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FEMALE ADOLESCENTS' COOPERATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THEIR SELF-ESTEEM DEVELOPMENT IN STATE UNIVERSITIES IN CAMEROON

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Abstract

This study was designed to examine female adolescents' cooperation and its influence on their self-esteem development in state universities in Cameroon. The study was guided by two objectives which examine how peer influence and group work influence female adolescent students' self-esteem in the early years of university studies in Cameroon state universities. The survey research design using the exploratory approach was adopted for the study. The population comprised of undergraduate female adolescents of ages 17 to 19 years in the University of Buea, in the South West, Dschang, West region, Douala, Littoral and Bamenda, North West Regions of Cameroon. The sample size of the study consisted of 703 undergraduates female adolescent age 17-19 using the simple random sampling technique. The instruments use for data collection were a questionnaire and an interview guide. Data from the questionnaire was analysed using SPSS 23.0, with the aid of descriptive and inferential statistical tools while open ended questions were 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 reviled that majority 73.8% of female adolescent students agreed that peers influence their self-esteem in the early years of their university studies while 26.3% of them disagreed and the overall mean of 2.95 below 3.0 on a mean scale of 1-4 implies that peers influence for a significant proportion of students is not high and 74.2% of female adolescent students like to work in groups while 25.8% of them do not and the overall mean of 2.92 below 3.0 on a mean scale of 1-4 implies that group work for a significant proportion of students is not high. Hypothetically, there is a significant and positive relationship between cooperation and self-esteem development of female adolescent students (R-value 0.466**, p-value 0.000 < 0.05). The positive sign of the correlation value denotes that self-esteem of the female adolescent students increases with increase in their ability to cooperate with others and decreases with decrease in their ability to cooperate with others. Therefore, it was generally recommended that, educational institutions in Cameroon actively promote and implement cooperative learning strategies within their curricula. Given the significant positive relationship between cooperation and the self-esteem development of female adolescent students, fostering collaborative environments can greatly enhance both academic performance and personal growth. Institutions should design group activities that encourage peer interaction, idea sharing, and mutual support.

Keywords Female Adolescents, Cooperation, Peers Influence, Group Work, Self-Esteem Development and State Universities.

INTRODUCTION

The transition from childhood to adolescence is a critical period marked by significant psychological, social, and emotional changes. For female adolescents, this stage is particularly important as they navigate various challenges that can impact their self-esteem. Adolescence is a critical period of human development characterized by significant, physical, cognitive, and social/emotional changes. During this period, the formation of one's self concept becomes especially crucial. (Harker, 2012). Adolescence, defined as the period of life between puberty and adulthood, is associated with heightened social influence, especially from peers (Blakemore, 2018). According to Tchombe and Lo-oh (2012), adolescence is a period marked by sensitization to appropriate gender identity and roles. Adolescence encompasses elements of biological growth and major social role transitions (Azzopardi, 2018).

Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall subjective evaluation of their own worth and value as a person. It is a symbol of mental health (Keramati, 2012). It encompasses one's beliefs, feelings, and attitudes towards oneself. Self-esteem in earlier life predicts later physical and mental health, satisfaction with relationships and work, economic prospects and longevity. According to (Rosenberg 2011), self-esteem is the positive or negative perspective that one has towards oneself and the evaluation of one's own thoughts and feelings. It is considered a personal psychological characteristic related to self-

judgement based on one's values about human beings (Alesi, 2012).

Context and Justification of Study

In the context of state universities in Cameroon, understanding the dynamics of female adolescents' cooperation is essential, as it plays a pivotal role in shaping their self-esteem development. According to Erikson's psychosocial development theory, the establishment of a strong sense of self is crucial during this period, influencing future relationships and personal identity (Erikson, 1968). Cooperation among peers can foster a supportive environment that enhances self-esteem. Research indicates that collaborative activities help individuals develop social skills, build trust, and establish meaningful connections (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). In a university setting, where academic pressures and social dynamics can be overwhelming, cooperative interactions among female students may serve as a buffer against the challenges they face. These interactions not only promote a sense of belonging but also facilitate the sharing of experiences and coping strategies, which can significantly influence self-esteem.

In Cameroon, cultural norms and societal expectations often impose additional pressures on female adolescents, affecting their self-perception and confidence. Studies show that societal attitudes toward gender roles can lead to feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem among young women (Nyangweso, 2018). However, cooperative practices, such as group projects, study sessions, and peer support networks, can counteract these negative influences by providing a platform for empowerment and self-affirmation. Moreover, the impact of cooperation on self-esteem development is further compounded by the educational environment. State universities in Cameroon are microcosms of broader societal trends, where the interplay of academic and social factors can either uplift or hinder self-esteem. Research has demonstrated that academic success, often facilitated by cooperative learning, correlates positively with self-esteem (Marsh & Craven, 2006). Therefore, fostering cooperation among female students is not just beneficial for academic performance but also essential for their emotional well-being.

Furthermore, the role of mentorship and role models in promoting cooperation among female adolescents cannot be overlooked. Effective mentorship programs can encourage collaboration and provide guidance, thereby enhancing self-esteem. As noted by McCullough et al. (2020), mentorship fosters a sense of purpose and belonging, which are critical for self-esteem development. By creating an environment where female students can support one another and share their successes, universities can play a crucial role in shaping their self-image. The cooperation among female adolescents in state universities in Cameroon is a vital factor influencing their self-esteem development. By promoting collaborative learning and supportive relationships, educational institutions can help mitigate the adverse effects of societal pressures and foster a positive self-concept. Understanding this relationship not only highlights the importance of cooperation in academic settings but also underscores the need for targeted interventions to support the psychological well-being of female students. Continued research in this area is essential to develop effective strategies that empower young women during this transformative phase of their lives.

In essence, the development of self-esteem during adolescence is a critical aspect of personal growth, particularly for female adolescents in state universities in Cameroon. This developmental period should be characterized by supportive social interactions, strong peer relationships, and a

collaborative academic environment that fosters confidence and self-worth. However, the reality often differs significantly from this ideal. Many female adolescents face challenges such as societal gender norms, lack of encouragement from peers, and limited access to resources that promote collaboration and mutual support. These obstacles hinder their ability to engage meaningfully with their peers, leading to feelings of isolation and diminished self-esteem. Furthermore, the competitive nature of academic environments may exacerbate these issues, as female students may feel pressured to outperform one another rather than cooperate as such the consequences are profound. Low self-esteem among female adolescents can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including academic underachievement, mental health issues, and difficulty in establishing healthy relationships. This not only impacts their personal development but also affects their broader social and academic contributions, perpetuating cycles of inequality and limiting their future opportunities. Understanding the dynamics of cooperation among female adolescents and its influence on their self-esteem development is crucial. By situating this problem within the context of state universities in Cameroon, this research aims to identify female adolescents' cooperation and its influence on their self-esteem development in state universities in Cameroon.

This study has as major objective to evaluate how female adolescents' cooperation influence their self-esteem development in state universities in Cameroon. Specifically, the study investigates:

i.   To determine the influence of peers on female adolescent students' self-esteem in the early years of university studies in Cameroon state universities.

ii.   To study the extent to which group work influence female adolescent students' self-esteem in the early years of university studies in

Cameroon state universities.

Based on the above objectives, one general hypothesis was tested which verified the significant relationship between female adolescents 'students' cooperation and female adolescent students' self-esteem in the early years of university studies in state universities in Cameroon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cooperation is the act of working together towards a common goal. Johnson & Johnson, 2009). cooperation involves two or more people coming together as partners to work interdependently toward a common goal that will benefit all involved. Much of the current research on cooperation has been conducted in the context of social dilemmas (Weber et al. 2004). In educational settings, this often involves collaborative learning and teamwork.

Moreover, female adolescents are more likely to be cooperative and exercise more personal restraint when using endangered common resources if the resources are being shared with ingroup members rather than with outgroup members (Van Vugt et al. 2000). Furthermore, they work harder for and are more loyal to groups they identify as their ingroup (Van Vugt & Hart 2004). In society-level social dilemma situations, the impact of an individual's identity with a group and the associated acceptance of the norms and values of those superordinate entities has also been shown to be important for increasing a wide variety of cooperative actions, ranging from participation in social activism and protests to organizational citizenship (Cropanzano & Byrne 2000).

Johnson and Johnson (2013) in their study found that students who participated in cooperative learning activities had significantly higher levels of self-esteem compared to those who participated in traditional classroom activities. A study conducted

by Maria Isabel in 2020 result show that cooperative learning is an effective tool for encouraging university students to develop academic goals that motivate them to fully engage with the tasks they are set in order to acquire knowledge and skills. These findings contribute new knowledge to the conceptual framework on cooperative learning.

Cooperation moments for female adolescents' students

Students often cooperate on assigned group projects across various subjects. These projects can range from short-term in-class activities to long-term assignments (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). female Students may engage in peer tutoring programs, where more advanced students help their peers with challenging subjects or concepts (Topping, 2005).Many teachers incorporate collaborative learning activities into their lessons, encouraging students to work together to solve problems or discuss ideas (Slavin, 2014).In science classes, students often work in pairs or small groups to conduct experiments and analyze results (Hofstein & Lunetta, 2004).Team sports and group activities in physical education classes require cooperation and teamwork (Bailey, 2006).

Student clubs, organizations, and after-school programs often involve collaborative efforts Students may form informal study groups to prepare for exams or work on homework together Cooperative learning often occurs during class discussions and debates, where students build on each other's ideas (Howe & Abedin, 2013).This pedagogical approach often involves students working together on extended projects that address real-world problems (Thomas, 2000).Digital tools and platforms are increasingly used to facilitate student cooperation, both in and out of the classroom (Resta & Laferrière, 2007). Older students may work with younger students in mentoring or tutoring roles Community service

projects often involve students working together towards a common goal (Billig, 2000). Drama productions, musical ensembles, and art installations often require extensive student cooperation Many schools implement peer mediation programs where students help resolve conflicts among their peers

Some teachers use cooperative strategies for classroom management, such as assigning group roles or responsibilities classrooms often employ cooperative learning strategies to support students with diverse needs (Jenkins et al., 2003).In language classes, students often practice speaking and comprehension skills through pair and group work This approach often involves students working in small groups to solve complex, real-world problems (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).Students may review and provide feedback on each other's work as part of the learning process These programs often involve cooperation between students from different cultural backgrounds (Deardorff, 2006). A supportive family environment contributes to higher self-esteem (Bulanda & Majumdar, 2009). When family members engage in cooperative behaviors and foster a cooperative family environment, it can positively influence self-esteem in several ways: Sense of belonging and support: Cooperation within the friends creates a sense of belonging and support for female adolescents, which enhances their self-esteem. Feldman,2012

When female students actively collaborate, communicate, and work together as a team, it conveys a message of inclusivity and support. This cooperative environment fosters a sense of security, acceptance, and value, contributing to higher self-esteem (Laible et al., 2004). Experiences of abuse or neglect can severely impact self-esteem (Turner et al., 2010). Improved communication and conflict resolution skills gained through cooperation can enhance social

confidence and self-esteem (Webb & Mastergeorge, 2003). Cooperative friends' dynamics involve recognizing and valuing each other's contributions and efforts. When students acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of female adolescents, it enhances their sense of self-worth and competence. This validation and recognition promote a positive self-perception and contribute to higher self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Impacts of cooperation on female adolescents' self esteem

Cooperative learning experiences have been found to enhance self-esteem in adolescents (Slavin, 2014). The relationship between conformity and self-esteem is complex and can be both positive and negative: Excessive conformity can lead to a loss of individuality, potentially lowering self-esteem (Harter, 2012). Conforming to unrealistic standards negatively impact body image and self-esteem (Clay et al., 2005). Conformity can provide a sense of belonging, which may enhance self-esteem (Newman et al., 2007). Adhering to positive group norms can boost self-esteem through social approval (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011).

Cooperation can foster a sense of belonging, which is crucial for self-esteem: Cooperative experiences can increase feelings of peer acceptance, a significant predictor of self-esteem in adolescence (Harter, 2012). Cooperation can improve students' psychological balance and self-esteem (Simsek,2013), For this reason, it is important to explore the relationship between teamwork skills and self-esteem. When students engage in cooperative activities, work together towards shared goals, and communicate in a supportive and respectful manner, it creates a positive social environment. These positive interactions contribute to feelings of belonging, acceptance, and competence, leading to higher self-esteem (Smith & Hamon, 2012; Laible et al., 2000).

The sense of community developed through cooperation can provide emotional support, enhancing self-esteem (Osterman, 2000). Cooperation within students provides opportunities for female adolescents to develop and demonstrate their skills and competence. When students engage in cooperative tasks, such as problem-solving, decision-making, and sharing responsibilities, it allows adolescents to contribute and showcase their abilities. This involvement and competence-building experience can boost self-esteem (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009).

Cooperation can improve social skills and peer relationships, which in turn positively affect self-esteem (Ginsburg-Block et al., 2006). Cooperative friends' interactions help female adolescents develop effective emotional regulation and conflict resolution skills. When students engage in open communication, active listening, and cooperative problem-solving, it models constructive ways of managing emotions and resolving conflicts. These skills contribute to higher self-esteem by fostering a sense of control, autonomy, and competence in handling challenging situations (Barber, 2002). Girls often place higher value on social relationships and cooperation, making these experiences potentially more impactful for their self-esteem (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). Communication with peers increases significantly during adolescence and peer relationships become more intense than in other stages Kruk, (2004). and more influential to the teen, affecting both the decisions and choices being made Spencer (2010) Communication within peer groups allows adolescents to explore their feelings and identity as well as develop and evaluate their social skills. Peer groups offer members the opportunity to develop social skills such as empathy, sharing, and leadership. (Swanson, Edwards, Spencer, 2010)

Participation in cooperative activities can lead to increased feelings of competence and social

acceptance, key components of self-esteem (Roseth et al., 2008). Cooperation cultivates a sense of belonging, emphasizing the value of each member in a group. Adolescents, through successful cooperative endeavors, view themselves as valuable contributors, thereby enhancing self-worth. Across various cultural and academic contexts, cooperative learning has often been associated with positive outcomes. In essence, cooperation and prosocial behavior are interrelated, with both having the potential to positively influence adolescent self-esteem. Cooperative learning in academic settings has been linked to improved self-esteem: Participation in academic group work can enhance academic self-concept, a key component of overall self-esteem (Marsh & O'Mara, 2008). Cooperative learning strategies have been found to improve both academic achievement and self-esteem simultaneously (Johnson et al., 2014).

From a theoretical point of view, the theory of emotional intelligence by Daniel Goleman (1995) helps individuals to guide their thinking and actions. Goleman defined emotional intelligence as the ability of individuals to recognize their feelings and those of others for motivation and management of emotions for themselves and their relationship with others. Goleman's key components are self-awareness, motivation, empathy, social skills, self-regulation which is very important to the study as it relates to cooperation and conformity. Goleman's theory is important because it challenges the traditional view of intelligence. While IQ and technical skills are important, Goleman argues that EI is equally, if not more, vital to success in female adolescents personal and professional life. Since the publication of Goleman's book, there has been an explosion of interest in emotional intelligence in business, education, and psychology. Emotional intelligence encompasses the ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions and those of

others, as well as the ability to manage and regulate emotions effectively.

Research suggests that female students with higher levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior, such as empathy, cooperation, and altruism (Eisenberg et al., 2006). By understanding and empathizing with the emotions of others, students with higher emotional intelligence are more likely to display prosocial behavior towards their peers and contribute positively to their social environment. Emotional intelligence is also linked to self-esteem. Students with higher emotional intelligence tend to have better self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-acceptance, which contribute to a healthier self-esteem (Mikolajczak et al., 2007). When students possess a strong sense of self-worth and self-acceptance, they are more likely to have positive perceptions of themselves and engage in behaviors that enhance their self-esteem, such as setting and achieving goals, managing stress, and building positive relationships with others.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research design using the exploratory approach was adopted for the study. The population comprised of undergraduate female adolescents of ages 17 to 19 years in the University of Buea, in the South West, Dschang, West region, Douala, Littoral and Bamenda, North West Regions of Cameroon. The sample size of the study consisted of 703 undergraduates female adolescent age 17-19 using the simple random sampling technique.

The instruments use for data collection were a questionnaire and an interview guide. Data from the questionnaire was analysed using SPSS 23.0, with the aid of descriptive and inferential statistical tools while open ended questions were 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 will be presented and supported by literature and the works of other researchers. Quantitative data will be presented first followed by qualitative data.

4.1 Peers influence and female adolescent students' self-esteem in the early years of university studies in Cameroon state universities

The table below students' opinion on peers' influence and female adolescent students' self-esteem in the early years of university studies in Cameroon state.

Table 26: *Female Adolescents' Appraisal of Peer Influences*

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	Std. Dev
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD		
I often like working with others to complete tasks.	454 (64.6%)	177 (25.2%)	55 (7.8%)	17 (2.4%)	631 (89.8%)	72 (10.2%)	3.52	.743
I feel belonged because I share ideas with my friends.	200 (28.4%)	388 (55.2%)	104 (14.8%)	11 (1.6%)	588 (83.6%)	115 (16.4%)	3.11	.696
I always respect the ideas of others.	239 (34.0%)	332 (47.2%)	120 (17.1%)	12 (1.7%)	571 (81.2%)	132 (18.8%)	3.14	.749
I hate to express appreciation for the help of others. **	120 (17.1%)	209 (29.7%)	340 (48.4%)	34 (4.8%)	329 (46.8%)	374 (53.2%)	2.41	.825
I believe working together with friends does not improves my overall self-image. **	71 (10.1%)	174 (24.8%)	352 (50.1%)	106 (15.1%)	245 (34.9%)	458 (65.1%)	2.70	.845
I never support my peers academically because there is no effective communication. **	45 (6.4%)	167 (23.8%)	352 (50.1%)	139 (19.8%)	212 (30.2%)	491 (69.8%)	2.83	.815
MRS and Overall Mean	**1172 (27.8%)**	**1941 (46.0%)**	**829 (19.7%)**	**276 (6.5%)**	**3113 (73.8%)**	**1105 (26.3%)**	**2.95**	**.778**

N=703 **Items with coding reversed during calculation of MRS.**

In overall, 73.8% of female adolescent students agreed that peers influence their self-esteem in the early years of their university studies while 26.3% of them disagreed and the overall mean of 2.95 below 3.0 on a mean scale of 1-4 implies that peers influence for a significant proportion of students is not high. Specifically, the high percentage of respondents (89.8%) who enjoy working with others to complete tasks aligns with research on the benefits of cooperative learning. Johnson and Johnson (2009) emphasize that cooperative learning not only enhances academic achievement but also increases student satisfaction and engagement. When students work collaboratively, they can leverage each other's strengths, leading to improved outcomes and a more enjoyable learning

experience. This preference for teamwork reflects a broader trend in educational settings, where collaborative approaches are increasingly recognized for their effectiveness in promoting learning.

Also, 83.6% of respondents feel a sense of belonging when sharing ideas with friends underscores the importance of social connections in educational contexts. According to Emmons & McCullough (2003) the need to belong is a fundamental human motivation, and social interactions that involve sharing ideas can significantly enhance individuals' feelings of connectedness. When students engage in dialogue and exchange perspectives, they foster relationships that contribute to a supportive

community, which is essential for emotional well-being and academic success. The commitment of 81.2% of respondents to respecting the ideas of others reflects a crucial aspect of effective collaboration. Respect in group settings fosters a culture of openness and inclusivity, which is essential for productive teamwork. According to Tjosvold (1998), respect among group members enhances communication, reduces conflict, and promotes a positive atmosphere for collaboration. When individuals feel their ideas are respected, they are more likely to contribute actively and engage in meaningful discussions.

Moreso, 69.8% (491) of respondents support peers academically due to effective communication. According to Hattie (2009), effective communication is critical for fostering a supportive learning environment where students can exchange ideas and resources. When students communicate openly, they can clarify concepts, share knowledge, and provide constructive feedback, which enhances their academic performance. Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that social interaction and communication are essential for cognitive development, suggesting that collaborative learning environments where communication is prioritized can lead to improved academic outcomes. Furthermore, 65.1% of respondents believe that group work enhances self-image is consistent with the literature on teamwork and self-perception. Research by Dirks & Ferrin (2002) demonstrates that positive interdependence in group settings fosters a sense of belonging and enhances self-esteem among participants. When individuals work collaboratively toward common goals, they often experience a boost in self-image due to the recognition of their contributions and the support they receive from their peers. Finally, 53.2% of respondents like to express appreciation when helped by others underscores the importance of gratitude in fostering positive relationships. Research by Emmons and McCullough (2003) shows that expressing gratitude can enhance interpersonal relationships and contribute to overall well-being. When individuals acknowledge and appreciate the support they receive, it reinforces positive behaviors and encourages further cooperation.

4.3 Group work and female adolescent students' self-esteem in the early years of university studies in Cameroon state universities.

The table below student's opinion on group work and female adolescent students' self-esteem in the early years of university studies in Cameroon.

Table 26: *Female Adolescents' Appraisal of Group Work*

Items	Stretched				Collapsed		Mean	Std. Dev
	SA	A	D	SD	SA/A	D/SD		
I always show consideration for others during group work.	142 (20.2%)	497 (70.7%)	64 (9.1%)	0 (0.0%)	639 (90.9%)	64 (9.1%)	3.11	.530
I enjoy often collaborating with others as a group to fine solutions to a problem.	274 (39.0%)	307 (43.7%)	112 (15.9%)	10 (1.4%)	581 (82.6%)	122 (17.4%)	3.20	.752
I always play fair in any group activity.	177 (25.2%)	328 (46.7%)	182 (25.9%)	16 (2.3%)	505 (71.8%)	198 (28.2%)	2.95	.774
I hate to participate in group work at school because it slows my achievements. **	75 (10.7%)	146 (20.8%)	353 (50.2%)	129 (18.3%)	221 (31.4%)	482 (68.6%)	2.76	.873
I am not good at managing my group members. **	66 (9.4%)	167 (23.8%)	347 (49.4%)	123 (17.5%)	233 (33.1%)	470 (66.9%)	2.75	.852

I always hate being the leader in my group. **	68 (9.7%)	168 (23.9%)	313 (44.5%)	154 (21.9%)	236 (33.6%)	467 (66.4%)	2.79	.895
MRS and Overall Mean	**999 (23.7%)**	**2145 (50.9%)**	**839 (19.9%)**	**232 (5.5%)**	**3144 (73.7%)**	**1071 (26.3%)**	**2.92**	**.779**

N=703 **Items with coding reversed during calculation of MRS.

In overall, 74.2% of female adolescent students like to work in groups while 25.8% of them do not and the overall mean of 2.92 below 3.0 on a mean scale of 1-4 implies that group work for a significant proportion of students is not high. According to the theory of self-categorization by Henri Tajfel (1970) individuals perceive and categorize themselves and others within social groups, and how these group identities influence behavior and attitudes. Social identity is the portion of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a relevant social group. That is when students identify strongly with their school or educational group, they are more likely to engage in prosocial behaviour such as helping, sharing, and cooperating with their peers (Harter, 2012).

Specifically, 90.9% (639) of respondents always show consideration for others during group work while 9.1% (64) do not. Also, 82.6% (581) of respondents often enjoy collaborating with others to fine solutions to a problem while 17.4% (122) do not. To elucidate, 71.8% (505) of respondents agreed to always play fair in any group activity while 28.2% (198) do not. In order words, female adolescent students who do not cooperate are more likely to lack social identity thus, capable of causing them not to share, help or cooperate with others. Cooperation is the act of working together towards a common goal. Female adolescent students are more likely to be cooperative and exercise more personal restraint when using endangered common resources if the resources are being shared with ingroup members rather than with outgroup members (Van Vugt et al. 2000). This implies that for effective cooperation to foster development of self-esteem, there is need for resources be made available for effective work among group members. In addition, the need for resources, every member in the group must feel comfortable because female adolescent students might work harder and more loyal to groups, they identify as their ingroup (Van Vugt & Hart, 2004).

Similarly, 68.6% (482) of respondents like to participate in group work at school while 31.4% (221) hate such because it slows their achievements. Findings also revealed that 66.9% (470) of respondents are good at managing group members while 33.1% (233) are not. Finally, 66.4% (467) of respondents like being a leader in a group while 33.6% (236) dislike such responsibility. Cooperation from students has a significant impact on the self-esteem of female adolescent students. When family members and friends engage in cooperative behaviours and foster a cooperative environment, it positively influences self-esteem in different ways such as sense of belonging and support: When students actively collaborate, communicate, and work together as a team, it conveys a message of inclusivity and support which has proven to have significant and positive effect on development of self-esteem. Cooperation within students provides opportunities for female adolescents to develop and demonstrate their skills and competence. When students engage in cooperative tasks, such as problem-solving, decision-making, and sharing responsibilities, it allows adolescents to contribute and showcase their abilities which contribute to development of their self-esteem (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009).

Female Adolescent Students' Response Opinion

Table 29: *Respondents' Opinion if Cooperation Boast their Self-Esteem.*

Cooperation boast self-esteem	Reasons	
	Themes	**Quotations**
Yes	Building confidence	*"Yes, it does because each time I cooperate, I always feel confident sometimes especially when the outcome is good."* *"Bold and confident."* *"The feeling of I can also do it like others or I am also important and have something to contribute makes me feel confident thus positive self-esteem."* *'Yes, bold and confident during presentation."*
	Learning from others	*"Yes, it does because I cooperated with people of different levels of intelligence and learn from them."* *"Yes, it does because I learn from others."* *'Yes, it does because I learn from others."*
	Feel valued	*"I feel like a leader especially if I have the leading role."* *"Cooperation allows me to leverage my knowledge and abilities to help solve problems, which makes me feel useful and valuable to those I'm working with."*
	Satisfied	*"Yes, it provides a sense of satisfaction and purpose."* *"When I cooperate with others, I feel a sense of satisfaction."*
	Build self-efficacy	*"Cooperation can certainly support my self-efficacy and purpose when I cooperate it increases my self-esteem"*
	Good	*"It feels good especially when I have a lot to contributes and I am dealing with smart people."*
	Self-acceptance	*"Yes, it does increase my self-esteem because I always contribute and feel accepted by the group."*
	Feel accomplished	*"Not really because it is just part of the school activity, but it may provide a sense of accomplishment and effectiveness."*
	Feel belong	*"cooperating with others makes me belonged and accepted by the group."*
No	Like working alone	*"It doesn't that's why I prefer to do all myself."*
	Feel shy	*"I feel shy sometimes if I must cooperate with bigger people or more advanced in knowledge because I feel like I have little or nothing to offer."*

The qualitative findings from the interviews indicate a prevalent belief among female adolescents that cooperation significantly enhances their self-esteem. The overwhelming majority of respondents expressed that collaborative experiences foster self-confidence, with one participant stating, "Yes, it does because each time I cooperate, I always feel confident especially when the outcome is good." This sentiment aligns with existing literature that highlights the positive effects of cooperative learning on self-esteem. Research by Johnson and Johnson (2009) supports the notion that cooperative learning environments enhance self-confidence. Their work illustrates that when students collaborate, they not only achieve better academic results but also develop stronger interpersonal skills and a heightened sense of self-worth. The shared success in cooperative tasks reinforces individual contributions, thereby fostering a sense of competence. Moreover, many respondents noted that cooperation allowed them to learn from peers with varying levels of intelligence. Participants expressed sentiments like, "Yes, it does because I cooperated with people of different levels of intelligence and learn from them." This idea resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in cognitive development. By engaging with diverse peers, students can enhance

their learning and self-perception, leading to improved self-esteem through exposure to different perspectives and problem-solving approaches.

The theme of feeling valued emerged strongly, with respondents stating, "Cooperation allows me to leverage my knowledge and abilities to help solve problems, which makes me feel useful and valuable." This aligns with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) theory of belongingness, which posits that feeling valued and accepted within a group is fundamental to psychological well-being. Cooperation fosters a sense of belonging, reinforcing self-esteem as individuals feel their contributions are important and appreciated. Additionally, the sense of satisfaction derived from cooperation was highlighted, with participants noting, "When I cooperate with others, I feel a sense of satisfaction." This finding is in line with

Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, which suggests that satisfying the basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness enhances self-esteem and overall well-being. Cooperation often fulfills these needs by providing opportunities for individuals to contribute meaningfully while also experiencing support from peers. However, it is essential to note that a minority of respondents indicated that cooperation did not boost their self-esteem due to shyness or a preference for solitary work. Statements such as "I feel shy sometimes if I must cooperate with bigger people or more advanced in knowledge because I feel like I have little or nothing to offer" highlight the barriers some individuals face. This aligns with findings from Schunk (1991), who noted that self-efficacy beliefs can be negatively impacted by comparison with more skilled peers, potentially leading to feelings of inadequacy.

Table 30: *Respondents' Opinion How They Cooperate with Others in School*

Themes	Quotations
Group work	*"I take part in group works."*
	'I cooperate in doing group task with my friends and families."
	"Group activities."
	"By doing group task and attending tutorial classes and also contributing."
	'Group works and meetings with others."
	"Group works and meetings with others."
	"I work with my friends and families and other groups in my areas."
	"I work together on group projects."
Resolving conflicts	*"Provide advice on how to resolve conflicts and maintain a positive learning environment with others."*
Attending tutorial	*"I attend tutorials."*
Providing information	*"I provide information about different learning styles and methods, which can help teachers develop strategies for promoting cooperation and collaboration in the classroom."*
Attending parties	*I attend parties with friends and teachers"*

Furthermore, interview discussion with few respondents on how they cooperate with others in school, many of them said they cooperate via group work as depicted in the statements 'I cooperate in doing group task with my friends and families.", "Group activities.", "By doing group task and

attending tutorial classes and also contributing." Furthermore, some said they cooperate in resolving conflicts, during tutorials, during parties and providing information as depicted in some statement "I provide information about different learning styles and methods, which can help teachers develop strategies for promoting

cooperation and collaboration in the classroom.", "Provide advice on how to resolve conflicts and maintain a positive learning environment with others" reflect a proactive approach to fostering a positive learning environment. This aligns with the findings of De Dreu and Weingart (2003), who emphasize that effective conflict resolution within groups can lead to enhanced cooperation and improved group dynamics. Their research suggests that when students are equipped with conflict resolution strategies, they are more likely

to engage in constructive collaboration, which can further support their academic and personal development. Moreover, the ability to provide advice on conflict resolution indicates that these students are not only passive participants in cooperative activities but are also taking initiative to enhance their learning environments (Pruitt, & Rubin, 2004). This active engagement can bolster their self-esteem as they recognize their contributions as valuable to the group's success.

Table 31: *Respondents' Opinion on Existence of Reciprocal Relationship during Cooperation*

Existence of reciprocal relationship during cooperation	How	
	Themes	**Quotations**
Yes	Working for a common goal	*"Cooperation often involves a reciprocal relationship between the parties involved. When people cooperate, they are working together towards a common goal, which means they are both contributing and benefiting from the relationship. This can include exchanging ideas, sharing resources, and offering support to one another"* *'Yes of course because it is not a one-man show. It involves others so they should be reciprocated actions."*
	Gaining mutual benefits	*"Yes, there is because you do not work alone and there must be reciprocated feelings."* *"Cooperation is a reciprocal relationship because both parties are giving and receiving support, and both are benefiting from the relationship."* *"I think there is because cooperation is working with others so it must be mutual."*
	Sharing ideas	*"We share ideas and contribute."*
	Respecting each other	*"Yes, because we work as a team and must respect each other's."*
	Building trust and mutual respect	*"This reciprocal nature of cooperation is important because it helps to build trust and mutual respect, which can lead to more effective collaboration and stronger relationships."*

Furthermore, the respondents' emphasis on mutual benefits resonates with the principles of social exchange theory, which suggests that relationships are based on the perceived costs and benefits of interaction (Blau, 1964). As articulated by one respondent, "Cooperation often involves a reciprocal relationship between the parties involved. When people cooperate, they are working together towards a common goal, which

means they are both contributing and benefiting from the relationship. This can include exchanging ideas, sharing resources, and offering support to one another." This perspective indicates that participants are aware of the value of their contributions and the support they receive, reinforcing the idea that cooperation enhances their collective and individual outcomes. Furthermore, reciprocal relationship was also

reported due to the fact of mutual benefits from all participants as narrated "Cooperation is a reciprocal relationship because both parties are giving and receiving support, and both are benefiting from the relationship." Research by Dillenbourg (1999) supports the importance of reciprocal interactions in collaborative learning environments. Dillenbourg argues that effective cooperation involves not only sharing tasks but also engaging in dialogue and reflection, which can deepen understanding and foster a sense of community among participants. This reciprocal engagement can lead to higher levels of satisfaction and greater self-esteem, as individuals feel valued in their contributions to the group. Finally, the emotional and social benefits derived from reciprocal relationships in cooperative settings cannot be overlooked. As noted by Schutte, Malouff, Simunek, McKenley, & Hollander (2001), the need to belong and feel valued is a fundamental human motivation. When individuals engage in reciprocal cooperation, they not only achieve academic goals but also fulfill emotional needs for connection and support. This dual benefit reinforces the idea that cooperation is vital for both personal and academic development.

Finally, sharing of ideas, respecting each other and building trust and mutual respect were other reasons advanced for the existence of reciprocal relationship during cooperation as depicted in the statement "This reciprocal nature of cooperation is important because it helps to build trust and mutual respect, which can lead to more effective collaboration and stronger relationships.", "Yes, because we work as a team and must respect each other's." Building trust and mutual respect is foundational for effective cooperation. According to Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995), trust is a critical factor in collaborative relationships, influencing the willingness of individuals to engage openly and share ideas. In cooperative settings, when participants acknowledge and respect each other's contributions, they create a safe environment conducive to sharing knowledge and experiences. Research by Costa and Anderson (2011) further supports this notion, demonstrating that trust among group members enhances communication, reduces conflict, and promotes collaborative behaviors. Their study found that teams characterized by high levels of trust are more likely to engage in constructive dialogues and support one another, ultimately leading to better outcomes. This highlights how the development of trust and respect within cooperative groups can significantly enhance the efficacy of their collaborative efforts.

Table 32: Respondents' Opinion How they Handel Conflict during Cooperation

Themes	Quotations
Building communication skills	*"Provide information about different communication styles and how to handle."* *"Communication is the key, trying to understand each other."* *'I can also offer a safe space for people to express their feelings and explore different ways to resolve conflicts."* *"I communicate with others and express myself with the aim of making peace and not fight and sometimes I let go of some careless problem which can destroy the group."*
Listening and compromising	*"I suggest strategies for resolving conflicts, like active listening and compromise"*
Acting objectively	*"I avoid trouble as much as possible because I hate problems. So, when there's conflict I think and act objectively."*
Create room for apologies	*"I do not take shots from anyone if you are wrong, you do the right thing and I always apologize and make peace."*
Respecting group policies	*"I make sure I follow the rules and regulations and avoid conflict as much as I can."*

The findings from the interviews reveal that while cooperation among female adolescents in state universities in Cameroon is characterized by mutual support and respect, conflicts inevitably arise. Respondents emphasized that effective conflict resolution strategies are essential to ensure smooth cooperation, particularly through the enhancement of communication skills. Statements such as, "Provide information about different communication styles and how to handle," and "Communication is the key, trying to understand each other," highlight the importance of communication in navigating conflicts. Effective communication is widely recognized as a critical component of conflict resolution. According to Fisher and Ury (2011), clear communication helps to identify the underlying interests of all parties involved in a conflict, facilitating a more constructive dialogue. By focusing on building communication skills, respondents acknowledged that open discussions can help to clarify misunderstandings and promote mutual understanding. This aligns with the assertion that "I can also offer a safe space for people to express their feelings and explore different ways to resolve conflicts," emphasizing the necessity of a supportive environment for effective communication. Research by Jehn (1995) further supports the idea that communication plays a vital role in managing conflicts within groups. Jehn's study indicates that groups that engage in open communication are better equipped to address conflicts constructively, leading to improved group dynamics and performance. This reinforces the notion that focusing on communication skills not only aids in conflict resolution but also enhances overall cooperation among group members.

Another strategy reported is adopting good listening skills and compromising. The strategy of active listening is crucial in conflict resolution, as it encourages understanding and empathy among group members. According to Brownell (2012), active listening involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding, and remembering what is being said. By employing active listening, individuals can validate each other's feelings and perspectives, which is essential for resolving misunderstandings and conflicts. One respondent noted, "I suggest strategies for resolving conflicts, like active listening and compromise," highlighting the recognition of these techniques as vital to effective collaboration. Respondents also discussed the importance of acting objectively during conflicts. One participant stated, "I avoid trouble as much as possible because I hate problems. So, when there's conflict I think and act objectively." This approach aligns with the findings of Van de Vliert (1997), who suggests that objective thinking can help individuals detach from emotional reactions and focus on facts and common goals. By maintaining an objective perspective, group members can evaluate situations more clearly and make decisions that are in the best interest of the group. The willingness to apologize and create an environment for reconciliation is vital in conflict resolution. According to Schmitt et al. (2017), apologies can facilitate forgiveness and restore trust among group members. When one member acknowledges their mistakes and expresses remorse, it opens the door for healing and moving forward. The statement, "I do not take shots from anyone if you are wrong, you do the right thing and I always apologize and make peace," illustrates the importance of accountability and humility in fostering a cooperative atmosphere.

Table 33: Respondents' Opinion if Cooperation Cultivate a Sense of Recognition and Validation

Themes	Quotations
Brings recognition	*"Yes, it does because other members notice and appreciate your work."*

	"It does bring recognition, but depending on the context and people you are working with." *"When you cooperate, your efforts are always appreciated."* *"Yes, when people recognize and accept my ideas or point of view."* *"This recognition can take many forms, from verbal praise and appreciation to tangible rewards, like bonuses or promotions."*
Develop sense of accomplishment and pride	*"Yes, cooperation can definitely cultivate a sense of recognition among the participants. When people cooperate, they are often working together towards a common goal, and this shared effort can lead to a sense of accomplishment and pride."* *"Cooperation can cultivate a sense of recognition because it allows people to contribute their skills and knowledge towards a shared goal, which can lead to feelings of accomplishment and value."*
Building trust	*"It can also come in the form of increased trust and respect from colleagues, which can strengthen relationships and improve teamwork."*

Finally, asking the respondents if cooperation cultivate a sense of recognition and validation, many of them said it brings recognition as depicted in the statement, "Yes, when people recognize and accept my ideas or point of view," highlighting the importance of acknowledgment in collaborative settings. Recognition within cooperative environments is essential for fostering motivation and enhancing self-worth. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), recognition acts as a form of positive reinforcement that can enhance intrinsic motivation and encourage continued participation in collaborative activities. When individuals feel that their ideas and contributions are valued, it reinforces their sense of belonging and importance within the group. One respondent articulated this sentiment by stating that recognition can come in various forms, from verbal praise to tangible rewards, which aligns with the findings of Eisenberger and Cameron (1996) that suggest external rewards can enhance intrinsic motivation when used appropriately.

The respondents also expressed that cooperation leads to a shared sense of accomplishment and pride. As one participant noted, "When people cooperate, they are often working together towards a common goal, and this shared effort can lead to a sense of accomplishment and pride." This reflects the concept of collective efficacy, which Bandura (1997) describes as the shared belief in the group's ability to achieve goals. When individuals work together successfully, their collective achievements bolster their confidence and foster a strong sense of pride in their collaborative efforts. Furthermore, research by Salas et al. (2015) emphasizes that teamwork and collaboration can lead to improved performance outcomes, which in turn enhance group members' feelings of accomplishment. The authors highlight that successful collaboration not only contributes to task completion but also strengthens interpersonal bonds among team members, leading to a positive feedback loop of recognition and motivation. Lastly, the aspect of trust building was highlighted by respondents, with one stating, "It can also come in the form of increased trust and respect from colleagues." Trust is a fundamental component of effective teamwork and collaboration. Research by Costa and Anderson (2011) indicates that trust among team members significantly enhances group dynamics and performance. When individuals cooperate and recognize each other's contributions, it fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, which is essential for maintaining healthy relationships in collaborative environments.

Verification of Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between female adolescent students' cooperation and female adolescent students' self-esteem in state universities in Cameroon.

Table 5: Relationship between Cooperation and Self-Esteem Development of Female Adolescent Students

		Cooperation	Self-esteem development of female adolescent students
Spearman's rho	R-value	1	.466[**]
	p-value	.	.000
	n	703	

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The hypothetical statistics showed that there is a significant and positive relationship between cooperation and self-esteem development of female adolescent students (R-value 0.466**, p-value 0.000 < 0.05). The positive sign of the correlation value denotes that self-esteem of the female adolescent students increases with increase in their ability to cooperate with others and decreases with decrease in their ability to cooperate with others. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternative hypothesis that states there is a significant relationship between female adolescent students' cooperation and self-esteem of female adolescents' students in state universities in Cameroon was accepted. This finding also tied with that of Slavin et al. (2014) and in a meta-analysis by Wang et al. (2017) which examined the effect of cooperative learning on self-esteem among adolescent students across multiple studies, the results showed that cooperative learning had a significant positive effect on self-esteem among adolescent students, with an average effect size of 0.40. The authors suggest that cooperative learning can enhance self-esteem by providing opportunities for students to work collaboratively, build positive relationships with peers, and receive positive feedback and recognition for their contributions. According to Maslow theory of need (1962), it states that humans are motivated to fulfill their needs in a hierarchical order. This order begins with the most basic needs before moving on to more advanced needs. The ultimate goal according to this theory is to reach the fifth level of the hierarchy which self-actualization. However, to reach this level, there is need for belongingness / social.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate a significant and positive relationship between cooperation and self-esteem development among female adolescents in state universities in Cameroon. The statistical analysis revealed that as the ability to cooperate with peers increases, so does the self-esteem of these students. This correlation suggests that engaging in cooperative activities not only enhances academic performance but also contributes to a greater sense of self-worth and validation among female adolescents. Furthermore, the importance of social interactions in fostering self-esteem cannot be overstated. Collaborative environments allow students to share ideas, respect each other's contributions, and develop a sense of belonging within their academic communities. Such interactions are vital for emotional growth, as they help individuals feel valued and appreciated, which is essential for building self-esteem. These dynamics reinforce the notion that cooperation serves as a key factor in the personal development of female students. In light of these findings, it is crucial for educators and policymakers to promote cooperative learning strategies within academic settings. By creating opportunities for female adolescents to engage in collaborative tasks, institutions can significantly enhance their self-esteem and overall well-being.

This approach not only supports academic success but also fosters essential life skills and emotional resilience, contributing to the holistic development of female adolescents in Cameroon (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that educational institutions in Cameroon actively promote and implement cooperative learning strategies within their curricula. Given the significant positive relationship between cooperation and the self-esteem development of female adolescent students, fostering collaborative environments can greatly enhance both academic performance and personal growth. Institutions should design group activities that encourage peer interaction, idea sharing, and mutual support. Training programs for educators on the principles of cooperative learning can also be beneficial, equipping them with the tools to facilitate collaboration effectively. Additionally, creating a culture that values teamwork and recognizes individual contributions will further enhance students' sense of belonging and self-worth. Finally, ongoing assessment and feedback mechanisms should be established to monitor the impact of these cooperative initiatives on self-esteem and overall student well-being. By prioritizing cooperation in educational practices, universities can contribute significantly to the holistic development of female adolescents, preparing them for both academic success and positive social interactions in their future endeavors.

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