

# School Policies and Their Impact on Student's Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in the Douala IV Municipality, Littoral Region of Cameroon

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## **Abstract:**

This study which was based on school policies' effects on students' achievement examined admission, grading and discipline policies and their impacts on student's academic performance in secondary schools in Douala IV municipality. The specific objectives of this study included: 1) To investigate the impact of admission policies on students' academic performance. 2) To investigate the impact of grading policies on students' academic performance. 3) To investigate the impact of disciplinary policies on students' academic performance. The study employed a quantitative research method with a descriptive survey design. The population of this study included principals and vice principals in secondary schools in Douala IV municipality. 13 secondary schools principals and 19 vice principals were involved in the study, giving a total of 32 school administrators selected from 13 secondary schools. The instrument used to collect the required data from the school administrators was the questionnaires. Quantitative data was analyzed by means of descriptive statistical analysis using simple frequency distributions and percentages. Findings reveal that admission policies focusing on merit-based selection positively correlate with higher academic performance, as they ensure the enrollment of students with strong academic foundations. Grading policies that incorporate continuous assessment alongside final exams were found to encourage consistent student efforts and result in better academic outcomes. Discipline policies that promote supportive and constructive environment, rather than punitive measures, were also shown to positively influence student performance by fostering a more conducive learning atmosphere. The study ended with recommendations, suggesting the adoption of flexible and supportive admission, grading and discipline policies to improve student's academic performance.

**Keywords:** School policies, academic performance, secondary schools.

**Introduction:** The nexus between educational policies and students' academic achievements is a domain of increasing scholarly interest, underscored by a growing recognition of the foundational role that institutional frameworks play in shaping educational landscapes. Schools, through the enactment of their policies, wield considerable influence over the academic and social development of their student populations. This research is predicated on an exploration of the impact of specific school policies; namely, admission, grading, and disciplinary policies on student academic performance, with a particular focus on 13 educational institutions in Douala IV subdivision.

Educational outcomes, as influenced by school policies, provide a critical lens through which the efficacy of these policies can be assessed. Admission policies, for instance, serve as gatekeepers to educational opportunity and resource allocation, potentially affecting the demographic composition and overall academic caliber of the student body (Smith & Johnson, 2021).

## **Background**

The historical evolution of educational policy and its implications for student academic performance offer a fascinating glimpse into how societies have sought to structure learning environments over time. This evolution is marked by significant shifts, driven by changing societal needs, economic conditions, and prevailing political ideologies, each influencing the direction and nature of educational reforms. In the earliest stages of formal education systems, the primary focus was on imparting basic literacy and numeracy skills. This emphasis was rooted in the practical needs of societies to equip individuals with essential skills for daily transactions and civic participation. The establishment of such systems was often influenced by the economic imperatives of the time, aiming to create a workforce capable of supporting emerging industrial economies (Kliebard, 2004). However, as societies evolved and became more complex, the objectives of education expanded. The Enlightenment period, for instance, introduced the idea of education as a means for individual empowerment and societal improvement, leading to broader curricular inclusions such as the sciences and humanities.

The 19th century saw the advent of compulsory education laws in many Western countries, a significant milestone that reflected growing governmental interest in educating the populace. These laws were underpinned by the belief in education as a right and a necessary foundation for a well-functioning democracy. However, the implementation of such policies also revealed the challenges of standardization and the tension between public education objectives and local control (Tyack and Tobin, 1994). The 20th century heralded profound changes with the progressive education movements, which critiqued traditional, rote-learning approaches. Renowned figures like John Dewey in the United States championed the idea of "learning by doing" and advocated for education that nurtured the whole child intellectually, socially, and emotionally. This period saw a shift towards more student-centered policies that considered the diverse needs of learners, integrating aspects of creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving into the curriculum. Progressive education sought to prepare students not just for economic participation but for life in a rapidly changing world.

The latter part of the 20th century and the onset of the 21st century have been characterized by increasing globalization and the information technology revolution. These developments have further transformed educational priorities and policies. There has been a growing emphasis on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education, reflecting the demands of a knowledge-based economy. Moreover, the digital age has prompted educational systems worldwide to integrate technology into learning processes, aiming to equip students with digital literacy skills essential for the modern workforce (Collins & Halverson, 2010). Throughout these historical shifts, educational policies have continuously adapted to meet the evolving demands of society. Each period's policies reflect a dialogue between traditional education values and the pressing needs of contemporary society, whether economic, political, cultural or social.

Conceptually, incorporating an analysis of the framework underpinning school policies requires an intricate examination of the guiding principles and theories that inform the governance of educational settings. At the heart of this exploration is the understanding that school policies—spanning admission, grading, and disciplinary measures, serve as the scaffolding for educational environments, aiming to bolster both academic success and the personal growth of students.

Admission policies stand as the entryway to the educational journey, establishing the criteria that shape the student body's composition. These policies mirror an institution's ethos and objectives, striving to balance merit-based selection with broader ambitions toward equity and inclusivity. The intricacies of admission policies lie in their dual purpose: to identify students who will thrive within and enrich the school's academic offerings and standards, while also crafting a student body that reflects a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives. This dual aim underscores the challenge of balancing academic qualifications with the imperative to extend opportunities to underrepresented or disadvantaged groups, thereby enriching the educational tapestry with varied narratives and insights (Alcott, 2017).

Simultaneously, grading policies sit at the core of the educational system's academic structure, offering a framework through which student performance is evaluated, in order to set the standards of institutions and educational systems. These policies are multifunctional: they provide critical feedback to students regarding their progress, set forth clear benchmarks for academic success, and lay the groundwork for future educational or career pathways based on academic accomplishments. The development of grading policies navigates the challenge of delivering accurate assessments of student learning while accommodating the diverse array of student talents and modes of learning. The objective is to cultivate an evaluative system that is both rigorous and equitable, motivating students towards deep engagement with their studies and fostering a sense of academic achievement and growth (Brookhart & McMillan, 2020).

Furthermore, disciplinary policies are vital in maintaining a respectful and orderly educational atmosphere or school climate (Mbua, 2002; 2023). These policies delineate acceptable conduct within the school community and outline the repercussions for behavioral infractions. Beyond their corrective function, disciplinary policies possess an inherently educative value, aimed at instilling principles of responsibility, mutual respect, and adherence to community standards among students. The art of formulating effective disciplinary measures involves striking a delicate balance between upholding regulations and nurturing students' rights and personal development, ensuring that disciplinary actions promote not only compliance but also understanding and personal growth (Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

Collectively, these policy domains are instrumental in realizing the overarching ambition of fostering an educational environment conducive to the comprehensive development of students. The success of school policies is contingent upon their capacity to be both structured and adaptable, offering clear directives while also being sensitive to the individual needs and contexts of students. Achieving this equilibrium is crucial in empowering educational institutions to accomplish their mission of cultivating well-rounded individuals ready to navigate the complexities of the future. As the educational landscape continues to evolve, the fundamental principles that guide the formulation and implementation of school policies remain a central concern for educators, policymakers, and scholars, reflecting a shared commitment to enhancing the educational journey for all students (Brookhart & McMillan, 2020; Skiba & Peterson, 2003).

Contextually, the educational landscape in Cameroon is intricately woven with the country's unique historical, economic, and sociolinguistic fabrics which have implications in coming out with school policies of the country, presenting a distinct set of opportunities and challenges. At the heart of these challenges is the bilingual nature of Cameroon, where English and French serve as official languages, a legacy of colonial history that has profound implications for educational policy and

practice. This bilingualism, while a rich cultural asset, complicates the development and implementation of educational policies, necessitating strategies that ensure equitable and effective education across different linguistic communities.

The admission policies of Anglophone and Francophone secondary schools in Cameroon have slight differences. Although the admission of students in form one (For Anglophone secondary schools) and its equivalent sixieme (For Francophone secondary schools) is granted to pupils who have completed six years of primary education in the respective sub-systems, the required entry certificate into form one is the first school leaving certificate (FSLC) while that required to get into sixieme is the “Certificat d’Etude Primaire” (CEP). Moreover, most students are admitted into form one and sixieme after their success in Government Common Entrance Examination or Entree en sixieme, for the Francophone sub-system. However, students can be admitted into intermediate classes upon showing proves of promotion from their previous classes in the same school or another school. This is usually done by presenting a progress report card.

The grading policy for the intermediate classes for both Anglophone and Francophone sub-systems is based on the average system, with a maximum score of twenty (20). A student who scores a mark of ten and above in the exam is normally said to have succeeded while those with scores less than ten are said to have failed. Nevertheless, some institutions sometimes moderate the success score and go below ten to promote students into higher classes. In terminal or public exams such as the Cameroon General Certificate of Education, Ordinary and Advanced level exams for the Anglophones, the grading system is the percentage system in which marks are score on one hundred. This is unlike the Francophone sub-system where their terminal exams like the Brevet d’Etudes du Premier Cycle (BEPC) and the Baccalaureate use the average grading system.

With respect to the disciplinary policy, all schools within the national territory are supposed to be void of corporal punishment as ordered by the minister of secondary education. However, teachers and school administrators like discipline masters, vice principals, principals, among others are supposed to technically use negative reinforcement and light punishment strategies to curb disruptive behaviours in schools and consequently uphold a serene school climate. Such punishments may include: sweeping, clearing, weeding among others.

Disparities in educational access between urban and rural areas exacerbate the challenges faced by the Cameroonian educational system. Urban centers often benefit from better infrastructure, more qualified teachers, and greater access to educational resources compared to their rural counterparts. This urban-rural divide contributes to unequal educational outcomes, with students in rural areas often at a disadvantage in terms of academic performance and access to higher education opportunities (Fonkeng & Ntembe, 2009). With respect to the admission policy in rural areas, some pupils who fail the FSLC exams are usually given the opportunity to enter into form one so that they can rewrite the exams while already in secondary schools. Such opportunities are farfetched for pupils who fail the same exams in urban area or schools. It should be noted that, students with severe recalcitrant behaviours who refuse to change after a series of warnings and punishments can be expelled from the institution.

Furthermore, the issue of limited resources ranging from physical infrastructure to teaching materials and trained personnel (Alama, 2020) remains a significant barrier to achieving educational equity and quality in Cameroon. The scarcity of resources is particularly acute in rural schools, but it also affects urban schools, highlighting the need for policies that effectively allocate resources to where they are most needed.

In response to these challenges, Cameroon has embarked on a series of educational reforms aimed at improving access to quality education for all children, irrespective of their linguistic, geographic, or socioeconomic background. These reforms include efforts to promote gender equality in education, recognizing the pivotal role of education in empowering girls and women and addressing

societal inequities. Moreover, there is an ongoing initiative to revise the national curriculum to better align with contemporary societal needs, including the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) skills, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (Tchombe, 2014).

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of recent educational policies in Cameroon remains a subject of considerable debate. Assessing the impact of these policies on students' academic performance is critical, not only for gauging their success but also for identifying areas for improvement. The need for rigorous empirical research in this context cannot be overstated, as it provides the evidence base necessary to inform policy adjustments and ensure that educational reforms achieve their intended outcomes. As Cameroon continues to navigate its unique educational challenges, the quest for policies that foster equity, quality, and inclusivity in education remains paramount, reflecting broader aspirations for national development and societal well-being (Tchombe, 2014). The bottom line of all education policies in general and admission, grading and discipline policies in particular, as viewed in this research is to positively impact students' academic achievements which is the sine qua non aspect of schooling and formal education.

**Statement of the problem** School policies have a remarkable importance in shaping students' academic performance or experience. When school policies such as admission policies, grading policies and discipline policies among others are well implemented, there is likely to be an improvement in students' academic outputs. From experiences, these researchers realized that students' academic performance are dropping, poor students participation in class, poor test scores, poor performance during assignments, high level of indiscipline among students, among others which are attributed to ineffective implementation of school policies. It is for this reason or backdrop that this study sought to investigate school policies of admission, grading and discipline on students' academic performances in Douala IV municipality.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To investigate the impact of admission policies on students' academic performance.
2. To investigate the impact of grading policies on students' academic performance.
3. To investigate the impact of disciplinary policies on students' academic performance.

### **Research questions**

1. What is the impact of admission policies on students' academic performance?
2. What is the impact of grading policies on students' academic performance?
3. What is the impact of disciplinary policies on students' academic performance?

### **Operational definition of terms**

**School policies** According to Fullan (2007), school policies are "the set of guidelines and regulations that are formulated by educational institutions or governing bodies to organize and manage the school environment, aiming to ensure a safe, efficient, and equitable educational experience for all students." In this study, school policies are defined as the rules and frameworks established by educational authorities to create an organized, secure, and fair learning setting. These policies cover various aspects of school life, including how students are admitted, assessed, and disciplined, with the ultimate goal of fostering an environment conducive to learning and personal growth in order to attain the educational objectives at the student, classroom, school and societal levels.

**Academic performance:** Achankeng, (2008) defines academic performance as "the extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has achieved their short or long-term educational goals, which can be measured through various means including, but not limited to, grades, tests, and other academic

indicators." In this study, academic performance refers to the level at which students meet their educational objectives, as evidenced by their grades, test scores, and other forms of assessment. It reflects the effectiveness of both teaching strategies and student engagement in the educational process, serving as a key measure of the success of educational policies and practices.

**Secondary schools:** Baker (2014) describes secondary schools as "educational institutions that serve students typically in the adolescent stage of development, following primary education and preparing students for higher education or vocational training." In this study, secondary schools are viewed as the educational phase following primary school, where students receive instruction tailored to adolescents. These institutions play a critical role in preparing students for future educational pursuits or entry into the workforce, emphasizing both academic and personal development during a pivotal stage in students' lives.

**Methodology:** The study was a quantitative research which used a descriptive survey design to collect the required data from school administrators, including principals and vice principals. A sample thirteen principals and nineteen vice principals was selected from secondary schools in Douala IV municipality to supply the requisite data for this research. The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire designed for administrators, to arrive at the objectives of the study, answer the research questions. The questionnaire used a four points Likert's scale – strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. All the thirty two questionnaire copies given out to the school administrators were collected by the researchers. This gave a 100% return rate.

**Table 1: Sample of Principals and Vice principals in their respective schools**

Schools	Principals	Vice-principals	Sample Size
St. Bernard College	1	1	2
Ngueson College	1	2	3
DAAS College Bonaberi	1	1	2
A.B.C H S Douala	1	2	3
CIGET College	1	1	2
INSET College	1	1	2
NABICO College	1	1	2
BELMON College	1	1	2
SMART College	1	2	3
ALL SAINT College	1	1	2
GBHS Bonaberi	1	2	3
GBHS Bonasama	1	2	3
GBHS Mabanda	1	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>32</b>

Source: Field work 2024

A simple random sampling technique was used to select the schools and their principals and vice principals were used to constitute the sample. The data analysis to answer the research questions was done descriptively, using frequency counts and percentages.

## Findings

The findings for this study were organized based on research questions

### Findings based on research question one

The findings focused on the first eight items of the questionnaire, based on admission policies and their effects on students' academic performance.

**Table 2: Impact of Admission Policies on Students' Academic Performance. f = frequency, % = percentages, SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree**

Items	SA f (%)	A f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)	Total f (%)
1. Admission criteria are clearly defined and transparent.	10 (31)	19 (59)	2 (6)	1 (3)	32 (100)
2. Admission policies ensure a fair selection of students.	12 (38)	17 (53)	2 (6)	1 (3)	32 (100)
3. Admission policies are regularly reviewed and updated.	9 (28)	19 (59)	2 (6)	2 (6)	32 (100)
4. The school admits students based on academic merit.	11 (34)	17 (53)	2 (6)	2 (6)	32 (100)
5. Parents and students are well informed about admission policies.	9 (28)	19 (59)	2 (6)	2 (6)	32 (100)
6. The admission process is efficient and timely.	11 (34)	17 (53)	2 (6)	2 (6)	32 (100)
7. Strict admission policies lead to better academic performance.	10 (31)	18 (56)	2 (6)	2 (6)	32 (100)
8. Admission policies contribute to maintaining high academic standards.	10 (31)	18 (56)	2 (6)	2 (6)	32 (100)

Source: Fieldwork 2024

From table 2, amidst the findings arrived at from the administrators' questionnaire items, 90% of the administrators agreed that their schools had clearly defined and transparent admission criteria while only 10% of them disagreed to the assertion (from item 1). Also, the findings revealed that 87% of the respondents indicated that admission policies in their respective secondary schools lead to an improvement in students' academic performance and contribute in maintaining high academic standards (from items 7 & 8). Thus the first research question was answered as follows: secondary schools in Douala IV municipality had well defined admission policies which had a high positive effect on the academic achievements of students and contribute in maintaining high academic standard.

### Findings based on research question two

The findings focused on the items 9 to 16 of the questionnaire, based on grading policies and their effects on students' academic performance.

**Table 3: Impact of Grading Policies on Students' Academic Performance**

Items	SA f (%)	A f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)	Total f (%)
9. My school has fair and consistent. grading policies	12 (38)	19 (59)	1 (3)	0 (0)	32 (100)
10. Grading policies are clearly communicated to students and parents.	14 (44)	17 (53)	1 (3)	0 (0)	32 (100)
11. Regular assessments help improve academic performance.	13 (41)	18 (56)	1 (3)	0 (0)	32 (100)
12. Students understand the criteria for grading.	11 (34)	20 (63)	1 (3)	0 (0)	32 (100)
13. Teachers adhere strictly to the grading policies.	12 (38)	19 (59)	1 (3)	0 (0)	32 (100)
14. Grading policies motivate students to perform better.	10 (31)	21 (66)	1 (3)	0 (0)	32 (100)
15. Grading policies are reviewed to enhance academic outcomes.	11 (34)	20 (63)	1 (3)	0 (0)	32 (100)
16. Continuous feedback on performance helps students improve.	13 (41)	18 (56)	1 (3)	0 (0)	32 (100)

Findings from table 3 reveal that 31 (97%) out of the 32 administrators selected for the sample agreed that their schools possess fair and consistent grading policies while only one administrator (3%) refuted the statement (from item 9). Further finding on the impact of grading policies on students' performance revealed that 97% of the administrators agreed that their grading policies motivate students to perform better; they are reviewed to enhance students' outcome; and continuous feedback given to students help them to improve on their performance. Research question two can be answered thus: grading policies have a high impact on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Douala IV municipality as attested by most (97%) principals and vice principals of the institutions.

### Findings based on research question three

The findings focused on the items 17 to 24 of the questionnaire, based on discipline policies and their effects on students' academic performance.

**Table 4: Impact of Disciplinary Policies on Students' Academic Performance**

Items	SA f (%)	A f (%)	D f (%)	SD f (%)	Total f (%)
17. My school has disciplinary policies which are well known to all students.	10 (31)	17 (53)	3 (9)	2 (6)	32 (100)
18. Disciplinary actions are fair and consistent.	11 (34)	16 (50)	4 (13)	1 (3)	32 (100)
19. Students are aware of the consequences of violating rules.	10 (31)	18 (56)	3 (9)	1 (3)	32 (100)
20. There is a clear process for handling disciplinary issues.	12 (38)	17 (53)	2 (6)	1 (3)	32 (100)
21. Discipline is enforced uniformly across the school.	11 (34)	17 (53)	3 (9)	1 (3)	32 (100)
22. Regular reviews of disciplinary policies are conducted to improve effectiveness.	11 (34)	16 (50)	4 (13)	1 (3)	32 (100)
23. Disciplinary policies help maintain a conducive learning environment.	10 (31)	18 (56)	3 (9)	1 (3)	32 (100)
24. Strict disciplinary policies lead to better academic performance.	9 (28)	18 (56)	4 (13)	1 (3)	32 (100)

Source: Fieldwork 2024

Findings from table 4 revealed that 84% of secondary school administrators in Douala IV municipality agreed that their respective schools had disciplinary policies which are well known to students while 16% of them disagreed (from item 1). On the impact of disciplinary policies on students' academic performance, 87% of the principals and vice principals asserted that, disciplinary policies help to maintain a conducive learning environment in their schools and 84% of them agreed that, strict disciplinary policies led to better academic performance of their students (items 23 & 24). The response to research question three was that disciplinary policies had a high positive impact on students' academic performance in secondary schools in Douala IV municipality of the Littoral Region of Cameroon, as attested by most administrators.

### Conclusion

From the research findings, on the impact of school policies on the academic performances of students in secondary schools in Douala IV municipality, it was concluded that admission policies, grading policies and disciplinary policies all had a positive effect on students' academic performance as declared by the principals and vice principals (32 school administrators) of the 13

selected schools. This implies that the problems of poor and declining academic performance of students which the researchers initially attributed to these policies were mildly caused by them. The problems could therefore be greatly linked to other factors that affect students' performance such as: students' readiness to learn, teacher qualification and competences, administrators' leadership style, parental background and parents' socio-economic status, counseling services, availability of instructional materials and infrastructures among others. Some recommendations were nonetheless made to completely close the gap and ensure optimum academic performance of students under the influence of school policies.

### **Recommendations**

1. All school heads are recommended to adopt flexible and supportive admission policies and guide the students to study their fields of interests. This will go a long way to arouse the students' interests and motivate them to study better so as to improve on their academic performance.
2. School administrators are recommended to regularly review and update their admission, grading and discipline policies to improve student's academic performance.
3. School administrators are recommended to provide professional development opportunities, such as workshops for teachers and administrators on implementing and enforcing admission, grading and disciplinary policies which can enhance their effectiveness.

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