

Review Article

The Precarious State of Educational/School Psychologists in Cameroon: Confronting Title Usurpation, Systemic Role Confusion, Structural Amateurism and the Quest for Legitimacy

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Abstract

This article critically examines the precarious state of educational/school psychology in Cameroon through a conceptual framework defining the educational psychologist (EP) or school psychologist (SP) as a specialist in learner well-being, academic support, and evidence-based interventions. SP roles lack statutory recognition despite ministerial policies acknowledging student support needs. Title usurpation proliferates, with unqualified personnel (teachers, spiritual guides, social workers) impersonating EPs/SPs due to regulatory voids, eroding service credibility and risking learner welfare. Concurrent systemic role confusion blurs professional boundaries: SPs are frequently conflated with teachers (focused on pedagogy), guidance counsellors/spiritual guides (prioritising academic/moral advice), and social workers (addressing socioeconomic barriers), diluting specialised mental health interventions. Structural amateurism compounds these issues, stemming from: 1) absent specialised SP training programmes; 2) difficulties adapting Eurocentric psychological models to Cameroon's sociocultural realities; and 3) professional isolation limiting knowledge exchange. The consequences are severe: learners face unmet psychological needs affecting academic outcomes; the education system lacks standardised support frameworks; and the SP profession battles eroded legitimacy. To address this, we propose: 1) statutory regulation via a national professional association; 2) specialised SP training through university programmes; and 3) structured supervision networks. Crucially, Cameroon's state university Departments of Educational Psychology are pivotal in driving solutions by: a) designing accredited SP curricula integrating local cultural competencies; b) delivering continuous professional development; and c) promoting a unified professional identity distinct from allied roles. Without these reforms, Cameroon's SP field will remain fragmented, perpetuating amateurism and failing its educational community.

Keywords

Educational Psychology/School Psychology, Cameroon, Title Usurpation, Role Confusion, Professional Amateurism, Educational Psychology Training, Learner Well-being, Regulatory Reform

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1. Introduction

In the course of this paper, the terms educational psychology and school psychology are used interchangeably. The role of the educational/school psychologist has emerged as a crucial component in promoting both the psychological well-being and academic success of learners. In educational settings, students face multifaceted psychological, emotional, and academic challenges that, if unaddressed, hinder their development. School psychologists are trained to deliver tailored assessments, interventions, and support systems, fostering conducive learning environments while addressing mental health needs. Globally, integrating psychological services into schools is increasingly prioritised to enhance student well-being and resilience.

School psychologists serve as intermediaries between students, teachers, and parents, providing services that are crucial for addressing behavioural, emotional, and learning difficulties [41]. They engage in activities such as psychological assessments, the design of intervention programmes, and the provision of counselling services, which help to support students facing various challenges. By identifying the underlying factors contributing to academic or emotional struggles, school psychologists ensure that students receive appropriate interventions, enabling them to reach their full potential [45]. Moreover, they play an essential role in guiding teachers and administrators in implementing inclusive educational strategies that cater to the diverse needs of students, further enhancing the learning environment.

In the context of Cameroon, Decision N 067/B1/14/54/MINEDUC/CAB of February 19, 2001, emphasises the importance of these services for student support. However, the implementation of such programmes and the employment of qualified personnel can vary significantly across private institutions, and many do not have dedicated school psychologists on staff. Thus, while guidance and counselling are recognised as essential components of education, there is no legal obligation for neither public nor private secondary schools to employ school psychologists specifically. Consequently, the role of school psychologists remains underdeveloped and poorly recognised. Although the importance of mental health services in schools is widely acknowledged in many parts of the world, Cameroon faces significant challenges in professionalising and institutionalising the role of school psychologists [19, 41]. The country's educational system has traditionally focused on academic achievement without giving adequate attention to the psychological and emotional needs of students. Thus, the field of school psychology is still in its infancy, and the profession faces numerous obstacles, including the misuse of titles, role confusion, and amateurism in practice [5, 18].

1.1. The Importance of School Psychologists

The primary responsibility of a school psychologist is to

promote the psychological well-being of students, which directly impacts their academic performance [55]. Research has shown that students who experience psychological distress—whether due to learning disabilities, emotional difficulties, or behavioural problems—often struggle academically [28, 42, 46]. School psychologists are equipped to identify these issues early and intervene to prevent further academic decline. They work closely with teachers and parents to develop strategies for managing behavioural challenges, supporting students with learning difficulties, and fostering emotional resilience.

Also, to direct interventions with students, school psychologists contribute to the overall mental health climate of the school by promoting preventative measures and creating awareness of mental health issues [4, 53]. This includes implementing school-wide programmes aimed at reducing bullying, improving social skills, and promoting positive behaviours. These efforts are essential for building a supportive and inclusive school environment that nurtures the social and emotional development of all students.

One of the key roles of school psychologists is conducting psychological assessments to identify students who may need additional support. These assessments can reveal learning disabilities, developmental delays, or emotional and behavioural disorders, allowing for early interventions. Through collaboration with teachers and special education staff, school psychologists help to develop individualised education plans (IEPs) for students with special needs, ensuring they receive the necessary accommodations to succeed academically [51, 21].

1.2. Challenges in the Cameroonian Context

In Cameroon, the profession of school psychology is not well-established. The education system places a strong emphasis on academic achievement, often at the expense of students' mental health and well-being. While some schools have begun to recognise the importance of providing psychological support to students, the lack of a formal framework for school psychology hinders the effective delivery of these services [46]. This gap has led to:

1. **Title Usurpation:** Untrained individuals (teachers, counsellors) often assume the role of school psychologists due to the absence of regulatory frameworks;
2. **Role Confusion:** Overlap between school psychologists, guidance counsellors, and social workers creates ambiguity, with non-specialists expected to perform psychological interventions;
3. **Structural Amateurism:** Training programmes are poorly structured; consequently, many practitioners rely on general knowledge rather than specialised skills, compromising service quality.

These challenges stem from systemic neglect, including the

absence of university training programmes and professional accreditation bodies.

2. Overview of the Issues

The challenges facing the professionalisation of school psychology in Cameroon can be categorised into three main areas: misuse of titles, role confusion, and amateurism in practice. The misuse of titles is prevalent, as individuals without the requisite qualifications frequently assume the role of school psychologist, resulting in substandard services that inadequately address students' psychological needs [47, 5]. Role confusion stems from the lack of clear definitions and distinctions between related professions, such as school psychologists, guidance counsellors, and social workers. This ambiguity often leads to overlapping responsibilities and the provision of psychological services by unqualified personnel [33, 12]. Without specialised training programmes, practitioners are compelled to rely on generalist knowledge, which undermines the effectiveness of their interventions [40, 1].

Addressing these issues necessitates collective action from policymakers, educational institutions, and professional bodies [52]. The establishment of clear guidelines and regulations for the practice of school psychology is essential to ensure that only qualified individuals are allowed to assume the title of school psychologist. Furthermore, the development of specialised training programmes is crucial for equipping professionals with the skills required to perform their duties effectively [31]. By addressing the misuse of titles, role confusion, and amateurism in practice, Cameroon can make significant strides towards the professionalisation of school psychology and ensure that students receive the psychological support they need to thrive academically and emotionally.

2.1. Conceptual Framework and the Cameroonian Context

2.1.1. Definition and Roles of the School Psychologist (SP)

The role of the school psychologist is integral to addressing the psychological, emotional, and academic needs of students in educational settings. According to international standards, a school psychologist is a highly trained professional who works within schools to provide a range of psychological services aimed at fostering the well-being and academic success of students [17, 30]. These professionals possess specialised knowledge in areas such as developmental psychology, educational psychology, mental health, and behaviour management, enabling them to support students, teachers, and parents in navigating the complex challenges faced within schools [41].

The core responsibilities of school psychologists include conducting psychological assessments, which involve the use of standardised tools to evaluate a student's cognitive, emo-

tional, and behavioural functioning. These assessments provide valuable insights to identify students' strengths and areas of need, developing and implementing intervention plans, and offering counselling and therapeutic services to students facing emotional or behavioural difficulties [22, 28]. School psychologists also collaborate with teachers and school staff to create a supportive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of students, particularly those with special educational needs [41]. They play a crucial role in facilitating the development of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) and delivering evidence-based interventions tailored to students' individual circumstances [28, 41].

2.1.2. The Cameroonian Context

In Cameroon, the role of the school psychologist has not yet been fully developed or institutionalised within the education system [47]. The country's educational structure primarily focuses on academic achievement, with limited attention paid to students' psychological and emotional well-being. Although some schools have begun to recognise the importance of psychological services, the profession of school psychologist remains underdeveloped, with significant gaps between international expectations and the reality of its implementation in Cameroon [40].

Cameroon's education system is characterised by a centralised structure that emphasises academic excellence and exam-oriented learning. This focus on academic achievement often leaves little room for addressing students' psychological needs, resulting in an educational system where mental health services are seen as secondary to academic performance [52]. In many schools, guidance counsellors, social workers, spiritual guides or teachers are expected to provide psychological support to students despite lacking the specialised training required to fulfil the role of a school psychologist [12].

One of the key challenges in the Cameroonian context is the lack of formal recognition and professionalisation of the school psychologist's role. While international standards emphasise the need for highly trained professionals to provide psychological services within schools, there is currently no established framework in Cameroon for training or certifying school psychologists. This has led to a situation where individuals without the necessary qualifications assume the responsibilities of a school psychologist, leading to substandard services and a lack of consistency in the quality of psychological support provided to students [26, 33].

The insufficiency of specialised training programmes in educational psychology (school psychology) further aggravates the issue. Cameroonian universities offer degree programmes specifically focused on educational psychology; however, the quality is questionable, leaving aspiring professionals with few options for obtaining the necessary qualifications [1]. Consequently, many individuals practising as school psychologists have received only generalist training in psychology or related fields, without the specialised knowledge required to effectively address the unique chal-

lenges of working in schools. This lack of training limits the effectiveness of psychological interventions and contributes to the professional isolation of those working in the field [33].

Cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping the practice of school psychology in Cameroon. The country's diverse cultural landscape, with its wide range of languages, traditions, and belief systems, presents unique challenges for school psychologists. In many communities, mental health issues are still stigmatised, and there is limited awareness of the role of psychological services in promoting students' well-being [31]. This cultural stigma can hinder students' willingness to seek psychological support, further complicating the delivery of services in schools [31]. This is compounded by the fact that many traditional beliefs about mental illness attribute it to spiritual and metaphysical causes, leading to a preference for traditional healers or religious figures over mental health professionals [1].

Institutional and systemic factors also contribute to the challenges faced by school psychologists in Cameroon. The education system is under-resourced, with many schools lacking the necessary infrastructure and personnel to provide comprehensive psychological services [52]. Additionally, there is a shortage of mental health professionals in the country, resulting in an over-reliance on underqualified staff to provide psychological support. The lack of a regulatory body overseeing the practice of school psychology further complicates efforts to professionalise the field and ensure the delivery of high-quality services [5].

The gap between global expectations for the role of school psychologists and the reality in Cameroon is evident in the limited availability of psychological services in schools, the lack of specialised training, and the cultural and institutional barriers to accessing mental health support. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach, including the development of formal training programmes, the establishment of regulatory frameworks, and efforts to raise awareness of the importance of psychological services within schools.

While international standards emphasise the critical role of school psychologists in supporting students' psychological and academic needs, the Cameroonian context presents significant challenges to the professionalisation and effective implementation of school psychology. The absence of formal training, cultural stigma, and institutional barriers contribute to a gap between global expectations and the reality in Cameroon.

2.2. Usurpation of Titles and Functions

The role of the school psychologist is a specialised field that requires extensive training, professional expertise, and a clear understanding of the psychological needs of students in educational settings [19, 44]. However, in many contexts, including Cameroon, there is a significant issue with individuals assuming the title of "school psychologist" without the necessary qualifications or training. This usurpation of

titles and functions is pervasive in many schools and educational institutions, where individuals such as teachers, guidance counsellors, and social workers often take on psychological roles despite lacking the required skills and knowledge [33, 3]. The consequences of this phenomenon are far-reaching, affecting not only the well-being and academic outcomes of students but also the professional identity and reputation of school psychologists.

2.2.1. Profiles of Impersonators

In the Cameroonian context, the usurpation of the title "school psychologist" is largely due to the absence of a clear professional framework that defines the qualifications and responsibilities associated to this role [26, 15]. As a result, many individuals without formal training in psychology or mental health services assume the responsibilities of a school psychologist, leading to the dilution of the profession and confusion about its functions. The profiles of these impersonators often include teachers, guidance counsellors, and social workers who, due to the lack of professional clarity and institutional gaps, step into psychological roles without the necessary credentials [35, 36].

Teachers are one of the primary groups of individuals who, in the absence of a qualified school psychologist, assume psychological responsibilities. Teachers are often seen as the first point of contact for students experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties, and in many cases, they take on the role of a counsellor or psychologist, providing advice and support to students. While teachers play an essential role in supporting students' academic and emotional needs, they are not equipped with the specialised training required to diagnose and treat psychological issues effectively. This lack of expertise can result in inappropriate interventions, misdiagnosis, or the failure to recognise serious mental health conditions, which can negatively impact the well-being of students [23, 54, 19].

Guidance counsellors, another group commonly found in schools, also often assume the role of school psychologists. Due to the absence of a qualified school psychologist more competent in conducting psychological assessments and diagnosis, many guidance counsellors are expected to address the emotional and mental health needs of students, even though this falls outside the scope of their expertise. This blurring of roles leads to confusion and can result in ineffective support for students dealing with complex psychological issues [5, 36, 44].

Social workers, who often provide support to students and families in addressing social and economic challenges, may also assume the responsibilities of school psychologists. In the absence of a professional school psychologist, social workers may find themselves taking on psychological responsibilities without the necessary training, leading to inadequate support for students facing mental health challenges [33, 15].

The common thread among these impersonators is that they

step into psychological roles due to a lack of professional clarity, institutional support, and the absence of a formal framework for school psychology in Cameroon. This situation creates confusion about the role of school psychologists and undermines the professional identity of those trained to provide psychological services in schools [35, 3].

2.2.2. Consequences of Usurpation

The usurpation of the school psychologist's role by unqualified individuals commonly called "bat", meaning unqualified individuals who usurp the school psychologist's role, akin to how bats are often misunderstood yet occupy spaces they aren't suited to, has significant consequences for students, the education system, and the profession as a whole [3, 12]. One of the most immediate effects of impersonation is the potential harm to students' well-being. School psychologists are trained to identify and address a wide range of psychological issues, including learning disabilities, behavioural problems, and emotional disturbances [19]. When unqualified individuals assume this role, they may fail to accurately assess and intervene in these issues, leading to misdiagnosis, inappropriate interventions, or even the exacerbation of existing psychological conditions [12, 44].

Without proper diagnosis and intervention, some students are unlikely to receive the support they need, resulting in poor academic performance, increased frustration, and a heightened risk of dropping out of school [29, 50]. Furthermore, students dealing with emotional or behavioural difficulties may not receive the appropriate therapeutic interventions, leaving them to struggle with their challenges without the necessary support [20, 29].

The educational outcomes of students are also negatively impacted by the misuse of titles and functions. When unqualified individuals attempt to provide psychological services, the interventions are often ineffective or inappropriate, leading to a lack of progress in addressing students' academic or behavioural issues. This can result in a cycle of underachievement, where students continue to struggle without receiving the specialised support they need to succeed academically. In the long term, this can lead to lower graduation rates, decreased opportunities for higher education, and limited career prospects for affected students [45, 50].

The professional identity of school psychologists is also significantly diluted by the practice of impersonation. In contexts where unqualified individuals assume the title of "school psychologist," the boundaries of the profession become blurred, leading to confusion about the specific responsibilities and expertise required for the role. This dilution undermines the credibility of the profession, making it difficult for qualified school psychologists to assert their expertise and demonstrate the value of their services [26, 19]. It also creates challenges for the development of the profession, as the lack of clear professional standards and recognition hampers efforts to establish school psychology as a respected and essential field within the education system [33, 10].

The reputation of the profession is further damaged when unqualified individuals provide substandard psychological services, leading to negative outcomes for students. Parents, teachers, and school administrators may lose confidence in the effectiveness of psychological services if they perceive that the support provided is inadequate or harmful. This can result in a reluctance to seek psychological interventions for students, further marginalising the role of school psychologists in the educational system and limiting access to critical mental health support for students [33, 11, 44].

Moreover, the lack of professional regulation and oversight exacerbates the problem of impersonation. In Cameroon, there is no established regulatory body (still at the level of the steering committee for its creation) to oversee the practice of school psychology or ensure that individuals assuming the title of school psychologist have the necessary qualifications and training. This lack of regulation creates an environment where unqualified individuals can easily assume psychological roles without facing accountability for their actions. Establishing a professional regulatory framework is essential to address this issue, ensuring that only qualified professionals are allowed to practise as school psychologists and that the profession is held to high standards of competence and ethics [10, 19].

2.3. Confusion of Roles

In many educational systems, including that of Cameroon, there is often a lack of clarity surrounding the distinct roles of school psychologists, teachers, guidance counsellors, social workers, and spiritual leaders. This systemic ambiguity often leads to overlapping responsibilities, thereby compromising the provision of psychological services and undermining the professional identity of each group. In a country like Cameroon, where school psychology is not yet fully professionalised and recognised, this confusion is exacerbated by the lack of formal structures and regulatory oversight, leading to a blurring of roles between different stakeholders within the educational system [37, 25].

2.3.1. School Psychologist Versus Teacher

The role of the school psychologist and the teacher are fundamentally different, yet they often intersect, leading to confusion and role overlap. Teachers are primarily responsible for the academic development of students, providing instruction, educational assessment, and feedback in specific subject areas. However, in the absence of a formal school psychologist, teachers may find themselves assuming psychological responsibilities, including identifying and addressing emotional and behavioural issues in students. While teachers play a critical role in observing students' day-to-day behaviour and emotional well-being, their training does not equip them to conduct psychological assessments or provide therapeutic interventions [20, 16].

In Cameroon, the confusion between the roles of school

psychologists and teachers is particularly pronounced due to the scarcity of trained psychologists in schools. Teachers, by default, become the first point of contact for students struggling with mental health issues or behavioural problems. While well-intentioned, teachers may lack the specialised knowledge required to diagnose psychological conditions or provide evidence-based interventions. This can lead to misunderstandings about the nature of a student's difficulties. For instance, a student with a learning disability like dyslexia might be mislabelled as lazy or inattentive by a teacher untrained in recognising such conditions [23, 9].

The dual burden of instructional and psychological responsibilities places significant strain on teachers. Many attempt to support students facing anxiety, depression, or trauma without sufficient training, often resulting in inadvertently harmful outcomes [26, 38]. This scenario not only affects student well-being but also impedes the institutional recognition and professionalisation of school psychology in Cameroon. When teachers are perceived as capable substitutes for school psychologists, the demand for trained psychological professionals remains suppressed, perpetuating a cycle of inadequate support and professional marginalisation [39].

2.3.2. School Psychologist Versus Guidance Counsellors/Spiritual Guides

The confusion between the roles of school psychologists and guidance counsellors or spiritual guides is another issue that frequently arises in the Cameroonian educational system. Guidance counsellors are primarily responsible for providing academic, vocational, and career advice to students. However, due to the absence of a clear distinction between the roles, they are often expected to take on psychological responsibilities, including addressing students' emotional and mental health needs.

In practice, many guidance counsellors in Cameroon find themselves dealing with issues related to student behaviour, emotional distress, and interpersonal conflicts, even though their training is not geared towards psychological intervention. For example, a guidance counsellor may be called upon to mediate between students experiencing bullying or conflict, but without the training of a school psychologist, they may not be equipped to address the deeper psychological issues underlying these behaviours [33].

The intersection between the roles of school psychologists and guidance counsellors is further complicated in denominational schools, where religious figures such as chaplains and pastors may also take on psychological responsibilities. In many faith-based schools in Cameroon, priests and pastors are seen as spiritual and moral leaders who provide counselling to students. While their support is often valuable in terms of offering moral guidance and spiritual advice, it is important to recognise that religious figures are not trained mental health professionals. The assumption that priests or pastors can adequately address psychological

issues such as depression, anxiety, or trauma is problematic, as their approach may focus more on spiritual rather than psychological solutions [5, 2].

This blurring of roles between school psychologists, guidance counsellors, and religious figures can lead to confusion among students, parents, and school staff about where to seek appropriate psychological support. It can also result in psychological issues being framed in moral or spiritual terms rather than addressed through professional psychological interventions. For instance, a student exhibiting signs of depression might be advised to pray or engage in religious activities rather than receiving the necessary psychological support from a trained school psychologist [45].

2.3.3. School Psychologist Versus Social Worker

The confusion between the roles of school psychologists and social workers is another significant issue in the Cameroonian educational system. Social workers play an important role in schools by addressing social and economic challenges that affect students, such as poverty, family dysfunction, and community-related issues. However, in the absence of clear professional boundaries, social workers are often expected to take on psychological duties that fall outside their scope of expertise.

In schools, social workers are frequently involved in addressing issues related to student welfare, including providing support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds or those experiencing family-related problems. While social workers are trained to provide social and community-based interventions, they are not equipped to conduct psychological assessments or provide therapeutic services to students with mental health needs [33]. Nevertheless, in the absence of a qualified school psychologist, social workers may be expected to address issues such as anxiety, depression, or behavioural disorders, leading to role overlap and confusion.

This confusion can result in students receiving inadequate psychological support. For example, a social worker might be called upon to provide counselling to a student experiencing trauma, but without the specialised training of a school psychologist, they may not be able to offer the evidence-based therapeutic interventions that the student needs. This can result in the student's psychological issues going unresolved or, in some cases, being exacerbated by inappropriate interventions [20, 54].

The connection between the roles of school psychologists and social workers also has broader implications for the professional development of school psychology in Cameroon. When social workers are expected to provide psychological services, it diminishes the perceived value of school psychologists and creates a barrier to the recognition of school psychology as a distinct profession. This lack of recognition makes it difficult for schools to prioritise the hiring of qualified school psychologists, perpetuating the confusion and overlap between these roles [12].

2.4. Amateurism in Practice

Amateurism in the practice of school psychology is a significant challenge in Cameroon, stemming from a variety of factors, including the lack of specialised training, difficulties in adapting international models to local contexts, and professional isolation. These challenges undermine the effectiveness of psychological interventions in schools and contribute to the broader confusion of roles within the educational system. Without proper training, school psychologists are often ill-equipped to address the complex psychological needs of students, leading to suboptimal outcomes for students, teachers, and the educational system as a whole.

2.4.1. Lack of Specific Training

One of the most pressing issues contributing to amateurism in school psychology in Cameroon is the lack of specialised training programmes. School psychology is a distinct field that requires a unique set of skills and knowledge, including psychological assessment, intervention, counselling, and collaboration with educators and parents. However, in Cameroon, there are few, formal training programmes specifically designed to prepare individuals for careers as school psychologists. As a result, many individuals who take on the role of school psychologist have only generalist training in psychology or related fields, such as education or social work [13].

The absence of specific training programmes for school psychologists means that individuals entering the field often lack the necessary competencies to carry out their duties effectively. For example, psychological assessment is a critical component of a school psychologist's role, but without specialised training, many practitioners may not be familiar with the tools and techniques required to assess students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioural needs accurately. This can result in misdiagnoses or failure to identify students who require support, leading to a failure to address critical issues such as learning disabilities, mental health disorders, or behavioural challenges [26]. This is further complicated by the limited availability of standardized assessment tools that are culturally appropriate and validated for use in the Cameroonian context [36].

Moreover, the lack of specialised training limits the ability of school psychologists to implement evidence-based interventions. In many cases, generalist training does not provide the depth of knowledge needed to apply psychological theories and practices in the school setting. For example, a school psychologist with only a generalist background may be familiar with broad psychological concepts but lack the specific skills needed to develop and implement interventions for students with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder, or trauma-related difficulties [34, 15].

The implications of this lack of specialised training are far-reaching. Not only does it compromise the quality of

psychological services provided to students, but it also reinforces the perception of school psychology as a secondary or auxiliary profession within the education system. Without the formal recognition that comes with specialised training, school psychologists are often seen as interchangeable with teachers, guidance counsellors, or social workers, further blurring the lines between these professions and perpetuating the confusion of roles [13].

2.4.2. Difficulties to Adapt to the Context

Another significant challenge contributing to amateurism in school psychology in Cameroon is the difficulty of adapting international models to the unique socio-cultural and educational contexts of the country. Many of the theories, practices, and intervention models used in school psychology are developed in Western contexts and may not be directly applicable to the Cameroonian setting. For example, psychological assessments and interventions that are effective in European or North American schools may not account for the cultural, linguistic, or social realities of Cameroonian students [48].

One of the key difficulties in adapting international models to the Cameroonian context is the lack of culturally relevant tools and resources. Many of the psychological assessments used in school psychology, such as intelligence tests or behavioural checklists, are normed on Western populations and may not accurately reflect the experiences or abilities of Cameroonian students. This can lead to misinterpretations of students' abilities or behaviours, particularly for those from marginalised or rural communities where cultural practices and educational experiences may differ significantly from those in urban or Westernised areas [6, 50].

In addition to the challenges posed by the lack of culturally appropriate assessment tools, school psychologists in Cameroon also face difficulties in implementing interventions that are sensitive to the local context. For example, interventions designed to address behavioural problems in Western schools may focus on individualistic strategies, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) or self-regulation techniques. However, these approaches may not resonate with Cameroonian students, who come from a collectivist culture that emphasises community and family support [48]. School psychologists may struggle to adapt these interventions to a more communal context, where family involvement and community-based approaches are critical to the success of psychological support. This highlights the need for interventions that are culturally adapted and incorporate traditional healing practices or community resources, where appropriate [1].

Furthermore, the broader socio-political and economic context of Cameroon presents additional challenges for school psychologists. Many schools lack the resources to implement psychological services effectively, and the prioritisation of academic performance over mental health support often leaves school psychologists with little institutional backing to

carry out their work. This can make it difficult for school psychologists to establish themselves as valuable contributors to the educational system, further entrenching the perception of amateurism in the profession [6]. The ongoing socio-political instability in certain regions of Cameroon can also create additional challenges for school psychologists, who may need to address trauma and displacement among students while facing limited resources and support [54].

2.4.3. Professional Isolation

Professional isolation is another significant factor that exacerbates amateurism in school psychology in Cameroon. Unlike more established professions, such as teaching or medicine, school psychology in Cameroon lacks a strong professional community or support network. This isolation makes it difficult for school psychologists to access ongoing professional development, share best practices, or receive mentorship from more experienced colleagues. In many cases, school psychologists are the only individuals in their schools or even regions who are trained in psychology, leaving them without the opportunity to collaborate with others in their field [23].

The lack of a professional community is compounded by the intrusion of non-qualified authorities, such as school proprietors or principals, into the work of school psychologists. In some cases, these authorities may impose their own views on how psychological services should be provided, without understanding the specific requirements of the profession. For example, a school principal may expect a school psychologist to focus solely on discipline and behaviour management, rather than on the broader range of psychological services, such as counselling or mental health support. This intrusion can limit the autonomy of school psychologists and force them to work in ways that do not align with their professional training or best practices [34, 38].

The absence of a professional association for school psychologists in Cameroon further contributes to this isolation. In many countries, professional associations provide school psychologists with opportunities for networking, continuing education, and advocacy. These associations also serve as a platform for establishing professional standards and promoting the recognition of school psychology as a distinct field. However, in Cameroon, the lack of such an association means that school psychologists have little access to the resources and support needed to develop their skills and advance their careers [26, 38].

The professional isolation faced by school psychologists in Cameroon not only limits their professional growth but also reinforces the perception of amateurism in the field. Without opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and professional development, school psychologists may struggle to stay up to date with the latest research and best practices in their field. This can lead to stagnation in their practice and perpetuate the cycle of amateurism that characterises much of the profession in Cameroon [23].

3. Consequences of the Current Situation

The challenges surrounding the role of school psychologists in Cameroon—marked by role confusion, amateurism, and usurpation—have far-reaching consequences. These issues significantly impact learners, the education system, and the profession itself. The consequences manifest in several ways, including detrimental effects on students' mental health, hindered educational outcomes, diminished professional credibility, and systemic inefficiencies. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring the proper functioning of school psychologists and fostering a supportive learning environment.

3.1. Impact on Learners

One of the most critical consequences of role confusion, amateurism, and usurpation in school psychology is the negative impact on learners' mental health, development, and academic performance. School psychologists are uniquely positioned to address a wide range of student needs, from emotional and behavioural challenges to cognitive development and learning disabilities. However, when individuals lacking the necessary training and qualifications assume the role of school psychologists, students are deprived of the professional care and interventions they require.

First, role confusion and amateurism can lead to misdiagnoses or the failure to identify students in need of support. School psychologists play a crucial role in conducting psychological assessments to identify learning disabilities, developmental disorders, and mental health issues. Without adequate training, those assuming these roles may lack the skills and knowledge needed to accurately assess students, leading to inappropriate interventions or a failure to provide support altogether. This situation is particularly concerning for students with conditions that require specialised interventions to thrive in the school environment [7, 29].

Moreover, amateurism in the practice of school psychology can result in ineffective or inappropriate interventions. Psychological interventions should be tailored to the specific needs of the student, based on evidence-based practices. However, individuals lacking specialised training may rely on general or outdated methods that are not suited to the complexities of students' psychological needs. This can exacerbate students' mental health issues, leading to increased anxiety, depression, or behavioural problems, all of which can negatively affect their academic performance and overall well-being [49, 54].

Usurpation of the role by unqualified individuals, such as teachers or guidance counsellors, also compromises the quality of psychological support provided to students. While these professionals may have valuable expertise in their respective fields, they are not trained to provide psychological care. The conflation of roles can lead to inappropriate advice or interventions, such as prioritising academic performance over

mental health, which can exacerbate students' emotional distress [27]. As a result, students may struggle to cope with the pressures of school life, leading to a decline in both their mental health and academic performance [36].

3.2. Impact on the Education System

The consequences of amateurism, role confusion, and usurpation extend beyond the individual learner and have a profound impact on the overall education system. School psychologists are essential in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment by addressing students' psychological needs, collaborating with teachers, and providing guidance to administrators. When these roles are improperly fulfilled, the entire educational system suffers.

One of the key ways in which the education system is affected is through the strain placed on teachers and administrators. Without the support of qualified school psychologists, teachers are often left to manage students' emotional and behavioural issues on their own. This can be overwhelming, as teachers are not trained to handle complex psychological problems and may struggle to provide the necessary support. As a result, classroom management becomes more difficult, and teachers may experience increased stress and burnout [24]. Furthermore, without proper psychological interventions, students with emotional or behavioural difficulties may disrupt the learning environment, negatively affecting their peers and the overall classroom dynamic [9].

Administrators, too, are impacted by the absence of qualified school psychologists. School leaders rely on school psychologists to provide guidance on mental health policies, crisis intervention, and strategies for supporting students with diverse needs. When these services are lacking or inadequate, administrators may make decisions that are not in the best interest of students' well-being. For example, without input from a school psychologist, administrators may adopt punitive disciplinary measures for students with behavioural issues, rather than addressing the underlying psychological causes [13, 38].

Additionally, the improper functioning of school psychologists undermines the broader goals of the education system in Cameroon, including the promotion of inclusive education. School psychologists are critical in ensuring that students with special educational needs receive the appropriate accommodations and support. However, when their roles are filled by unqualified individuals, students with disabilities may be overlooked or denied access to the resources they need to succeed. This failure to support all students equitably undermines the principles of inclusion and social justice that are central to modern education systems [32, 15].

Overall, the education system in Cameroon suffers when school psychologists are unable to fulfil their roles effectively. The lack of proper psychological support creates a wave effect, placing additional burdens on teachers and administrators, disrupting the learning environment, and hindering the education system's ability to meet the needs of all students.

3.3. Impact on the Profession

The challenges facing school psychologists in Cameroon, including role confusion, amateurism, and usurpation, also have a detrimental impact on the profession itself. These issues contribute to the devaluation of school psychology as a legitimate and essential field within the education system, hindering its development and recognition.

One of the key consequences of the current situation is the erosion of the professional identity of school psychologists. When individuals without the necessary training assume the title of school psychologist, it dilutes the profession's credibility and undermines the specialised knowledge and skills required to practise effectively. This devaluation is compounded by the fact that school psychology is often viewed as secondary to other professions, such as teaching or guidance counselling, further marginalising those who are properly trained in the field [32, 50].

The lack of recognition and professional support also limits opportunities for career development and advancement for school psychologists in Cameroon. In many countries, school psychologists benefit from professional associations, ongoing training, and clear career pathways. However, in Cameroon, the absence of these structures leaves school psychologists isolated and without the resources needed to continue their professional development [27]. This isolation can lead to stagnation in practice, as school psychologists may struggle to stay up to date with the latest research and best practices, further entrenching the perception of amateurism in the field.

Moreover, the improper functioning of school psychologists hinders the growth of the profession within the education system. Without clear professional standards and recognition, there is little incentive for individuals to pursue specialised training in school psychology. This perpetuates the cycle of amateurism, as the field fails to attract qualified individuals who are committed to advancing the profession. The result is a shortage of trained school psychologists, further exacerbating the challenges faced by students, teachers, and the education system as a whole [7].

The current situation in Cameroon has significant consequences for learners, the education system, and the profession of school psychology. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to establish clear professional standards, provide specialised training, and promote the recognition of school psychology as a vital component of the education system. Only by addressing these challenges can the field of school psychology in Cameroon achieve its full potential and provide the necessary support to students and schools.

4. Possible Solutions

The issues of role confusion, amateurism, and misuse of titles in the field of school psychology in Cameroon present a serious challenge to the profession and the well-being of learners. Efforts to address these challenges must focus on

professionalising the field, providing specialised training, and raising awareness of the importance of psychological services in promoting students' well-being and academic success. Therefore, they require the establishment of a clear regulatory framework, the creation of specialised training programmes, and the implementation of supervision and professional support systems. These solutions will help ensure that school psychologists are adequately trained, recognised, and supported in their roles, ultimately improving the quality of psychological services provided in schools.

4.1. Regulation and Professional Association

One of the most pressing needs for addressing the challenges facing school psychology in Cameroon is the creation of a regulatory framework and a professional body to oversee the profession. Currently, there is a lack of standardised certification processes for school psychologists, allowing individuals without the necessary qualifications to assume the role. This situation has led to confusion about the profession's identity, diluted the quality of psychological services, and undermined the credibility of school psychologists.

The establishment of a regulatory body would create clear standards for the training, certification, and practice of school psychologists. This body would be responsible for defining the qualifications required to practise as a school psychologist, ensuring that only individuals who have undergone specialised training are allowed to assume the title. Additionally, it would oversee the certification process, ensuring that school psychologists meet the necessary standards of competence and professionalism. By creating clear entry requirements, the regulatory body would help to eliminate the issue of role usurpation and ensure that only qualified individuals can practise in the field.

In addition to a regulatory framework, the creation of a professional association for school psychologists would provide a platform for the profession to advocate for its interests and promote the development of school psychology in Cameroon. A professional association would serve several key functions. First, it would provide a space for school psychologists to come together, share knowledge, and support one another. This sense of professional community would help to combat the isolation that many school psychologists currently experience [43].

Second, the professional association could advocate for the recognition and inclusion of school psychology within the broader educational system. By engaging with policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders, the association could raise awareness of the importance of school psychology and ensure that the profession is properly valued and supported. This advocacy would be particularly important in promoting the integration of school psychology into national education policies, ensuring that psychological services are seen as an essential component of student support [32].

Finally, the professional association could play a key role in

promoting professional development and lifelong learning among school psychologists. By offering workshops, conferences, and other opportunities for continuing education, the association would ensure that school psychologists stay up to date with the latest research and best practices in the field. This commitment to professional development would help to address the issue of amateurism by ensuring that all school psychologists have the skills and knowledge needed to provide effective psychological services.

4.2. Tailored Training

The second key solution to the challenges facing school psychology in Cameroon is the development of tailored training programmes. Currently, many individuals who assume the role of school psychologists lack the adequate training needed to address the complex psychological needs of students. Instead, they often come from other professions, such as teaching or guidance counselling, and lack the knowledge required to perform psychological assessments, provide interventions, and support students' mental health.

To address this issue, higher education institutions in Cameroon, in accordance with the professional association, should develop tailored training programmes for school psychologists. These programmes should be designed to equip individuals with the appropriate skills and knowledge required for the profession. The curriculum should include coursework in areas such as psychological assessment, child and adolescent development, counselling techniques, and mental health interventions. In addition, students should receive practical training through supervised placements in schools, where they can gain hands-on experience working with students and addressing their psychological needs [8].

One model for tailored training in school psychology could be the development of professional postgraduate programmes or certifications. These programmes could be open to individuals with undergraduate degrees in psychology or related fields, allowing them to receive the additional training needed to work as school psychologists. By offering postgraduate training, higher education institutions could help to fill the current gap in the profession and ensure that school psychologists have the qualifications needed to provide effective psychological services.

Tailored training is also essential in ensuring that school psychologists are equipped to work in the unique socio-cultural and educational context of Cameroon. International models of school psychology may not always be directly applicable to the Cameroonian context, and school psychologists need to be trained in culturally sensitive practices. Tailored training programmes should include content that addresses the precise needs of students in Cameroon, including issues related to poverty, trauma, and social inequality. This culturally relevant training would ensure that school psychologists are better prepared to support the psychological well-being of students in their specific context.

In addition to initial training, there should be a commitment to continuous professional development for school psychologists. Given the rapidly evolving nature of the field, school psychologists need to engage in ongoing learning to stay up to date with new research and best practices. The proposed professional association, in collaboration with higher education institutions, could offer comprehensive professional development opportunities for school psychologists to enhance their expertise throughout their careers. These initiatives might include practical workshops on emerging interventions, annual conferences featuring evidence-based research, and accredited online courses covering specialist topics such as neurodiversity or trauma-informed practice. By combining academic rigour with applied training, this partnership would ensure practitioners remain at the forefront of psychological knowledge while addressing real-world challenges in educational settings. Such continuous learning would ultimately benefit both professionals and the pupils they serve. [34].

4.3. Supervision and Professional Support

The third key solution to the challenges facing school psychology in Cameroon is the creation of mentoring and supervision systems for newly qualified school psychologists, along with continuous professional support. One of the major contributors to amateurism in the profession is the lack of guidance and support for school psychologists, particularly those who are new to the field. Without adequate supervision and mentorship, newly qualified school psychologists may struggle to apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in training, leading to ineffective or inappropriate interventions.

To address this issue, a structured supervision system should be established for school psychologists, particularly those in their early years of practice. This supervision could take the form of regular meetings with experienced school psychologists, where newly qualified professionals can receive feedback, guidance, and support in their work. Supervisors could help new school psychologists navigate complex cases, provide advice on best practices, and offer emotional support in what can be a demanding and challenging profession [49].

In addition to one-on-one supervision, there should be opportunities for peer support and collaboration. School psychologists can benefit from working together to share knowledge, discuss cases, and learn from one another's experiences. The creation of local or regional professional networks, facilitated by the proposed professional association, could provide a platform for school psychologists to connect and support one another. These networks could also serve as a space for ongoing professional development, with regular meetings, workshops, and case discussions.

Finally, there should be a commitment to providing continuous professional development opportunities for school

psychologists. Supervision should not end once a school psychologist has gained experience; instead, it should be an ongoing process that supports lifelong learning. The professional association, in collaboration with higher education institutions, could offer mentorship programmes, where experienced school psychologists are paired with those seeking further guidance or support in their careers. This mentorship could help to address the issue of professional isolation and ensure that school psychologists have access to the resources they need to continue growing in their roles [14].

5. How Can the Training Offered in Departments of Educational Psychology in State Universities Become a Solution

The Departments of Educational Psychology in State Universities hold the potential to significantly address the professional challenges faced by school psychologists in Cameroon. By offering specialised training, fostering continuous professional development, and promoting a clear professional identity, these departments can play a pivotal role in elevating the field of school psychology, thereby improving the overall education system.

5.1. Specialised Training

One of the critical solutions to the challenges of role confusion and amateurism in school psychology lies in the provision of specialised training. Departments of Educational Psychology in State Universities are uniquely positioned to offer comprehensive training programmes tailored to the specific needs of school psychologists. This training would include coursework in psychological assessments, counseling techniques, child and adolescent development, psychopathology, clinical psychology, child/adolescent mental health and intervention strategies, ensuring that school psychologists are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to support students effectively.

Additionally, the development of culturally relevant curricula is essential. Given the unique socio-cultural context of Cameroon, training programmes must adapt international standards to local realities. This would ensure that school psychologists are prepared to address prevalent issues faced by students in the Cameroonian educational system [8]. By aligning training with both global best practices and local needs, the Departments of Educational Psychology can bridge the gap between theory and practice, ensuring that school psychologists can make a meaningful impact.

5.2. Continuous Professional Development

Another way in which the training offered in these de-

partments can become a solution is through the promotion of lifelong learning. School psychology is a dynamic field that is continually evolving. As new research emerges and best practices change, it is crucial for school psychologists to stay updated. State Universities can play a key role in providing opportunities for continuous professional development. These initiatives can help school psychologists keep pace with developments in the field and ensure that they are delivering the highest quality psychological services to students [34].

Moreover, continuous professional development (CPD) cultivates a strong sense of professional identity and commitment among school psychologists. When practitioners have regular access to high-quality training opportunities—such as specialised workshops on inclusive education strategies or accredited courses in therapeutic interventions—they develop greater confidence in their expertise and decision-making. This ongoing learning not only enhances their professional competence but also reduces instances of amateurism by ensuring practice remains evidence-based and ethically sound. State universities play a pivotal role in this process by establishing structured CPD frameworks that promote lifelong learning. Through partnerships with professional associations, they can offer tailored programmes addressing emerging challenges like adolescent mental health crises or neurodiverse learning needs. By fostering this culture of professional growth, universities help reinforce the status of school psychology as a rigorous, respected discipline while directly improving outcomes for the students and communities these professionals serve.

5.3. Promotion of a Clear Professional Identity

Departments of Educational Psychology can also contribute to addressing the issue of role confusion by clearly defining and promoting the identity of school psychologists. Many of the problems surrounding the misuse of titles and functions arise from a lack of understanding of what school psychologists do. Through training programmes, universities can establish clear distinctions between the roles of school psychologists, teachers, guidance counsellors, and social workers. This clarity would help reduce instances of role overlap and ensure that school psychologists are recognised for their specific expertise [43].

Moreover, by working closely with regulatory bodies and professional associations, universities can help set standards for certification and licensure, ensuring that only individuals with the appropriate qualifications are allowed to practise as school psychologists. This approach would mitigate the problem of usurpation and elevate the status of school psychology as a respected and essential profession within the education system.

The training offered by Departments of Educational Psychology in State Universities can be a powerful solution to the challenges facing school psychology in Cameroon. By providing specialised, culturally relevant training, promoting

continuous professional development, and clarifying the professional identity of school psychologists, these departments can help elevate the profession, improve student outcomes, and strengthen the overall education system.

6. Conclusion

The field of school psychology in Cameroon is currently facing significant challenges, including the misuse of titles, role confusion, and amateurism. These issues undermine the effectiveness of psychological support services in schools, hinder the professional development of school psychologists, and compromise the well-being of students. Usurpation occurs when individuals without the necessary qualifications assume the role of school psychologists, often leading to substandard psychological services and confusion about the role's core functions. The overlap between the responsibilities of school psychologists, teachers, guidance counsellors, and social workers further complicates the professional identity of school psychology in the country. Additionally, the lack of specialised training and professional isolation contribute to a culture of amateurism, where individuals in the field often lack the necessary expertise and support to perform effectively.

To address these pressing issues, there is an urgent need for systemic reforms within the Cameroonian educational and professional landscape. Firstly, regulatory structures must be put in place to formalise the training, certification, and practice of school psychologists. These frameworks would help ensure that only qualified individuals assume the role of school psychologists, thus eliminating the issue of title usurpation and professional dilution. Additionally, establishing professional associations and creating standards for licensure would provide a clearer definition of the profession and its functions, reducing role confusion among educators and other stakeholders [32].

Moreover, professional development initiatives are essential for improving the quality of school psychology practice in Cameroon. Higher education institutions must take the lead in providing specialised training programmes that are tailored to the socio-cultural and educational context of the country. These programmes should equip aspiring school psychologists with the necessary skills in psychological assessment, intervention strategies, and counselling techniques, while also addressing the unique challenges faced by students in Cameroon, such as poverty and trauma. Furthermore, continuous professional development opportunities must be made available for practising school psychologists to ensure they stay current with best practices and emerging trends in the field [49].

In addition to academic training, mentorship and supervision systems should be implemented to support newly qualified school psychologists and help them transition into the profession. Supervision systems would offer guidance and feedback, ensuring that school psychologists are not work-

ing in isolation but have the opportunity to grow and refine their practice [43]. This would also foster a sense of professional community, which is crucial for combating the feelings of isolation that many school psychologists currently experience.

The time has come for educational authorities, professional bodies, and stakeholders to take decisive action in addressing the challenges facing school psychology in Cameroon. The lack of systemic regulation, inadequate professional development, and confusion regarding professional roles cannot be allowed to persist. It is essential that the government, in collaboration with universities, professional organisations, and educators, invest in reforms that will promote the growth and legitimacy of school psychology in the country. By establishing regulatory frameworks, offering specialised training, and providing ongoing professional support, Cameroon can ensure that school psychologists are better equipped to serve the psychological needs of students and contribute positively to the educational system.

Abbreviations

CPD	Continuous Professional Development
EP	Educational Psychology/Educational Psychologist
IEP	Individualised Education Plan
MINEDUC	Ministry of National Education (Cameroon)
NASP	National Association of School Psychologists (USA)
SP	School Psychology/ School Psychologist

Author Contributions

Siméon Boris Nguéhan is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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