



# Role of School Climate/Culture in Sustaining Peace and Good Citizenship among Students of Bilingual Secondary Schools in Cameroon: Perspectives from John Dewey’s *Democracy and Education*

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**Abstract:** This study examined the contribution of school climate and culture in sustaining peace and good citizenship among students in bilingual secondary schools in Cameroon. The study was motivated by the need to understand how schools, especially in socially and linguistically diverse settings, can help learners live peacefully with others and develop responsible civic values. We adopted a concurrent mixed methods research design. The study was done in selected Government Bilingual Secondary Schools in four sub-divisions within the Bamenda and Yaoundé City Councils. The sample comprised 376 students and 10 teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools and teachers, while students who had spent at least two years in the schools were selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire for students and a Key Informant Interview guide for teachers. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, percentages, charts, regression, and chi-square, at the 0.05 level of significance. The qualitative data were organized into themes and interpreted in relation to the quantitative findings. The findings revealed that school culture/climate play a significant role in sustaining peace and good citizenship among students in bilingual secondary schools. School climate/ culture was a strong factor influencing peace and good citizenship. The results showed that students are more likely to develop peaceful attitudes, tolerance, cooperation, mutual respect, and civic responsibility when they learn in an environment that is inclusive, supportive, participatory, and respectful of linguistic and cultural diversity. Based on these findings, the study recommended that educational authorities, school administrators, and teachers should make deliberate efforts to strengthen multicultural practices that foster enabling school climate/cuture in schools. This could be done by promoting a peaceful and inclusive school climate to reflect cultural diversity, encouraging the use of multiple languages in learning, improving teacher preparation in multicultural and civic education, and giving students more opportunities to participate actively in school life. The study concluded that an enabling school climate and culture remains an indispensable means of promoting peaceful coexistence and good citizenship among students in Cameroon’s bilingual secondary schools.

**Keywords:** School climate and culture peace; good citizenship; bilingual secondary schools; Cameroon.

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## Introduction and Background

The question of school climate and culture and their influence in the process of peace and good citizenship remains a perennial problem within educational circles. In a multicultural context like Cameroon with many ethnic groups and a bi-cultural educational system, the issue becomes more compelling and pertinent. Cameroon has often been described as “Africa in miniature” as a result of its wide range of cultures, languages, and natural landscapes (African Development Bank (AfDB) Report, 2018). This diversity is a source of pride for many citizens of Cameroon. At the same time, it has also contributed to a long history of political and social tensions in the country. These tensions are particularly very visible in the Northwest and Southwest Regions, where the Anglophone Crisis has taken root and persisted over the years. The crisis is linked to deep historical complaints and bitterness about the marginalization of English-speaking communities in Cameroon as French-speaking institutions dominate public life (Nkwi, 2021). Education stands at the centre of this conflict, although the educational system is not the only sector implicated in it. Bilingual secondary schools were originally designed to bring English-speaking and French-speaking Cameroonians together in order to bridge the social and historical divides and to promote social cohesion and living together. In practice, however, these schools have often reflected and reinforced existing inequalities.

The Anglophone Crisis intensified in 2016 when English-speaking teachers and lawyers organized mass protests against what they perceived as marginalization of the English subsystems of education and law. They objected to the introduction of Francophone-based curriculum in Anglophone schools, the appointment of French-speaking teachers without English language skills to Anglophone schools, the shortage of English-language textbooks and legal documents, and the appointment of French-speaking judges to preside over English Common Law Courts. Many protesters saw these issues as clear, undeniable signs of systemic marginalization (International Crisis Group, 2017). This study examines whether a multicultural school climate and culture can help transform bilingual secondary schools into spaces that promote peace and responsible citizenship among secondary school students. The discussion is guided by John Dewey’s classic work, *Democracy and Education* (Dewey, 1916), which presents education as a foundation for democratic life.

Since independence in the early 1960s, education in Cameroon has remained closely tied to questions of identity and power. The 1996 Constitution of the Republic of Cameroon declared bilingualism an official policy and presented it as a path toward national unity. However, over the years, the implementation of this policy across the nation has not been balanced. In many cases, French language and culture have dominated school curricula, teacher recruitment, and administrative decisions. This imbalance has increased feelings of exclusion among Anglophone communities of the two English-speaking Regions of the country (Ayafor, 2005; Neba, 2017). The situation in bilingual secondary schools within the city of Bamenda reflects these wider national tensions. During the height of the Anglophone Crisis (that is, between 2016 and 2021), about 80% of schools in the regions were closed (UNICEF, 2022). In some of these schools, students have had to cope not only with academic demands but also with language politics, cultural hierarchies, and the legacy of colonial rule. This notwithstanding, these same schools also hold promise. If they are reshaped, reformed and

transformed using Dewey’s model of democratic education, it is likely that they could become places where young people learn to think critically, respect cultural differences, and work together across divides.

In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) forcefully argues that education is not simply preparation for adult life; instead, he insists that education is part of life itself. For Dewey, schools should operate as democratic communities, or democratic spaces where students learn through participation, shared problem-solving, and open discussion. Dewey believed that students should not be passive recipients of information, but active members of a learning community. This study explores how Dewey’s democratic school climate and culture could contribute to peace-building and the development of responsible citizenship in Cameroon.

Applying Dewey’s model of democratic education to Cameroon requires careful, reflective, objective and critical thought. Cameroon’s education system still carries strong colonial influences. For instance, in many instances, teaching methods still emphasize memorization rather than critical reflection, and much of the curriculum remains centred on Eurocentric perspectives rather than indigenous Africentric ones (Tchombe, 2014). The Anglophone Crisis has further weakened the educational system, exacerbating existing problems and introducing new ones. Schools have been attacked or occupied, and more than 700,000 students have been displaced (Human Rights Watch, 2020). As a result, trust in educational institutions has been deeply shaken especially on grounds of safety concerns. Against this background, this study asks the fundamental question: how can multicultural education, guided by Dewey’s democratic ideals, help bridge linguistic and cultural divisions in operational bilingual secondary schools and support lasting peace?

This question is pertinent. This is because as Cameroon struggles with division and mistrust, schools can either deepen alienation or help build reconciliation. This study places strong emphasis on the voices or perspectives of students and teachers. It seeks to provide evidence that can guide efforts to move bilingual education away from assimilation and toward genuine inclusion. In such a model, cultural diversity and linguistic diversity would not be treated as a problem but rather as a key foundation for democratic participation. The findings of this study are expected to inform national policymakers, educators, and international partners working toward the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Quality Education and Sustainable Development Goal 16 on Peace and Justice. At the same time, the study contributes to broader discussions on decolonizing education in Cameroon in particular and in Africa at large, and designing conflict-sensitive schooling in non-Western contexts.

### Statement of the problem

Educational institutions play an important role in shaping the values of society and encouraging people from different cultural backgrounds to live together peacefully. In Cameroon, where the education system is officially bilingual, schools are expected to promote multicultural understanding as a way of strengthening peace and responsible citizenship. Although the legal framework supports bilingualism and multiculturalism, there is still a wide gap between policy and practice. In many bilingual secondary schools, these principles are not meaningfully reflected in the curriculum or in everyday school life. Schools often do not fully use Cameroon’s rich cultural diversity as a resource for building peace. As a result,

it becomes necessary to examine how effective current educational strategies are, not only in supporting academic success, but also in preparing students to become responsible citizens who value and respect diversity.

Peace and good citizenship are central to the survival of any healthy democracy. John Dewey viewed education as the foundation of democratic life. He argued that schools should do more than transmit knowledge; they should build social cohesion and prepare young people for active participation in community life. Dewey emphasized learning through experience and highlighted the importance of dialogue, cooperation, and shared problem-solving. In the Cameroonian context, however, there is limited empirical research that assesses whether teaching practices in bilingual secondary schools truly help students engage meaningfully with their multicultural environment. This lack of evidence makes it necessary to examine school climate/ culture in public bilingual schools through the lens of Dewey's democratic ideals. Such an inquiry can help determine whether current practices reflect ideals that positively influence students' development as constructive and engaged citizens.

The ongoing Anglophone Crisis also raises serious questions about the effectiveness of an enabling school climate and culture in Cameroon. The persistence of identity-based conflict, rooted in feelings of marginalization and exclusion, suggests that schools may not be adequately addressing issues of cultural diversity, language division, and political sensitivity. If multicultural education were deeply rooted, genuinely implemented, and peace-oriented, one would expect schools to play a stronger role in preventing or easing such tensions. Yet there is little research examining the impact of the National Commission for the Promotion of Bilingualism and Multiculturalism on strengthening multicultural education in public bilingual schools. There is also limited research assessing whether existing bilingual schools are equipped to respond to systemic identity conflicts and to promote sustainable peace and engaged citizenship. This study seeks to address these gaps. It investigates the role school climate and culture play in sustaining peace and promoting good citizenship among students in public bilingual secondary schools within the Yaounde and Bamenda City Councils. By doing so, it aims to contribute to a clearer understanding of how schools can move beyond formal bilingualism and become genuine spaces for inclusion, dialogue, and democratic growth.

- ❖ What role does school climate/culture play in sustaining peace and good citizenship among students of Bilingual Secondary Schools in Cameroon?

## Review of Literature

School climate/culture is the collective social, emotional, and ethical environment of a school. It involves: (1) Relational dynamics - Interactions between students, teachers, and administrators across linguistic/cultural lines; (2) Institutional norms - Policies promoting tolerance, multilingualism, and conflict resolution; and (3) Symbolic practices - Recognition of cultural events (Cohen et al., 2009; Dewey, 1938). In this study, the expression "school culture" was used to mean the collective ensemble of norms, practices, values, behaviours and attitudes that govern social interactions between students and between students and teachers in a school. School climate, sometimes called school culture, refers to the overall quality of life within a school. It includes the norms, values, relationships, and daily practices that

shape how students and teachers experience school (Cohen et al., 2009). School climate influences whether students feel safe, respected, and accepted. It is shaped by interactions among students and staff, by school policies, and by how well cultural differences are recognized and valued. Research shows that school climate has a strong effect on both academic achievement and social development (Thapa et al., 2013). It covers several areas, including academic expectations, relationships within the school community, safety, and institutional structures.

School climate is central to the success of multicultural education because it shapes the environment in which teaching and learning take place. A school that values diversity and inclusion creates conditions where students from different backgrounds can feel safe and respected. McKinney (2020) argues that students are more likely to feel a sense of belonging when schools promote respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. Sleeter (2018) similarly maintains that schools need to address systemic inequalities if they are to build a genuine culture of equity. Both scholars agree that school culture is not neutral; rather it can either support multicultural education or weaken it. However, they differ in their emphasis. McKinney (2020) has argued for the importance of policy reforms, such as inclusive language policies. Sleeter (2018), on the other hand, places emphasis on the need for grassroots efforts that challenge bias within institutions. This difference reflects a wider debate about whether change should come mainly from official policy or from everyday practice within schools. In reality, however, both approaches are necessary for achieving lasting improvement.

Research suggests that an inclusive school climate can produce measurable benefits. For example, Voight et al. (2021) found that U.S. schools that implemented multicultural practices, including culturally relevant curricula and prejudice reduction activities, reported a 15% increase in students' sense of belonging. African American and Latino students in these schools also showed improvements in attendance and academic performance. These findings suggest that when students see their identities respected, it increases the likelihood that achievement gaps will narrow. In South Africa, Harber and Mncube (2017) studied post-apartheid schools and found that incorporating indigenous knowledge and themes of reconciliation into the curriculum increased emotional engagement by 18%. Students who participated in the study reported experiencing reduced racial tension and stronger social bonds.

An inclusive school climate has also been found to strengthen social justice by improving relationships among students from different backgrounds. Zirkel (2008) found that schools characterized by cooperative learning and diverse staff representation reduced implicit bias among students by 12%. This improvement was reflected in more positive peer interactions among students. These findings support Banks' (2019) view that equity pedagogy and prejudice reduction are critical or very essential for building inclusive school climates. In Nigeria, Osakwe (2019) reported that schools that integrated Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo cultural elements experienced a 10% increase in positive peer relationships. These results show that culturally responsive school climates have the potential to strengthen unity and cooperation.

Despite these benefits, creating an inclusive school climate nonetheless has some challenges. One major concern is the fear about the possibility of superficial multiculturalism. The concern here is that some schools could tend to celebrate cultural festivals

or display symbols of diversity without addressing deeper inequalities. Zirkel and Pollack (2016) found that in certain U.S. schools, poorly implemented multicultural initiatives led 20% of students to view cultural content as stereotypical. This perception reduced students' emotional engagement and sometimes reinforced bias. Another challenge is resistance from educators or communities, especially in contexts where resources are limited. Jansen (2017) observed that in rural South African schools, limited teacher training and scarce resources made it difficult to create inclusive school climates, with only 40% of teachers being able to implement multicultural practices effectively.

Measuring school climate also presents specific difficulties. Cohen et al. (2009) note that researchers use different definitions and tools, such as surveys or classroom observations, and that these can lead to inconsistent findings. McKeown et al. (2020) argue that schools which focused heavily on standardized test scores often tended to neglect relational aspects of school climate. In exam-driven systems, attention to academic performance could also tend to overshadow efforts to build inclusive relationships. As a result of this imbalance, progress toward equity could be significantly hampered.

To successfully establish an effective school climate, teacher preparation and systemic support are also crucial. Gay (2018) found that teachers who were trained in culturally responsive pedagogy helped to create school climates that reduced disciplinary referrals for minority students by 25%. This outcome suggests that teacher readiness directly affects equity. However, such efforts, in order to be fruitful, require institutional backing or support. Francis and Darity (2021) reported that in Ghana, schools saw a 15% increase in student satisfaction where teachers received continuous diversity training. Thus, it is arguable that in the absence of sustained policy support and funding, such improvements are difficult to maintain.

From a theoretical point of view, this study is informed by John Dewey's theory of philosophical pragmatism. It offers a unique way of understanding how education can respond effectively and adequately to diversity, inequality, and social change. John Dewey's theory of pragmatism presents education as an active and social process closely linked to democracy. Dewey believed that knowledge is not simply received from teachers but is developed through experience and interaction with the environment. In *Democracy and Education* (1916), he argued that schools should prepare learners to think critically, to solve problems, and also to participate responsibly in society. His theory includes several key ideas. One of these ideas is "learning by doing," which means that students learn best when they engage in real-life tasks and practical activities. Another is the idea that education is a social process, where cooperation and shared inquiry are central to knowledge

sharing and knowledge construction. Dewey also believed that the purpose of education is growth; by growth he meant continuous intellectual and moral development rather than the achievement of fixed outcomes. Finally, he argued that schools should model democratic values by encouraging dialogue, participation, and fairness (Dewey, 1938; Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

Empirical studies have confirmed the practical education value of Dewey's ideas. Papanastasiou and Drigas (2019) found that project-based learning improves critical thinking and long-term understanding in science and technology subjects. Johnson and Johnson (2009) showed that cooperative learning strengthens both academic performance and social relationships in diverse classrooms. Research on democratic classrooms equally indicates that when students take part in decision-making, they tend to develop stronger civic responsibility and show fewer behavioural problems (Apple & Beane, 2007). Thomas (2000) found that students educated in Deweyan-inspired settings were more likely to participate in civic life later on as compared to students who were educated in non-Deweyan settings. However, in spite of these prospects in the implementation of Dewey's democratic principles, there exist some challenges. For instance, standardized testing systems often emphasize memorization rather than inquiry, and this conflicts with Dewey's vision (Ravitch, 2010). In Cameroon, Tchombe (2014) observed that teacher-centered methods tend to limit student engagement, while inquiry-based approaches produce better student participation and student interest. This theory provides a strong foundation for this study for the reason that it highlights the importance of equity, democracy, cultural recognition, and linguistic inclusion in education. In addition, it also shows that meaningful reform requires more than policy statements. It requires changes in classroom practice, curriculum design, teacher preparation, and institutional structures.

## Methodology

This study employed a concurrent mixed methods research design. The study was done in selected Government Bilingual Secondary Schools in four sub-divisions within the Bamenda and Yaoundé City Councils. The sample comprised 376 students and 10 teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools and teachers, while students who had spent at least two years in the schools were selected through simple random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire for students and a Key Informant Interview guide for teachers. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, percentages, charts, regression, and chi-square, at the 0.05 level of significance. The qualitative data were organized into themes and interpreted in relation to the quantitative findings.

## Findings

### School climate/culture and sustenance of peace and good citizenship among students of Bilingual Secondary Schools in Cameroon

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on School Climate/School Culture**

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD	Mean	Std Dev
1	A peaceful school climate reduces fights among students.	204	121	32	19	325	51	3.36	.839
2	A friendly school environment helps me get along with others.	141	205	24	6	346	30	3.28	.653
3	A caring and supportive school makes me proud to be a good citizen and makes me to care about my community.	164	177	26	9	341	35	3.32	.707
4	A welcoming school helps me solve problems peacefully.	124	185	49	18	309	67	3.10	.802
5	A kind school environment teaches me to respect and treat others better.	185	152	24	15	337	39	3.35	.772
6	Without a positive or healthy school culture and climate, there will be more conflicts in school.	146	156	49	25	302	74	3.12	.878
<b>Overall Mean of Responses (out of 24)</b>								<b>19.53</b>	<b>2.792</b>

Table 1 shows that school climate and school culture play a strong and positive role in sustaining peace and promoting good citizenship among students in Bilingual Secondary Schools in Cameroon. The mean scores across the six items range from 3.10 to 3.36 on a 4-point Likert scale, suggesting that there is high agreement among students that a friendly, caring, supportive, and peaceful school environment contributes immensely to behavioural development and peaceful coexistence. The overall mean of 3.26 (19.53 out of 24) suggests that students overwhelmingly recognize the importance of school climate in shaping attitudes, reducing conflict, and fostering responsible citizenship.

Item 1, with the highest mean score, expresses the belief that a peaceful school climate reduces fights and violence (M = 3.36, SD = .839). This echoes previous findings which indicate that conflict rates are very much lower when schools create an environment that is calm and orderly and have clear rules, are perceived as being fair, and where teachers are supportive. The slightly higher standard deviation indicates some variation in the degree of peacefulness in different school environments and would suggest that not all schools have the same effectiveness in enforcing discipline and/or promoting peace.

Item 2 also demonstrates strong agreement that a friendly school environment helps students get along with others, with a mean of 3.28 and a standard deviation of .653. The relatively low standard deviation indicates a high consistency of student experiences, implying that a majority of the respondents really feel their schools create environments where friendliness and social harmony are fostered. This, indeed is a reflection of good interpersonal relations and suggests that daily interactions among students are patterned by norms of respect and cooperation.

Item 3 reinforces the positive perception of school culture with a mean score of 3.32. Students felt that a caring and supportive school makes them proud of their roles as good citizens and subsequently motivates them to take care of their communities. This finding is important, since it shows how strong emotional and

social supports are in fostering civic values and a sense of membership among students. A supportive school culture, characterized by helpful teachers, approachable administrators, and warm peer relationships, appears to nurture civic responsibility and community-mindedness.

Item 5 indicates strong agreement, with a mean score of 3.35, that a kind school environment teaches respect and good treatment toward others. This points out the role of school norms in shaping character, empathy, and moral behavior. Students in kind and respectful environments are likely to be kind and respectful, thus contributing directly to peacebuilding and harmonious coexistence.

Although item 4 (M = 3.10) and item 6 (M = 3.12) had somewhat lower means compared with the first three items, they nevertheless fall within the “agree” range. Item 4 suggests that a welcoming school contributes to students solving problems in nonviolent ways, corroborating that inclusiveness and feelings of belonging play a part in conflict resolution. Item 6 suggests that students believe that without a positive and healthy school climate, conflicts would escalate. The relatively higher standard deviations for these two items (.802 and .878) suggest variation in the degree to which schools are able to create welcoming and positive school cultures. This could reflect differences in leadership practices, teacher-student relationships, and approaches to school discipline.

These findings, in totality, strongly indicate that school climate and culture are the prime determinants of peace and good citizenship in students. A peaceful, friendly, caring, and supportive environment, governed by acts of kindness, pays off in enhancing student behavior, reducing conflict, instilling mutual respect, and building civic pride. However, these variations in standard deviation also point toward increased consistency of schools in this regard. Strengthened leadership, inclusive school values, training of teachers on positive climate practices, and engaging students in shared responsibility will, therefore, be helpful in creating uniformly healthy and peaceful school environments.

**Table2: Model Summary on Role of School Climate/School Culture in Sustaining Peace and Good Citizenship among Students**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.462 <sup>a</sup>	.214	.212	2.337	1.745

a. Predictors: (Constant), School Climate/School Culture

b. Dependent Variable: Peace and Good Citizenship

The model summary presented in Table 2 indicates a correlation coefficient (R) of .462, suggesting a positive and moderate-to-strong relationship between school climate/school culture and peace and good citizenship among students. The R Square value of .214 implies that school climate/school culture accounts for 21.4% of the variance in peace and good citizenship. This proportion of explained variance is substantial in educational and social science

research, underscoring the importance of the school environment in shaping students' civic behavior. The adjusted R Square (.212) confirms the robustness of the model after adjusting for sample size. Furthermore, the Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.745 falls within the acceptable range, indicating no serious autocorrelation among the residuals and confirming that the regression model meets the assumption of independence of errors.

**Table 3: ANOVA on Role of School Climate/School Culture in Sustaining Peace and Good Citizenship among Students**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	554.901	1	554.901	101.610	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2042.437	374	5.461		
	Total	2597.338	375			

a. Dependent Variable: Peace and Good Citizenship

b. Predictors: (Constant), School Climate/School Culture

The ANOVA results in Table 3 further demonstrate the overall significance of the regression model. The computed F-value of 101.610 with a significance level of  $p = .000$  is far below the 0.05 threshold. This indicates that the regression model is statistically

significant and that school climate/school culture makes a meaningful contribution to explaining variations in peace and good citizenship among students. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected based on the overall model significance.

**Table 4: Regression Coefficients on Role of School Climate/School Culture in Sustaining Peace and Good Citizenship among Students**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	12.557	.853		14.726	.000	10.881	14.234
	School Climate/School Culture	.436	.043	.462	10.080	.000	.351	.521

a. Dependent Variable: Peace and Good Citizenship

The regression coefficients in Table 4 provide additional evidence of the predictive strength of school climate/school culture. The unstandardized coefficient ( $B = .436$ ) shows that a one-unit improvement in school climate/school culture leads to an increase of 0.436 units in peace and good citizenship, holding other factors constant. The standardized beta coefficient (.462) indicates that school climate/school culture is a strong positive predictor of peace and good citizenship. Moreover, the t-value of 10.080 with a corresponding significance level of  $p = .000$  confirms that this predictor is statistically significant at the 5% level. The 95% confidence interval for the coefficient (.351 to .521) does not include zero, further reinforcing the reliability and significance of the effect.

Based on the evidence from the model summary, ANOVA, and regression coefficients, there is sufficient statistical evidence at the 5% level of significance to reject the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ). The alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) is therefore accepted. This implies that school climate/school culture plays a statistically significant and positive role in sustaining peace and good citizenship among students of Bilingual Secondary Schools in Cameroon.

Qualitative data describe pathways by which school climate/culture promotes peace and good citizenship among students of bilingual secondary schools in Cameroon. From the qualitative perspective, four sub questions were designed to capture data on how school climate/culture promotes peace and citizenship among students of

bilingual secondary schools in Cameroon. The first sub question asked participants to describe the general atmosphere of their school regarding respect for diversity and inclusion. Most participants reported that there is only surface-level tolerance of diversity and inclusion in their schools. They explained that inclusion is real only on the surface, as their school cultures are characterized by polite coexistence at the surface yet harbour underlying ethnic/linguistic divides, sometimes enforced by authority. Some respondents reported the occasional prevalence of actual tensions among students and teachers grounded in regional and linguistic differences. One of the respondents said, "Students from rural areas who master Pidgin English well but are struggling in English and French are often mocked as being backward or as "villagers" by those from urban centers who have no challenge in English and French; I think respect for diversity is still aspirational if we have to be honest."

The second sub question required respondents to describe their school's climate regarding interethnic respect and conflict resolution. Participants reported periodic cases of conflicts or clashes among students along Francophone - Anglophone lines or along indigenous ethnic lines, sometimes expressed through name-calling, labeling, stereotyping and stigmatization and occasional physical brawls. Some of the respondents reported that their schools have often adopted a top-down or authoritarian approach to conflict resolution among students, with the school administration and the discipline masters and mistresses enforcing discipline in order to restore and maintain order. Some participants noted that in their school student prefects were charged were resolving minor disputes among students informally and only serious cases being referred to the school administration.

The third sub question asked respondents if there were school activities or traditions that promote unity and peaceful coexistence among students in their schools. On this question, participants mentioned activities like weekly school assemblies and sporting activities as promoting unity and peaceful coexistence among students. Some participants stated that they hold morning assemblies in their schools at least once a week and that these assemblies involve brief moments of ecumenical prayers (often involving Christian and Muslim students leading the prayers jointly) with the intention of promoting inter-faith respect and peaceful co-existence among students of different faiths. In addition, some participants reported that extracurricular activities like school choirs and sporting activities (e.g. football, handball and athletics) which usually engage students working in teams with one another helped to build positive relationships and cooperation among students thereby building unity and peaceful co-existence.

The last sub question required respondents to account for how their schools fostered supportive social environments in line with Dewey's belief that a supportive social environment is necessary for nurturing democratic habits. Majority of participants reported that the promotion of supportive social environments in their schools was not very effective with some stating that the efforts to achieve such supportive environments were mainly verbal with little practical action. One participant noted that "In my school, students usually elect their prefects democratically, echoing Dewey, but the school principal vetoes decisions" while others noted that at student assemblies democratic values are usually preached but thereafter these as well as real debates on diversity are stifled by top-down control and surveillance. Furthermore, participants reported that the social insecurity in the region and the

rigid centralization of authority hinder open, supportive interactions among students in their schools. According to one of the participants, "There exists a peaceful climate, but there is no space for challenging authority democratically given the tensions and insecurities we live in." Thus, there was no affirmation of the existence of flourishing supportive school environments from participants.

Descriptive statistics indicate strong agreement that peaceful, friendly, caring, and supportive school environments reduce conflicts, foster respect, and encourage civic responsibility. Inferential findings show that school climate/culture explains a substantial proportion of variance in peace and good citizenship ( $R^2 = 21.4\%$ ,  $p < .05$ ), making it the most influential factor in the study. A positive school climate characterized by fairness, kindness, safety, and support significantly enhances students' moral behaviour, social cohesion, and sense of belonging. This underscores the central role of school leadership, teacher-student relationships, and institutional values in peacebuilding and citizenship education.

## Discussion

The findings of this study showed that school climate and culture have strong influence on peace and good citizenship in Cameroon's bilingual secondary schools. Students generally strongly agreed that when a school is peaceful, friendly, caring, and supportive, conflicts tend to decrease and respect tends to increase. Students also reported that such schools encourage them to carry out their civic responsibilities with pride. The statistical results from analysed data showed that school climate explained 21.4% of the variation in peace and citizenship behaviours, and the p-value below 0.05 showed that the relationship is statistically significant, thereby lending support to what the students said. Findings show that schools that are fair, safe, and supportive help students develop moral behaviour, social unity, and a genuine sense of belonging. Leadership, strong teacher - student relationships, and clear, fair rules all play an important role in building this peaceful culture. These findings agree with Cohen et al. (2009) who describe school climate as the quality of daily school life, shaped by relationships, teaching practices, rules, and the physical environment, all of which influence whether students feel safe and included. The findings also agree with Thapa et al. (2013) who hold that school climate includes learning conditions, relationships, safety, and institutional structures, and that it directly affects school success. The students' agreement in the current study that caring school environments reduce conflict fits well with these conceptualizations. The strong 21.4% result reflects how fairness and respect in daily school life shape behaviour.

Not only do the findings of this study agree conceptually with existing literature, insights from the literature also support this study's findings. McKinney (2020) supports the finding that school climate and culture have a positive influence on peace and good citizenship when he explains that a positive school climate, especially one that respects cultural differences, strengthens students' sense of belonging. This is especially important in Cameroon, where students come from many ethnic groups and study in English or French. Sleeter (2018) has argued for the urgency for schools to create a culture of fairness by addressing deep-rooted inequalities and biases. When students in this study reported that kind and supportive schools strengthen civic responsibility, they were describing this type of culture in practice.

Positive and peace-oriented school climates can be built in several ways. For instances, McKinney (2020) recommends strategies such as strong leadership policies, and including fair language practices. Sleeter on his part focuses more on daily actions by teachers and staff to challenge bias. The strong results from this present study in Cameroon suggest that both approaches could be working together. An important contribution of this study is its focus on bilingual secondary schools, since much of the earlier research has focused on primary schools or general school settings. This helps to fill an important research gap.

The finding that school climate and culture have a strong influence on peace and good citizenship also align closely with Dewey's theory. In *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) argued that schools should function as small democratic communities. For him, students learn cooperation and responsibility by living and working together in shared spaces. A positive school climate reflects this Deweyan idea, because it encourages unity and shared responsibility. James Banks (2019) on his part described an empowering school culture as a key dimension of multicultural education. He believed that such a culture reduces prejudice and promotes fairness. Danesh's peace theory (2006, 2019) also supports these findings. He argued that school environments can heal divisions by teaching unity among diverse groups. The strong statistical link of 21.4% shows that school climate really plays a central role in shaping peaceful behaviour.

These theories match the findings of this study for the reason that they all view school culture as something lived out in daily practice rather than written only in policies. This is especially important within the context of Cameroon's diverse bilingual schools, where tensions could easily erupt and grow if relationships are not handled carefully. This present study is unique in that it provides measurable evidence for Dewey's general ideas about democratic living and shows that school climate is the strongest predictor of peace and citizenship. However, the theories that underpin this study say less about how school climate functions during times of major conflict, such as Cameroon's language crisis, leaving this question open for further enquiry.

The finding that school climate and culture have a strong influence on peace and good citizenship agree with pre-existing empirical studies such as Voight et al. (2021), Harber and Mncube (2017), Zirkel (2008) and Osakwe (2019). Voight et al. (2021) found that multicultural practices in U.S. schools increased students' sense of belonging by 15%, especially among minority students. Harber and Mncube (2017) reported that South African schools using peace-focused and culturally inclusive practices improved social connection by 18% and reduced racial tensions. Zirkel (2008) showed that inclusive climates reduced hidden biases by 12%, and thereby helped students to interact more positively. Osakwe (2019) found that incorporating local cultural practices in Nigerian schools tended to improve peer relationships by 10%. The 21.4% result in Cameroon is higher than many of these findings. This could be explained in part as a result of Cameroon's (and Cameroon's schools') bilingual environment, where students interact across language and cultural lines every day.

Some studies have reported weaker outcomes, suggesting that school climate or school culture is not always a strong predictor of peace and good citizenship among students. Zirkel and Pollack (2016) found that when diversity efforts felt superficial, students withdrew rather than engaged. The positive responses in Cameroon

suggest that school climate efforts are more genuine and meaningful. They also suggest the possibility that existing contextual factors play a critical role in shaping outcomes, implying that context specificities matter. In fact, in societies with histories of division, such as post-colonial African countries, school climate has the potential to serve as a powerful space for healing and unity. This aligns with Soudien (2009) in the South African context. Gay (2018) showed that proper teacher training can significantly reduce disciplinary problems for minority students, a factor that could have cross context applicability. Differences seen in other studies, such as those reported by Jansen (2017) in under-resourced areas, suggest that adequate support and leadership are essential for positive climates to succeed. A significant challenge that emerged from literature relates to the question about school climate can be measured. Indeed, Cohen et al. (2009) noted that measuring school climate can vary widely, and some studies focus mainly on academic outcomes rather than peace and citizenship. It is also unclear whether the sense of belonging developed in school continues into adulthood as studies have not addressed this question.

## Conclusion

What has to be retained in this study is that schoolclimate/culture constitute a critical case in the process of peace and good citizenship in secondary schools in Cameroon. From the foregoing analysis, it appears quite plausible to argue that school leaders should prioritize the building of caring and inclusive cultures. Also, we argue that there is need for training programs (both pre-service and in-service capacity building programs) to help teachers strengthen fairness and respectful relationships. Policies in place should promote safety, inclusion, and cooperation at every level. In addition, Dewey's vision of shared democratic life should be integrated with local peace-building efforts so that schools can serve as practical models of democracy. Moreover, if all aspects of school climate are measured, that is, safety, relationships, fairness, and learning conditions, it will help to ensure that every student benefits. In this way, positive school climates can play a lasting role in strengthening unity and citizenship in Cameroon's diverse society. Finally, student councils, if and where they exist, should also be given genuine authority. They should participate in selecting student leaders from diverse backgrounds and in organising intercultural events. Monthly or per term voting on key issues will allow students to practise democracy in the spirit described by Dewey (1916). The study's findings show that participation strengthens civic pride and reduces conflict. When students are trusted with responsibility, they learn to carry that responsibility into society.

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