

PERCEPTION OF THE PSYCHO EDUCATIONAL RELATIONSHIP AS A PILLAR OF LEARNER ENGAGEMENT IN CAMEROONIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**^{1,*} Noumbi Nouwou Georges and ²Tadaha Moffo Achille**¹Department of Educational Sciences, University of Douala, Cameroon²Department of Psychology, University of Douala, CameroonReceived 05th April 2025; Accepted 10th May 2025; Published online 20th June 2025

Abstract

This article examines the relationship between the perception of the psychopedagogical relationship and the level of engagement of level 3, tier 1 learners in primary school. It stems from the observation that learners at this level do not really do their homework, participate little in the teaching/learning process and partially miss lessons; this leads to an alarming failure rate of around half the class in termly assessments. The survey was conducted among 200 pupils selected using stratified sampling in six primary schools in the Douala V district. A hetero-evaluation questionnaire was used to collect the data, and Spearman's correlation test was used to test the hypotheses. The results suggest that the learner's image of emotional support, the perceived organisation of the classroom and the representation they have of the quality of their teacher's support during learning are linked to their engagement in school activities. Necessary for student empowerment, the quality of the psychopedagogical relationship during learner guidance is decisive during and after cognitive activity.

Keywords: Perception, Psycho pedagogical relationship, Commitment, Learning, Primary school.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, primary schools are the foundation on which education systems are built (Gauthier, 2006). Its main mission remains the acquisition of a culture based on basic knowledge: reading, writing, counting and expressing oneself in one's own language. This is why nursery and primary education are the foundation of sustainable education. They train learners and encourage them to become creative and dynamic (Curriculum de l'Enseignement primaire Francophone Camerounais, 2018). However, Cameroon is lagging far behind in achieving this mission. According to the work of Siakeu (2010), the high and persistent dropout rate reveals that 17.4% of pupils do not complete primary school. They drop out and perform poorly, and 28% of pupils repeat a year. In addition, we have noted that school performance appears unsatisfactory in Cameroon's basic education system, and specifically in public schools in the city of Douala. During 2023-2024 academic school year, at the first term we observed in a pre-survey that learners in level 3 and tier 1 did not really do their homework, participated less in the teaching/learning process and partially missed lessons. Pupils complain about being overlooked and not having the opportunity to take part in lessons because they cannot read. As a result, more than half the class fails its end-of-term exams. By way of illustration, we have alarming results at the Camp Mboppi group 2 public school, which in the first term had a failure rate of 83.33%, with 60 learners enrolled and 50 failing (Source: public school management Camp Mboppi Group 2). Also, in group 1 of the same school, the alarming nature of the results remains visible with a score of 61.40% failures, i.e. 57 learners registered and 35 failed. Similar results were also seen in the public schools of Bonamoussadi and Ndog-bong. At Bonamoussadi public

school group 1 and 2, 71.42% and 75% of learners in level 3 and tier 1 also face failure. Similarly, at Ndog-bong public school, groups 1 and 2, 60% and 73.33% of learners in levels 3 and 1 respectively were failing. This being the case, we believe that, in line with Mvesso (2005), it would be wise to place particular emphasis on the quality of the psychosocial relationship between the teacher and the child. This situation is in line with the results of the PASEC survey (Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN, 2015), which show that Cameroonian schools are notable for failing exams. As a result, the problem of this article based on the lack of engagement of pupils in their learning. So we wonder what could be at the root of this malaise. The representation of the teacher-learner relationship has evolved over time. Initially perceived as having the task of transmitting knowledge to learners who are responsible for assimilating it (Boutin, 2012), the teacher has become a guide with the rise of the Competency-Based Approach. This paradigm shift has led to a transformation of the pedagogical relationship into a psychopedagogical one, as the teacher, once considered as a 'master', a 'repository of knowledge' (Noumbi Nouwou & Fasse Mbouya, 2023), now finds himself the guarantor of the pupil's autonomy during the learning process. To achieve this, emphasis should be placed on the quality of teacher-learner interactions and, more specifically, on the learner's image of this relationship. According to Fallu and Janosz (2003), a warm relationship between teacher and learner reduces the risk of dropping out of school, as well as the intention to drop out (Bergeron, Chouinard and Janosz, 2011). This means that students who feel supported and who believe that their teacher is paying attention to them are more committed and more motivated than students who evaluate their relationship with their teacher more negatively. From this perspective, the perception of a negative relationship is linked to low achievement (Demagnet and Van Houtte, 2012). In the same vein, research by Kubanek and Waller (1994) indicates that one-to-one contact with and encouragement from teachers is

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conducive to learning and perseverance at school, whereas distant and impersonal teaching is associated with academic failure whatever the age of the pupil. This article is in line with the work of Hamre and Pianta (2007), who argue that the student's perception of the psychopedagogical relationship depends on the representation he or she has of the organisation of the classroom and the cognitive and emotional support received at school. Thus, these authors highlight the fundamental link between the affective and cognitive dimensions within the classroom insofar as the teacher who takes into account the scope of emotional support enables the learner to make himself available to become involved in his learning. As Glasser (1986) points out, the image that pupils have of their teacher's assiduous response to their psychological needs helps them to realise their potential. How important is the perception of the psychopedagogical relationship for the level of commitment of level 3, tier 1 Cameroonian pupils? In other words, does the perceived emotional support, the perceived organisation of the classroom and the image that the pupil constructs of the support provided by his teacher during the learning process influence his level of commitment?

The main objective of this article is to verify the influence of the perceived psychopedagogical relationship on the level of engagement of level 3, tier 1 primary school pupils. More specifically, we are about to assess how these learners feel during lessons, the perceived organisation of the classroom, their image of follow-up during learning, and the links between these components and their level of engagement. That said, this study is important in targeted to improve the quality of teacher-pupil relationships. These asymmetrical and bidirectional relationships would help to awaken a taste for learning and, consequently, optimise school engagement.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Participants

The parent population of this study was made up of all learners in public primary schools in the Littoral region and the accessible population was made up of learners in level 3, tier 1, in public primary schools in Douala V. The sample was made up of pupils in Cours Moyen Première Année (CM1) enrolled in three public schools: the public school Camp Militaire in Mboppi, the public school in Ndogbong and the public school in Bonamoussadi. Methodological triangulation enabled us to carry out a double selection by simultaneously using stratified and typical sampling techniques. With a heterogeneous population made up of learners from three different schools with different infrastructural realities and school environments, but with one thing in common: failure at school. We were able to select a sample of 200 learners on the basis of two specific criteria: they were CM1 learners and they were among those who had failed in the first term of the current year. This heterogeneous sample was made up of 22% of pupils from the Ecole Publique de Ndogbong (6% of group 1 and 16% of group 2); 36.5% from the Ecole Publique de Bonamoussadi (20% of group 1 and 16.5% of group 2) and 41.5% from the Ecole Publique du Camp Militaire de Mboppi (16.5% of group 1 and 25% of group 2). In addition, 92 of the 200 participants were boys and 108 were girls, with an average age of 11 to 13 years, and only 1%, i.e. 2 subjects under 8 years old, or 17.5%, i.e. 35 participants over 13 years old. There were 150 repeaters, and among the teachers, 168 learners said they were

taught by a woman and 32 said they were taught by a man. When asked who they lived with, 173, or 86.5%, lived with their two biological parents, compared with 7, or 3.5%, who lived with their grandparents, 3, or 1.5%, respectively. The school environment in the city of Douala is characterised by the heterogeneity of its learners, as is the cosmopolitan nature of its inhabitants. We were therefore able to differentiate the participants in terms of age, gender, parents' socio-professional level, religious obedience and family type.

Data collection procedure

Considering Dépelteau (2011) who cites among the data collection tools the questionnaire, we resorted to a self-evaluation questionnaire adapted from COMEGAM (Metacognitive Knowledge on the Management of Mental Activity) for the collection of our data from our sample. Indeed, as stipulated by (Fonkeng, Chaffi, and Bomda, 2014), the questionnaire is a technique with great advantages in its use including: speed of execution, capture of unobservable behaviours (the respondent, alone to answer and being assured of anonymity, can provide information on very intimate behaviours), comparability of answers (the same questions are asked in the same terms to each informant and each makes a choice from the same list of answers), application to large numbers (this is the technique to be favoured if we have to address a few hundred people, or even a thousand or more) (Tadaha, 2020). Information was collected from primary school learners in CM1 who were failing at school in Douala V using a question form to which we submitted the subjects in our direct administration sample. The form was built around four main themes directly related to the hypotheses of our study. The items concerned the representation of the emotional support provided by the teacher, the image of classroom organisation, the image of support for learning and the level of learner engagement. To this end, we formulated several types of essentially closed questions: dichotomous questions (Male, Female); trichotomous questions (Low, Medium, High) and ordered qualitative questions (Never, Rarely, Often, Always). Finally, the metric qualities of our instrument included the calculation of Cronbach's alpha test, with a value of .59, indicating good reliability of the instrument, and the Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) index, with a value of .67, confirming good correlation between items. This was also confirmed by Barlett's sphericity test, which associates a significance level of $P = .000$ that the fit of the sample to the data is satisfactory (Fonkeng, Chaffi, and Bomda, 2014). Our data were analysed using SPSS version 23.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software, which involved descriptive analysis, item by item in the frequency tables, and inferential analysis using hypothesis testing, i.e. Spearman's correlation. The ordinal qualitative nature of our qualitative variables enabled us to choose the Spearman rank coefficient.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The perception of the psychopedagogical relationship and the level of engagement of learners in a situation of failure in learning were evaluated using a self-evaluation questionnaire and an adapted school engagement test addressed to CM1 learners in public primary schools in Douala V. The data collected, coded and analysed made it possible to measure the correlational link between the variables tested in this article.

Table 1. Symmetrical measurements between the representation of emotional support provided by the teacher and level of engagement of learners

| | | Value | Asymptotic standard error ^a | Approximate T ^b | Approximate significance |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-------|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Interval by Interval | Pearson's R | ,090 | ,072 | 1,266 | ,004 ^c |
| Ordinal by Ordinal | Spearman correlation | ,136 | ,077 | 1,939 | ,003 ^c |
| Number of valid observations | | 200 | | | |

a. The null hypothesis is not considered.
b. Use of the asymptotic standard error in the null hypothesis.
c. Based on normal approximation.

Table 2. Symmetrical measurements between the cliché of classroom organisation and level of engagement of learners

| | | Value | Asymptotic standard error ^a | Approximate T ^b | Approximate significance |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-------|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Interval by Interval | Pearson's R | ,181 | ,083 | 2,595 | ,010 ^c |
| Ordinal by Ordinal | Spearman correlation | ,195 | ,082 | 1,349 | ,009 ^c |
| Number of valid observations | | 200 | | | |

a. The null hypothesis is not considered.
b. Use of the asymptotic standard error in the null hypothesis.
c. Based on normal approximation.

Source: SPSS software. 23

Table 3. Symmetrical measurements between the image of support for learning and level of engagement of learners

| | | Value | Asymptotic standard error ^a | Approximate T ^b | Approximate significance |
|------------------------------|----------------------|-------|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Interval by Interval | Pearson's R | ,091 | ,070 | 1,286 | ,004 ^c |
| Ordinal by Ordinal | Spearman correlation | ,128 | ,068 | 1,809 | ,002 ^c |
| Number of valid observations | | 200 | | | |

a. The null hypothesis is not considered.
b. Use of the asymptotic standard error in the null hypothesis.
c. Based on normal approximation.

Source: SPSS software. 23

In addition, frequency analysis was used to describe the sample, the results of which provided support for our various study hypotheses. It is in fact a conclusion on the existence of a correlational link between the perception of the psychopedagogical relationship and the level of engagement of learners in the public primary school of level 3 tier 1 of Douala V. Thus :

- *With regard to the emphasis placed on the representation of emotional support provided by the teacher and the level of engagement of learners at the level 3 tier 1 primary school in Douala V, we conclude in the light of the results of the cross-tabulation :*

The table above shows that the cross-tabulation between the teacher gives lessons by making fun of you if you give the wrong answers and Sometimes I run away from lessons without my parents' permission, which are items obtained from the principal component analysis (PCA) of our two variables (representation of the emotional support provided by the teacher and level of commitment of the learners) gives the following values: Spearman's correlation coefficient $\beta = .13$ at a significance level of $P = .05$. This leads us to conclude that there is a weak proportional correlation between the representation of emotional support provided by the teacher and the level of engagement of learners in primary school at level 3, tier 1.

- *Concerning the cliché of classroom organisation and its influence on the level of engagement of learners at level 3, tier 1 primary school in Douala V, we have the following results:*

With regard to the comparison between the emphasis placed on the cliché of the organisation of the classroom and the level of engagement of the learners in the primary school of level 3, tier 1 of Douala V, we cross-tabulated the items:

Before or during lessons, the teacher arranges the class into strong pupils sitting in front or behind or into weak pupils sitting in front or behind and Sometimes I run away from lessons without my parents allowing me to do so, obtained from the factorial analysis (PCA). Following this cross-tabulation, the value of Spearman's Rhô correlation coefficient $\beta = .19$ at a significance level of $P = .009$. This means that there is a proportional correlation of low intensity between the classroom organisation clichés and the level of engagement of learners at the level 3 tier 1 primary school in Douala V.

- *Finally, on the influence of the image of support for learning on the level of engagement of learners in primary school at level 3, tier 1 in Douala V, we conclude from the results:*

If we look at the results of the table above, we can see that after cross-tabulating the items obtained from the factorial analysis (PCA): Usually, our teacher suggests that we do repetition lessons at school or at home in order to improve our level and Sometimes I run away from lessons without my parents' permission, we have: a Spearman's Rhô correlation coefficient with a value of $\beta = .12$ at a significance level of $P = .002$. This means that there is a weak proportional correlation between the image of support for learning and the level of engagement of learners in primary school at level 3, tier 1 in Douala V.

DISCUSSION

In the psychopedagogical reality of the classroom, the emotional support of the facilitator (teacher) is a requirement that refers to the latter's sensitivity and receptiveness to learners and constitutes an inescapable modality in the psychopedagogical relationship for a better quality of these interactions that are indispensable to the teaching/learning process (April, Lanaris and Bigras, 2017). In addition to the

dynamic-complementary nature of teacher/learner interactions, the equally active participation of pupils in the construction of their knowledge is a requirement of new teaching methods based on the activity of the subject in the teaching/learning process, and therefore their involvement in different classroom activities. This is something that cannot exist without the learners' positive mental conceptions of the feelings and emotions shared by the players in the psychopedagogical relationship (Pianta, 1999). Learner commitment is elucidated by the quality of the interactions they have with adult experts, peers and activities (Audas, and Willms, 2001) against a backdrop of emotional support offered in class, which makes it possible to demonstrate a warm and close relationship between the teacher and the learner, leading the latter to become actively and positively involved in interactions with others and their learning in class (Pianta, 1999). Thus, according to Pianta (1999), the learner's view of the quality of the emotional support offered in class is linked to the quality of the interactions the learner has with his or her peers, especially in the primary cycle. To this end, the rather downward trend in results or academic performance during the school year of these learners, which shows a lack of seriousness or application in their work and a total absence of tasks or homework, illustrates the failure rate observed. The failure rate at the Camp Militaire de Mboppi group 2 public school in the first term was an alarming 83.33%, with 60 learners enrolled and 50 failing group 1. And 61.40% failed, with 57 learners enrolled and 35 failing in group 2. In this perspective Appleton, Christenson, Kim and Reschly (2006) already supported that the learners' commitment to academic tasks is low, hence their perennially low success rate. Espinosa (2016) rightly responds by describing their pupils' low motivation in class as the major obstacle encountered by teachers in their work, particularly at primary and secondary level. This reality fits in well with Bruner's thoughts on scaffolding and Vygotsky's thoughts on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as described by Tadaha (2024), which places particular emphasis on mediation and tutorial interaction in learning. In short, the description of the primordial role of the adult/expert in guiding children in their socialisation process and even in the teaching-learning process in general.

Furthermore, the image that the learner has of the social climate in class is, without context, an essential indicator of his/her commitment to the pedagogical activity here. Audas and Willms (2001) understand this well when they state that a climate of mastery is also associated with the goals of mastery of content by learners, in other words, the desire to perform. Thus, learners who learn in a control-oriented classroom climate are more likely to aim to improve than to be the best because, as Kaplan et al, (2002) state in making an association between performance climate and students' cognitive engagement, a learning opportunity supported by the classroom climate, the teacher's attitude and classroom behaviours, teaching activities, assessment practices and learning situations form an optimal learning context in the classroom (Bédard and Viau, 2001). Furthermore, referring to the work of Picciano (2002), the quality of the support provided by teachers indicates a counterbalancing element to the phenomenon of disengagement from school. For this reason, better relationships with teachers are also likely to protect them from a drop in school engagement, particularly through the support that such relationships provide to learners in the face of difficulty during the teaching activity (Blaya, 2010).

Finally, in the light of the work carried out by Fortin (2010) on the teacher-student relationship, we can conclude that the consequences of this relationship on the learner's academic success are unquestionable, but also perceptible in terms of their commitment, motivation and well-being in the teaching-learning process. In fact, a quality teacher-learner relationship enables learners to participate actively and strengthens their motivation to get involved in the teaching-learning process.

Conclusion

With the aim of analysing the influence of the perception of the psychopedagogical relationship on the level of engagement of learners in primary school, we conducted a survey of a sample of 200 pupils in the CM1 class in public schools in Douala V. The issue of the quality of the learner-teacher relationship is at the heart of the priorities of many national and international school organisations, and in this respect the literature consulted supports the fact that school must be a place of protection for the most vulnerable learners through the resources it provides to mitigate the risks arising from their social or family environment (O'Connor, 2010; Blaya, C (2010). This explains the inclusion in the reference framework of teacher competences of a quality student-teacher relationship that should know how to interact and cooperate with students in order to achieve the school's objectives (MEQ, 2001). Through this study, we sought to resolve the problem of the drop in academic standards and the lack of commitment of primary school learners in CM1 to their learning. We defined engagement as: A complex process through which students become involved in planning their studies, participating in the various learning activities offered to them and self-evaluating their college experience.

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