



Research Article

STUDENT RECORDS AND THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THE SOUTH WEST AND LITTORAL REGIONS OF CAMEROON

Journal Website:
<https://theamericanjournals.com/index.php/tajssei>

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Submission Date: October 14, 2023, Accepted Date: October 19, 2023,

Published Date: October 24, 2023 |

Crossref doi: <https://doi.org/10.37547/tajssei/Volume05Issue10-06>

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine student records and the effective management of public secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon. The study was guided by two objectives which examine the impact of students' admission files and students' attendance registers on the effective management of secondary schools. This is supported by the system theory by Bertalanffy (1968) where organizations as interdependent and interrelated where there is constant interaction among the members of the organization may be very useful to this study. This theory is relevant to this study as it shows that students' record keeping in relation to school management should not be treated as an independent aspect of school management but, it should be treated with needed attention to the overall management of the school system. The Triangulation research method specifically the descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The instruments used for data collection were a questionnaire (closed ended questions) for academic staff (teachers) and an interview guide for administrators (principals and bursars). The sample for this study consisted of 302 teachers and 24 principals/bursars. The proportionate stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques were adopted for the study. Data from closed ended questions was analysed using SPSS 23.0, with the aid of descriptive and inferential statistical tools while the interview was analysed thematically. The Spearman's rho was used to test the research hypotheses formulated for the study. Findings revealed that students' admission files play a role on the effective management of secondary schools and that students' attendance registers play a role on

the effective management of secondary schools. Hypothetically, there is a positive significant, relationship between students' records keeping and the effective management of secondary schools with (R-value =0.129*, p-value < .025 < 0.05). The positive sign of the correlation value implies that the management of students' records will contribute to a certain extent in the effective management of secondary schools. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that students' records especially admission files if completely compiled immediately at the beginning of the school year may be of great impact to the records management system of the school and effective management of the school.

KEYWORDS

Student Records, Admission Files, Attendance Registers, Effective Management, Public, Secondary Schools.

INTRODUCTION

The school is one of the most important establishments in human societies. The purpose for which the school is created can only be achieved through effective administration. Effective administration helps to bring about achievement of any establishment. One of the most important aspects of school administration is record keeping. Students records are very crucial to the success of the school system. Effective management and maintenance of students records are very essential for schools to achieve their predetermined educational goals. Conversely, the poor management and maintenance of students' records can mar the success of the entire school system. According to Akinwumiju and Agabi (2008), gathering information and keeping them in records is an important aspect in the socio-economic development of human society. They hold that information carefully gathered, stored and retrieved in records and transmitted has helped in the maintenance and sustenance of the human society. Records are documents that memorize and provide objective evidence of activities performed, events occurred, results achieved, or statements made (Makhura, 2005). From these assertion, school records are therefore written statements of information about the life of a school.

These students' records give a lot of information about the students in the school that will enable administrator to take decisions and assess the progress of the students in the school. National policy on education requires that some of the records should be kept appropriately. Farrant (2004) holds that people such as the principals, the class teacher, and the government education authority should keep different records about the school. Students records are official documents of students, books and files containing essential and crucial information of students which are kept and preserved in the school offices for utilization and retrieval of information when needed (Osakwe, 2011). Such records are kept by the school head, teachers and the Parent Teachers Association (P.T.A). Some of the major school records include the admission and students' personal files, attendance register, results amongst others. The purpose of students' record keeping and management is to ensure that accurate and proper records of pupils' achievement and growth, information on school activities and matters that will promote efficiency and effectiveness of the school system are kept, amongst others (Besong, 2016). With this, the life of administrative institution may be short-lived if effective records keeping and management is absent. Based on this backdrop this study aims at analysing the

effect of students' record on the effective management in secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon.

Context and Justification of Study

The school is an educational institution within which several components come together consisting of the central administration, attached bodies and other personnel (Handbook for teachers and high schools, 1996). The central administration of the secondary general and technical school consists of the Head (principal), one or several deputy heads, one or several discipline masters/mistresses, one or several chiefs of works and one Bursar. The principals harmonize the collective life of the school which to some extent depends on the attention he/she pays on the relationship and behaviour of each and everyone in the school system. This system only existed for the students and all the actors of the educational system have their justification in terms of their relationship with the students. Therefore, all school activities are centered on the students. Secondary schools in Cameroon are under the Ministry of Secondary Education. These schools are administered or run by teachers who have obtained training in Higher Teachers Training Colleges (HTTC) found in Bamili, Yaounde, Maroua and Bertoua and Higher Technical Teachers Training College (HTTTC) found in Bamili, Douala and Kumba. Secondary general schools and secondary technical schools have at their summit a head (principal) and vice appointed by the central authorities (the ministry of secondary education).

It may be common to see many school administrators being too inclined to paper records that need much space for storage, unlike software records that take little space and time for its storage in computers. According to Fonkeng and Tamajong (2009), computer as one of the ICT tools can be used to keep students'

academic and behavioural progress. They added that filing and finding information about a student or a staff can be very easy with a computer. To them, effective school management requires the effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in the management of school records such as registration and admission, timetabling, school security, students' records, school calendar, and school accounting and management.

In essence, students record keeping and management is key to any educational institution for the role these aspects of educational administration play in the school system as it may lead to effective school management. Effective school management requires that the principal create and keep records on the number of students per class and school, sex, ages, number of teachers in a department and in the whole school, records on income and expenditure and the records on school facilities (Ololube 2013). It has been observed that some school managers do not regularly take students' attendance, teachers do not frequently sign the record of work book and sometimes sign periods they have not taught. The researcher has also observed that principals sometimes do not always give students enrollment during Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings and sometimes unrealistic figures are presented to hierarchy without appropriate students' records to justify these figures. In some secondary schools, the students' class list is being updated every term so that one cannot accurately know the number of students admitted for that year in a particular class.

The schools most at times do not keep records of students' past performance and criminal records; and they often dispose of records that are very useful to the whole life of the school. Bursars do not always present records of correct finances of fees paid with a

lot of discrepancies from one student to another for different amounts of PTA levies and other levies charged by the school for different students. Sometimes the Bursars prepare expenditure vouchers without appropriately justifying documents in a school. Sometimes school finances are used without proper records to back the usage. Facilities records are always not properly reflected with the realities of the schools as valuable school items are often loaded out of school. Some principals are not able to provide necessary justification documents of schools during central control visits in their schools, and some of them sometimes dispose school financial records that are very valuable because of embezzlement of school funds. This attitude of school administrators keeps the school in danger of appropriate decision making. Students record keeping in schools is very essential in efficient and effective planning, accountability and to monitor the progress of the school. It becomes very pertinent to examine the role of students' record on effective management of secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon.

This study has as major objective student records and the effective management of public secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon. Specifically, the study investigates:

1. The impact of students' admission files on the effective management of secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon
2. The impact of students' attendance registers on the effective management of secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon

Based on the above objectives, one general hypothesis was tested which verified the significant relationship between students' records and the effective

management of secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students' records are documents that are created for students' information to monitor their achievement and growth in the school system. According to Akanbi (1999) and Philip (2007), the purpose of record keeping for effective school management is to ensure that accurate and proper records are kept of students' achievements and growth, school activities and matters that will promote school efficiency and effectiveness. Ololube and Amanchukwu (2015) asserted that school records include among others, those pertaining to personal details of students, alongside with those of their academic performance, assessments and examination results. The effective keeping and management of these records involves all activities that ensure that they are in good conditions and kept in an orderly manner for the effective management of schools during and after some years (Ololube, 2013).

Good record management is very essential to the overall success of the school system and poor management and keeping of these records about the school and students may mar the effective management of the school and the success of the whole school system. To support, Ololube and Amanchukwu (2015) intimated that properly kept records of students can help considerably in accurate production of thorough certificates and testimonials to students to show how they performed during their studies. Sood (2004) held that records keeping enable teachers and parents to monitor the performance of their students to be able to react faster to the needs of their children.

The use of computers is in the management of records and instruction of students. In administration, records of students' performance are kept in computers and can be accessed at any point especially when they are kept in the cloud (Davies, 2011). The current world requires some knowledge of modern technology like the internet and when students and teachers are introduced into this world of technology as early as possible, it becomes very easy for them to access their records when stored in a computer (Durrand and Holden, 2005). Well improved schools store students' records in a computer, although areas without electricity supply are still too inclined to paper-based storage.

Students' records management comprises of a whole range of records. These records contain information about students that can help provide guidance and counselling to students. It helps in daily management of students' affairs at the school level. These records include applications, admissions, academic and social welfare, letters from parents, copies of letters to parents concerning the student and many others. The management of some of these records according to Philip (2007) are discussed below:

Management of applications and transfer forms: They should be made standard to facilitate the processing to applicants and make it more efficient process. Application forms enable the school to gather all the pre-requisite as well as comparable information on applications. It is advisable that the school, to which a new student is applying, provides its own application form.

Management of admission register: This is a permanent record in which every student is recorded on the first day he or she is admitted into a school. It is the comprehensive listing of the school's former and current students. It keeps stock of school enrolments

and it is important retrospective reference for the past enrolments into the school. This record should be filed in by the school head to record and keep track of information for the school reports and for individuals who may need references. It is used by the school head and anyone in charge of keeping records for reference purposes on current and former students of the school. It is kept in the school head's office. The storage of these records that have been full can be done by arranging them chronologically by the year of the original entry. It could create the index of the students by name, giving each a serial number. This can facilitate retrieval. This register should be kept in the school head's office for a good number of years, although the students must have completed their course of learning.

Management of students' record cards: They contain specific particulars as well as a summary of information on every student attending the school. They should be foldable to give access to other records like letters. In case of transfer of a student, it is preferable to leave the card at the school for reference purposes. This card is usually filed by the class teacher or school head, and can be used by the class teacher, guidance teacher and school head.

The students' cards could be stored alphabetically according to the name of the student. In the case of similar names, initials, education number, class or year of birth are recommended to differentiate the students. On transfer by the student, the card can be transferred to a suitable storage area within the school. School heads can create an index of the student by name and enrolment or education number where applicable. Where the students have left the school, the card should be moved to a suitable storage area within the school where it can be stored

alphabetically by name. Do not destroy the students' record cards.

Management of class register: It shows daily attendance for each class. It enables students at any given time to be traced easily, as long as one knows what class he or she was in at the time in question. It provides class teachers with information about students at a glance; show the size of each class and facilitate the comparison between girls and boys, it monitors individual students' attendance for administrative purposes and it reveals average class attendance. The class teacher of any student in charge of the attendance should fill in the register. The teacher can use it to monitor individual students as well as class attendance. It can also be used to fill in the students' record cards. This register together with students' record cards can draw the school administration's attention to irregular students' attendance.

During the term all school attendance registers may be stored in the staff room where teachers can have access to them. They should be kept secured during vacation periods. Where they are full, the registers should be kept in the school head's office. They can be arranged by grade, class and year. They should be stored for long and never to be destroyed.

Management of Mark schedule: It shows students' performance in test and assignments including end-of-term class tests. It gives the overall comparative results of each student. It enables the teacher to consistently record the performance of individual students, shows the comparative performance of the class; collects information for completing students' records cards and facilitates the preparation of progress reports. It is usually filled by the subject teacher and class teacher/master. The class and subject teachers need folders in which these schedules can be arranged

according to grades, year and term. It is necessary to create an index of students showing the grades. If the records are kept in folders, the students' names should be shown in the index. This enables cross-referencing.

This schedule is kept by the teacher or subject teacher so long as they teach the class or subject. Therefore, it can be retained by the school head for as long as all the students in this record are still at the school. After the students have left the school, the head must check the information in the students' record cards, using the mark schedule. Only then may the schedule be discarded.

Mills (2021) proposed the following importance of students' records to the effective management of secondary schools. This importance includes;

Monitoring students' progress in school: Students records such as test scores and progress report sheets are very essential in providing information about students' failures and success in secondary school. They also act as an information provider for parents and other authority to consult for further reference on the students' success or failures. The failures or success of student assist the school management to look for course of action to provide adequate pedagogic student support for those who are weak and to try to motivate the successful student by encouraging them or provide additional academic support for further improvement.

Follow up of students' effective presence in school: The keeping of students' records on attendance and absence habits is very important to monitor students' effective presence in secondary schools and keep parents and school administrators informed of these habits. The attendance information can be sent to parents alongside their academic performance records of the students for parents to assess their children

seriousness in schools. If students are not performing well in class, a well-kept record of attendance can help offer insight and possible causes which sometimes can be absences from classes during school periods.

Details Information about Student and family background: Students information on their parents and occupation can portray the socio-cultural and socio-educational background of the learners. This background information can assist school administrators and teachers to follow up the student learning and social habits in school.

Bases of Assessment: Students records provide a basis for the objective assessment of the state of teaching and learning in a school, including staff and student performance by supervisors and inspectors (Yahaya, 2007). Records on the performance of students are consulted by administrators, teachers, parents and inspectors to ascertain whether teaching was effective or not in a particular secondary school.

Methods of effective management and keeping of student's records

Records keeping is concerned with achieving economy and efficiency in the creation, maintenance, use and disposal of the records of secondary schools and in making the information they contain available to support the effective management of secondary schools (Kimberly, Piers & Dawn, 2001). The objective is to furnish accurate and complete information when it is required to carry out the functions and meet the objectives of government. The following methods of effective students' records management and keeping were opined by (Kimberly, Piers & Dawn, 2001).

Fixed student records: During the creation of students' record, it will go through a process of development and change, which is drafting the minutes for review

and approval of students' admission into the secondary schools. Once this process of creation is finished and the document is considered complete, it may be regarded as students' record. In order to provide evidence, the record must now be fixed and must not be susceptible to change. If a student's record is changed or manipulated, it cannot no longer provides evidence of the transaction originality.

Students' records have authority: Students Records provide the 'official' evidence of the activity or transaction they document. To be reliable, they must have authority that is by whom was the record generated or issued, under what authority and can this authority be proved? Obvious indicators of the official nature of students' records are signatures (also electronic signatures), letterheads, seals and office stamps. Therefore, the continuous safekeeping of students' records also protects their reliability. It is also important to note that a student record can be reliable in the sense that it is accurate and complete, however, it may have been created by someone without due authority to effect that act for which the record was created.

Unique students' records: Students Records are unique in the sense that, they are maintained in their appropriate context, they are a component in a unique compilation or sequence of transactions rather than isolated bits of information. They have meaning because they were generated during a particular transaction and each student is unique in character and behaviour. The records make sense within the context of the overall functions and activities of the individual or the school organization that created or used them.

Authentic student records: it must be possible to prove that students' records are what they say they are. The authenticity of a student record is derived from the record keeping system in which it was created or

received, maintained and used. A student record is authentic if it can be verified that it is now exactly as it was when first transmitted or set aside for retention. Students' records may be produced in a range of systems and stored in a range of media, including paper and electronic forms; different versions may be stored in different media in different locations. This phenomenon is increasing with the growth of information communication technology in secondary schools.

From a theoretical point of view, the system theory by Bertalanffy (1968) sees organizations as interdependent and interrelated where there is constant interaction among the members of the organization may be very useful to this study. Systems theory is an interdisciplinary theory about every system in nature, in society and in many scientific domains as well as a framework with which researchers can investigate phenomena from a holistic approach (Capra, 1997). Systems thinking come from the shift in attention from the part to the whole (Checkland, 1997; Weinberg, 2001; Jackson, 2003), considering the observed reality as an integrated and interacting unicom of phenomena where the individual properties of the single parts become indistinct. In contrast, the relationships between the parts themselves and the events they produce through their interaction become much more important, with the result that "system elements are rationally connected" (Luhmann, 1990) towards a shared purpose (Golinelli, 2009). The systemic perspective argued that researchers are not able to fully comprehend a phenomenon simply by breaking it up into elementary parts and then reforming it; but, need to apply a global vision to underline its functioning. Although researchers can start from the analysis of the elementary components of a phenomenon, in order to fully comprehend the phenomenon in its entirety researchers have to

observe it also from a higher level: a holistic perspective (Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

This theory is relevant to this study as it shows that students' record keeping in relation to school management should not be treated as an independent aspect of school management but, it should be treated with needed attention to the overall management of the school system. Thus, proper management of students' records in a school is essential in the overall management of the school. If students' records are not properly managed, information and statistical analysis will not be coherent and as such school administrators may not be able to take proper decisions to improve school management. Thus, students' records keeping in school should be part of the school management policy.

METHODOLOGY

The Triangulation research method specifically the descriptive survey design was adopted for the study.

The population of the study comprised of all public secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of the Republic of Cameroon. The South West Regions as of 2022/2023 academic year operated over 100 secondary schools with the Littoral Region operating over 300 secondary schools as of 2022/2023 academic year. The sample for this study consisted of 302 teachers and 12 principals. The proportionate stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques was adopted for the study.

The instruments use for data collection were a questionnaire (closed ended questions) for academic staff (teachers) and an interview guide for administrators (principals).

Data from the close ended questions was analysed using SPSS 23.0, with the aid of descriptive and

inferential statistical tools while interview was analysed thematically. The hypotheses of the study were tested using a non-parametric test (Spearman's Rho test) presented at 95% level of confidence interval with alpha set at 0.05 levels accepting 5% margin of error.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are presented and supported by literature and the works of other researchers. Quantitative data are presented first followed qualitative data.

Demographic Data

Among the 302 teachers who successfully completed the questionnaire, 53.0% (160) of the teachers are male and 47.0% (142) are female. This signifies that there were more male teachers than females in the sampled secondary schools. In line with the teachers' age, 42.4% (128) of the teachers are between the ages of 20-30 years old, 35.8% (108) are between the ages of 31-40

years old, and 21.9% (66) are between the ages of 41 years old and above. This shows that, there are more young teachers in the sampled secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Region of Cameroon. With reference to working experience, 70.2% (212) have worked for less than 10 years, 23.2% (70) have worked for 11-20 years, and 6.6% (20) for above 21 years. This signifies that, majority of the respondents have the required experience to provide information needed for the study. Finally, on teachers' region of work, 54.3% (164) of the teachers are in the South West Region and 45.7% (138) are in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. This gives a valid sample size of 302 respondents used to complete the teachers' questionnaire for this study.

Research Objective One: Students' Admission Files and the Effective Management of Secondary Schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon

The table below depicts teachers' opinion on students' admission files and the effective management of secondary schools.

Table 1: Teacher Opinion on teachers' opinion on students' admission files and the effective management of secondary schools

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
Students admission files contain vital records about each student in school.	121 (40.1%)	149 (49.3%)	28 (9.3%)	4 (1.3%)	270 (89.4%)	32 (10.6%)
Administrators take better decisions towards students when they consult their records.	112 (37.1%)	154 (51.0%)	33 (10.9%)	3 (1.0%)	266 (88.1%)	36 (11.9%)
When counselors consult the records of students, it becomes easy for them to help students.	102 (33.8%)	164 (54.3%)	27 (8.9%)	9 (3.0%)	266 (88.1%)	36 (11.9%)
All students have personal admission files in school.	136 (45.0%)	127 (42.1%)	24 (7.9%)	15 (5.0%)	263 (87.1%)	39 (19.9%)
School counselors consult students record before they begin a counseling session with the students.	63 (20.9%)	132 (43.7%)	77 (25.5%)	30 (9.9%)	195 (64.6%)	107 (35.4%)
Multiple Responses Set (MRS)	534 (35.4%)	726 (48.1%)	189 (12.5%)	61 (4.0%)	1260 (83.5%)	250 (16.5%)

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which the school is created can only be achieved through effective administration. Effective

administration helps to bring about achievement of any establishment. One of the most important aspects of school administration is record keeping. Students records are very crucial to the success of the school system. Effective management and maintenance of students records are very essential for schools to achieve their predetermined educational goals. Conversely, the poor management and maintenance of students' records can mar the success of the entire school system. According to Akinwumiju and Agabi (2008), gathering information and keeping them in records is an important aspect in the socio-economic development of human society. They hold that information carefully gathered, stored and retrieved in records and transmitted has helped in the maintenance and sustenance of the human society. Records are documents that memorize and provide objective evidence of activities performed, events occurred, results achieved, or statements made (Makhura, 2005). From these assertion, school records are therefore written statements of information about the life of a school.

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admission and students' personal files, attendance register, results amongst others. The purpose of students' record keeping and management is to ensure that accurate and proper records of pupils' achievement and growth, information on school activities and matters that will promote efficiency and effectiveness of the school system are kept, amongst others (Besong, 2016). With this, the life of administrative institution may be short-lived if effective records keeping and management is absent. Based on this backdrop this study aims at analysing the effect of students' record on the effective management in secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon.

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Based on the above objectives, one general hypothesis was tested which verified the significant relationship between students' records and the effective management of secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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The use of computers is in the management of records and instruction of students. In administration, records of students' performance are kept in computers and can be accessed at any point especially when they are kept in the cloud (Davies, 2011). The current world requires some knowledge of modern technology like the internet and when students and teachers are introduced into this world of technology as early as possible, it becomes very easy for them to access their records when stored in a computer (Durrand and Holden, 2005). Well improved schools store students' records in a computer, although areas without electricity supply are still too inclined to paper-based storage.

Students' records management comprises of a whole range of records. These records contain information about students that can help provide guidance and counselling to students. It helps in daily management of students' affairs at the school level. These records include applications, admissions, academic and social welfare, letters from parents, copies of letters to parents concerning the student and many others. The management of some of these records according to Philip (2007) are discussed below:

Management of applications and transfer forms: They should be made standard to facilitate the processing to applicants and make it more efficient process. Application forms enable the school to gather all the

pre-requisite as well as comparable information on applications. It is advisable that the school, to which a new student is applying, provides its own application form.

Management of admission register: This is a permanent record in which every student is recorded on the first day he or she is admitted into a school. It is the comprehensive listing of the school's former and current students. It keeps stock of school enrolments and it is important retrospective reference for the past enrolments into the school. This record should be filed in by the school head to record and keep track of information for the school reports and for individuals who may need references. It is used by the school head and anyone in charge of keeping records for reference purposes on current and former students of the school. It is kept in the school head's office. The storage of these records that have been full can be done by arranging them chronologically by the year of the original entry. It could create the index of the students by name, giving each a serial number. This can facilitate retrieval. This register should be kept in the school head's office for a good number of years, although the students must have completed their course of learning.

Management of students' record cards: They contain specific particulars as well as a summary of information on every student attending the school. They should be foldable to give access to other records like letters. In case of transfer of a student, it is preferable to leave the card at the school for reference purposes. This card is usually filed by the class teacher or school head, and can be used by the class teacher, guidance teacher and school head.

The students' cards could be stored alphabetically according to the name of the student. In the case of similar names, initials, education number, class or year

of birth are recommended to differentiate the students. On transfer by the student, the card can be transferred to a suitable storage area within the school. School heads can create an index of the student by name and enrolment or education number where applicable. Where the students have left the school, the card should be moved to a suitable storage area within the school where it can be stored alphabetically by name. Do not destroy the students' record cards.

Management of class register: It shows daily attendance for each class. It enables students at any given time to be traced easily, as long as one knows what class he or she was in at the time in question. It provides class teachers with information about students at a glance; show the size of each class and facilitate the comparison between girls and boys, it monitors individual students' attendance for administrative purposes and it reveals average class attendance. The class teacher of any student in charge of the attendance should fill in the register. The teacher can use it to monitor individual students as well as class attendance. It can also be used to fill in the students' record cards. This register together with students' record cards can draw the school administration's attention to irregular students' attendance.

During the term all school attendance registers may be stored in the staff room where teachers can have access to them. They should be kept secured during vacation periods. Where they are full, the registers should be kept in the school head's office. They can be arranged by grade, class and year. They should be stored for long and never to be destroyed.

Management of Mark schedule: It shows students' performance in test and assignments including end-of-term class tests. It gives the overall comparative results

of each student. It enables the teacher to consistently record the performance of individual students, shows the comparative performance of the class; collects information for completing students' records cards and facilitates the preparation of progress reports. It is usually fill by the subject teacher and class teacher/master. The class and subject teachers need folders in which these schedules can be arranged according to grades, year and term. It is necessary to create an index of students showing the grades. If the records are kept in folders, the students' names should be shown in the index. This enables cross-referencing.

This schedule is kept by the teacher or subject teacher so long as they teach the class or subject. Therefore, it can be retained by the school head for as long as all the students in this record are still at the school. After the students have left the school, the head must check the information in the students' record cards, using the mark schedule. Only then may the schedule be discarded.

Mills (2021) proposed the following importance of students' records to the effective management of secondary schools. This importance includes;

Monitoring students' progress in school: Students records such as test scores and progress report sheets are very essential in providing information about students' failures and success in secondary school. They also act as an information provider for parents and other authority to consult for further reference on the students' success or failures. The failures or success of student assist the school management to look for course of action to provide adequate pedagogic student support for those who are weak and to try to motivate the successful student by encouraging them or provide additional academic support for further improvement.

Follow up of students' effective presence in school: The keeping of students' records on attendance and absence habits is very important to monitor students' effective presence in secondary schools and keep parents and school administrators inform of these habits. The attendance information can be sent to parents alongside their academic performance records of the students for parents to assess their children seriousness in schools. If students are not performing well in class, a well-kept record of attendance can help offer insight and possible causes which sometimes can be absences from classes during school periods.

Details Information about Student and family background: Students information on their parents and occupation can portray the socio-cultural and socio-educational background of the learners. This background information can assist school administrators and teachers to follow up the student learning and social habits in school.

Bases of Assessment: Students records provide a basis for the objective assessment of the state of teaching and learning in a school, including staff and student performance by supervisors and inspectors (Yahaya, 2007). Records on the performance of students are consulted by administrators, teachers, parents and inspectors to ascertain whether teaching was effective or not in a particular secondary school.

Methods of effective management and keeping of students' records

Records keeping is concerned with achieving economy and efficiency in the creation, maintenance, use and disposal of the records of secondary schools and in making the information they contain available to support the effective management of secondary schools (Kimberly, Piers & Dawn, 2001). The objective is to furnish accurate and complete information when

it is required to carry out the functions and meet the objectives of government. The following methods of effective students' records management and keeping were opined by (Kimberly, Piers & Dawn, 2001).

Fixed student records: During the creation of students' record, it will go through a process of development and change, which is drafting the minutes for review and approval of students' admission into the secondary schools. Once this process of creation is finished and the document is considered complete, it may be regarded as students' record. In order to provide evidence, the record must now be fixed and must not be susceptible to change. If a student's record is changed or manipulated, it cannot no longer provides evidence of the transaction originality.

Students records have authority: Students Records provide the 'official' evidence of the activity or transaction they document. To be reliable, they must have authority that is by whom was the record generated or issued, under what authority and can this authority be proved? Obvious indicators of the official nature of students' records are signatures (also electronic signatures), letterheads, seals and office stamps. Therefore, the continuous safekeeping of students' records also protects their reliability. It is also important to note that a student record can be reliable in the sense that it is accurate and complete, however, it may have been created by someone without due authority to effect that act for which the record was created.

Unique students' records: Students Records are unique in the sense that, they are maintained in their appropriate context, they are a component in a unique compilation or sequence of transactions rather than isolated bits of information. They have meaning because they were generated during a particular transaction and each student is unique in character and

behaviour. The records make sense within the context of the overall functions and activities of the individual or the school organization that created or used them.

Authentic student records: it must be possible to prove that students' records are what they say they are. The authenticity of a student record is derived from the record keeping system in which it was created or received, maintained and used. A student record is authentic if it can be verified that it is now exactly as it was when first transmitted or set aside for retention. Students' records may be produced in a range of systems and stored in a range of media, including paper and electronic forms; different versions may be stored in different media in different locations. This phenomenon is increasing with the growth of information communication technology in secondary schools.

From a theoretical point of view, the system theory by Bertalanffy (1968) sees organizations as interdependent and interrelated where there is constant interaction among the members of the organization may be very useful to this study. Systems theory is an interdisciplinary theory about every system in nature, in society and in many scientific domains as well as a framework with which researchers can investigate phenomena from a holistic approach (Capra, 1997). Systems thinking come from the shift in attention from the part to the whole (Checkland, 1997; Weinberg, 2001; Jackson, 2003), considering the observed reality as an integrated and interacting unicom of phenomena where the individual properties of the single parts become indistinct. In contrast, the relationships between the parts themselves and the events they produce through their interaction become much more important, with the result that "system elements are rationally connected" (Luhmann, 1990) towards a shared purpose (Golinelli, 2009). The

systemic perspective argued that researchers are not able to fully comprehend a phenomenon simply by breaking it up into elementary parts and then reforming it; but, need to apply a global vision to underline its functioning. Although researchers can start from the analysis of the elementary components of a phenomenon, in order to fully comprehend the phenomenon in its entirety researchers have to observe it also from a higher level: a holistic perspective (Von Bertalanffy, 1968).

This theory is relevant to this study as it shows that students' record keeping in relation to school management should not be treated as an independent aspect of school management but, it should be treated with needed attention to the overall management of the school system. Thus, proper management of students' records in a school is essential in the overall management of the school. If students' records are not properly managed, information and statistical analysis will not be coherent and as such school administrators may not be able to take proper decisions to improve school management. Thus, students' records keeping in school should be part of the school management policy.

METHODOLOGY

The Triangulation research method specifically the descriptive survey design was adopted for the study.

The population of the study comprised of all public secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of the Republic of Cameroon. The South West Regions as of 2022/2023 academic year operated over 100 secondary schools with the Littoral Region operating over 300 secondary schools as of 2022/2023 academic year. The sample for this study consisted of 302 teachers and 12 principals. The proportionate

stratified sampling and purposive sampling techniques was adopted for the study.

The instruments use for data collection were a questionnaire (closed ended questions) for academic staff (teachers) and an interview guide for administrators (principals).

Data from the close ended questions was analysed using SPSS 23.0, with the aid of descriptive and inferential statistical tools while interview was analysed thematically. The hypotheses of the study were tested using a non-parametric test (Spearman's Rho test) presented at 95% level of confidence interval with alpha set at 0.05 levels accepting 5% margin of error.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are presented and supported by literature and the works of other researchers. Quantitative data are presented first followed qualitative data.

Demographic Data

Among the 302 teachers who successfully completed the questionnaire, 53.0% (160) of the teachers are male and 47.0% (142) are female. This signifies that there were more male teachers than females in the sampled secondary schools. In line with the teachers' age, 42.4% (128) of the teachers are between the ages of 20-30 years old, 35.8% (108) are between the ages of 31-40 years old, and 21.9% (66) are between the ages of 41 years old and above. This shows that, there are more young teachers in the sampled secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Region of Cameroon. With reference to working experience, 70.2% (212) have worked for less than 10 years, 23.2% (70) have worked for 11-20 years, and 6.6% (20) for above 21 years. This signifies that, majority of the respondents have the

required experience to provide information needed for the study. Finally, on teachers' region of work, 54.3% (164) of the teachers are in the South West Region and 45.7% (138) are in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. This gives a valid sample size of 302 respondents used to complete the teachers' questionnaire for this study.

Research Objective One: Students' Admission Files and the Effective Management of Secondary Schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon

The table below depicts teachers' opinion on students' admission files and the effective management of secondary schools.

Table 1: Teacher Opinion on teachers' opinion on students' admission files and the effective management of secondary schools

Statements	Stretched				Collapsed	
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD
Withdrawal records enables the school administrators to keep track of all the students that are current and those that are not.	104 (34.4%)	165 (54.6%)	25 (8.3%)	8 (2.6%)	269 (89.1%)	33 (10.9%)
Students records help school administrators to follow up students in school, especially through attendance register.	111 (36.8%)	157 (52.0%)	28 (9.3%)	6 (2.0%)	268 (88.7%)	34 (11.3%)
Teachers easily plan their activities when they know the number of students that offer their subjects.	138 (45.7%)	127 (42.1%)	31 (10.3%)	6 (2.0%)	265 (87.7%)	37 (12.3%)
Administors consult student records before they take certain actions towards the students, like dismissal and order disciplinary sanctions.	115 (38.1%)	147 (48.7%)	32 (10.6%)	8 (2.6%)	262 (86.8%)	40 (13.2%)
The attendance registers of students enable staff to determine the performance of the school in terms of discipline.	108 (35.8%)	151 (50.0%)	26 (8.6%)	17 (5.6%)	259 (85.8%)	43 (14.2%)
Multiple Responses Set (MRS)	576 (38.1%)	747 (49.5%)	142 (9.4%)	45 (3.0%)	1323 (87.6%)	187 (12.4%)

In aggregate, 87.6% of teachers agreed that students' attendance registers have an impact on the effective management of secondary schools while 12.4% saw no impact. Specifically, 269(89.1%) accepted that withdrawal records enable the school administrators to keep track of all the students that are current and those that are not. Durrand and Holden, (2005) hold that students' attendance registers help to keeps stock of school enrolments and it is important retrospective reference for the past enrolments into the school. This record should be filed in by the school head to record and keep track of information for the school reports and for individuals who may need references. It is used by the school head and anyone in charge of keeping

records for reference purposes on current and former students of the school. It is kept in the school head's office. The storage of these records that have been full can be done by arranging them chronologically by the year of the original entry. It could create the index of the students by name, giving each a serial number. This can facilitate retrieval. This register should be kept in the school head's office for a good number of years, although the students must have completed their course of learning.

Similarly, 268(88.7%) of teachers accepted that students' records help school administrators to follow up students in school, especially through attendance

register. This tie with the view of Osunu (2002) who indicated that students' attendance registers help in the follow up of students' effective presence in school. The keeping of students' records on attendance and absence habits is very important to monitor students' effective presence in secondary schools and keep parents and school administrators informed of these habits. The attendance information can be sent to parents alongside their academic performance records of the students for parents to assess their children seriousness in schools. If students are not performing well in class, a well-kept record of attendance can help offer insight and possible causes which sometimes can be absences from classes during school periods.

Also 265(87.7%) accepted that teachers easily plan their activities when they know the number of students that offer their subjects. Ololube and Amanchuwu (2015) opined that properly kept records on teachers' information serve useful employment and planning related purposes. The information about the number of teachers, their subject area, qualifications, age and gender may help the principal to determine personnel needs and assets of his or her school.

Furthermore, 262(86.8%) accepted that administrators consult student records before they take certain

actions towards the students, like dismissal and order disciplinary sanctions. Finally, 259(85.8%) of teachers indicate that attendance registers of students enable staff to determine the performance of the school in terms of discipline. To the International Records Management Trust (1999), the information held in personnel records is used to make decisions about suitability for promotion, transfers, or in some cases, disciplinary actions. According to Law Insider (2003), these are records kept by the employer that identifies the employee, to the extent that the record is used or has been used or may affect or be used relative to that employee's qualifications for employment, promotion, transfer, additional compensation or disciplinary action. Furthermore, teachers indicated that attendance registers of students enable staff to determine the performance of the school in terms of discipline.

Principals' Interview Responses on Students' School Records

The table below presents principals' interview responses on students' school records and the effective management of secondary schools.

Table 3: Principals Opinion on the type of students' records kept in Schools.

Themes	Quotations
Continuous assessment records/ Report card	<p><i>"we ensue that mark sheet are well preserved"</i></p> <p><i>"The mark of students are recorded here from the various tests"</i></p> <p><i>"We keep assessment records as it shows the progress of the last for the term and for the year"</i></p> <p><i>"Sometime, it equally shows how the student has instead been regressing".</i></p> <p><i>"This document shows the result of each student" it shows the students performances, in the various subject the averages, the position and the appreciation of the class council and the principal of the school"</i></p> <p><i>"From our report card we expect the parents to know how the school see their child whether positively or negatively, in terms of moral or conduct wise and academically"</i></p>

Admission files	<i>"It contains students' birth certificates, acceptance slips, Transfer certificates, admission numbers and medical Certificate if any"</i> <i>"It show the registration date, serial number of student"</i> <i>"It indicates the sex of the child, age and whether they student is an inclusive or normal".</i> <i>"Admission files of those students who have deficiency" "Admission files from which we know the total number of registered students and even withdrawn cases"</i>
Attendance registered	<i>"We keep attendance register which show the number of student in class. How regular they students are"</i> <i>"we keep attendance register to shoes how often a student is school or in class"</i>

The principals interviewed testified that they keep the following students' records in their schools: continuous assessment records/report card, admission files and attendance registered. Some of the principals indicated that continuous assessment records/ report card is the most kept students' records in school as they stated in their own words that "The mark of students are recorded here from the various tests; I keep assessment records as it shows the progress of the last for the term and for the year; Sometime, it equally shows how the student has instead been regressing. This document shows the result of each student, it shows the students performances in the various subject and the averages, the position and the appreciation of the class council and the principal of the school". It is always signed by the principal at the end of each term. This is in line with Bobbie and Attrams (2015) in their study on "students' record management system using smart cards and biometric technology for educational institutions". They also found that, the system of students' records management proved to be beneficial for students' records keeping schools as it helps solve the problem of space enables quick record recovery but, its serious challenge is virus attacks for soft copy records management. However, it was recommended that both paper and electronic formats are good for students' record management for easy accessibility and retrieval.

Some principals said that admission files are kept categorically as they stated in their own words that "It contains students' birth certificates, acceptance slips, transfer certificates, admission numbers and medical Certificate if any; It show the registration date, serial number of student; Admission files of those students who have deficiency; Admission files from which we know the total number of registered students and even withdrawn cases." Also a section of the principals said that students' records help as a data bank, helps in evolution of students, need assistance of students and developmental classification of student. This is concurrent with Besong (2016) as he stressed that these records are usually kept because educational law emphasizes the creation and keeping of such records. To support his assertion, Omaha (2013) added that in any public school or any voluntary agency such as the school, education law demands that important school records must be kept. Concurrently, Osunu (2002) intimated that the responsibility of these records lies on the shoulders of the school head (Principal).

Moreover, some of the principals indicated that students' attendance registered are being kept in secondary schools as they said in their own words that "they keep attendance register which show the number of student in class. How regular they students are; we keep attendance register to shoes how often a student is school or in class." Principals' opinions were

also sought on students' records keeping and decision making. The qualified information was presented as follows from the selected schools. This concurs with The World Bank (2006) which pointed that records are essential for the effective and productive functioning of both private and public schools. Students' records are particularly important record series in any educational institution. This is evidence as students expect their past attainments to be honoured and their academic credits to be transferred from school to school; receiving schools expect to receive not only students but transcripts, test scores, and health records. The government officials expect to receive regular updates on the aggregated educational status of students at all levels of the school system. The management of students' records protects the

interests and rights of graduates and current students, and helps to deliver services and obligations consistently and equitably. For schools to manage students' records effectively, they need to develop capacities to manage records and information. This is because the challenges of convincing, initiating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating activities will always require reliable, pertinent and timely records as well as information (Kalusopa, 2011). Students' records are vital to virtually every aspect of school management process as they provide vital information for decision making in schools.

The table below presents principals' interview responses on how students' records help in decision making.

Table 4: Principals Opinion on How Students' Records Help in Decision Making

Themes	Quotations
Essie disciplinary decisions	<p><i>"Students' records help in school disciplinary decisions on whether students' should be punished, suspended or dismissed"</i></p> <p><i>"They show punctuality of the students"</i></p> <p><i>"Students' records help in administration of disciplinary measures, that is, the records indicate whether the student is disable or not and this can help the disciplinary department in disciplinary decisions"</i>.</p>
Counseling decisions	<p><i>"Students' records help school counselors to take counseling decisions on students"</i>.</p> <p><i>"Students' records give clear follow-up of students"</i>.</p> <p><i>"Students' records like report cards help the school counselors on career orientation"</i>.</p>
Data Bank	<p><i>"Student records serve as a data bank both for the students and the entire school administration"</i>.</p> <p><i>"Help the parents know the academic performance of their children. Their punctuality in school, their position in class and the size of their class"</i>.</p>
Evolution of students	<p><i>"Students' records determine whether the students be promoted, should repeat or be dismissed"</i>.</p> <p><i>"Students' records help in selection decisions for inter-school competitions". That is, those capable to represent the school in different occasions.</i></p>
Need assistance of students	<p><i>"Students' records enable authorities to identify internally displaced students who can be given assistance "by the actors of a school"</i>.</p> <p><i>"Student records enable authorities to identify how inclusive is the class and to see about their needs"</i></p>

**Developmental
classification
of
student**

“Students’ records help in giving testimonies and recommendation about their ages to match with their activities (developmental stages)”.

The responses proved that principals recognized how helpful students’ records are in decision making in the school system. With the most highlighted being students’ record help to ease disciplinary decisions making as some of them categorically stated that “Students’ records help in administration of disciplinary measures, that is, the records indicate whether the student is disable or not and this can help the disciplinary department in disciplinary decisions.” This is in line with Ujah’s (2016) findings as the author holds that, with the significance of students’ record keeping, one can observe that records facilitate accountability. Students’ record is a vital means of accountability because they provide proof for decision making.

Some of principals said that students’ record help in counseling decision making as they pointed that “Students’ records help school counselors to take counseling decisions on students; Students’ records like report cards help the school counselors on career orientation.” In addition, some of the principals said that students’ records help as a data bank as they admitted that, “Student records serve as a data bank

both for the students and the entire school administration. It helps the parents know the academic performance of their children, their punctuality in school, their position in class and the size of their class.” Principals also said those students’ records helps in evolution of students, and portray if the students need assistance and developmental classification of student. In the same vein, Hassan (2017) revealed that non-statutory record such as cumulative records cards, disciplinary commute file, and staff minutes’ book, and school photo album were adequately provided, utilized and maintained except cash/account book, stock book and health book.

Verification of Hypothesis: Students’ records do not have any significant role on the effective management of secondary schools in the South West and Littoral Regions of Cameroon.

The extent of the possible relationship that exists between the two variables was verified using the Spearman’s rho test statistics presented on the following table

Table 5: Relationship between Students’ School records and effective management of secondary schools

		Students’ Records	Effective management of secondary schools
Spearman's rho	R-value	1.000	0.129*
	p-value	.	0.025
	N	302	302

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To verify whether there is any relationship between the two variables, the Spearman's rho hypothetical statistics was calculated. These test statistics showed that there is a positive significant, relationship between students' records keeping and the effective management of secondary schools with (R-value = 0.129*, p-value < .025 < 0.05). The positive sign of the correlation value implies that the management of students' records will contribute to a certain extent in the effective management of secondary schools. The findings are also in congruence with the system theory by Bertalanffy (1968). This theory pointed that students' record keeping in relation to school management should not be treated as an independent aspect of school management but, it should be treated with needed attention to the overall management of the school system. Thus, proper management of students' records in a school is essential in the overall management of the school. If students' records are not properly managed, information and statistical analysis will not be coherent and as such school administrators may not be able to take proper decisions to improve school management. Thus, students' records keeping in school should be part of the school management policy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the need to improve the effective management of secondary schools is very important in this fast changing and growing world. Indicating that to better the effective management of secondary schools, student records such as students' admission files and students' attendance registers will significantly ensure the effective management of secondary schools. As Besong (2016) stressed that these records are usually kept because educational law emphasizes the creation and keeping of such records. Omaha (2013) added that in any public school or any

voluntary agency such as the school, education law demands that important school records must be kept. Osunu (2002) intimated that the responsibility of these records lies on the shoulders of the school head (Principal). It is therefore recommended that students' records especially admission files should be completely compiled immediately at the beginning of the school year. This may be of great impact to the records management system of the school and effective management of the school. It also recommended that the school authorities should make parents understand the importance of admission file and submit immediately at the period of registration of their children. This may help foster the students' records management and effective school management.

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