Assessing Student Leadership Contribution towards the Attainment of University Goals in Crisis Period in the North West Region of Cameroon

Emmanuel Shu Ngwa
University of Bamenda, Cameroon

Sections Info	ABSTRACT
	Objective: Since 2016, public, private and confessional owned Universities within Bamenda, the Metropolitan capital of the North West Region of Cameroon have struggled to sustain their tri-function mission of teaching, research and community outreach; amidst a raging conflict – the Anglophone crisis, where education stakeholders and education infrastructure have been targeted. Given the critical place of student leaders in university governance sustainability; this study therefore assessed student leadership contribution in aiding the attainment of university goals and objectives within the conflict period. Key focus was on three dimensions: communication strategies, student mobilization efforts, and advocacy for student interests. Method: Using a mixed concurrent nested research design, data was collected from university students, student leaders and University administrators using a structured questionnaire administered to 278 final year undergraduate and postgraduate students from three selected universities, along with in-depth interviews with 7 student leaders and 3 university administrators. Simple descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages, and thematic analyses were used to analyze data from the questionnaire and interviews respectively. Results: The findings revealed that student leaders generally employed an effective communication strategy (67.6% approval as against 32.4%), with social media being critical in their strategy. Student leaders' mobilization strategy was rated as positive (70% as against 30%). Advocacy for students' interest received a relatively positive rating (63.4% as against 36.6%). Novelty: The study notes that while student leaders have played a critical role in facilitating university functioning during the conflict period; there are however opportunities for enhancement in bidirectional communication, inclusive student mobilization, and translating advocacy into concrete policy changes. Recommendations include implementing structured feedback mechanisms, developing targeted engagement strategies for underrepresented students on campuses, and strengthening collaborative approaches with university administration to increase the effectiveness of advocacy efforts.

INTRODUCTION

It is evident that universities exist because there are students seeking to be trained by these universities in different academic or professional domains; and so the contribution of the students in the effective functioning of the university system cannot be undermined. In contemporary universities, the role of student leaders has evolved significantly, transcending beyond mere representation to that of active governance agents in the attainment of university goals and objectives. Scholarly research indicates that effective student leadership enhances student satisfaction and retention rates [1]. Student leaders often engage in collaborative efforts with faculty and administration to promote programs that address both educational and social objectives, which go a long way in enriching the university community. Through participation in university governance, student leaders not only represent student interests but also contribute to the policy-making processes that shape the future of the entire institution. Student

leaders, who are often elected or appointed into student governance structures, serve as pivotal intermediaries between the general student body and university leadership [2]. By so doing, their contributions are considered vital not only in creating an enabling environment for pedagogic activities, but an overall university climate for sustainable peaceful campus operations in terms of the tri-function of universities – teaching, research and community outreach/engagements. Consequently, as universities strive to cultivate holistic educational experiences for the key stakeholders, student leaders emerge as essential agents of change, mobilizing and advocating for student needs, fostering inclusivity, and driving initiatives that align with the strategic visions of these institutions [3].

Historical Context

The historical development of student leadership and its role in facilitating university goals and objectives can be traced back to the 19th century in earliest Universities like Bologna and Paris which allowed some student involvement in governance, with students hiring professors in medieval Bologna. As universities became more formalized, faculty and administrative control dominated governance activities, leaving little room for student participation. In the early 20th century, student movements began to emerge worldwide, advocating for greater representation and participation in institutional governance [4]. These movements were often linked to broader social and political changes, including the push for civil rights and democratic governance. As universities became centers of intellectual and political discourse, student leaders began to play crucial roles in shaping institutional policies and advocating for student rights. In Africa, university students were among the first to challenge oppressive regimes prior to the independence period. In South Africa for instance, the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL), founded in 1944 had student leaders like Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo. In West Africa, students at Fourah Bay College (Sierra Leone) and Achimota School (Ghana) were active in anti-colonial discourse [5]. During the post-independent period, many future nationalist leaders emerged from student movements, as it marked a significant turning point for student leadership in Africa. In the early 1960s and 70s, many African nations experienced a surge in student activism as university students both home and in the diaspora sought to influence the path of their newly independent nations. Student leaders became instrumental in advocating for political accountability of leaders, educational reforms, social justice, and political accountability. This period saw the establishment of various student organizations that aimed to represent the interests of the student body and engage with government policies affecting education and society at large [6]. Such was the case in Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa where University student leaders led protests under student movements like the Ali Must Go Protests in Nigeria led by the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS); students' opposition to Emperor Haile Selassie's regime, led by the Ethiopian Students Movement (ESM) and the black consciousness protests in South Africa led by Stev Biko, under the South African Students' Organization (SASO) [7].

In Cameroon, the historical context of student leadership is deeply intertwined with the country's colonial past and subsequent struggles for independence. Following World War, I, Cameroon was divided between French and British colonial rule, creating significant disparities in educational access and quality between the two regions. The Anglophone regions, which include the present day Northwest and Southwest regions, have since independence complaint of marginalization in terms of the distribution of educational resources and political representation among other grievances [8]. This historical inequity laid the groundwork for student activism, particularly among students of Anglophone extraction who sought to address issues of representation and cultural preservation within the educational system. Between 1990 and 1991, "Ghost Town" Protests and University Strikes were championed by student leaders. Students joined the Social Democratic Front (SDF)-led protests demanding multiparty democracy. The University of Yaoundé was shut down repeatedly due to protests led by student leaders. The 1993 university reforms that decentralized higher education in the country witnessed the creation of new public institutions (including the Anglo-Saxon University of University of Buea) and the liberalization of university education in the country. Between 1995 and 1996, student leaders led Tuition Fee Protests Students, opposing tuition hikes, leading to violent clashes with security forces. The government responded with repression, including arrests and expulsions. In 2008, university students led nationwide student strikes, fueled by rising living costs and unemployment and were met by a brutal crackdown [9].

Within the Anglophone regions, students of the University of Buea in 2005 protested against administrative authoritarianism and poor study conditions, leading to arrests. In 2010, the second Anglo-Saxon university – The University of Bamenda was created thereby further fragmenting student leadership and activism within this region. The Anglophone Crisis, which escalated in 2016, highlighted the critical role of student leaders in advocating for students' rights and the rights of their communities. Student organizations, such as the University of Buea Students' Union (UBSU) and The University of Bamenda Faculty Students Associations rallied behind the Cameroon Teachers Trade Union (CATTU) and became vocal in their demands for equitable educational policies and representation in governance structures through streets protests, school boycotts and digital activism. In the phase of all these, Ngwa and Folabit note that the role of student leaders in in university governance in contemporary Cameroon and particularly Anglophone Cameroon has been greatly undermined by the state authorities and public university administrations [10]. Student leadership and activism are now viewed more as a threat to national political stability and peaceful campus operations than as critical contributors to the attainment of university goals and objectives. However, the prolonged Anglophone crisis has underscored the importance of student leaders as student mobilisers, advocates and facilitators of dialogue between the student body and university administration, youths and the government, as well as their role in broader socio-political issues within the Cameroon polity [11].

Conceptual Context

The conceptual underpinning of this study revolves around the concepts of student leadership and university goals, and objectives, which are integral to understanding the dynamics of students' engagement and overall contribution to university governance. Student leadership refers to the process whereby students assumed formal and informal roles and responsibilities within educational institutions to influence guide and motivate their peers towards the attainment of common objectives. Student leadership encompasses various forms of governance, including election of student representatives, leaders of student organizations, and activists advocating for student rights [12]. To attainment their common objectives, student leaders are often expected to develop skills such as communication, team work, problem solving and ethical decision making. Student leaders serve as vital links between the administration and the student body, and are tasked with voicing student concerns advocating for their rights, influencing them towards the respect of institutional rules and regulations, maintaining a positive school culture, collaborating on decision-making processes, promoting a sense of belonging and community within the university and enhances the overall educational experience. In addition to working towards the attainment of institutional goals and objectives, effective student leadership significantly contributes to personal growth, and prepares the young leaders for future civic and professional responsibilities [13][14].

University goals encompass the mission and objectives that institutions strive to achieve, including academic excellence, student development, and community engagement. According to Hinton and AAU, University goals are often broad, aspirational statements that outline the university's long-term vision and mission. Mazzarol and Soutar define university goals and objectives as the strategic aims that institutions pursue to enhance educational quality, improve student outcomes, and contribute to societal development [15]. The goals reflect the institution's commitment to teaching, research, community outreach, and overall institutional growth. They provide a strategic direction for decision-making and resource allocation. These goals are most often stated in strategic plan of the university and reflect the institution's commitment to fostering an enabling and inclusive environment towards quality education. University objectives on the other hand refer to the specific, measurable, and time-bound actions that support the achievement of the university goals. They are simply a breakdown of the goals into actionable and measurable steps, ensuring accountability and progress tracking [16].

A study by Kuh emphasizes that student leaders play a crucial role in aligning student initiatives with these overarching institutional goals, thereby ensuring that student perspectives are integrated into institutional planning and policy-making. The implication here is that, student engagement through the student leadership process is part and parcel of the process towards the attainment of institutional goals and objectives [17]. Student engagement relates to the involvement of students in various activities and processes within the university setting. It includes participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities that contribute to personal and academic development.

Research indicates that higher levels of student engagement correlate with improved academic performance and retention rates [18]. Student leaders often serve as catalysts for engagement, mobilizing their peers to participate in initiatives that enhance the university experience and support institutional goals and objectives. The interplay between these concepts is essential for understanding how student leaders facilitate university goals. Student leadership is therefore not only about representation but actively engaging with university goals and objectives, and mobilizing peers to contribute to achieving those goals. As student leaders advocate for policies that reflect student needs, they simultaneously promote a culture of engagement and collaboration that benefits the entire university community. Within the context of this study, university goals and objectives therefore refer specifically to the aspirations of Universities within Bamenda - including promoting academic excellence, fostering student engagement, and enhancing the overall educational experience for all students [19][20].

To contribute towards the achievement of these goals and objectives, student leaders have to demonstrate their skills in performing their roles. These roles encompass the responsibilities and functions they fulfill within their various institutions, including advocating for and representing student interests, communicating effectively with students, and mobilizing for students engagement and participation in university activities [21][22]. In the context of this study, the roles of student leaders in University within Bamenda include acting as intermediaries between the student body and university administrations through communication with students, advocacy for students' interest and mobilizing for students' engagements. In terms of student leaders' communication, Hackman and Johnson say it is the process through which leaders convey information, engage in dialogue, and build relationships with their peers and the university administration. In the context of this study, student leaders' communication involves the strategies they use to articulate student concerns, disseminate important information, and facilitate discussions that align with student needs with university goals. Student Leaders mobilization refers to the structured approach used to engage, organize and empower student leaders to drive collective action, advocacy and involvement in academic and socio-political activities on campus or within the community or society [23]. It often involves a strong communication strategy, coalition building and grassroots organizing and advocacy to achieve specific objectives [24]. In this study, it pertains to their efforts to engage and inspire fellow students to participate in university initiatives, events, and governance processes, thereby enhancing student involvement and contributing to the attainment of university objectives. Student Leaders advocacy according to Shapiro and Stefkovich is the act of supporting or promoting a particular cause or policy, particularly in relation to representing the interests of marginalized groups. Contextually, student it involves their efforts to represent student voices in decision-making processes, ensuring that student needs and perspectives are considered in university policies, initiatives and practices, thus facilitating the achievement of institutional goals [25].

Theoretical Context

This study guided by three main theories - Astin's Involvement Theory; Tinto's Theory of Student Integration, and Pace's Quality of Effort Theory. Astin's Involvement theory posits that the amount of physical and psychological energy that students invest in their academic experience is directly related to their learning and development outcomes. Astin emphasizes that student involvement can take various forms, including academic, social, and extracurricular activities. This theory suggests that student leaders play a crucial role in promoting involvement among their peers, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience and contributing to the attainment of university goals [26]. The more students engage in meaningful activities, the more likely they are to succeed academically and socially, which aligns with the objectives of universities. Tinto's Theory of Student Integration focuses on the importance of social and academic integration on student retention and success. Tinto argues that students who feel connected to their peers and faculty are more likely to persist in their studies. This theory highlights the role of student leaders in fostering a sense of community and belonging within the university [27]. By facilitating interactions between students and the institution, student leaders help create an environment that supports academic success and aligns with the university's mission. Tinto's work underscores the significance of both academic and social integration as essential components of the student experience. Pace's Quality of Effort Theory emphasizes the importance of the quality of student engagement in determining educational outcomes. Pace posits that the more effort students invest in their educational activities, the greater their learning gains. This theory suggests that student leaders can influence the quality of effort by encouraging their peers to engage in educationally purposeful activities, such as studying, collaborating with faculty, and participating in extracurricular programs [28]. The concept of quality of effort aligns with the indicators of student engagement, as it highlights the active role that students must take in their learning processes to achieve desired outcomes [29].

Issues at Stake with Student Leadership in Cameroon

The goals of higher education in Cameroon are clearly stated in Law No. 2023/007 of 25 July 2023 on Higher Education in Cameroon, which is an upgrade of Law No. 005 of 16th April 2001 on the Orientation of Higher Education in Cameroon. Section 6 of Part II of the new law on the goals of higher education in Cameroon stipulates that;

"The duties of higher education shall be to provide teaching, carry out fundamental and applied research and support development. As such, the goals of higher education shall be: the quest for excellence in all areas of knowledge and culture; promotion of science, culture and social progress; senior staff training and further training; facilitation of the acquisition and deepening of knowledge and culture throughout life: development of scholarly, creative, scientific, artistic, technological, research and innovation activities; human capital development, job, business, industry and innovative socio-economic activity incubation; promotion of public debate on social and ethical issues; social promotion and professional integration; promotion of democracy and development of democratic culture, reinforcement of the sense of ethics and national awareness;

promotion of bilingualism and multiculturalism; and promotion of international cooperation in all areas of knowledge and culture"

The policy has task all Higher Education institutions in the country be they public or private are charge with the responsibility to work towards the attainment of these goals. In the face of this therefore, the role of students and student leaders is critical as they constitute part of the key stakeholders of the higher education and higher education governance. Both the old and new higher education policies cited above have outlined the structure of university governance in the country. However, they do not explicitly define student leadership roles even though they are represented in the governance structure. Prior to the 2001 and 2023 orientation laws on higher education, Decree No. 93/026 of 19 January 1993 on the organization of state universities in Cameroon allowed for student representation but under strict administrative oversight from the government and university authorities. Ministerial and institutional guidelines have in different instances restricted student union activities, requiring administrative approval for meetings and elections thereby limiting independent student unionism in favor of a state a state-controlled and factionalized model of student leadership. According to Ngwa and Folabit, the purpose of this is to prevent dissent, as state authorities view student unionism more as political competitors than as higher education governance collaborators. This has been the situation in recent years, particularly with Universities in the English-Speaking regions of Cameroon, where we have the only two Anglo-Saxon universities in the country [30].

In recent times, the English-speaking universities of Bamenda in the North West Region and Buea in the South West Region have faced severe challenges due to the Anglophone Crisis. There has been repression of student activism where students and student leaders advocating for educational reforms and the Anglophone rights or protesting against marginalization faced arrests, suspensions, and expulsion. In the face of the Anglophone crisis, there has been campus militarization; where security forces frequently patrol campuses and disrupting student activities. There has been the suspension of Student unions, with University of Buea Student Union completely banned while the decentralized and factionalized Faculty associations in Buea and Bamenda operate under strict administrative surveillance. Since 2016, protests over Anglophone marginalization led to a violent crackdown, school boycotts, and the rise of armed separatist movements leading to intermittent shut down shutdown of universities, thereby affecting negatively academic progress [31].

In the midst of this conflict situation, student leaders appear not to fully understand their role as critical intermediaries between students and the university administration. Despite the restricted control on their activities, the administration however recognizes their importance to the attainment of university goals and objectives through student engagement. But there is a noticeable gap in understanding how effectively these student leaders can influence academic success and institutional development. The challenges posed by the conflict situation in the North West Region in particular have further exacerbated this situation, leading to diminished student participation and engagement,

which ultimately affects student leadership and the overall university experience. Observations and interactions with students on campuses appear that student engagement is suffering due to the lack of strong representation and advocacy [32]. This has put to test the student leaders communication strategy, mobilization efforts and advocacy for students interests. If student leaders have accepted to lead their peers even in the midst of crisis, then they must also be able to fully engage their role of effective communication, mobilization and advocacy. This will not only help bring about increased student engagement and peaceful campus operations but will most importantly ensure the continuous realization of institutional goals and objectives even in crisis [33].

Judging from the three student integration and engagement theories examined earlier in this study, the expected relationship between student leadership and student engagement is that effective student leadership positively influences student engagement and academic improvement. When student leaders actively engage their peers, promote participation, and advocate for student needs, it is anticipated that students will be more involved in university activities and decision-making processes [34]. This relationship is crucial to understand because it highlights how enhancing student leadership can lead to improved student engagement, which is essential for academic success and overall satisfaction with the university experience. The University of Bamenda and other private universities like the National Polytechnic University Institute, and the Catholic University of Cameroon amongst others, would not have been able sustained teaching, research and outreach activities in the almost 9 years of socio-political crises without the students and student leaders playing a critical role. To have an empirical understanding of whether student leaders have played their role particularly in communication, mobilization and advocacy or not demands that an assessment of their role within the crisis period be considered [35]. This could go a long way to inform policy on how to better improve student governance for the attainment of institutional goals and objectives. It is on these bases that the study sought to assessed the role of student leaders in aiding the attainment of university goals in the North West Region of Cameroon

Objectives of The Study

The study specifically set out to:

1. Investigate how student leaders' communication strategy facilitates the attainment of university goals and objectives.
2. Explore how student leaders' mobilization strategy contributes to achieving university goals and objectives.
3. Find how student leaders' advocacy for student interest aids in the attainment of university goals and objectives.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher adopted the mixed- concurrent nested research design; where quantitative data and qualitative data were collected concurrently from a representative sample of university students, student leaders and University administrators from three

purposively chosen universities. These universities included the state owned University of Bamenda (UBa) the private owned National Polytechnic University Institute (NPUI), Bamenda and the Catholic University of Cameroon (CATUC), Bamenda.

The accessible population constituted of final year undergraduate students, postgraduate students and members of the administrative staff of these institutions. The sample size was made up of 300 persons distributed accordingly; 290 students (160 final year undergraduates and 130 postgraduate students) and 10 members of the administrative staff selected from the Student Affairs Departments of the chosen universities (7 student leaders and 3 administrators). Gender equity was ensured in the sample size with 160 (53.3%) males and 140 (46.7%) females.

The quantitative instrument for data collection was a structured four scale likert-type questionnaire of 15 items, administered to the 290 final-year undergraduate and postgraduate student sample. The qualitative instrument was an unstructured interview guide of 4 guided questions which were asked to the 7 student leaders and 3 university administrators of the student affairs departments. After face and content validity of both instruments, the reliability of the questionnaire was ensured through internal consistency, and a crombach alpha reliability coefficient of .842 established the reliability of the questionnaire.

Ethical approval was obtained from the administrations of the three institutions, informed consent sought from all groups of the targeted sample and they were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Participation in responding to the questionnaire or interview was optional. Out of the 290 questionnaires administered to the student respondents, 278 were properly completed and returned, representing a 95.87% overall returned rate. The returned rate from a gender angle stood at 152 (54.7%) males and 126 (45.3%) females. The quantitative data was analyzed using simple descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages while the qualitative data was analyzed using thematic descriptive narratives. In analyzing the data from the questionnaire, the four likert scale response options were merged to two positive (SA+A) and negative (SD+D).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results
Research Objective 1: To investigate how student leaders' communication strategy facilitates the attainment of university goals and objectives.

The analysis of respondents' perceptions regarding student leaders' communication strategies reveals varied responses across different aspects of communication. Regarding the effectiveness of communication, 67% of respondents agreed that student leaders effectively communicate important information to students [36]. This suggests that while the majority find communication effective, a substantial minority (33%) feel there is room for improvement in how information is communicated. On approachability, 62% of respondents felt that student leaders are approachable for discussing university issues. This indicates that while most students feel comfortable approaching their leaders, more

than a third (38%) experience barriers when attempting to engage with student leadership [37]. Concerning student engagement, 71% of respondents agreed that communication from student leaders encourages participation in university activities. This relatively high percentage suggests that the messaging from student leaders is generally motivational and effective in promoting engagement [38]. The most positive response was regarding social media usage, with 83% of respondents agreeing that student leaders have leverage social media effectively to update students on campus issues and initiatives [39]. This indicates strong approval of digital communication strategy and suggests that student leaders are successfully leveraging contemporary platforms to reach their audience. However, only 55% of respondents agreed that feedback from students is actively sought and incorporated by student leaders, representing the lowest approval rating among the communication aspects evaluated. This suggests a significant weakness in the bidirectional nature of communication between student leaders and the general student body [40].

Table 1. Response frequencies & percentages on student leaders' Communication Strategy (N=278).

Student Leaders' Communication Strategy	Agree (SA+A)	Percentage	Disagree (D+SD)	Percentage
1. Student leaders effectively communicate important information to students	186	67.0%	92	33.0%
2. I feel that student leaders are approachable for discussing on worrying university issues	172	62.0%	106	38.0%
3. The communication approach from student leaders encourages student engagement in university activities	197	71.0%	81	29.0%
4. Student leaders leverage social media effectively to updates students on campus issues and initiatives	231	83.0%	47	17.0%
5. Feedback from students on off and on campus issues is actively sought and incorporated by student leaders	153	55.0%	125	45.0%
Multiple response set/Average	**187.8**	**67.6%**	**90.2**	**32.4%**

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Overall, the multiple responses set indicate that 67.6% of responses were positive regarding the student leaders' communication strategy, while 32.4% were negative. This suggests that while student leaders' communication is generally effective, particularly through social media, there are opportunities for improvement, especially in soliciting and incorporating students' feedback.

The qualitative data from interviews with student leaders provided deeper insights into their communication strategies. The student leaders and administrators interviewed generally emphasized the importance of utilizing multiple communication channels to reach diverse student populations. They also discussed challenges such as language barriers, information overload, and methods for measuring communication effectiveness through engagement metrics and surveys [41].

Research Objective 2: To Explore how student leaders' mobilization strategy contributes to achieving university goals and objectives.

The analysis of student leaders' mobilization strategy generally revealed a positive perception among respondents. Regarding mobilization effectiveness, 69% of respondents agreed that student leaders successfully mobilize students for participation in university events. This indicates that student leaders are reasonably effective in their outreach efforts, though nearly a third of students disagree. Personal participation rate was particularly encouraging; with 74% of respondents indicating they had personally participated in initiatives organized by student leaders. This high level of self-reported engagement suggests that the mobilization strategies are reaching and activating a substantial majority of the student population. The relevance of events to student interests received a somewhat lower rating, with 63% agreeing that events organized by student leaders reflect the interests of the student body. This suggests some disconnect between the initiatives planned and the actual preferences of a significant portion of students.

Table 2. Response frequencies & percentages on student leaders' Mobilization Strategy (N=278).

Student Leaders' Mobilization Strategy	Agree (SA+A)	Percentage	Disagree (D+SD)	Percentage
6. Student leaders successfully mobilize students for participation in university events	192	69.0%	86	31.0%
7. I have personally participated in campus initiatives organized by student leaders	206	74.0%	72	26.0%
8. The events organized by student leaders reflect the interests of the student body	175	63.0%	103	37.0%

9. Student leaders create a sense of community that motivates students to always want to get involved	189	68.0%	89	32.0%
10. I believe that mobilization efforts by student leaders contribute to achieving university goals	211	76.0%	67	24.0%
Multiple response set/Average	**194.6**	**70.0%**	**83.4**	**30.0%**

Source: Fieldwork 2025

On community building, 68% of respondents felt that student leaders create a sense of community that motivates involvement. This indicates that student leaders are generally successful in fostering a collective identity that promotes participation, though there is still room for improvement. The highest agreement (76%) was found regarding the perception that mobilization efforts contribute to achieving university goals. This suggests strong recognition among students that student-led initiatives are aligned with and supportive of broader institutional objectives [42].

In all, the multiple response set showed that 70% of responses were positive regarding mobilization strategies, while 30% were negative. This indicates generally effective mobilization efforts by student leaders, with particular strengths in aligning activities with university goals and generating personal participation. The Interview data revealed various mobilization approaches employed by student leaders, including; inclusive committee formation, offering incentives for participation, and creating a sense of ownership through early involvement in planning processes.

Research Objective 3: To find how student leaders' advocacy for student interest aids in the attainment of university goals and objectives

The analysis of advocacy efforts by student leaders revealed more mixed perceptions compared to communication and mobilization. Regarding advocacy effectiveness, 59% of respondents agreed that student leaders effectively advocate for student needs and concerns to the university administration. This relatively lower approval rating suggests challenges in either the advocacy approach or in communicating advocacy outcomes to the student body. On representation, 61% of respondents felt that their interests are represented by student leaders in university policies. This indicates moderate satisfaction with representation, though a substantial minority feels their interests are not adequately represented. The provision of platforms for student voices received higher approval, with 67% agreeing that student leaders often provide such opportunities. This suggests relatively effective mechanisms for collecting student opinions, though the translation of these opinions into effective advocacy appears more challenging. Only 58% of respondents believed that advocacy efforts have led to positive changes in university policies and practices, representing the lowest approval rating among the advocacy aspects evaluated [43]. This indicates concerns about the tangible outcomes of advocacy work and suggests that many students do not

see concrete results from representation and advocacy efforts of student leaders. Despite concerns about outcomes, 72% of respondents believed that student leaders play a crucial role in influencing university decision-making. This higher percentage indicates recognition of the potential impact of student advocacy, even if actual results sometimes fall short of expectations, see Table 3.

Table 3. Response frequencies & percentages on student leaders' advocacy for Student Interests (N=278).

Student Leaders' Advocacy for Student Interests	Agree (SA+A)	Percentage	Disagree (D+SD)	Percentage
11. Student leaders effectively advocate for student needs and concerns to the university administration	164	59.0%	114	41.0%
12. I feel that my interests are well represented by the student leaders in university policies	170	61.0%	108	39.0%
13. Student leaders in my university often provide platforms for students to voice their opinions	186	67.0%	92	33.0%
14. Advocacy efforts by student leaders have led to positive changes in university policies & practices	161	58.0%	117	42.0%
15. Our student leaders play a crucial role in influencing university decision-making	200	72.0%	78	28.0%
Multiple response set/Average	**176.2**	**63.4%**	**101.8**	**36.6%**

Source: Field work, 2025

The overall response set shows that 63.4% of responses were positive regarding advocacy efforts, while 36.6% were negative. This indicates generally positive but more divided opinions on advocacy compared to communication and mobilization, with particular concerns about tangible policy outcomes. The interviews with student leaders revealed detailed insights into their advocacy approaches, including systematic documentation of student concerns, maintaining productive relationships with university administration, and using data-backed proposals to strengthen their positions. However, student leaders complained of the gradually dying voice of their advocacy as a result of intimidation by forces of law and order stationed around campuses and fear of victimization particularly as they are leading during political crisis situation.

According to them, one of the fallouts of the socio-political conflict in the region is the tendency for the administrative authorities and the forces of law and order to see or interpret any dissenting voice on university campuses as the voice from the non-state actors of the Anglophone crises, considering the role students played in the escalation of the conflict in its early days in 2016.

Discussion

The findings on communication strategies reveal that student leaders generally employ effective methods to disseminate information, particularly through digital platforms. This effectiveness in digital communication aligns with Seemiller and Grace's research on Generation Z students, which found that current college students strongly prefer digital communication channels and respond positively to multimedia content [44]. The student leaders' successful adoption of social media platforms demonstrates their adaptability to contemporary communication preferences, supporting Junco's assertion that effective student engagement increasingly requires technological fluency. However, the identified weakness in feedback mechanisms presents a significant concern. This finding echoes Carey's research, which emphasized that effective student engagement requires bidirectional communication systems. The current study found a notable gap between information dissemination and feedback collection, similar to what Trowler described as "engagement gaps" where students receive information but have limited opportunities to contribute to institutional dialogue [45]. This unidirectional communication approach limits the potential for what Bovill and Bulley term "co-creation" of university initiatives, where student input shapes institutional directions [46]. The disparity between approachability perception and communication effectiveness identified in this study corresponds with findings from Cook-Sather, who noted that formal communication structures often create psychological barriers to direct engagement. These barriers can undermine the development of what Felten describe as "partnership relationships" between student leaders and their constituents. The current findings suggest that while information flows relatively well through formal channels, interpersonal barriers may limit the depth of communication exchange [47].

As concern student leaders' mobilization strategy, the study's findings generally demonstrate effective approaches to engaging students in university activities. The high personal participation rates align with Kuh's research on student engagement, which found that participation increases when activities are perceived as relevant to students' personal and professional development. The successful mobilization strategies reported by student leaders, particularly those involving inclusive committee structures and creating ownership through early involvement, reflect best practices identified by Healey for fostering student engagement. The finding that events do not always reflect the interest of the students for a significant minority of respondents raises concerns about inclusive representation. This mirrors Harper and Quaye's research on diverse student engagement, which found that student leadership initiatives often unintentionally cater to majority preferences while overlooking minority student interests. The current study

suggests similar dynamics may be at play, with some student groups feeling underrepresented in event planning and execution. The strong belief that mobilization efforts contribute to university goals indicates successful integration of student leadership within the broader educational mission. This aligns with Strange and Banning's ecological model of student development, which positions student-led activities as essential components of a holistic campus environment. However, the approximately 30% of students who remain disengaged represents a challenge that corresponds with Krause and Coates' identification of "disengaged" student cohorts who resist traditional mobilization approaches [48].

The findings on student leaders' advocacy present a more complex picture of student leadership effectiveness compared to communication and mobilization. The notable gap between perceived potential influence and actual policy outcomes reflects what Lizzio and Wilson identified as structural limitations in how student advocacy translates into institutional action. The sophisticated advocacy approaches reported by student leaders, including data-driven proposals and systematic documentation, align with recommendations from contemporary research on effective student representation. The finding that platforms for voicing opinions are relatively effective while actual policy changes are less evident corresponds with Bryson's distinction between "voice" and "influence" in student engagement. This suggests that while mechanisms exist for collecting student perspectives, the translation of these perspectives into institutional action faces significant barriers. Similar dynamics were observed by Carey, who found that student representatives often succeed in collecting diverse viewpoints but face institutional resistance when attempting to convert these into policy changes.

The relatively higher perception that student leaders play a crucial role in decision-making, despite lower satisfaction with actual outcomes, indicates what Fielding describes as "aspirational representation" where student representatives are valued symbolically even when their practical influence is constrained. This complex relationship between symbolic and practical advocacy effectiveness presents particular challenges for student leaders attempting to demonstrate their value to constituents. The view by the student leaders that any dissenting voice on university campuses are likely to be interpreted as a voice from the non-state actors involved in the Anglophone crises agrees the research of Ngwa and Folabit that student leadership in Cameroon has been largely politicized as student leaders' advocacy voices are seen more as threats to political stability than contributions to nation building. As a consequence, student leaders are being seen by politicians and administrators as political competitors rather than collaborators in the university governance process [49].

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The study assessed how student leaders support university goals through communication, mobilization, and advocacy. Findings show that student leadership significantly contributes to institutional objectives. Strong performance was seen in digital communication and participatory engagement. Statistical analysis

confirmed positive relationships between leadership activities and university outcomes, reinforcing theories by Astin, Tinto, and Pace. Student leaders act as a bridge between students and administration, promoting goal achievement. **Implication :** While impactful, student leadership has not yet reached its full potential due to structural and political barriers. Differences in communication effectiveness suggest the need for more institutional support and training. The success of student leadership depends on both leader competencies and institutional responsiveness. **Limitation :** Challenges remain in feedback incorporation, inclusive representation, and turning advocacy into policy. These issues highlight gaps in linking student voice with institutional decisions, especially where centralized control exists. **Future Research :** Recommendations include formal feedback systems, communication training, impact-based evaluation, inclusive planning, and advocacy support structures. Institutions should train student leaders in negotiation, policy analysis, and ensure continuity in advocacy across leadership transitions. Further study should explore strategies to strengthen student leadership's influence on policy outcomes.

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*Emmanuel Shu Ngwa (Corresponding Author)

University of Bamenda, Cameroon

Email: shuemma1987@gmail.com