthetics; health and sanitation and others. Some of the causes that have been categorised under discipline and pedagogy include the following: The complaints were mostly on too many rules and regulations, too much punishment especially corporal punishment, strict and unqualified teachers, poor teaching methods like sending notes to students to copy without adequate or at times no explanations. Secondly, Social interaction: complaints such as poor social interaction between students and teachers, tense social relationship between students and the school administration, poor social and interpersonal relationships between junior and senior students (especially when some senior students do not consider and treat the junior ones as their own younger brothers

and sisters). Thirdly Co-curricula activities: this had complaints such as lack of good play grounds, complete absence of co-curricula activities like sporting competitions. Infrastructure and aesthetics: some complaints here included lack of modern infrastructures, dirty school environment, old and dilapidated school structures, congestion and limited school infrastructure, lack of aesthetic beauty (like the absence of flowers) and poor planning of the school structures in general. Health and sanitation: complaints here included dirty school environment, lack of health facilities like an infirmary or school dispensary, absence of trash cans and proper waste disposal facilities. Others: lack of a school fens to prevent dodging, absence of pipe born water (school taps), undulating and unattractive topography (eg too many stones and hills), bad roads leading to school especially in the rainy season, school too far from the house (thus making it strenuous to get to school) irregular and inconsistent attendance on the part of the teachers, a lot of stealing in school, too much brutality, low level of spiritual consciousness, presence of marine spirits (mermaids) in school leading to too much initiation of students into the marine world in school, too many distractions in school. The pie chart (Figure 1) below demonstrates the information on the table 1.

Part B of the open ended question sought information on the things students don't like about their teachers, to which the researcher got the following responses:

This table 2 presents information obtained from an open – ended question to find out some of the things that students don't like about their teachers (which will undoubtedly cause them to be alienated from their school). Since the information was obtained from an open-ended item, and like the previous table, the researcher decided to group the responses under five headings for easy coding and categorisation of the responses. It is in this light that the researcher had the following 5 headings: discipline; pedagogy; social interaction; punishment and others. Some of the causes that have been categorised under discipline include the following: the teachers are too strict, some of the teachers don't give the student's time to explain their own side of the story before enforcing discipline, some of the students complained of lack of discipline in their own schools, etc.

Secondly, pedagogy: complaints here included poor teaching methods like sending notes to students to copy without adequate explanations, irregular attendance of class lectures on the part of teachers, unqualified teachers who lack adequate knowledge of course content, in some cases there is complete lack of teachers. Thirdly, social interaction: complaints such as poor social interaction between students and teachers, poor social and interpersonal relationships between junior and senior students (especially when some senior students do not consider and treat the junior ones as their own younger brothers and sisters), some complained of

Table 1. Frequency distribution of the Causes of alienation from the school

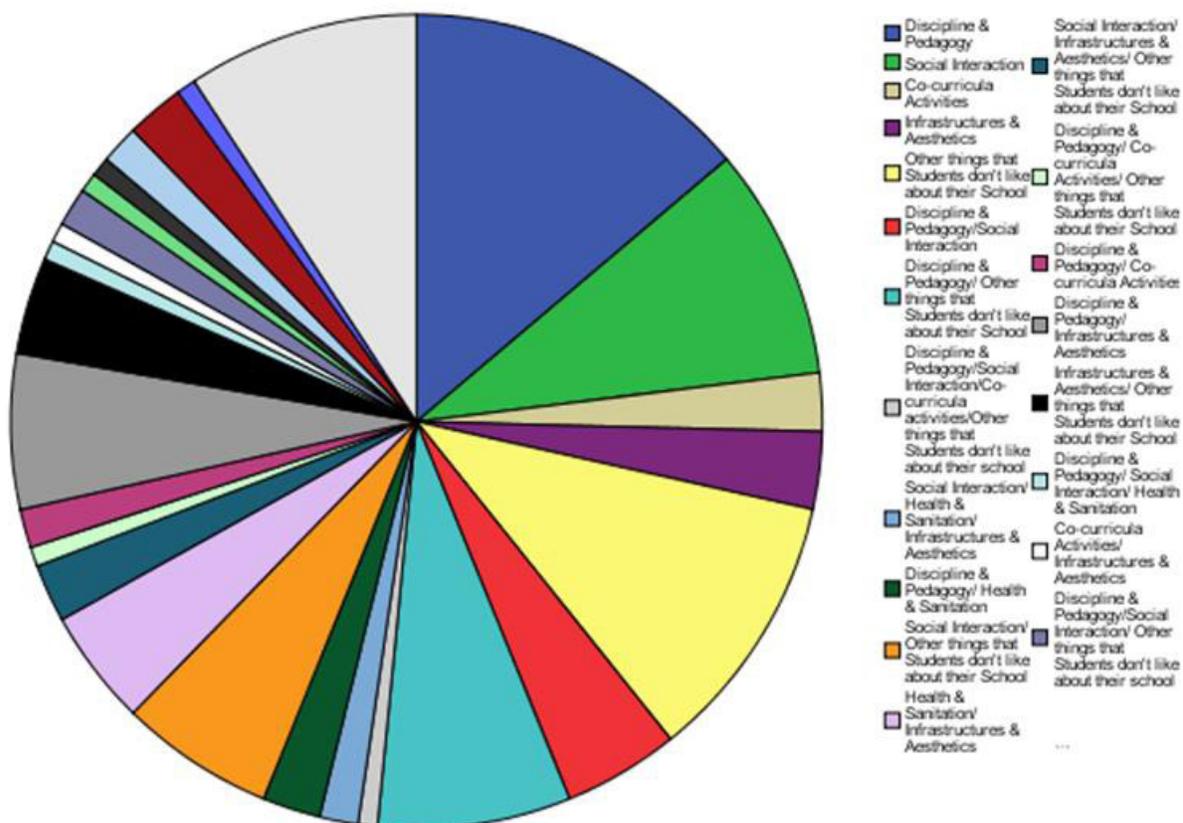| Causes of alienation		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Discipline and Pedagogy	19	14,6	16,1	15,3
	Social Interaction	16	12,3	13,5	25,4
	Co-curricula Activities	6	4,6	5	28,0
	Infrastructures and Aesthetics	9	6,9	6,8	31,4
	Other things that Students don't like about their School	14	10,8	11,9	43,2
	Discipline and Pedagogy/ Social Interaction	6	4,6	5,9	48,3
	Discipline and Pedagogy/ Other things that Students don't like about their School	11	8.5	9.3	56,8
	Discipline and Pedagogy/ Health & Sanitation	3	2,3	2,5	61,9
	Social Interaction/ Other things that Students don't like about their School	8	6,2	6,8	68,6
	Health and Sanitation/ Infrastructures & Aesthetics	6	4,6	5,1	73,7
	Social Interaction/ Infrastructures and Aesthetics/ Other things that Students don't like about their School	3	2,3	2,5	76,3
	Discipline and Pedagogy/ Infrastructures and Aesthetics	8	6,2	6,8	85,6
	Infrastructures and Aesthetics/ Other things that Students don't like about their School	5	3,8	4,2	89,8
	Discipline and Pedagogy/ Health and Sanitation/ Infrastructures and Aesthetics	3	2,3	2,5	99,2
	Total	118	90,8	100,0	
Missing	System	12	9,2		
Total		130	100,0		

Causes of alienation from the school

Figure 1. Pie chart of the causes of alienation from the school

some teachers getting into unhealthy social relationships with students.

Next is punishment: most of the students strongly complained against corporal punishment which they say is rampant in their school, some girls frowned at them being wiped on their buttocks, others decried the fact of them being wiped under their legs. Lastly, others: other complaints the students gave about their teachers included, some teachers becoming too mercantilist as they insist more on selling pamphlets and policops than teaching, some don't know how to dress well, others distract the students with their dressing (especially the female teachers), some don't know how to speak well (some have bad ascents while others speak in very low tunes). All these complaints about their teachers cause some of the students to be alienated from the school. The pie chart (Figure 2) below demonstrates the information on the table.

Conclusion of Research Question One

The students in the study revealed that the causes of alienation vary, though mostly centred on discipline and

pedagogy, punishment (especially corporal punishment), infrastructure and the aesthetic beauty of the school, security and social amenities. The respondents revealed that students do not like an environment with a lot of control and punishment; especially corporal punishment. These and other factors, make them to be alienated from that environment.

Research question two: How does students' alienation manifest itself in schools?

Answer to this question was sought with the help of the "School Opinion Questionnaire", which is Section B of the questionnaire that was used in the study. It contained 9 items with each having five possible responses from which the respondents are to tick one (**SA** for Strongly Agree; **A** for Agree; **N** for Neutral; **D** for Disagree and **SD** for Strongly Disagree). The frequency of the responses collected can be seen on the table 3 below:

The table 3 below gives the results of the frequency distribution of the manifestation of alienation. From table, B4 which represents item 4 of the questionnaire: "*The size and complexity of this school make it very difficult for a student to know where to get help or advice*" has the highest manifestation of alienation (65% of the

Table 2. Frequency distribution of the Causes of alienation from teachers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Discipline	14	10,7	12,1	4,3
	Pedagogy	16	12,3	13,9	18,3
	Social Interaction	12	9,2	10,4	28,7
	Punishment	8	6,2	7	34,8
	Other things that Students don't like about their Teachers	11	8,5	9,6	44,3
	Pedagogy and Social Interaction	5	3,8	4,3	48,7
	Pedagogy and Punishment	4	3,1	3,5	52,2
	Discipline and Pedagogy & Social Interaction	4	3,1	3,5	55,7
	Pedagogy and Social Interaction and Punishment	7	5,4	6,1	61,7
	Social Interaction and Punishment	9	6,9	7,8	69,6
	Social Interaction and Other things that Students don't like about their Teachers	4	3,1	3,5	73,0
	Social Interaction and Punishment and Other things that Students don't like about their Teachers	3	2,3	2,6	76,5
	Discipline and Pedagogy & Punishment and Other things that Students don't like about their Teachers	2	1,5	1,7	78,3
	Discipline and Pedagogy & Punishment	3	2,3	2,6	80,9
	Discipline and Other things that Students don't like about their Teachers	3	2,3	2,6	85,2
	Discipline and Pedagogy	2	1,5	1,7	87,0
	Punishment and Other things that Students don't like about their teachers	6	4,6	5,2	93,9
	Discipline and Social Interaction	3	2,3	2,6	97,4
	Total	115	88,5	100,0	
Missing	System	15	11,5		
Total		130	100,0		

Causes of alienation from teachers

Legend:
- Discipline
- Pedagogy
- Social Interaction
- Punishment
- Other things that Students don't like about their Teachers
- Pedagogy & Social Interaction
- Pedagogy & Punishment
- Discipline & Pedagogy & Social Interaction
- Pedagogy & Social Interaction & Punishment
- Social Interaction & Punishment
- Social Interaction & Other things that Students don't like about their Teachers
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- Pedagogy & Other things that Students don't like about their Teachers
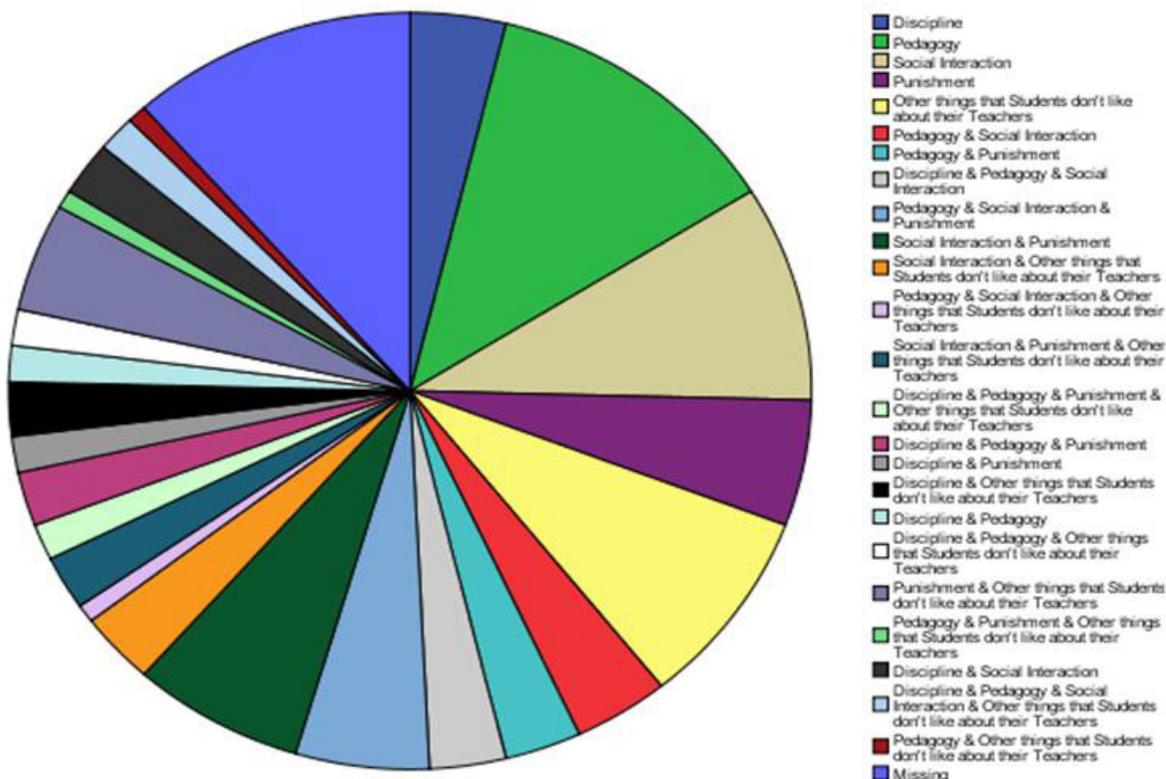- Missing

Figure 2. Pie chart of the causes of alienation from teachers

Table 3. Frequency distribution of the manifestation of alienation

ITEMS	SA		A		N		D		SD		TOTAL	
	f	%	F	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
B1 (item 1)	29	22,3	19	14,6	12	9,2	32	24,6	38	29,2	**130**	**100**
B2 (item 2)	55	42,3	44	33,8	8	6,2	9	6,9	14	10,8	**130**	**100**
B3 (item 3)	28	21,5	32	24,6	24	18,5	23	17,7	23	17,7	**130**	**100**
B4 (item 4)	46	35,4	39	30,0	8	6,2	18	13,8	19	14,6	**130**	**100**
B5 (item 5)	15	11,5	18	13,8	28	21,5	42	32,3	27	20,8	**130**	**100**
B6 (item 6)	40	30,8	41	31,5	5	3,8	27	20,8	17	13,1	**130**	**100**
B7 (item 7)	29	22,3	33	25,4	10	7,7	25	19,2	33	25,4	**130**	**100**
B8 (item 8)	27	20,8	33	25,4	23	17,7	26	20,0	21	16,2	**130**	**100**
B9 (item 9)	46	35,4	28	21,5	8	6,2	24	18,5	24	18,5	**130**	**100**

participants). This is because those who agree or strongly agree with this statement, manifests signs of alienation. B2 which represents item 2 of the questionnaire on the other hand, has the least manifestation of alienation with 18% of the respondents' manifesting signs of alienation.

Conclusion of Research Question Two

From the information obtained from the School Opinion Question, 42% of the entire participants of the study manifested that they are alienated.

Research question three: What is the effect of student alienation from school on their academic aspiration?

Research from eight schools to determine the effects of alienation on students' academic achievement was handled by section C of the questionnaire: 'Alienation and academic aspiration'. From the responses of the students, the students were grouped into three categories: low, moderate and high academic aspiration.

Table 4. Alienation and academic aspiration of participants * First Term performance of participants Cross-tabulation

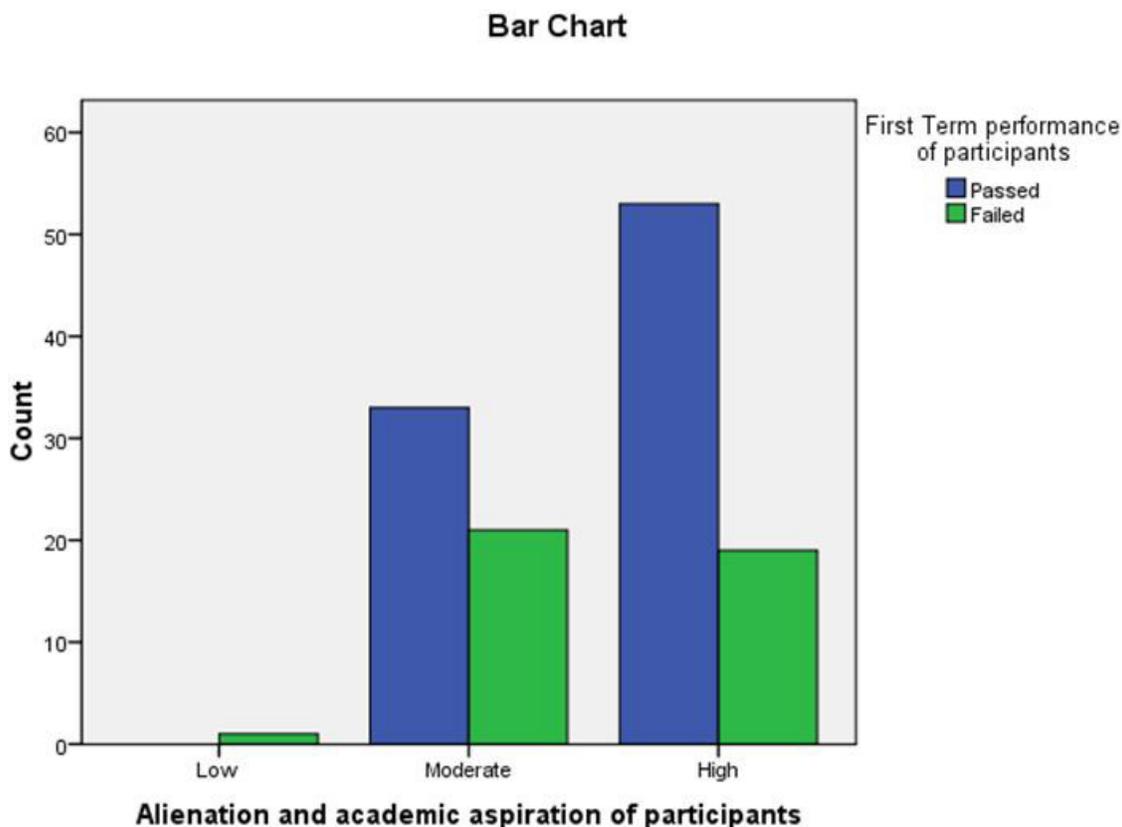| | | | First Term performance of participants | | |
			Passed	Failed	Total
Alienation and academic aspiration of participants	Low	Count	0	1	1
		% within Alienation and academic aspiration of participants	,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% within First Term performance of participants	,0%	2,4%	,8%
		% of Total	,0%	,8%	,8%
	Moderate	Count	33	21	54
		% within Alienation and academic aspiration of participants	61,1%	38,9%	100,0%
		% within First Term performance of participants	38,4%	51,2%	42,5%
		% of Total	26,0%	16,5%	42,5%
	High	Count	53	19	72
		% within Alienation and academic aspiration of participants	73,6%	26,4%	100,0%
		% within First Term performance of participants	61,6%	46,3%	56,7%
		% of Total	41,7%	15,0%	56,7%
Total		Count	86	41	127
		% within Alienation and academic aspiration of participants	67,7%	32,3%	100,0%
		% within First Term performance of participants	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	67,7%	32,3%	100,0%

Bar Chart

Figure 3. Bar chart of alienation and academic aspiration of participants cross tab with their first term performance

The table 4 above is a cross tabulation of alienation and academic aspiration of the participants and their first term performance.

To take a look at the relationship that exists between alienation and academic aspiration of the participants, they are classified under three categories: Low (0.8%), Moderate (42.5%) and High (56.7%) academic aspiration. Those with high academic aspiration occupy 42% of the 68% who passed the first term exams, while those with moderate academic aspiration had 26% pass and those with low academic aspiration had 0% pass. The bar chart (Figure 3) above demonstrates the information on the table.

CONCLUSION OF RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

Students who have high academic aspiration perform well academically, while those with low academic aspiration don't perform well academically.

Summary of Results

• It was found that many factors account for alienation of some secondary school students in the Buea Municipality. The factors range from school related to teachers' related factors. On the part of the school, too many rules and regulations, lack of a curriculum that is in touch with reality, poor infrastructures, lack of social and co – curricular facilities like good play grounds make students not to wish to be part of the school community, and as such they become alienated from the school community; and on the part of the teachers, strictness and too much corporal punishment, lack of good and healthy relationships with the students, poor teaching methods, irregular school attendance, just to highlight these view.

• It was found that the prevalence of alienation was manifested by 42% of the participants of the study.

• In answering research question three, it was found that Students who have high academic aspiration perform well academically, while those with low academic aspiration do not perform well academically.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations made are based on the opinions expressed in the findings of the study. These recommendations are for the teachers and administrators, the government, the parents and the students.

Teachers and administrators should be vigilant to heed themselves with warning signs which lead to or indicates students' alienation such as absenteeism, lateness, poor inter personal relationships, isolation, moodiness, disrespect, truancy and other deviant behaviours.

Teachers should show love and sympathy to students who fail their examinations and encourage them through extrinsic motivation. Above all, Counsellors should give counselling sessions to students and their parents, especially students who have manifested signs of alienation.

The government should create adult literacy centres for those illiterate parents so that they can improve their standards and be able to assist their children with their education. And the government can also establish policy statements which define sanctions on parents who fail to support their children in school, giving the means at their disposal.

The parents should try very hard to visit the schools that their children attend; attend PTA meetings and dialogue with the teachers of their children on matters concerning their children's welfare in school. They should as well try to provide the educational needs of their children in order to encourage them to stay in school.

Based on the results of research question three, that students who have high academic aspiration perform well academically, while those with low academic aspiration do not perform well academically; it was recommended that students be aware of the importance of staying in school and completing their education, which will give them a wider opening in the society, give them the opportunity to pick up good jobs with better salaries and also make them to be regarded as respectable persons in the society in future

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