| Research Article

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Understanding Career Aspirations through the Lens of Cultural Values

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Abstract: This paper entitled "Understanding career aspirations through the lens of cultural values," investigates how deeply held cultural values influence the career dreams and goals of secondary school students in Douala III municipality. Three specific objectives gave focus to the study: To examine how the career aspiration of secondary school students in Douala III municipality is influenced by cultural values; to explore the challenges and barriers faced by secondary school students in Douala III municipality in incorporating customs, traditional beliefs, and practices in choosing a future career; and to bring out strategies to enable secondary school students to integrate cultural values into their career aspirations. Two theories were adopted to explain the concept of this study. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Data was collected from 120 secondary students from few schools in Douala III municipality using the simple convenient random sampling technique by using questionnaires and semi – structured interviews. The data was analysed by descriptive and inferential statistics, presented in figures, percentages and means and thematic analyses for qualitative insights. Findings revealed that individualistic values have more influence on career aspirations compared to communal and family values indicated by 60.58% (mean=2.29) response rate. Also, 63.83% (mean=2.73) response rate revealed that students face significant challenges in integrating cultural values in career aspirations. However, strategies to inculcate cultural values gave a positive responsive rate of 68.17% and a mean score of 2.86 respectively. We recommended that understanding these dynamics is essential for teachers, career advisors, and policymakers to provide support that truly resonates with student's life experiences. Tailoring support in career development can empower young people to pursue careers that are both personally fulfilling and culturally meaningful.

Keywords: Cultural Values, Career Aspirations, Career Guidance, Cultural Influence, Secondary School.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the career choices of students means first discerning the cultural perspective through which they see the world. In most Cameroonian societies and communities, career choices aren't just personal decisions, they're deeply tied to tradition, family expectations and values influenced by communal life. In secondary schools across the country, students are often balance between inherited cultural beliefs and the pressures of a modern, competitive job market. Traditional gender roles, societal norms and collective expectations can influence possible career decision. Endogenous knowledge is deeply embedded in the cultural values and practices that play vital role in the development and sustainability, particularly in local communities (Asasira, 2012). Domenico and Jones (2007) reported the influence of socio-cultural factors that is gender, socio-economic status and cultural patterns affecting the career choices and aspirations of secondary schools' students. Career choice is a significant issue in the development live of youths because it is reported to be associated with positive as well as harmful psychological, physical, socio-economic inequalities that persist beyond the youthful age into an individual's adult life (Roberson, 2014 Bubic, and Ivanisevic, 2016). According to Ma & Allen, 2009 career decisions may depend on their cultural values. Gregory, Munch and Peterson (2002) assert that cultural values can influence individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. Singaravelu et al. (2005) identified the influence of culture and society on the career aspirations of students, as societal needs and demands have influenced the career patterns of the individuals. Research carried out by Akosah-Twumasi (2018) on the role of cultural values showed that beliefs, norms, and traditions which are deeply embedded within communities is significant but a limited researched determinant that influences young people's career aspirations. Moreover, Culture fundamentally not only what individuals view as desirable or respectable professions but also the motivations, ambitions, and decision-making processes surrounding career choices (Kim et al., 2016).

The extensive research carried out by Hofstede (2001) highlighted how distinct cultural settings, particularly individualistic versus collectivist societies, influence students' career goals differently. In individualistic cultures, such as those prevalent in Western countries, students are likely to emphasize personal interests and intrinsic motivation, leading to more autonomous career decision-making (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Guan et al., 2015). Conversely, in collectivist societies, students' career aspirations tend to align more closely with family expectations, societal norms, and the desire to contribute to the community, reflecting a relational orientation toward career development (Sawitri et al., 2014). These cultural distinctions emphasized the importance of understanding how career aspirations are influenced by cultural values rather than solely focusing on external factors like labour market conditions or educational resources

Despite the recognition of culture's impact, much existing literature has concentrated on external determinants of career choice, with relatively less attention dedicated to the ways internalized cultural beliefs and traditions influence students' visions of their futures (Hora, 2020). Cultural values intricately connect to various psychosocial elements such as family honour, community welfare, and respect for tradition, all of which silently guide students' ambitions (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Dong). For example, family expectations may act as a motivational force or constraint, depending on the societal context (Sawitri et al., 2014). These insights necessitate deeper qualitative inquiry alongside quantitative methods to better capture these dynamics (Qonitatin et al., 2023). Even though Cameroon is characterized by a rich cultural diversity and an evolving educational landscape less study has been carried out on the relation between career choices and cultural values hence presenting a critical vantage point to understand how adolescents in Cameroon understand the concept of career development within their unique sociocultural settings. Historically, the introduction of these Western education systems during colonial periods aimed to replace traditional education and cultural socialization with Eurocentric knowledge, values, and practices. The curriculum and educational environment in both Anglophone and Francophone schools largely emphasize Western cultural norms, languages, and

career paths valued in Western societies, such as formal professions requiring higher education, thereby embedding Western ideals of career success more than indigenous ones. Students often receive more exposure to Western cultural knowledge than to their own ethnic or local cultural heritage during schooling (Kamkou et al., 2024). This results in career aspirations influenced more by Western concepts of individual achievement, professional success, and economic self-reliance than by indigenous communal or traditional cultural values.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how deeply held cultural values influence the career dreams and goals of secondary school students in Douala III, with the aim of uncovering the familial and community factors and challenges that impact these aspirations. This study seeks to provide evidence-based insights for educators, career advisors, and policymakers to tailor career development support that aligns closely with students' cultural realities, thereby enhancing both their personal fulfilment and societal contributions, ultimately, such understanding aids in fostering career development environments that are inclusive, respectful, and culturally relevant, improving student engagement and outcomes (Sawitri et al., 2014)

Cultural values

Cultural values represent the shared beliefs, norms, traditions, and expectations that shapes or influences perceptions, behaviours, and decision-making within a social group (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Sultan, 2022). They are deeply rooted in societal structures and influence individual priorities on life roles, including careers (Kim, Park, & Choi, 2016). Culture is the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group of people from another (Hofstede, 2001, p.9).

Cultural values emerge from collectively held beliefs and norms formal or informal rules that dictate appropriate behaviour in social settings. These norms guide everyday conduct and decision-making by establishing what is considered acceptable or taboo within a group. For example, in collectivist cultures, beliefs about family loyalty and social harmony shape behaviour toward prioritizing group needs over personal desires, whereas individualistic cultures encourage self-expression and personal achievement (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Sawitri, Creed, & Zimmerman, 2014). Cameroon is a culturally diverse country with over 200 ethnic groups, each with distinct traditions influencing career expectations (Bama & Nnam, 2019). Cultural norms influence career aspirations by prescribing acceptable behaviours, roles, and professions. In many communities, cultural norms prioritize occupations that uphold social harmony and community advancement over individual preference. For example, a vocational or technical career may be esteemed if it contributes tangibly to societal development (Che, in press).

A primary dimension of cultural values is the extent to which a society values collectivism or individualism. Collectivist cultures stress interdependence, community welfare, and fulfilling social obligations, often measuring success in terms of group wellbeing (Hofstede, 2001; Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). Individualistic cultures emphasize autonomy, self-reliance, and personal achievement, encouraging individuals to pursue goals independent of group expectations (Guan et al., 2015). In Individualist cultures students are free to make their career choice aspirations while in collectivist cultures students are bound to act upon the advice and suggestions of their elders. According to Salami (2007) young students who grow up in collectivist cultures, make career choice decisions on the advice of parents and if they make such decisions on the basis of their own free will then it may result in unrealistic career development and emotional disturbances of students due to lack of approval and financial support which is the source of success for the career development of adolescents. Communal identity is central to many African worldviews, including those in Cameroon.

The respect for authority, elders, and hierarchical social structures. This respect manifests in obedience to familial, community, or institutional expectations. Elders are regarded as custodians

of wisdom and tradition; their advice and preferences heavily influence youths' career decisions. The social hierarchy reinforces deference to elder opinions, which can either encourage adherence to traditional careers or acceptance of modern educational paths endorsed by community leaders. This dynamic means that career choices are often negotiated within the family and community, respecting elders' perspectives (Bama & Nnam, 2019).

Moreover, traditional vocational expectations remain strong in Cameroon, where certain vocations are historically tied to specific ethnic groups or family lineages. For instance, some families have longstanding traditions in farming, blacksmithing, or trading, which continue to influence career aspirations of younger generations (Che, in press). Although globalization and modernization have introduced new career avenues, vocational training and technical education are still valued for their practical contributions to society and economic development (Bama & Nnam, 2019). However, there is also a noted tension as some traditional vocations are viewed as less prestigious than white-collar professions, affecting youth preferences.

Societal values emphasize respectability, stability, and contribution to communal welfare in career choices. Given the economic challenges and social transformations, societal values often favour professions that guarantee steady employment and social prestige. Also, societal values underscore the need for skills and education that meet current labour market demands while also conforming to traditional frameworks (Bama & Nnam, 2019). Although cultural values are deep-rooted, they are neither static nor universal. They evolve in response to societal changes such as globalization, technological advances, and political shifts, adapting while maintaining a core sense of cultural identity. This fluidity is essential for cultures to remain relevant in changing environments. Cultural values vary in time orientation, with some societies adopting long-term perspectives that emphasize perseverance, thrift, and respect for tradition, while others prefer short-term focus on immediate results and change (Hofstede, 2001). This temporal orientation affects career planning and goal setting, as long-term oriented cultures encourage stability and community-connected ambitions.

Career Aspirations

Career aspirations refer to individuals' ambitions, goals, and hopes concerning their future occupational roles and professional pathways. They encapsulate the desired career outcomes that individuals strive to achieve, which is shaped by personal interests, values, motivations, perceived abilities, and contextual influences such as family, culture, education, and social environment (Gray & O'Brien, 2007; Sherwood, 1989). Career aspirations are fundamentally future-oriented goals they represent what individuals intend to accomplish professionally at some point ahead (Sherwood, 1989). Unlike idle wishes or vague hopes, aspirations are characterized by a willingness to invest time, effort, and resources toward achieving these long-term outcomes. This future-directed motivation guides educational and career choices and fosters goal-driven behaviours. Students and young individuals with high career aspirations tend to exhibit greater motivation in their study behaviours and skill mastery, seeing their academic work as instrumental in reaching their career goals (Mesa, 2012). Ambitious career plans also correlate with perseverance and willingness to overcome challenges in pursuit of success (Willcoxson & Wynder, 2010; Schoon, 2007.)

Self-efficacy, defined as the belief in one's ability to successfully perform tasks and reach goals, is critical for career aspirations (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy is guided by prior successful experiences, vicarious learning (observing peers succeed), and encouragement from educators and family. Enhanced self-efficacy promotes resilience and willingness to pursue challenging careers, especially in competitive or traditionally underrepresented fields. Conversely, low self-efficacy can limit aspirations and lead to premature career abandonment. Secondary students who recognize their competencies in certain domains are more likely to choose careers that match their capabilities. Personal values and traits profoundly influence career aspirations. Values such as

autonomy, security, prestige, and the desire to contribute to society shape preferences for specific careers (Kerka, 2000). The importance individuals place on work as a domain of life influences career aspirations (Gray & O'Brien, 2007).

Family expectations, cultural values, socioeconomic status, (SES) and educational environments critically shape the nature and level of aspiration (Qonitatin et al., 2023). For example, cultural emphasis on community and family honour can direct aspirations toward socially respected careers (Sawitri et al., 2014). Conversely, lack of resources or exposure to opportunities can limit or reshape aspirations (Willcoxson & Wynder, 2010). Family influence remains pivotal, with parents guiding career choices based on perceptions of prestige, financial security, and tradition, often shaping students' early aspirations and the support structures available to them (Kai & Njungwa, 2025; Bala, 2024). Additionally, parenting styles have been analysed revealing that authoritative and supportive parenting positively correlates with clearer and more confident career choices among students. Students from higher SES backgrounds generally benefit from greater information and support, which enhances career planning whereas those from less privileged backgrounds face significant constraints (Broken Chalk, 2024; Bama & Nnam, 2019). Prescribed gender roles often limit female students' participation in traditionally male-dominated fields, while simultaneously promoting careers seen as socially constructive or prestigious, aligned with community and national progress ideals (Bala, 2024). Peer influence further impacts career aspirations as students often adapt their ambitions based on peer norms and shared values, which can either broaden or limit their perspectives on viable careers (Bala, 2024). The educational environment, notably the quality of secondary education and the presence of career guidance services, substantially affects students' awareness and choice-making. For instance, studies in the South West Region emphasize the effectiveness of career interest assessments and aptitude-based guidance in aligning students' natural abilities with appropriate career paths, greatly improving decision outcomes when implemented (Ndum et al., 2025)

The dynamic job market also influences aspirations, with a noticeable shift towards entrepreneurial and self-employment career paths reflecting students' desire for independence and sustainability beyond the public sector. However, mentorship remains an underutilized resource in Cameroon's secondary schools, and its scarcity limits students' career navigation abilities and motivation to pursue less conventional or emerging career fields (Kai & Njungwa, 2025). Many students and their families focus on careers perceived to offer financial stability and upward mobility. Economic barriers remain a profound factor, especially in rural areas where 70% of families cite financial constraints as the main reason for school dropouts (ERIC Report, 2022). Secondary school students are becoming more aware of the need to balance professional demands with personal well-being, reflected in their growing interest in careers that offer flexibility or manageable workloads, such as entrepreneurship or certain service sectors (Bama & Nnam, 2019). However, traditional cultural expectations, especially around gender roles, may challenge these preferences, with some careers culturally valorised even if they do not permit a balanced personal life (Bala, 2024).

Career guidance

Career guidance is much more than just helping someone pick a job or a school. Career guidance theories like those from Savickas (2015) highlighted that people create personal stories about their careers, and these stories are influenced by cultural values. Career guidance, therefore, isn't just about finding a job but helping people make sense of their life story in a way that fits their cultural context and personal dreams. Understanding these cultural "affordances" allows career counsellors to better support individuals in making choices that feel authentic and meaningful to them. Researchers like Benson and colleagues (2020) have shown that different cultures prioritize different things when it comes to career success. Sartori, Hartmann, and Barberio (2023) remind us that career development is also shaped by broader cultural beliefs that either open up

possibilities or set limits. These cultural frameworks influence how people grow professionally, and effective career guidance needs to take these into account in a way that respects local values but also supports individual growth. Going back further, Wehrly (1982) pointed out that family, gender roles, social class, and politics elements deeply steeped in culture form the backdrop against which career guidance happens.

Cultural influence in secondary schools of Cameroon

Cultural influence is a key aspect of career development, encompassing diverse dimensions such as gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and family background (Gibbons et al., 2015). Family and societal expectations in collectivist cultures prioritize stable, high-status jobs often over personal passions (Singh, 2025). Access to education and training opportunities, often influenced by cultural and socioeconomic factors, further mediate career aspirations. Cultures with high regard for education and broad access enable individuals to consider a wider array of professional options. Conversely, limited educational access constrains career possibilities and shapes aspirations accordingly (Gibbons et al., 2015). Cameroonian secondary schools serving adolescents aged 12–18 through lower (BEPC/GCE O-Level) and upper cycles (Baccalauréat/GCE A-Level) function as cultural crucibles where career aspirations are actively mediated by communal values and historical legacies (Fonkeng, 2007; Ngalim, 2014). collectivist values prioritize kinship obligations, leading fathers in patrilineal communities to steer students toward "prestigious" careers like medicine or law to uphold familial honor (Zhao et al., 2023), while patriarchal hierarchies systematically narrow girls' trajectories through biased resource allocation, domestic burdens (3–5 hours/day), and teacher expectations funneling them toward caregiving roles, contributing to stark dropout disparities (UNESCO, 2022; Efuetngwa, 2021).

Impact of cultural values on students' career aspirations

Cultural values, such as family expectations, gender roles, and community norms, plays vital roles in shaping students' career aspirations. Empirical research showed that many students' career choices are significantly aligned with cultural and societal expectations, often emphasizing careers seen as prestigious or stable, such as government jobs (Ndum et al., 2025). For instance, parental and community influence strongly encourages boys toward careers in science and prestigious fields, while girls are often steered toward traditional gender roles, limiting their educational and career ambitions due to expectations of early marriage and domestic responsibilities (Efuetngwa, 2021). A systematic review studied the contrasting collectivist and individualist cultures and showed that family and cultural background weigh more heavily in career choices in collectivist societies of Cameroon, where the family's aspirations often guide individual career paths (ICPsyche, 2023). This cultural dynamic may sometimes conflict with students' personal interests but is a dominant influence. Gender disparities driven by cultural beliefs remain a critical barrier. For example, girls' educational achievements and career aspirations are often curtailed by cultural practices such as early marriage and societal attitudes prioritizing men's education and careers (Efuetngwa, 2021). Career guidance programs and interventions are recommended to address these cultural influences and support students in broadening their career aspirations. Such programs include career fairs, mentorship, and exposure to diverse professions, successfully improving students' career decision-making by reflecting cultural sensitivities and local realities (Ndum et al., 2025). Furthermore, contemporary empirical observations suggest that Cameroonian students, particularly in urban and more globally connected areas, increasingly adopt Westernized attitudes toward careers, including individualism, personal autonomy in career choice, and openness to diverse occupations beyond those traditionally valued by local cultural groups. Western education's emphasis on modern and globalized career fields (e.g., business, technology, medicine) often overrides traditional career paths related to family or community roles, which can marginalize the influence of cultural values on career aspirations. (Kamkou et al., 2024. However, this does not imply that cultural values have no role; rather, in the setting of Cameroon's dual

Western education systems, the school environment imposes significant Western cultural models that coexist and sometimes compete with indigenous cultural norms. This coexistence can lead to diminished or transformed roles of cultural values in influencing aspirations, especially where formal schooling and media consumption promote Western standards of career success and lifestyle.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, developed by Geert Hofstede in the 1980s, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how cultural values shape behaviour and social attitudes across different societies (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). It emerged from extensive empirical research involving over 100,000 employees from IBM in 50 countries, using factor analysis to distill fundamental cultural dimensions. The theory initially identified four primary dimensions power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and uncertainty avoidance later expanded to include long-term versus short-term orientation and indulgence versus restraint (Hofstede, 2001). The Power Distance Index (PDI) reflects how societies accept hierarchical order and unequal power distribution. For instance, high power distance cultures expect obedience to authority without questioning, impacting family, educational, and organizational dynamics. Individualism vs. Collectivism measures the degree to which individuals integrate into groups; collectivist cultures prioritize community and social harmony over personal goals, a critical factor when considering career aspirations in communal societies like parts of Cameroon. (Hofstede, 1980). The Masculinity vs. Femininity dimension contrasts goal-driven, competitive societies against those valuing care and quality of life, influencing the societal definitions of success and career priorities. Uncertainty Avoidance describes how cultures tolerate ambiguity, affecting risk-taking and decision-making processes in career planning. Long-term Orientation versus Short-term Orientation reflects societies' focus on future rewards versus respect for tradition, influencing persistence and planning in education and career development (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). The final dimension, Indulgence vs. Restraint, reflects how societies manage gratification of desires, potentially shaping attitudes toward career satisfaction and work-life balance.

Cameroon's cultural fabric exhibits characteristics of high collectivism, where family and community expectations play a profound role in individual career choices (Ndum et al., 2025; Kai & Njungwa, 2025). Studies focused on Cameroonian technical secondary schools by Kai & Njungwa, 2025 shows how students' aptitude and interests, held in both cultural and social settings, influence career decisions. For example, guidance counseling practice must navigate cultural expectations of authority and hierarchy (power distance) alongside students' personal aspirations that might be affected by collectivist norms (Ndum et al., 2025).

Theoretically, Hofstede's dimensions have also been critiqued and refined over time, especially considering dynamic social changes, globalization, and education reforms. It is crucial to contextualize Hofstede's framework within the African socio-educational landscape, acknowledging that national averages may mask ethnic, linguistic, and regional diversities in Cameroon that also influence career aspirations (ERIC, 2022). Nonetheless, the theory's core value lies in guiding teachers, policymakers, and counselors in understanding the relation between cultural values and individual career orientations, allowing for more effective and empathetic career education frameworks.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) with Cultural Affordances

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in the early 1990s, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals develop career interests, make occupational choices, and achieve career success. Rooted in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, SCCT emphasizes the dynamic interaction among personal cognitive factors,

environmental influences, and behavior to explain career development processes (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994;). Central to SCCT are the concepts of self-efficacy beliefs (one's conviction in their ability to perform career-related tasks), outcome expectations (beliefs about the consequences of career behaviors), and personal goals (the intentions to engage in specific activities) (Lent et al., 1994; Bandura, 1997). These elements interact to shape vocational interests and career aspirations over time, highlighting career development as an evolving process rather than a static event.

SCCT conceptualizes career development through three interrelated models: the interest development model, which explains how self-efficacy and outcome expectations contribute to the formation of interests; the choice model, describing how these interests translate into occupational and educational decisions under the influence of environmental supports and barriers; and the performance and persistence model, which focuses on how one's motivation and self-regulatory behaviors affect ongoing performance and career stability (Lent et al., 1994). Subsequently, the theory expanded to address career satisfaction and self-management across the lifespan, making it adaptable to complex and fluid modern career paths (Lent & Brown, 2013).

The strength of SCCT lies in its integration of multiple dimensions affecting career development: psychological traits, social and cultural settings, economic factors simultaneously influence career trajectories (Long et al., 2002; Buthelezi et al., 2010). This systemic approach distinguishes SCCT from traditional trait-oriented career theories by accounting for the significant role of contextual variables such as family expectations, social inequalities, and cultural norms, which are particularly salient in diverse and multicultural settings (Lent, 2013; Yuen et al., 2022). For instance, studies focusing on minority and marginalized populations have demonstrated how social and environmental factors mediate the impact of personal beliefs on career decisions, underlining SCCT's applicability in cross-cultural career research (McWhirter et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2017).

SCCT provides a theoretical framework for examining how cultural values affects students' career aspirations. Cultural values influence both environmental supports and barriers, as well as shape youths' self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations concerning various occupations. The relation between community expectations, educational opportunities, and individual agency as posited by SCCT is essential for understanding career aspirations in such a setting (Kwee, 2020). Prior research applying SCCT in Africa emphasizes the importance of social belonging, family influence, and local economic considerations in guiding career goals and decisions (Thompson et al., 2017).By focusing on enhancing self-efficacy through role models, mentorship, and community engagement, and by addressing contextual barriers such as gender stereotypes or limited exposure to diverse careers, SCCT-informed programs can foster more realistic and empowered career aspirations (Miles & Naidoo, 2016). While SCCT provides a useful framework for career development, it is relatively insufficient to fully integrate cultural settings and values which present shortcomings for the study given Cameroons' multi-cultural background and ethnicity.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A Young's person's life changes with hopes, uncertainties and dreams. To decide on future career represents a defining moment in the life of students in secondary schools and often enveloped by aspirations. While the influence of external factors such as job scarcity, economic condition, educational opportunities and the lack of information on career choices has been widely examined, the profound impact of cultural values especially those embedded in beliefs, traditions and expectations transmitted through families and communities has remained insufficient and underexplored most literature emphasizes socio-economic and demographic factors, usually overlooking how cultural norms impacts students understanding of success fulfilment, and vocational purpose across diverse social contexts (Zep, Ali & Hussain, 2005; Qonitatin et al,

2023). These shortcomings constitute a significant gap in career education and guidance, raising critical questions; how can teachers and policy makers effectively assist students in their career development while acknowledging the cultural narratives that inform their career aspiration. Most often cultural settings, career decisions are not merely individual choices but are intricately linked to family expectations, collective communal contribution, and the respect for enduring customs, traditional practices. The relation between personal ambitions and collective cultural expectations create a subtle structure within which career aspirations are formed. Where conventional counselling may fail to effectively address.

This research seeks to illuminate these cultural dimensions, recognizing their important role in molding the career aspirations of secondary school students in Cameroon. By doing so, it aims to provide teachers, career advisors or counsellors, and policy makers with a richer understanding of the cultural influences involved, thereby enabling the design of a more sensitive and adequate career support mechanisms. More importantly this study aims to bridge a critical space in education by enlightening the influence of cultural values on students; career goals, fostering career guidance practices that are both meaningful and culturally tuned to the development of the society.

Research questions

1. How are do cultural values influence secondary school in Douala III students' career aspirations?

2. What are the challenges and barriers faced by secondary school students in incorporating customs, traditional beliefs, and practices in choosing a future career?

3. Which strategies can enable secondary school students to integrate cultural values in their career aspiration plan?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to holistically investigate how cultural values influence the career aspirations of secondary school students of Douala 3. The quantitative component utilizes a descriptive cross-sectional survey design aimed at capturing measurable patterns and relationships between cultural value indicators and students' career ambitions at a specific point in time, the qualitative part adopts a phenomenological approach, using focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to have students' lived experiences, revealing the cultural and familial contexts shaping their career, The study targets all the secondary school student of the Douala 3 Village neighbourhood aged approximately 13 to 19 years. The convenient simple sampling technique was used to select participants drawn from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

A sample of 120 students from some accessible schools obtained through simple random sampling was used to quantitative data of the study. Structured questionnaires were distributed to these students to access their responses in relation to the objectives of the study. The questionnaire included a 4-point Likert scale items and open-ended questions to gather diverse insights. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview guide was used to collect qualitative data.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages and means were employed to summarize survey data, aided by statistical software SPSS version 25.0. the questionnaire items were scored 4 points for strongly agree (SA), 3 points for Agree (A), 2 points for disagree (D), and 1 point for strongly disagree (SD). Thus, the mean or decision making was at 2.5 and the percentage at 50%. In sum, regarding the influence of cultural values on student's career aspirations, if the total item mean score is greater than or equal to 2.5 and percentage greater than 50%, the objective was considered to influence career aspirations. Otherwise, they had no

influence. Moreover, items were considered to be major challenges and barriers faced by students in incorporating cultural beliefs, traditions and practices into their career paths if the total mean score 2.5and beyond (percentage above 50%) likewise the strategies proposed during the study. Qualitative data underwent thematic content analysis. identifying, coding, and synthesizing patterns related to family expectations, community norms, and personal meanings tied to career goals. Member checking was incorporated to enhance validity. Ethical protocols were strictly followed, including informed consent from students and guardians, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

FINDINGS:

Quantitative findings

Research question 1: How do cultural values influence secondary school students' career aspirations?

Table 1: Influence of cultural values on the career aspirations of secondary school students		SA	A	D	SD	SA/ A	SD/ D	Mean	Decision
1	What my family expects for my future job really influences me on what I want to do.	26 21.7%	20 16.7%	45 37.5%	29 24.2%	46 38.3%	74 61.7%	2. 36	**No influence**
2	I believe my career should match the beliefs and values I grew up with.	40 33.3%	25 20.8%	28 23.3% %	27 22.5%	65 54.2%	55 45.8%	2. 65	**Influence**
3	Jobs that people in my culture respect a lot are more interesting to me, even if they're not exactly what I like.	11 9.2 %	9 7.5 %	47 39.2%	53 44.2%	20 16.7%	100 83.3%	1. 82	**No influence**
4	I feel like I should pick a career that makes my family and community proud.	38 32 %	28 23 %	24 20 %	30 25 %	66 55 %	54 45 %	2. 62	**Influence**
5	My culture helps me understand what kind of job feels right to me	13 10.8%	20 16.70 %	48 40 %	39 27.5%	33 27.5%	87 72.5%	2. 01	**No Influence**
6	I think my work should help keep my culture's traditions and values alive.	22 18.30 %	34 28.30 %	34 28.30 %	30 25 %	56 46.6%	64 53.3%	2. 40	**No influence**
7	I feel pressure to pick a job that will make enough money to support my family.	34 28.30 %	48 40 %	31 25.80 %	7 5.80%	82 68.3%	38 31.6%	2. 91	**Influence**
8	My culture helps me understand what a "successful" job looks like.	12 10 %	29 24 %	44 37 %	35 29 %	41 0.34	79 0.66	2. 15	**No influence**
9	I would hesitate to choose a career that's not common or traditional in my culture.	10 8.30%	20 16.70	45 37.50	45 37.50	30 25 %^	90 75 %	1. 96	**No Influen**

			%	%	%				ce
10	I often think about how my career choices fit with my culture's ideas.	11 9.20%	23 19.2%	43 35.80%	43 35.8%	34 28.3%	86 72.7%	2.02	No Influence
	Total	**217 18.08%**	**256 21.33%**	**389 32.42%**	**338 28.17%**	**473 39.42%**	**727 60.58%**	**2.29**	**No Influence**

In summary, the quantitative research finding on table 1 indicated that students in secondary schools in Douala III municipality do not agree to the concept that their career aspirations are being influenced by cultural values. With a negative response of 60.58% against a positive response of 39.42% and a mean of 2.29. which indicates that cultural values have no influence on career aspirations. To be more elaborate, findings showed that 46(38.3%) of students pointed out that their family's expectations influence their future job career, meanwhile 74(61.7%) gave a negative response to this item(mean=2.36). Moreover, 20(16.7%) in contrary to 100(16.7%) of students supported the idea that they should pick a career based on cultural respect (mean=2.47). Moreover, 33(27.5%) against 87(72.5%) students agree that their culture helps them choose what kind of job feels right to them (mean=2.01). Furthermore, 54(46.6%) against 64(53.3%) of students gave positive note on preservation of cultural values and traditions(mean=2.4), 90(75%) against 30(25%) student's viewpoint supported the idea of choosing a commonly traditionally career (mean=1.96). Also, 34(28.3%) against 86(72.7%) of student's reviews showed that their career choices fit with their cultural ideas(mean=2.01). Overall these above factors supported the fact that career aspirations are not influenced by cultural values

The findings also highlighted influencing factors. Firstly, 65(54.2%) against 55(45.8%) of students believe their career should match the beliefs and values with which they grew up with(mean=2.65). Also, 65(55%) against 54(45%) believe they should pick a career that makes their family and community proud (Mean=2.62). more to it, 82 (68.3%) against 38 (31.6%) of student's viewpoints showed that the feel pressure in choosing a career that provides them enough income to help their family(mean=2.91).

Research question 2: What are the challenges and barriers faced by students in incorporating customs, traditional beliefs, and practices in choosing a future career?

Table 2: Challenges and barriers faced by students in incorporating customs, traditional beliefs, and practices in choosing a future career.	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	SD/D	Mean	Decision
1	I sometimes feel stuck between following my own dreams and doing what my family expects.	49 40.8%	33 27.5%	14 11.7%	24 20%	82 68.3%	38 31.7%	2.89	**Challenge**
2	I worry that if I choose a career that's not usual for my culture, my family or community will be disappointed.	32 26.7%	48 40%	25 20.8%	15 12.5	80 66.7%	40 33.3%	2.81	**Challenge**
3	I'm afraid that choosing a career outside of what my culture usually does might make people judge me or leave	22 18.3%	32 26.7%	38 31.7	28 23.3%	54 45%	66 55%	2.4	**Not a challenge**

	me out.								
4	It's hard to find advice or help that matches my cultural values when thinking about my future job.	24 20%	39 32.5%	30 25%	27 22.5%	63 52.5%	57 47.5%	2.5	**Challenge**
5	I feel like the career options in my culture are limited and don't always fit what I want.	27 22.5%	48 40%	32 26.7%	13 10.8%	75 62.5%	45 37.5%	2.74	**Challenge**
6	It's tough to balance my own goals with the pressure to keep cultural traditions in my career choice.	21 17.5%	52 43.3%	29 24.2%	18 15%	73 60.8%	47 39.1%	2.63	**Challenge**
7	I find it hard to explain my career dreams to family members who might not understand or agree.	32 26.6%	62 51.7	21 17.5	5 4.2%	94 78.3%	26 21.7%	3.01	**Challenge**
8	Sometimes, my culture feels like a barrier that stops me from going after certain jobs	33 27.5%	61 50.8	17 14.2%	9 7.5%	94 78.3%	26 21.6%	2.98	**Challenge**
9	I have faced unfair treatment or bias because of my culture when exploring job options.	18 15%	14 11.7%	42 35%	46 38.3%	32 26.6%	88 73.3%	2.03	**Not a challenge**
10	It's hard to fit my personal career goal s with the expectations linked to my cultural background. .	48 40%	59 49.2%	10 8.3%	3 2.5%	107 89.2%	13 10.8%	3.27	**Challenge**
Total		**306 25.5%**	**448 37.3%**	**258 21.5%**	**188 15.67%**	**766 63.83%**	**434 36.17%**	**2.73**	**Challenge**

In summary, quantitative findings on table 2 showed that 63.83% of students in secondary schools in Douala III municipality face challenges in incorporating customs, traditional beliefs, and practices in choosing a future career, meanwhile 36.17% of students gave a negative response and a mean of 2.73 indicating that this is a major challenge.

To be more elaborate, 82(68.3%) against 38(31.7%) of students agreed that they are stuck between following their dreams and choosing what their family expects(mean=2.89). Also, 80(66.7%) against 40(33.3%) of students supported that their family will be disappointed if that's not usual to their culture (mean=2.81). Moreover, 63(52.5%) against 57(47.5%) of students agreed the hardly find help to choose a career related to their cultural values(mean=2.5). Moreover, 75(62.5%) against 45(37.5%) of student's views supported the fact that that their carrier options are limited and don't fit what they want (mean=2.74). Further findings showed 73(60.8%) of students agreed to that they find it hard to balance their career goals with their cultural traditions meanwhile 47(39.1%) of students disagreed (2.63). In addition, 94(78.3%) against 26(21.7%) of students agree they find it hard to explain their career aspirations to family members who don't understand and disagree (Mean =3.01). Furthermore, 107(89.2%) against 13(10.8%) students are of the opinion that it's hard to fit their personal career goal with their cultural background norms(mean=3.27).

However, according to the student's viewpoints not all of these items indicated the challenges faced by students. 66(55%) of students disagreed that a career that isn't usual in their culture will disappoint their family and community while 54(45%) agreed, furthermore 88(73.3%) of students

disagreed that they have faced unfair treatment when they think of their career options while 32 (26.6%) supported this fact (mean=2.03)

Research question 3: Which strategies can enable secondary school students to integrate cultural values in their career aspiration plan?

Table 3: Strategies to enable students to integrate cultural values in career aspirations	**SA**	**A**	**D**	**SD**	**SA/A**	**SD/D**	**Mean**	**Decision**
1	It would be good to have more chances to talk about career choices with my family in a way that respects both their views and mine.	39 32.5%	58 48.33%	21 17.5%	2 2%	97 80.3%	23 19.2%	3.12	**Good Strategy**
2	Career advice programs should talk about cultural values and traditions.	48 40%	53 44.2%	13 10.8%	6 5%	101 84.2%	19 10.8%	3.19	**Good strategy**
3	Schools should offer resources and support for students who want to follow careers connected to their culture.	59 49.2%	34 28.3%	15 12.5%	12 10%	93 77.5%	27 22.5%	3.17	**Good Strategy**
4	It would help to have role models or mentors from my culture who have balanced their values and jobs successfully.	29 24.2%	49 40.8%	27 22.5%	15 12.5%	78 65%	42 35%	2.77	**Good Strategy**
5	Career counseling should help me see how my cultural values can be a strength, not a limit	39 39.2%	42 35%	19 15.8%	20 16.6%	81 67.5%	39 32.5%	2.83	**Good Strategy**
6	I want more chances to meet other students who share similar cultural values and career goals.	34 28.3%	44 36.7%	29 24.2%	13 10.8%	78 65%	42 35%	2.84	**Good Strategy**
7	Schools should encourage open talks about the challenges and chances of mixing culture with career choices.	25 20.8%	31 25.8%	38 31.2%	26 21.2%	56 46.7%	64 53.3%	2.46	**Not a good strategy**
8	It would be helpful to have career resources available in my native language.	30 25%	21 17.5%	37 30.8%	32 26.7%	51 42.5%	69 57.5%	2.41	**Not a good strategy**
9	Career guidance should consider how I can give back to my community through my work.	28 23.3%	69 57.5%	10 8.3%	13 2.5%	97 80.8%	23 10.8%	2.90	**Good strategy**
10	Schools should support programs that help students learn about and appreciate different cultures and career paths.	41 34.2%	45 37.5%	19 15.8%	15 12.5%	86 72.2%	34 28.3%	2.93	**Good strategy**
Total		372 23.83%	446 33.33%	228 19%	154 12.8%	818 68.17%	382 31.8%	2.86	**Good strategy**

In summary, quantitative findings from table 3 indicates that 68.17% of secondary school students in Douala III municipality agreed that integrating cultural values in students' career aspirations, plans or goals is a good strategy to them meanwhile 31.8% of students didn't support the recommended strategies. The overall Mean was 2.86 indicating the strategies are indeed effective to foster the integration of cultural values in students career choices.

Most strategies proved to be beneficial. To be more elaborate, 97(80.3%) against 23(19.2%) of students highlighted that their career choices should be supported by both their family's opinions and theirs (mean =3.12). More also, 101(84.2%) against 19(10.8%) of students agreed that resources should be made available in schools for culture related careers (mean = 3.19). In addition, 78(65%) against 42(35%) of students agreed that it would be helpful to get advice from elders who blended their culture and jobs successfully (mean =2.77). Furthermore, 81(67.5%) against 39(32.5%) of student's viewpoints support the assertion careers values should strengthen and not otherwise(mean=2.83). Also, 78(65%) against 42(35%) of students are of the opinion of meeting students who share equal career goals and cultural value (mean=2.84). Additionally, 97(80.8%) against 23(19.2%) of students concurrently accept that appropriate career guidance should give them the ability to provide to the community through their work(mean=2.90). Amongst others, 101(84.2%) against 19(10.8%) of students support the fact that career advice programs should talk and emphasize on cultural values and traditions(mean=3.19). In addition, the final strategy rated good by 86(72.2) %) against 34(28.3%) of students pointed out that schools should provide support to programs that train students on the incorporation of their cultural values and traditions to their career path(mean=2.93).

Even though the study brought up pertinent strategies, surprisingly according to the students' responses a few weren't considered. 51(42.5%) against 69(57.5%) of students agree schools encourage debates on career choice and cultural values(mean=2.46). Closing it up, 69(57.5%) of students against 51(42.5%) of students do not agree that career resources should be made available in their native languages(mean=2.93).

Qualitative findings:

The qualitative findings were gathered through semi-structured interviews with 20 secondary school students in Douala III municipality, and the results were as follows;

A majority of the students don't even know their cultural values, they have heard but they don't know anything about their cultural values and traditions, and more to that they don't even know their own native language the students further emphasised that most of them were born in Douala and haven't gotten the opportunity to find family members or community that advise them on choosing a career based on their cultural values and background. Consequently, the students choose available careers based on western education or any opportunity that presents itself independent of their cultural values. Furthermore, most students were of the idea that they faced difficulties following careers that were proposed to them by their parents in relation to their cultural values like for example a Fulani student we met on the field, in Douala, said his parents want him to do more studies on livestock but he prefers computer science as his career goal due to modernisation.

DISCUSSION

Influence of cultural values on the career aspirations of secondary school students

Statistically, findings showed that cultural values have less or no influence on the career aspirations of secondary school students in Douala III municipality, as evidenced by the overall negative response rate of 60.58% and a mean score of 2.29 which both supported this affirmation. From the study we find out that individualistic values are more prioritized within the study

population, where students prioritize personal interests and alignment with their growth over traditional cultural norms (Fan et al., 2014). Furthermore, research by Kim et al, 2013 and Gunkel et al reveals that collectivist cultures typically exert considerable influence on young people's career decisions through family expectations and cultural traditions. However, the students in this study largely disagreed with career choices being guided by such cultural pressures, including family expectations and cultural respect, which all had mean scores below the midpoint threshold (ranging from 1.82 to 2.40). Nevertheless, some cultural elements still hold moderate influence, such as the belief that career choices should match personal growth and family needs, with higher mean values of 2.86 and 2.91, respectively. This highlights that while traditional cultural values may be weakening, familial and personal development factors remain key motivators (Mian Said,2025)

Challenges and barriers faced by students in incorporating customs, traditional beliefs, and practices in choosing a future career.

Statistically, findings show that majority of secondary school students in Douala III municipality faced challenges in integrating customs, traditional beliefs, and practices into their career choices. With 63.83% of respondents indicating difficulty and a mean score of 2.73, the results suggest that cultural expectations can be a major barrier. This aligns with scholars like Super (1980) and Mian Said (2025) who emphasized the strong influence of socio-cultural factors on career development or career aspirations, noting that traditional values often influence the career paths endorsed by families and communities. The struggle between following personal aspirations and meeting familial expectations was notably evident, with 68.3% of students expressing this aspect (mean=2.89). This is consistent with findings by Fouad and Bingham (1995), who pointed out that cultural norms can restrict individuals' freedom to pursue non-traditional careers due to fear of family disappointment. Similarly, the difficulty students face in finding support for culturally aligned career options (mean=2.5) echoes Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994) social cognitive career theory, which points to the importance of social support in career decisions. Interestingly, while many students find it hard to articulate career goals to family (mean=3.01) and feel their personal goals clash with cultural norms (mean=3.27), some do not perceive these as significant problems, with over half disagreeing that non-traditional careers disappoint family or result in unfair treatment. This suggests a nuanced experience, where cultural pressure varies among individuals.

Strategies to enable students to integrate cultural values in career aspirations

Statistically, findings indicate a generally positive perception among secondary school students regarding strategies that integrate cultural values into their career aspirations, with 68.17% agreement and an overall mean score of 2.86, and this suggest moderate effectiveness. This holds with Flores and O'Brien (2019) and Fan (2014) who argue that cultural values have an impact on students' career decisions, showcasing, the importance of family and community support in career planning. Notably, 80.3% of students supported involving family opinions in career choices (mean=3.12), which reflects the findings of Kwon and Lee (2020) that family endorsement plays a critical role on influencing career choices or aspirations. Moreover, 65% agreed that advice from elders who successfully blended culture and career is helpful (mean=2.77), reinforcing the notion by Smith (2018) that mentorship rooted in cultural background and values enhances vocational outcomes. Though most strategies were embraced by the students, some were less favoured. For instance, 53.3% opposed emphasizing cultural values in formal career advice (mean=2.46), suggesting potential gaps in how culture is incorporated or understood in counselling, echoing concerns raised by Johnson and Martinez (2021) about the need for culturally sensitive career guidance programs. Additionally, the lack of support for resources in native languages (57.5% disagreement) points to linguistic barriers as a significant challenge, consistent with findings of Adeyemi and Ogunleye (2017).

Qualitative findings show a clarifies the gap that exists between students' knowledge of their own cultural values and the career paths they choose. Most students seemed unaware of their traditions and native languages, often making career decisions based on what's available or popular in Western education rather than their cultural background. This matches what Bama and Nnam (2019) found that many young people today prioritize external opportunities over cultural heritage when planning their futures. The average trend indicates students tend to pick careers based on availability, which sometimes clashes with parents' expectations rooted in culture. For example, a Fulani student wanted to study computer science instead of livestock management, showing how modernization influences aspirations supported by Arnett's (2002) work on modernization and globalization. This situation points to the importance of tailored career guidance that respects students' cultural identities while supporting their personal goals.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

In sum, the study indicates that cultural values exert a limited influence on the career aspirations of secondary school students in Douala III. Most don't involve their cultural background values in planning their future career, this indicates a gap in how education systems connect cultural identity with career guidance. This disconnect suggests the need for culturally responsive educational programs that help students appreciate and integrate their cultural values with modern employment opportunities.

Moreover, Students face significant challenges and barriers balancing their personal ambitions with cultural and familial expectations. This issue restricts career options and can cause emotional stress and confusion in choosing a suitable career highlighting the urgent need for educational counseling services that help students overcome this hindrance while maintaining their cultural identity.

Furthermore, the findings also show a strong student endorsement for strategies that integrate cultural values into career planning. Approaches such as involving family, elders, and peers with shared cultural backgrounds, as well as providing school resources and guidance centered around culture, are valued. However, gaps still exist with career advice programs seldom emphasizing cultural values explicitly, and there is a notable lack of native language resources, limiting accessibility and cultural relevance.

In addition, from the qualitative study, many students prioritize Western education and available career paths rather than their cultural traditions, partly due to lack of cultural knowledge. This emphasizes the challenge faced in introducing modernization with the preservation of cultural heritage so that these two can mutually reinforce educational and professional development. Overall, the education system in Douala III needs to adopt a more inclusive, culturally attuned approach to career guidance that respects tradition while preparing students for contemporary careers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Train counsellors, teachers, policy makers and other educational stakeholders to skillfully mediate between students' personal aspirations and cultural/family expectations. This can empower students to pursue fulfilling careers that respect their backgrounds

Develop comprehensive career counseling curricula that explicitly integrate cultural values and use native languages where possible. This would improve students' understanding of how their culture can align with and enrich their career choices.

Establish dedicated school resources such as libraries, workshops, and discussion groups that focus on career blending cultural values and modern professions. Also, schools should prioritize open dialogues and debates around career choices and cultural values. Moreover, introduce cultural awareness modules in the school curriculum that educate students about their heritage,

native languages, and traditional career paths. This foundation can foster pride and facilitate informed career decisions aligned with cultural identity.

Actively involve families, elders, and community role models who have successfully integrated cultural values into their careers. Their mentorship can inspire students and help cover up the gaps between.

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