

## AGENCY AND THE SELF-DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENT STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BAMENDA, CAMEROON

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### ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effects of agency on the self-development of adolescents in the University of Bamenda, Cameroon. Indicators of agency considered were forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, self-esteem and self-efficacy and were tested against the self-development of adolescents. The survey design was used and the sample was made up of 382 including 158 males and 224 female adolescent students purposively selected across four Faculties of the University of Bamenda. Data were collected with a questionnaire and subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. The Spearman's rho correlation was used to test the explanatory power of agency over self-development. Findings showed that descriptively, adolescents were endowed with forethought (91.5%), self-reactiveness (90%), self-reflectiveness (82.5%), self-esteem (91%) and self-efficacy (91%); and that there was a significant relationship between these agentic characteristics and self-development with an overall 88.8% explanatory power. From the findings self-esteem was the highest predictor of self-development ( $r=0.604$ ;  $P=0.000$ ) followed by self-efficacy ( $r=0.568$ ;  $P=0.000$ ) next by, self-reflectiveness ( $r=0.493$ ;  $P=0.000$ ), then self-reactiveness ( $r=0.481$ ;  $P=0.000$ ) and finally, forethought ( $r=0.434$ ;  $P=0.000$ ). These findings showed that agency is an intrinsic and instrumental part of one's own wellbeing and directs one's movement towards personal developmental pursuits. Hence with agency adolescents have the capacity to choose and execute actions that direct them towards desired and valued futures in a way that is not fully determined by external factors and conditions other than their self-understanding and reasoning about themselves and the futures they wish to attain.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, agency, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-development.

### INTRODUCTION

Different periods of life present certain typical challenges and competences that depend on developmental milestones for successful functioning. For most adolescents, the period of adolescence is a time of enormous vibrancy, discovery, innovation and hope (Lancet, 2012). According to Hall (1904), adolescents enter puberty at about 12 or 13 years and end as late as between the ages 18 to 21 years. And socially, Nurmi (1993) maintains that adolescents become agents of the reproduction of society, its economy and its way of life. During adolescence, an individual moves from being a member of the parental family to a full member of society. Characterized as social entrée, and probation and socialized internship, from early adolescence to late and end of adolescence, the period is a time when African

young people recognize and adjust to changes, perform domestic chores, participate in rites of passage to adulthood; visualize self, complete training and are poised for adult roles as they become junior partners as proto-adults (Nsamenang, 2016) in their society and culture. Yet media portrayals and professional literature of adolescents often rather emphasize the problems that can be a part of adolescence. To this end, gang violence, school shootings, alcohol-related accidents, drug use, and suicides involving adolescents are all too frequently reflected in newspapers headings and movie plots, not only in industrialized societies but also too often in the developing world today (Lo-oh, 2017).

In the professional literature too, adolescence is frequently portrayed as a negative stage of life, a period of storm and stress as well as turmoil and trouble to be survived or endured throughout the period (e.g. Arnett, 1999, Dusek, 1991). No wonder in a 1999 survey by Public Agenda, 71% of those polled used negative terms, such as “rude”, ‘wild’, and ‘irresponsible’ when they were asked what they thought about American teenagers (Public Agenda, 1999). This is not any different from Africans’ conceptions of African adolescents. At the same time, however, the Public Agenda survey found that 89% of the respondents believed that almost all teenagers can get back on track with the right kind of guidance and attention. It means that whether affected by individual factors like those expressed in media and professional literature or by social and environmental factors, adolescents can always get back on track, take their lives into their own hands and of course use the myriad of challenges as stepping stones on which to attain their life dreams. This is variously captured in positive psychology to connote the efforts that individuals make in order to re-write their life stories (e.g. Lo-oh, 2017; Lo-oh & Afumbom, 2017; Padilla-Walker & Larson, 2017). Key to this is agency with which young people become key actors or key agents of their own development, progress and learning.

Bandura (2006) defines agency as the human capability to exert influence over one’s functioning and course of events by one’s action; and the ways in which people exercise control over their lives by acting upon their environment in a goal directed manner. To Sen (1985) agency is an individual’s ability to act upon the world to achieve one’s goals. In this light, Bandura (2000) believes that agency is purposive, constructive, and planned. In fact, it involves anticipating the effects of one’s actions, estimating one’s capabilities and initiating efforts. Agency therefore is the capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one’s life. It is a fundamental capacity of all humans to be self-reflective, to be able to initiate their own actions and consequently influence their own life. Therefore, agency includes life plans and goal setting, that is, the ability to formulate and stick to advantageous life plans (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). This means that the development of agency in adolescents’ self-development includes activities that improve awareness and identity, talents and potentials, building human capital and facilitating employability, enhancing equality of life and contributing to the realization of dreams and aspirations.

According to Bratman (1999) intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and sense of purpose are key attributes of agency. To be an agent of one’s life is to intentionally influence one’s functioning and life circumstances. According to Bratman (1999) people form intentions that include action plans and strategies for realizing them. Individuals have to accommodate their self-interest if they are to achieve unity of effort within diversity. Hence collective endeavours require commitment to a shared intention and coordination of interdependent plans of action to realize them. The second property of agency considered in this study is forethought, which involves the temporal extension of agency through forethoughts. Forethought includes more than directed plans. People set themselves goals and

anticipate likely outcomes of perspective action to guide and motivate their efforts (Bratman, 1999). Hence a future cannot be a cause of current behaviour because it has no material existence. But through cognitive representation, visualized futures are brought into the present as current guides and motivators of behaviour. In fact in this form of anticipatory self-guidance, behaviour is governed by visualized goals and anticipated outcomes rather than pulled by an unrealized future state (Hitlin & Elder, 2007). The ability to bring anticipated outcomes to bear on current activity promotes purposeful and foresightful behaviour. Hence, when projected over a long time course on matters of value, a thoughtful perspective provides direction, coherence and meaning to one's life.

Agentic individuals are not only planners and fore-thinkers; they are also self-regulators with the capacity for self-reactiveness. Having adopted an intention and an action, one cannot simply sit back and wait for the appropriate performances to appear (Searle, 2003). Therefore, success requires a lot of self-regulatory effort to translate visions into reality. Hence, in the process of self-regulation, individuals adopt personal standards, construct appropriate courses of action, monitor their activities and regulate them by evaluative self-reactiveness. In fact, individuals do things that give them satisfaction and sense of worth and refrain from actions that bring self-censure (Searle, 2003). Therefore self-investment in the activity serves as a strong motivator to keep on striving on to achieve desired goals and aspirations. This multifaceted self-directedness operates through self-regulatory processes in the explanatory gap to link thought and action (Carlson, 2000). Benson (1997) argued that having a purpose in life contributes to optimal human development, and that youth with purpose are psychologically healthier. And Larson & Saraswathi (2005) contended that for young people to become leaders of tomorrow, they need to negotiate the formal and informal systems that exist in the complex world. Doing so requires a good sense of purpose to decipher between alternatives in order to strike dependable negotiations. This is also about self-esteem and Emler (2001) maintained that self-esteem is how people feel about themselves and their self-worth which is often influenced by achievement alone. Meanwhile Rosenberg (1990) maintained that high self-esteem persons have respect and feelings of worthiness and yet acknowledge their faults and shortcomings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Adolescence is the period of life between childhood and adulthood. It starts with physical beginnings of sexual maturity in the early teens and ends with the social achievement of independent adult status between the late teens and early twenties. According to Stenberg & Morris (2001) early maturation pays dividends for boys as, early developing boys tend to be stronger and athletic during their early teenage years, tend to be more popular, self-assured and independent, though more at risk for alcohol use and premature sexual activity. As cognitive abilities mature, many adolescents criticize their society, their parents and even their own shortcomings. According to Elder (1999) adolescence seems to be a period of particularly deep change with respect to time perspective. Yet many questions about the developmental pathways of African children and adolescents especially their pathways to adulthood have remained unanswered or worse still unasked (Lo-oh, 2012). According to Nsamenang (2007) it is visible how a lot of African youth especially those from Cameroon today seem to proceed with life as if tomorrow or the future of adulthood will never come. Tchombe and Lo-oh (2012) points out specific characteristics, traditional practices and rites of passage that mark the transition to adulthood in African societies. Examples of such norms and initiation are rites of marriage, ways of dressing, circumcision rites, cultural initiation, school ritual expectation and ceremonies that make the individual a full adult upon their performances.

In line with these developmental concerns and practices, Raffaelli & Crockett (2003) argue that adolescence is recognized as a critical developmental period during which long term patterns of healthy or potentially harmful behaviours are established. In fact, individuals come to know themselves by observing their own behaviour and interactions with others; then observations and inferences are drawn which further enhances the development of self-regulatory skills. As adolescents internalize standards and mechanisms of those around them, they may transform external bases of regulation into more internal mindful forms of regulation. Demetriou (2000) maintains that such internalization enables them to make better interpretations, choices and decisions depending on the environment in which they find themselves. In line with this, Erikson (1968) saw adolescence as the time to find and establish an identity. It is a time when adolescents must strive for emotional, if not physical independence from parents and family. They are involved in forming their identity, deciding on who they are and focused on making plans about what they wish their future to be like. The adolescent years are often full of self-doubt: their bodies change quickly and they become very self-conscious about such changes. Every change or event brings with it a new trauma and appearance is very important as it attracts the approval of peers. To be different is a problem and belonging to a group is important. The teenager must therefore, achieve a sense of identity in occupation, sex role, politics and religion (Lo-oh, 2012). All these strivings require a minimum degree of personal agency with which adolescents become agents of their own development, in other words, self-development.

To be agentic or an agent of one's development is to intentionally influence one's functioning and life circumstances (Bandura 2008). Intentionality involves a proactive behaviour to bring about a desired outcome. According to Synder, Irving & Anderson (1991), agency refers to the determination and commitment that helps individuals move in the direction of a goal, and is considered the driving force of hope and pathways. While Shanahan & Hood (2000) view agency as the individual's capacity to formulate and pursue life plans. And Emirbayer & Mische (1998) see agency as the capacity of actors to critically shape their own responsiveness to problematic situations. This may otherwise be the intentional causality process that brings about a novel state of affairs which would not have occurred otherwise or people's ability to act on behalf of what matters to them (Bhaska, 1994; Alkire, 2005). Alkire (2005) further conceptualizes agency as an intrinsic instrumental part of one's own wellbeing. Agency therefore is the deliberate, reflective activity of humans in framing, choosing and executing their action toward a valued goal in a way that is not fully determined by external factors and conditions other than their own personal understanding and reasoning.

Looking at agency and future orientation, Hitlin & Elder (2007) argued that beliefs about possible future selves motivate current agentic choices and over time, these agentic actions get folded into our sense of self and become guided forces for "identity agency." This supports the bi-directional link between future orientation and life values and congruent desired identity. According to Hitlin & Elder (2007) maintaining a congruent desired identity leads to the interactional goal for achieving desired social goals. This may also be linked to literature on "impression management," a goal-directed conscious and unconscious process in which people attempt to influence other's perceptions by regulating and controlling information and social interaction (Snyder, 1994). But fundamental to agentic and resilient behaviour is hope and goal-oriented behaviour.

Snyder (1994) argued that people are generally goal-oriented, that is, people always behave in ways that are predetermined to accomplish something or a task. He viewed hope as a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful

agency (goal-oriented energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals). The meaning of hope consists of both the “will power” (agency) and the “way power” pathways (Snyder et al., 1991). In this light Snyder (1994) argued that there are two components of hope: agency (will power) and pathways (proactive planning to achieve goals). Therefore agency represents an individual’s capacity or motivation to both start work on a given goal and to continue in the pathway of accomplishing the said goals. In other words, will power, which is agency, includes power to reason, decide and act towards a desired direction whereas way power, which is pathway is the governing power in man’s nature. Hence, will power is not mere purpose or wish, it is the deliberate choice and deciding power that everything else must obey.

Whether agency, hope or goal-directed behaviour, Larson (2005) argued that strategic thinking and reasoning is an important aspect of initiation of and a necessary ingredient for exercising agency or agentic behaviour in humans. Such strategic thinking requires that some or all the key features of agency, that is, intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, self-esteem and so on (Bandura, 2001) are explored and exploited. Intentionality involves proactive behaviour intended to bring about desired outcomes and the realization of goals; forethought is the agentic behaviour that constitutes the future time perspective, which requires that people set goals for themselves, anticipate the likely consequences of prospective action, and select and create courses of action likely to produce desired outcomes while avoiding detrimental courses (Bandura, 2000; Cantor, 1990). Through the exercise of forethought, people motivate themselves and guide their actions in anticipation of future events. Usually, a forethoughtful perspective provides direction, coherence, consistency and meaning to one’s life. According to Bandura (2002) and Carver & Scheier (1998), among forethoughtful individuals, foreseeable future events are often converted into current motivators and regulators of current behaviour so that goal setting becomes a non-negotiable agentic characteristic for people walking towards the future.

According to Bandura (2006), an agentic individual should also be a motivator or self-regulator, an agentic attribute that requires self-reactiveness. Haven adopted an intention and action plan, one cannot simply sit back and wait for the appropriate or desired performance or future event to appear. According to Nurmi (2004) this makes it such that agency does not only involve deliberate ability to make choices and action plans, but also and most importantly, the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution. This requires the use of self-regulatory processes such as self-directedness, self-monitory, self-guiding performance, personal standards and corrective self-reaction (Bandura, 2000). Meanwhile self-reflectiveness predisposes agentic individuals to be auto-examiners of their own functioning. According to Bandura (2002) the metacognitive capacity to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one’s thoughts and actions against his/her person is another key feature of agency. According to him, through reflective self-consciousness, people auto-criticize their motivations, values, beliefs and the meaning of their life pursuits to them. Through such auto-criticism, people are able to judge or verify their actions, the effects of other people’s actions, the beliefs of others and the deductions from established knowledge. Self-reflectiveness can determine whether people generate self-enhancing or self-handicapping thoughts and beliefs in relation to themselves, their life goals and ambitions (Locke & Latham, 1990). In this connection, self-efficacy beliefs are to a large extent responsible for a person’s choice about what goals to pursue, how much effort to invest in their undertaking, the level of perseverance in the face of difficulties and individual perceptions towards failure (Bandura, 2001).

Self-esteem, being the extent of an individual's beliefs of self-worthiness is also key to agentic behaviour in the quest for self-development. It is often the result of one's overall assessment of the self, a person's global self-perception, otherwise, self-concept in which either negative (or Self-handicapping) or positive (self-enhancing) feelings about the self develop further shaping the individual's behaviour in his or her developmental pathway (Adams, 2010; Salami, 2010; Bandura, 1993). It is generally believed that there are many benefits to having a positive view of the self. According to Branden (1994) and Coleman & Hendry (1990), those with a high self-esteem are presumed to be psychologically happy and healthy, whereas those with low self-esteem are generally perceived as psychologically distressed and even more predisposed to depressive dispositions. As such, young people with high self-esteem feel good about themselves, are able to cope effectively with challenges and negative feedback, accept themselves as they generally are, believe that others value and respect them and generally lead happy, positive and productive lives (Baumeister, 1998; Coleman & Hendry, 1990). In contrast, those with low self-esteem see the world in a more negative filter and their general dislike for themselves colours their perception of everything around them (Kassin, 1998). They will generally experience social anxiety and maintain derogatory public self-consciousness. The implication is that they may aim very little in life and also find it difficult to accomplish their desires since they are generally self-handicapping, self-punishing and derogatory thereby hurting any effort towards self-development (Yelsma & Yelsma, 1998).

Up to here, we find that agency is highly demonstrated in the literature as a key factor of self-development. And that agentic behaviours such forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness and self-esteem are very important ingredients of self-development. But what is self-development all about? Hawkins (2002) maintained that self-development is encouraging each individual to become personally and emotionally independent and responsible, making informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives. This means that self-development is about developing and improving aspects of an individual including areas such as education, motivation, health, skills and competencies. It includes activities that improve awareness and identity, developing talents and potentials, building human capital, facilitating employability, enhancing quality of life and contributing to the realization of dreams and aspirations (Smith & Carlson, 2000; Harter, 1998). Self-development involves continuous learning for personal excellence, improving awareness, self-knowledge, improving skills and learning new ones, building and renewing identity, developing strengths and weaknesses, improving and enhancing wealth, health, lifestyle; initiating personal autonomy and defining and executing personal development plans (Cerrone, 1997). These, no doubt, require that the individual is at the centre of action. That is why agency becomes a key factor of self-development. Individuals have to be agentic to take their lives and destinies into their own hands; they have to be able to pose as agents or factors of their own development (Lo-oh, 2017). In so doing, they require among other agentic behaviours or factors, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-esteem. It is on the strength of these that this study investigated into the possible links of agency and the self-development of adolescents in Cameroon university institutions.

## **Method**

The cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for the study; and with it a sample of 382 with 158 males and 224 female adolescent students selected across 4 faculties in The University of Bamenda, Cameroon.

**Sample description****Table1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample**

Indicator	Categories	N	%	Indicator	Categories	N	%
<b>Level</b>	200	271	70.9	<b>Age</b>	15-18	52	13.6
	300	74	19.4		19-21	184	48.2
	400	37	9.7		22-25	146	38.2
<b>Gender</b>	Male	158	41.4	<b>Religion</b>	Christian	353	92.4
	Female	224	58.6		Muslim	23	6.0
<b>Residential area</b>	Family house	122	31.9		Others	6	1.6
	Mini cite	230	60.2	<b>Parental status</b>	Married	234	61.3
	School hostel	7	1.8		Single	142	37.2
	Ghetto places	23	6.0	Divorce	6	1.6	
<b>Family income</b>	High	23	6.0	<b>Student status</b>	Married	23	6.0
	Moderate	302	79.1		Single	341	89.3
	Low	57	14.9	Divorced	2	.5	
<b>Have a child before</b>	Once	52	13.6	Engaged	16	4.2	
	Never	322	84.3	<b>Have experience</b>	Never	40	10.5
	Often	8	2.1		Sometimes	307	80.4
<b>I am easily affected by diseases</b>	Never	111	29.1	<b>poverty Face</b>	Always	35	9.2
	Sometimes	251	65.7		Never	30	7.9
	Always	20	5.2	<b>economic hardship</b>	Sometimes	319	83.5
<b>Encounter financial difficulties</b>	Never	21	5.5		Always	33	8.6
	Sometimes	310	81.2				
	Always	51	13.4				

**Instrumentation**

The instrument used for data collection was a 75 item questionnaire measuring forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-development. Forethought was measured by 10 Likert scale-type items featuring issues such as often creating a picture of the future by setting plans, guided to the future by current behaviour, being able to determine and stand by future goals, maintaining current behaviour that is titled towards goals, foreseeing the future by present and so on. Self-reactiveness was measured by 10 items amongst which were issues such as motivating oneself in order to achieve any life plan, being able to shape actions in order to arrive at set goals, determining one's pathway to achieving life goals, being an actor of one's life and so on. Measures of self-reflectiveness included amongst other issues always evaluating my thoughts before taking action, always think how sound one's thoughts are before taking a decision, understanding better how one's mind works before taking decisions, examining oneself first before taking actions on one's set goals and so on. Self-esteem had ten (10) items that measured concerns such as thinking they have a number of good qualities that makes them work towards their goals, always feeling confident about oneself and in all that one does, satisfied with oneself, seeing oneself as a success in all that one does, feeling they are people of worth to succeed, seeing oneself as an achiever in the things one does, hardly surrendering in the difficult moments of one's life and so on.

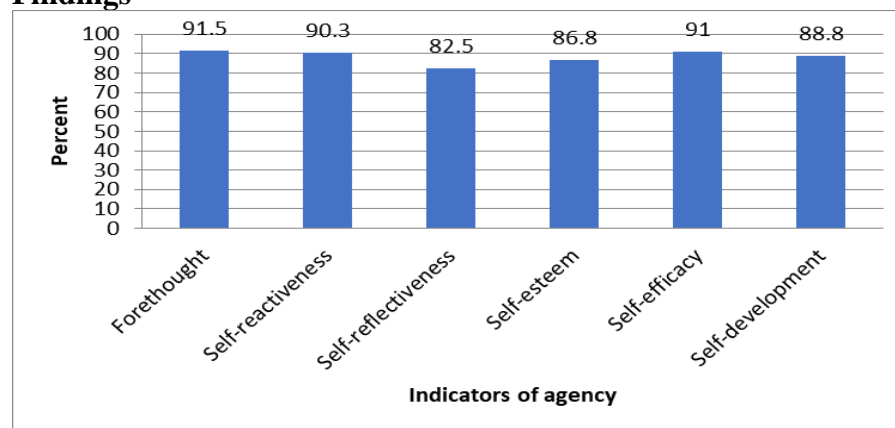
Self-efficacy had ten (10) items as well, amongst which were being certain one can motivate himself to finish any task of their choice, often putting in effort until they finish a task, always taking initiative to overcome difficult situations, often persisting when performing a task until they finish, believing the outcome of one's success is as a result of one's effort, being confident that one can deal with difficult situations that comes their way, engaging in activities with interest until they succeed, believing one can always use his/her intelligence to finish a task and so on. Self-development was measured by items such as often improving on oneself by reading, communicating well makes one develop oneself better, often listening to

others when discussing, knowing who one is through self-awareness, knowing their strengths and weaknesses better than any other person, thinking one is an honest and respected person, often spending time with people who are better off than they are, understanding one's emotions and controlling them better when situations arise, and being capable of creating a job for oneself .

**Table 2: Reliability analysis**

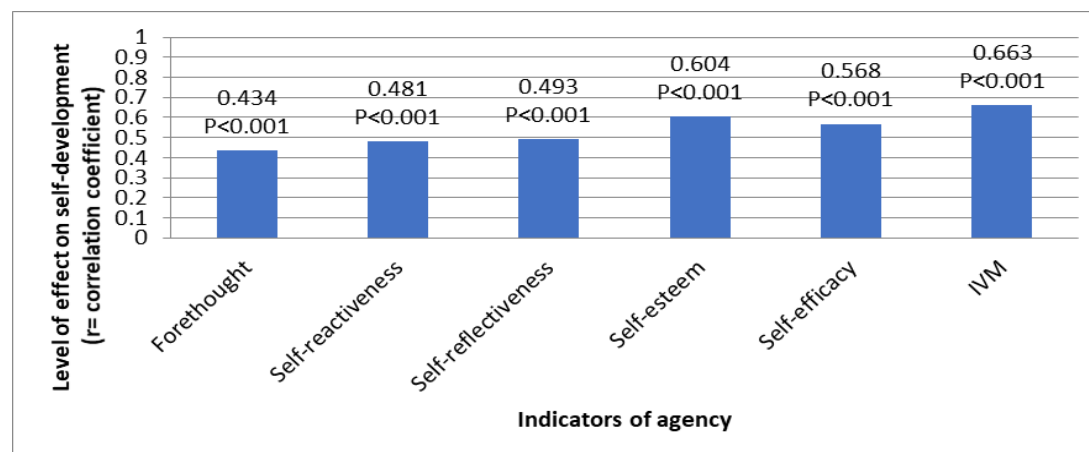
Conceptual components	Cronbach's Alpha	Variance	N <sub>cases</sub>	N <sub>item</sub>
Forethought	0.525	0.003	382	10
Self-reactiveness	0.636	0.001	382	10
Self-reflectiveness	0.668	0.002	382	10
Self-esteem	0.698	0.004	382	10
Self-efficacy	0.672	0.001	382	10
Self-development	0.602	0.001	382	10
<b>Integrated Value Mapping (IVM)</b>	<b>0.881</b>	<b>0.002</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>60</b>

## Findings



**Figure 1: Distribution of agentic characteristics among university adolescents**

Adolescent students were most endowed with forethought (91.5%), followed by self-efficacy (91%), then self-reactiveness (90.3%), self-esteem (86.9%) and self-reflectiveness (82.5%). However, this discrepancy was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2=299.33$ ;  $df=4$ ;  $P=0.000$ ). As far as self-development was concerned, 88.8% of them were endowed with this quality.



**Figure 2: Perceived effect of agency on self-development**



Among the five indicators of agency considered, the indicator self-esteem was found highest to influence the self-development of adolescents in Cameroon Universities with ( $r=0.604$ ) and the overall effect of all the predictor variables had an Integrated Values Mapping (IVM) of  $r=0.663$ . Such overall effect indicated that agency is an important variable to foster the self-development of university-level adolescents.

**Table 3: Summary of findings**

Hypothesis	Test (Spearman's rho)	Conclusions
There is no significant relationship between forethought and the self-development of adolescents in Cameroon Universities.	$r=0.434$ $P=0.000$	There was statistically enough evidence that forethought significantly determined the self-development potential of adolescents ( $r=0.434$ ; $P=0.000$ ). The positive correlation indicated that the better forethought, the better the predisposed self-development ability of the adolescent students
There is no significant relationship between self-reactiveness and the self-development of adolescents in Cameroon Universities.	$r=0.481$ $P=0.000$	There was statistically enough evidence that self-reactiveness significantly determined the self-development potential of adolescents ( $r=0.481$ ; $P=0.000$ ). The positive correlation indicated that the better self-reactiveness, the better the predisposed self-development ability of the adolescent students
Research hypothesis three: There is no significant relationship between self-reflectiveness and the self-development of adolescents in Cameroon Universities.	$r=0.493$ $P=0.000$	There was statistically enough evidence that self-reflectiveness significantly determined the self-development potential of adolescents ( $r=0.493$ ; $P=0.000$ ). The positive correlation indicated that the better self-reflectiveness, the better the predisposed self-development ability of the adolescent students
There is no significant relationship between self-esteem and the self-development of adolescents in Cameroon Universities.	$r=0.604$ $P=0.000$	There was statistically enough evidence that self-esteem significantly determined the self-development potential of adolescents ( $r=0.604$ ; $P=0.000$ ). The positive correlation indicated that the better self-reflectiveness, the better the predisposed the self-development ability of the adolescent students
There is no significant relationship between self-efficacy and the self-development of adolescents in Cameroon Universities.	$r=0.568$ $P=0.000$	There was statistically enough evidence that self-efficacy significantly determined self-development potential of adolescents ( $r=0.568$ ; $P=0.000$ ). The positive correlation indicated that the better self-reflectiveness, the better the predisposed the self-development ability of the adolescent students.

## DISCUSSION

### Forethought and the adolescent self-development

From the findings of this study, adolescents generally were endowed with the agentic characteristic of forethought (91.5%). The findings further showed that forethought significantly determined the self-development of adolescents in Cameroon universities. In this regard, there was enough statistical evidence that forethought significantly determined the self-development potentials of adolescents ( $r=0.434$ ;  $P=0.000$ ). This finding is in line with Benson (1997) who argued that having a purpose in life contributes to optimal human development, and that youth with purpose are psychologically healthier than those without a good sense of purpose. It also corroborates Bandura's (1990) theory which holds that individuals are imbued with certain capacities that define what it is to be human; hence these

capacities provide human beings with the cognitive means by which they are influential in determining their own life destiny. Again, Bandura (2001) is in congruence with the view that, setting goals and developing ambitions, as well as anticipating and selecting alternative courses of action in the human life course are likely to generate those outcomes that motivate people and guide their actions. Equally, Wendell (2003) argues that the goals of futurists are to contribute toward making the world a better place in which to live and that using the images of the future guides one's present behaviour. Similarly, Zimmerman (2000) propounded that goals represent the targets of self-directed development leading to personal strivings towards realizing one's goals.

The finding of the explanatory power of forethought over self-development also corroborates King (1998) who argued that people need to invest in some life dreams to instill meaning in their lives, so if dreams must be relinquished, it is important to find new ones. So people may attempt to reinstate agency by reformulating their life dreams King (1998). According to Carver & Scheier (1998) rewriting the life dream and adjusting new goals to fit declining capacities may be a way to reinstate a sense of agency. According to them, adolescents are able to fit their behaviours into what they see as desirable while staying away from what they see as undesirable. And all these are made possible through the agentic capacity of forethought, which according to Snyder (1995), individuals with higher levels of it exhibit a higher probability and propensity of reaching their goals. Besides, Nurmi (2004) found that adolescents often develop goals relevant to their forethoughtful expectations; and these goals often motivate achievement. That is why Little (2007) referred to hoped-for-selves being desired future states that increase chances of goal attainment; feared selves being undesirable future states that must be avoided; and expected selves, being likely outcomes that guide the way of life of an individual.

With regards to forethought and future plans, adolescents agreed that they could create a picture of their future by setting plans of action in the present. In the same way Larson (2005) contended that for young people of today to become leaders of tomorrow, they will need to negotiate the formal and informal systems that exist in the complex world. He maintained that motivational and emotional challenges youth encounter are linked to the environment. This was in line with Locke & Luthan (1990) who earlier argued that through the exercise of forethought, people motivate themselves and guide their actions in anticipation of future events. That is why Little (2007) referred to hoped-for-selves, feared selves and expected selves; all of which dictate different pathways of self-development. Similarly, empirical evidence from Hitlin & Elder (2007) shows that, possible future selves motivate current agentic choices and over time these actions get folded into one's present sense of being. Moreover, adolescent students themselves generally reported hopeful about their future (91.5%) which means they were generally forethoughtful. This ties with Snyder's (1994) hope theory which equally holds that, hope is a motivational state whereby agency (goal-directed determination) and pathways (proactive planning to achieve goals) interact to influence the journey through the life course.

### **Self-reactiveness and the adolescent self-development**

Descriptively, the findings on self-reactiveness revealed that adolescents were 90.3 % endowed with the agentic quality of self-reactiveness. When crossed with self-development, the findings showed that there was enough statistical evidence ( $r=0.481$ ;  $P=0.000$ ) that self-reactiveness determined the self-development potential of university student adolescents. In line with this, Bandura (1990) earlier maintained that people can make change happen by pursuing an active life that increases the number of fortuitous encounters they are likely to

experience in their life. Thus, young people's proactive efforts center on cultivating personal attributes that enable them to make the most of opportunities that arise unexpectedly from time to time. Equally, this finding trails Snyder's (1994) hope theory which opined that people are generally goal oriented, and always behave in such a way that they are trying to accomplish something. Hence agency represents an individual capacity or motivation to start work on a given goal and to continue in the pathway of accomplishing the set goals. Besides, Bandura (2000) in the same vein supports this view by saying that, self-reactiveness gives rise to agency as individuals act on specific plans focused on the transformation of the external environment to match self-set goals. In light of this, Blandict (2008) argued that young people are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, and they are not just passive subjects or recipients of social structures and processes. In the same way Alkire (2005) believed that self-direction is one of the universal values that motivate human action.

Eccles, Barber, Stone & Hunt (2003) found the importance and relevance of self-reactiveness and maintained that with it as a measure of self-development, adolescents are able to engage in exploratory behaviours that often help in elaborating their sense of identity; providing information about them that affects future plans. And so with it, adolescents are able to develop an extended future orientation in which they are able to think, dream and plan for their futures. With this capacity, young people are able to develop personal projects they wish to accomplish, and these projects also become driving forces towards desired futures.

### **Self-reflectiveness and adolescent self-development**

Descriptive findings on self-reflective ability revealed that adolescent students possessed self-reflectiveness (82.5%) as much as they did other indicators. The findings further revealed enough statistical evidence showing that self-reflectiveness influenced the self-development potential of adolescent students in the university ( $r=0.493$ ;  $P=0.000$ ). The positive correlation meant that the better the self-reflective ability, the better the self-development ability of adolescent students. This compares with Bandura's (1990) socio-cognitive theory which states that outcome expectation reflects individual beliefs about what consequences are most likely to ensue with particular behaviours. The decisions people make about what actions to take and what behaviours to suppress are usually based on their own past experience and the observations of others. In this connection Bandura (1990) argues that individuals are agents of their own development and can proactively make things happen the way they wish and by their actions. Gillin & Hayward (2005) argued that it is the image of the future that has the most particular relevance to people especially young people. As such the hope theory proffers an explanation as to the cognitive processes that surround the choice of whether or not to enact the vision. These images come with the relevance of self-regulatory effort with which to translate visions into reality (Searle, 2003). In this regard, with the process of self-reflectiveness, individuals adopt personal standards, construct appropriate courses of action, monitor their activities and regulate them by evaluative self-regulation.

In addition, adolescents agreed that they often evaluate their thoughts before taking actions. Bandura (1990) believes that people are not only agents of their actions but self-examiners of their own functioning and that the metacognitive ability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions is another distinctly core human feature of agency which requires self-reflection. Later, Bandura (2008) maintained that through functional self-awareness, people reflect on the meaning of their pursuits and the soundness of their thoughts and actions, therefore putting the variable of self-reflection at the core of agentic human functioning. This matches with Locke & Latham (1990) who argued that goal setting directs

people's attention and effort towards productive activities, energizing and stimulating their actions. Such auto-criticism will either generate self-enhancing or self-handicapping thoughts and beliefs in themselves, their life goals and ambitions.

### **Self-esteem and adolescent self-development**

The agentic characteristic of high self-esteem abilities was 86.9% reported among adolescent students in the university. Verified against self-development potential, the findings revealed enough statistical evidence ( $r=0.604$ ;  $P=0.000$ ) that self-esteem significantly determines the self-development potential of adolescent students in Cameroon universities. This relationship is in line with Rosenberg (1990) who maintained that high self-esteem persons have respect and feelings of worthiness and yet acknowledge faults and shortcomings. They have feelings which enable them know themselves better to be able to pay attention to developing and advancing their strengths while also working to improve on their downsides and weaknesses. With regards to high self-esteem, Synder (2002) maintained that people with high hope tend to be successful in the pursuit of their goals and, as a result, tend to experience more positive emotions while those with little or no hope tend to have more difficulties in overcoming the barriers to goal attainment. This finding also matches Schunk (1991) who assert that self-esteem is a type of belief involving judgment of worth.

Accordingly, self-esteem is an affective reaction indicating how a person feels about him or herself. In fact this is quite distinct from self-efficacy which involves cognitive judgments of personal capability. Perceptions of worth or self-esteem may develop from a person's global self-perception as well as from a variety of other sources such as possession of attributes that are either valued or devalued by society. It is no doubt therefore, that high self-esteem adolescents will exhibit characteristics such as being successful, being happy, making more effort and ignoring the unnecessary things in life (Kassin, 1998). Branden (1994) also found that those who have high self-esteem are presumed to be psychologically happy and healthy, whereas those with low self-esteem are believed to psychologically distress and perhaps even depressed. Therefore, high self-esteem apparently provides benefits to those who possess it and low self-esteem inadvertently hurts those who muster it. Accordingly high self-esteem individuals feel good about themselves, they are able to cope effectively with challenges and negative feedback, and they live in a social world in which they believe that people value and respect them (Baumeister (1998). On the contrary, those with low self-esteem are worried, pessimistic and with a battery of negative thoughts about life and the future (Coleman & Hendry, 1990). And Kassin (1998) adds that they are unsuccessful, nervous, make less effort and with the tendency to ignore the important things in life.

### **Self-efficacy and adolescent self-development**

Descriptive findings showed that 8.25% of adolescent students were endowed with self-efficacy beliefs. Furthermore, there was enough statistical evidence that self-efficacy significantly determines the self-development potential of adolescent students in the university ( $r=0.568$ ;  $P=0.000$ ). This is in line with Vries (1988) who maintained that low self-efficacy has been shown to predict higher levels of depression among young people. This also ties with Bandura (1993) who argued that people with high self-efficacy abilities set challenging goals, and stay committed even in the face of adversities and sustain their efforts to be successful. And Yelsma & Yelsma (1998) argued that adolescents with high self-efficacy beliefs prefer difficult circumstances, appear to be quite sure of their efforts leading to success, are less sensitive to emotional turbulence and affected by depression. Erikson (1968) also argued that purpose helps young people to successfully navigate and resolve their identity crisis during adolescence. Moreover, a strong sense of purpose underscores pro-

social action and civic engagement. Thus to pursue a goal with rigour requires a belief that one's efforts will pay off. Thus, perceived self-efficacy provides the incentive to persist in a course of action despite setbacks and obstacles.

## CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, this study has attempted to investigate on the concept of agency with focus on forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. The study further found that these elements of agency predict the self-development potential of adolescents in Cameroon Universities. Findings showed that adolescents possessed forethought, which they further benefited from to engage in self-development endeavours while as students in Cameroon Universities. Such forethoughtfulness connotes hope which Snyder & Lopez (2009) defined as a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency; suggesting that forethought is an intrinsic and instrumental part of one's own wellbeing which directs one's movement towards the future (Alkire, 2005). Hence adolescents as reflective human beings can choose and execute their actions toward a valued goal in a way that is not fully determined by external factors and conditions other than their understanding and reasoning of themselves and the futures they wish to attain. With self-reactiveness, adolescents were self-motivated to achieve their life goals further shaping their self-development. Bandura (2001) asserts that self-reactiveness gives rise to agency as individuals benefit from self-regulation and act on specific plans focused on the transformation of the external context in which they develop. With self-reflectiveness, adolescents are able to self-examine their thoughts before taking action. Bandura (2001) refers to self-reflection as the self-examining nature of the human agent. Thus, through self-awareness and self-understanding, people reflect on their personal agency, the soundness of their thoughts and actions, the meaning of their pursuits and possible changes they must make in life course patterns. Self-esteem and self-efficacy beliefs were also shown to determine the self-development potential of university-going students in Cameroon. Emler (2001) maintained that how people feel about themselves and the beliefs about their self-worthiness are very important vectors of how they eventually become. Thus, adolescents who are found to be positive about themselves demonstrated enough self-development potentials. They are most likely to feel good about themselves, cope effectively with challenges and negative feedback and tend to be more conscious about the important things in life, to which they make significant effort to pursue. These, therefore become very important agentic behaviours or attributes that must be inculcated or nurtured in young people in order to improve on their self-development potentials. Besides, these findings have also sustained scholarly work championing the need for individual and personal effort in positive and productive human development.

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