

Peacebuilding in Correctional Institutions: Explaining the Recurrence of Inmate Conflicts Despite Mediation Measures in Buea Central and Douala New Bell Central Prisons, Cameroon

Donatus Ntemgw Mbunya¹

¹PhD Candidate in Conflict Resolution

¹Department of International Relations and Conflict Resolution, University of Buea, Buea, Cameroon

Publication Date: 2026/07/06

Abstract: Inmate conflicts remain a persistent challenge within correctional institutions despite the implementation of various mediation and conflict-resolution measures. In Cameroon, existing prison conflict-management approaches have largely emphasised institutional security and disciplinary control, with limited empirical attention given to the implementation of mediation measures within correctional settings. This study examined the implementation of mediation measures in managing inmate conflicts in Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison, Cameroon. An explanatory mixed-methods research design was adopted, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive assessment of mediation practices. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to prison staff and inmates, while qualitative data were generated through semi-structured interviews with prison administrators, correctional officers, inmates, and selected stakeholders. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and one-way analysis of variance, whereas qualitative data were analysed thematically and integrated with the quantitative findings. The findings indicate that prison authorities implement several mediation measures, including dialogue before punishment, complaint-handling procedures, counselling, educational and sensitisation programmes, and collaboration with chaplains and external organisations. However, their implementation remains inconsistent because of overcrowding, staff shortages, limited mediation training, inadequate grievance management, fear of intimidation among inmates, and operational pressures that prioritise immediate institutional control over long-term reconciliation. Although dialogue and mediation contribute to resolving minor disputes, participants reported that serious conflicts are frequently managed through punitive responses, limiting opportunities for sustainable peacebuilding. The statistical analysis further revealed significant differences in respondents' perceptions regarding the implementation of mediation measures, confirming inconsistencies in institutional practice. The study concludes that mediation has become an important component of prison conflict management within the two correctional institutions but remains constrained by structural and institutional challenges that reduce its overall effectiveness. Strengthening mediation capacity, improving grievance procedures, expanding preventive peacebuilding programmes, and enhancing institutional support for mediation are essential for promoting sustainable conflict management within Cameroon's correctional institutions.

Keywords: *Peacebuilding, Correctional Institutions, Mediation, Inmate Conflict, Prison Rehabilitation, Restorative Justice.*

How to Cite: Donatus Ntemgw Mbunya (2026) Peacebuilding in Correctional Institutions: Explaining the Recurrence of Inmate Conflicts Despite Mediation Measures in Buea Central and Douala New Bell Central Prisons, Cameroon.

International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology, 11(6), 2554-2565.

<https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jun1973>

I. INTRODUCTION

Correctional institutions are established not only to confine offenders but also to facilitate rehabilitation, behavioral transformation, and successful reintegration into society. Achieving these objectives requires correctional environments that promote safety, order, and peaceful

coexistence among inmates and prison personnel. However, prisons across the world continue to experience persistent inmate conflicts arising from overcrowding, competition over limited resources, interpersonal differences, gang activities, psychological distress, and institutional constraints [1], [2]. These conflicts frequently manifest through violence, intimidation, bullying, threats, and confrontations among

inmates as well as between inmates and correctional staff, thereby undermining institutional security, rehabilitation programmes, and public confidence in correctional systems [3], [4].

For decades, correctional administrations relied predominantly on disciplinary sanctions, segregation, and security measures to manage inmate conflicts and maintain institutional order. While these approaches remain necessary for addressing serious breaches of prison regulations, studies have shown that punitive responses often suppress conflicts without addressing the underlying causes of hostility, mistrust, and recurring violence [5], [6]. Consequently, increasing attention has been directed towards mediation, restorative justice, counselling, dialogue, and other peacebuilding approaches that seek to transform relationships, encourage accountability, and resolve disputes through communication rather than punishment alone [7], [8]. These approaches sensitiza that sustainable peace within correctional institutions depends not only on enforcing discipline but also on addressing the social and psychological factors that generate inmate conflicts.

Evidence from Europe, North America, and other regions indicates that mediation has become an increasingly important component of prison conflict management. Several correctional systems have introduced prisoner-facilitated mediation, restorative justice programmes, conflict-resolution training, and dialogue-based interventions to reduce violence and improve relationships between inmates and prison staff [9], [10]. Such initiatives have been associated with improved communication, reduced disciplinary incidents, increased inmate participation in resolving disputes, and more positive prison climates. Nevertheless, the implementation of mediation programmes remains inconsistent because of overcrowding, inadequate staffing, insufficient training, and competing institutional priorities that often favour security-centred responses over restorative approaches [11].

Within Africa, correctional institutions continue to operate under difficult conditions sensitization by overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources, insufficient correctional personnel, and restricted rehabilitation services [12]. These structural challenges increase competition over scarce resources, intensify interpersonal tensions, and complicate efforts to implement effective conflict-management strategies. Although several African countries have undertaken reforms aimed at improving prison administration and rehabilitation, mediation and restorative approaches remain inadequately sensitization2555zed in many correctional systems, resulting in continued reliance on punitive disciplinary practices [13].

Cameroon reflects many of these challenges. Correctional institutions across the country continue to experience prison congestion, resource constraints, inadequate rehabilitation facilities, and increasing pressure on correctional personnel responsible for maintaining institutional order [14]. In response, prison authorities employ various conflict-management mechanisms, including

dialogue, mediation, complaint-handling procedures, disciplinary hearings, counseling, 2555ensitization programmes, and collaboration with religious organisations and other external actors. While these measures demonstrate institutional efforts to manage inmate disputes peacefully, recurring conflicts within correctional institutions suggest that their implementation may not always be consistent or sufficiently effective in promoting sustainable peace among inmates [15].

Despite growing scholarly interest in prison management, relatively limited empirical attention has been devoted to examining the implementation of mediation measures within Cameroon's correctional institutions. Existing studies have focused predominantly on prison overcrowding, detention conditions, human rights, prison administration, and rehabilitation, with comparatively little emphasis on how mediation measures are implemented in practice and the extent to which they contribute to effective inmate conflict management [14], [15]. Consequently, there remains insufficient empirical evidence regarding the consistency of mediation implementation, the institutional factors influencing its effectiveness, and its contribution to promoting peaceful coexistence within correctional institutions. This knowledge gap limits opportunities for evidence-based reforms aimed at strengthening mediation as a sustainable conflict-management strategy within Cameroon's prison system.

Against this background, this study examines the implementation of mediation measures in managing inmate conflicts within Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison. Using an explanatory mixed-methods research design, the study integrates quantitative and qualitative evidence to assess the extent to which mediation measures are implemented and to identify institutional factors influencing their effectiveness. The study contributes to the growing literature on correctional peacebuilding by providing empirical evidence from two major correctional institutions in Cameroon and offers practical recommendations for strengthening mediation-based conflict management within correctional settings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Peacebuilding in Correctional Institutions*

Correctional institutions have traditionally been established as spaces for punishment, deterrence, and the protection of society through the incarceration of offenders. However, contemporary correctional philosophy has progressively shifted from an exclusive emphasis on custodial control towards a broader mandate that incorporates rehabilitation, behavioral transformation, and successful social reintegration. This transition reflects growing recognition that prisons should not merely isolate offenders from society but should also address the social, psychological, and behavioral conditions that contribute to criminality and interpersonal violence. Consequently, peacebuilding has emerged as an important framework for understanding how correctional institutions can move beyond maintaining order through coercion towards fostering environments that

encourage dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence among inmates [1], [2].

The concept of peacebuilding was initially developed within the field of international conflict resolution to describe long-term processes aimed at preventing the recurrence of violence by addressing its structural, relational, and cultural causes. Rather than focusing exclusively on terminating violent confrontation, peacebuilding seeks to transform relationships, strengthen institutions, rebuild trust, and create conditions that sustain positive peace [3]. Although originally applied to post-conflict societies, scholars increasingly argue that peacebuilding principles are equally relevant within correctional institutions because prisons constitute complex social environments where violence, mistrust, exclusion, and power struggles frequently occur. In this context, prisons become microcosms of society in which the underlying drivers of conflict remain active despite institutional confinement [4].

The application of peacebuilding within correctional settings therefore extends beyond the maintenance of institutional security. It seeks to transform prison environments by promoting constructive relationships among inmates, strengthening communication between inmates and correctional personnel, encouraging behavioral change, and creating opportunities for reconciliation and personal development. This perspective contrasts with traditional prison management models that prioritize surveillance, punishment, and disciplinary sanctions as the primary mechanisms for maintaining order. While disciplinary measures remain necessary for institutional security, evidence increasingly suggests that punitive approaches alone rarely eliminate the conditions that generate repeated conflict. Instead, they frequently suppress immediate violence without resolving the grievances, mistrust, and interpersonal tensions that contribute to its recurrence [5], [6].

Contemporary scholarship further argues that correctional peacebuilding should be understood as a multidimensional process requiring institutional, relational, and individual transformation. Institutionally, prisons must establish transparent systems that promote fairness, accountability, and equal treatment of inmates. Relationally, peacebuilding requires strengthening trust, dialogue, and cooperation among inmates as well as between inmates and prison staff. At the individual level, rehabilitation programmes should equip inmates with communication skills, emotional regulation, empathy, and non-violent conflict resolution strategies that facilitate both peaceful coexistence during incarceration and successful reintegration after release [7].

Despite broad agreement regarding the importance of rehabilitation, scholars remain divided concerning the extent to which correctional institutions have genuinely embraced peacebuilding principles. Some researchers argue that many prison systems continue to operate within predominantly punitive paradigms where rehabilitation receives limited institutional support and security concerns consistently override peacebuilding objectives [8]. Others contend that meaningful transformation has occurred through the expansion of restorative justice programmes, educational

initiatives, vocational training, and psychological interventions designed to reduce institutional violence and recidivism [9]. This divergence suggests that the effectiveness of correctional peacebuilding depends not merely on the existence of rehabilitation policies but on the extent to which such initiatives are systematically implemented and supported within prison governance structures.

These contrasting perspectives are particularly relevant in low-resource correctional systems, where overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, limited staffing, and resource scarcity constrain the implementation of rehabilitation-oriented approaches. Under such conditions, prison authorities often prioritise restoring immediate order over addressing the deeper structural and relational drivers of inmate conflict. Consequently, although peacebuilding has gained increasing recognition within correctional theory, translating its principles into effective institutional practice remains a significant challenge in many developing countries, including Cameroon. This reality underscores the need for empirical research examining not only whether mediation and other peacebuilding measures exist within correctional institutions but also whether they are sufficiently implemented to prevent the recurrence of inmate conflicts.

➤ *Mediation as a Peacebuilding Mechanism in Correctional Institutions*

Mediation has become one of the most widely advocated approaches for managing conflicts within correctional institutions because it seeks to resolve disputes through dialogue rather than coercion. Unlike conventional disciplinary measures that primarily emphasize compliance with institutional rules, mediation encourages conflicting parties to communicate openly, identify the causes of disagreement, and negotiate mutually acceptable solutions with the assistance of an impartial facilitator. Its growing acceptance within prison systems reflects broader shifts in correctional philosophy from punishment-centered management towards restorative and rehabilitation-oriented approaches that seek to transform relationships rather than merely suppress disruptive behavior [10], [11].

The theoretical foundation of prison mediation is closely associated with restorative justice, which views conflict not simply as a violation of institutional regulations but as harm inflicted upon individuals and relationships that requires restoration. Restorative justice therefore seeks to involve those directly affected by conflict in identifying its causes, acknowledging responsibility, repairing damaged relationships, and preventing future violence through dialogue and mutual understanding [12]. Within correctional institutions, mediation operationalizes these principles by providing structured opportunities for inmates to resolve disputes peacefully while simultaneously developing communication skills, empathy, emotional regulation, and personal accountability. Rather than producing winners and losers, mediation seeks outcomes that restore coexistence and reduce the likelihood of retaliation.

Several studies conducted in Europe and North America indicate that prison mediation contributes positively to

institutional stability when implemented within comprehensive rehabilitation frameworks. Researchers report reductions in violent incidents, disciplinary infractions, and interpersonal hostility where mediation programmes are supported by trained facilitators, institutional commitment, and complementary rehabilitation initiatives such as counseling, educational programmes, vocational training, and psychological support [13], [14]. Beyond resolving individual disputes, these interventions strengthen inmates' capacity to manage future disagreements without resorting to aggression, thereby supporting both institutional security and post-release reintegration.

An important development within correctional mediation has been the emergence of prisoner-facilitated mediation. Under this approach, carefully selected inmates receive specialised training in communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution before serving as peer mediators within correctional facilities. Proponents argue that peer mediators often possess greater credibility among fellow inmates because they understand prison culture, informal social structures, and the realities of incarceration. Consequently, inmates involved in mediation may be more willing to engage openly with trained peers than with prison officials whom they may perceive as disciplinary authorities [15]. Where adequately supervised, prisoner-facilitated mediation has been associated with improved communication, increased trust, and greater inmate participation in peaceful conflict resolution.

Despite these reported successes, the effectiveness of mediation remains highly dependent upon institutional context. Mediation cannot function as an isolated intervention divorced from the broader conditions within correctional institutions. Scholars increasingly argue that mediation achieves sustainable outcomes only where prison administrations demonstrate organisational commitment, provide adequate training, guarantee mediator neutrality, ensure voluntary participation, and integrate mediation within wider rehabilitation and peacebuilding strategies [16]. In institutions characterised by severe overcrowding, resource scarcity, weak institutional legitimacy, or limited staff capacity, mediation frequently becomes reactive, addressing immediate disputes while leaving unresolved the structural conditions that continually reproduce conflict.

Another challenge concerns the relationship between mediation and institutional power. Correctional institutions operate within hierarchical administrative systems where prison authorities possess considerable control over inmates' daily lives. Under such circumstances, inmates may question the neutrality of mediation processes facilitated directly by prison personnel, particularly where disciplinary authority and mediation responsibilities overlap. Perceived bias may discourage open participation, reduce trust in mediation outcomes, and weaken compliance with negotiated agreements. Consequently, several scholars argue that effective prison mediation requires clear procedural safeguards capable of protecting impartiality, confidentiality, and voluntary engagement throughout the mediation process [17].

The effectiveness of mediation is further influenced by prison culture. Informal inmate hierarchies, gang affiliations, retaliation norms, and survival strategies frequently discourage dialogue by rewarding displays of strength while portraying compromise as weakness. Such prison subcultures may undermine mediation even where institutional procedures are formally available because inmates fear social repercussions associated with participation in negotiated conflict resolution. These realities demonstrate that successful mediation requires not only procedural reforms but also broader cultural transformation capable of encouraging trust, mutual respect, and non-violent methods of resolving disagreements [18].

Within many African correctional systems, mediation remains relatively underdeveloped despite increasing recognition of its potential contribution to prison peacebuilding. Existing interventions are frequently implemented through informal negotiation, religious organisations, prison chaplaincies, or external civil society actors rather than comprehensive institutional policies. Resource constraints, shortages of trained mediators, inadequate rehabilitation programmes, and limited governmental investment continue to restrict the institutionalisation of mediation across many prisons. Consequently, mediation often functions as an ad hoc response to emerging disputes instead of a systematic peacebuilding strategy capable of transforming institutional relationships over the long term [19].

The Cameroonian correctional context reflects many of these broader challenges. While prison authorities regularly employ dialogue, negotiation, and reconciliation to resolve inmate disputes, relatively little empirical evidence exists regarding the extent of mediation implementation or its effectiveness in preventing recurring conflicts. Existing studies primarily document overcrowding, detention conditions, and human rights concerns while paying comparatively limited attention to mediation as a correctional peacebuilding mechanism. Consequently, important questions remain concerning whether mediation measures currently implemented within Cameroon's correctional institutions adequately address the institutional, structural, and relational factors that sustain recurring inmate conflict. Addressing these questions is essential for understanding the contribution of mediation to sustainable peacebuilding and for identifying reforms capable of strengthening conflict management within correctional institutions.

➤ *Explaining the Recurrence of Inmate Conflicts Despite Mediation Measures*

The persistence of inmate conflicts despite the implementation of mediation measures has attracted increasing scholarly attention because it challenges the assumption that dialogue-based interventions alone are sufficient to sustain peace within correctional institutions. While mediation has demonstrated considerable potential for reducing interpersonal disputes, empirical evidence suggests that its effectiveness is significantly influenced by broader institutional, structural, social, and psychological conditions. Consequently, recurring inmate conflicts cannot be attributed

solely to weaknesses in mediation itself but rather to the complex interaction of factors that continually reproduce tensions within correctional environments [20], [21].

One of the most consistently identified factors is prison overcrowding. Overcrowded correctional facilities intensify competition for accommodation, food, sanitation facilities, healthcare, recreational opportunities, and other essential resources. Under such conditions, relatively minor disagreements frequently escalate into violent confrontations because inmates experience prolonged frustration, diminished privacy, and heightened psychological stress. Scholars argue that mediation implemented within severely overcrowded institutions often addresses only the immediate dispute while leaving intact the structural conditions that generated the conflict. As long as overcrowding persists, new conflicts emerge even after previous disputes have been successfully mediated [22], [23].

Closely related to overcrowding is the scarcity of institutional resources. Limited access to food, bedding, medical care, water, educational programmes, vocational training, and recreational facilities creates perceptions of inequality and injustice among inmates. Where institutional resources are insufficient to satisfy basic needs, competition becomes an inevitable feature of daily prison life. Such competition frequently undermines mediation because negotiated agreements cannot eliminate the material conditions that continually generate conflict. Researchers therefore contend that effective mediation must be supported by broader institutional reforms capable of improving inmates' living conditions and reducing structural sources of grievance [24].

The social organisation of prison life further complicates mediation efforts. Correctional institutions often develop informal power structures characterised by inmate hierarchies, gang affiliations, ethnic alliances, religious groupings, and systems of mutual protection. These informal structures operate alongside official prison administration and frequently shape inmates' responses to conflict. Loyalty to informal groups may discourage participation in mediation where compromise is perceived as betrayal or weakness. Similarly, retaliation norms embedded within prison subcultures may encourage inmates to resolve disputes through violence rather than dialogue in order to preserve personal status or group reputation. Consequently, mediation initiatives that fail to recognise the influence of prison subcultures often produce only temporary settlements [25], [26].

Institutional legitimacy also plays an important role in determining mediation outcomes. The willingness of inmates to participate genuinely in mediation depends largely on their confidence in the fairness, impartiality, and credibility of prison authorities. Where correctional staff are perceived as inconsistent, biased, or excessively punitive, inmates may regard mediation as another instrument of institutional control rather than an impartial conflict resolution process. Such perceptions weaken trust, discourage open communication, and reduce compliance with mediated agreements. Conversely, institutions characterised by procedural fairness,

transparency, and respectful staff-inmate relationships are more likely to achieve sustainable mediation outcomes because inmates perceive the process as legitimate and equitable [27].

Scholars have also highlighted the importance of psychological and behavioral factors in explaining recurring inmate conflict. Many incarcerated individuals enter correctional institutions with histories of trauma, substance abuse, exposure to violence, unresolved interpersonal conflicts, and limited emotional regulation skills. Without adequate psychological support and rehabilitation programmes, these experiences continue to influence inmates' behavior during incarceration. Mediation may therefore resolve immediate disputes while leaving unresolved emotional distress, anger, or behavioral patterns that contribute to future conflicts. This suggests that mediation should function alongside counselling, mental health services, anger management programmes, and other psychosocial interventions rather than operating as an isolated conflict management strategy [28], [29].

Another important explanation concerns the institutional implementation of mediation itself. Although many correctional institutions formally recognise mediation as a conflict resolution mechanism, implementation often remains inconsistent, informal, and reactive. In several jurisdictions, mediation is initiated only after conflicts have escalated into violence, with limited attention devoted to early conflict detection, preventive dialogue, or systematic follow-up. Furthermore, shortages of trained mediators, absence of standardised procedures, inadequate monitoring, and limited evaluation mechanisms frequently undermine the long-term effectiveness of mediation programmes. Scholars therefore argue that institutionalising mediation through formal policies, specialised training, and continuous evaluation is essential for sustaining correctional peacebuilding [30].

The broader governance environment within correctional institutions further shapes mediation outcomes. Administrative transparency, leadership effectiveness, staff professionalism, accountability, and respect for inmates' rights all influence institutional trust and cooperation. Weak governance structures may encourage perceptions of favoritism, corruption, discrimination, or selective enforcement of prison regulations, thereby increase resentment and reducing inmates' willingness to engage constructively in mediation. Conversely, correctional institutions characterised by accountable leadership and consistent application of institutional rules create conditions more conducive to peaceful conflict resolution [31].

Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that recurring inmate conflicts represent the product of interconnected structural, institutional, relational, and individual factors rather than the failure of mediation alone. Mediation remains an important peacebuilding mechanism because it facilitates dialogue and reconciliation, but its effectiveness depends upon the broader correctional environment within which it operates. Sustainable conflict transformation therefore requires integrated approaches that

combine mediation with institutional reform, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, improved prison governance, and enhanced living conditions. Understanding how these interacting factors influence mediation outcomes remains particularly important within correctional systems characterised by persistent overcrowding and limited institutional resources, such as those found in many developing countries.

➤ *Research Gap*

The literature reviewed demonstrates that significant progress has been made in understanding prison conflict, correctional rehabilitation, restorative justice, and mediation within correctional institutions. Existing studies consistently acknowledge that mediation contributes to improving communication, reducing interpersonal hostility, and promoting non-violent conflict resolution among inmates. Similarly, research on prison administration has extensively documented the influence of overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, poor living conditions, prison subcultures, and institutional resource constraints on inmate behavior and institutional stability. While these studies provide valuable insights into the dynamics of prison conflict, several important gaps remain.

First, a conceptual gap exists because most studies examine mediation as an independent conflict resolution mechanism or analyse prison violence as a consequence of structural deficiencies without adequately explaining the interaction between mediation implementation and the persistence of inmate conflicts. Consequently, limited attention has been devoted to understanding why conflicts continue to recur even in correctional institutions where mediation measures are routinely employed. This limits scholarly understanding of mediation as a long-term peacebuilding strategy rather than merely an immediate dispute resolution mechanism.

Second, a contextual gap is evident within the African and particularly the Cameroonian correctional literature. Although studies have documented prison overcrowding, human rights concerns, detention conditions, rehabilitation programmes, and correctional administration in several African countries, relatively few have specifically examined mediation within prison settings. In Cameroon, available research has concentrated largely on prison conditions, criminal justice reforms, inmate welfare, and rehabilitation, with comparatively limited empirical attention devoted to explaining the effectiveness of mediation in managing inmate conflicts. Consequently, little evidence exists regarding how mediation functions within Cameroon's correctional institutions or the contextual factors that influence its outcomes.

Third, a methodological gap is apparent in previous research. Many existing studies rely primarily on documentary analysis, institutional records, or the perspectives of a single stakeholder group, such as prison administrators or inmates. Such approaches provide important insights but often fail to capture the multidimensional nature of correctional conflict. Understanding why inmate conflicts recur despite mediation

requires evidence from multiple actors directly involved in prison conflict management, including correctional officers, prison administrators, and inmates themselves. Integrating these perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of both the implementation of mediation measures and the institutional realities shaping their effectiveness.

Finally, an empirical gap remains regarding the factors responsible for the recurrence of inmate conflicts despite the implementation of mediation measures. While previous studies generally acknowledge that mediation contributes to reducing prison violence, comparatively little empirical evidence explains why violent conflicts continue to re-emerge after mediation has been undertaken. Existing scholarship therefore provides limited understanding of the institutional, structural, relational, and behavioral conditions that constrain mediation from achieving sustainable peacebuilding within correctional institutions.

This study addresses these interconnected gaps by investigating the reasons inmate conflicts continue to recur despite the implementation of mediation measures in Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison, Cameroon. By examining both the implementation of mediation measures and the factors limiting their effectiveness, the study contributes empirical evidence that advances understanding of correctional peacebuilding within resource-constrained prison systems. The findings further provide practical insights for strengthening mediation, improving prison governance, and enhancing rehabilitation policies aimed at reducing recurring inmate conflicts and promoting sustainable peace within correctional institutions.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design to investigate the reasons inmate conflicts continue to recur despite the implementation of mediation measures in Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison, Cameroon. The mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate because the research problem required both quantitative evidence to determine patterns in the implementation and effectiveness of mediation measures and qualitative evidence to capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and explanations regarding the recurrence of inmate conflicts. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches enhanced the comprehensiveness of the analysis by enabling triangulation of findings from multiple sources.

The study was conducted in Buea Central Prison in the South-West Region and Douala New Bell Central Prison in the Littoral Region of Cameroon. The two correctional institutions were purposively selected because they represent major prison facilities with relatively large inmate populations, diverse categories of offenders, and frequent experiences of inmate conflict. Their institutional characteristics provided an appropriate context for examining the implementation of mediation measures and understanding the factors influencing

the recurrence of inmate conflicts within Cameroon's correctional system.

The study population comprised prison administrators, correctional officers, and inmates from the two correctional institutions. These categories of participants were selected because they possess direct knowledge and experience of prison conflict management processes. Prison administrators provided information regarding institutional policies and mediation procedures, correctional officers shared operational experiences relating to conflict management and inmate supervision, while inmates provided first-hand accounts of conflict experiences, participation in mediation processes, and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of existing interventions.

A combination of purposive and stratified sampling techniques was employed to ensure adequate representation of the different participant categories. Purposive sampling was used to identify prison administrators and senior correctional officers directly involved in conflict management and mediation activities because of their authorization knowledge of institutional procedures. Stratified sampling was used to select correctional officers and inmates from both correctional institutions to ensure that participants represented different institutional roles and prison experiences. The final sample size was determined by the objectives of the study and the need to obtain sufficient quantitative and qualitative information capable of addressing the research questions comprehensively.

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Structured questionnaires generated quantitative data regarding the implementation of mediation measures, the frequency and nature of inmate conflicts, and participants' perceptions of factors influencing conflict recurrence. Semi-structured interviews provided qualitative insights into participants' lived experiences, institutional practices, and explanations regarding the strengths and limitations of mediation within the two correctional institutions. Documentary review was also undertaken to examine relevant prison records, policy documents, institutional reports, and other official materials relating to correctional administration, inmate conflict, and mediation practices. The use of multiple data collection methods enhanced the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise participants' responses regarding mediation implementation and recurring inmate conflicts. Inferential statistical analysis was employed to examine relationships among selected variables relevant to the study objectives. Qualitative data obtained through interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed thematically. Thematic analysis involved authorization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of recurring themes, review and refinement of thematic categories, and interpretation of findings in relation to the study objectives and

existing literature. Integrating quantitative and qualitative findings provided a more comprehensive understanding of the factors responsible for the recurrence of inmate conflicts despite mediation measures.

Several measures were adopted to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the research. Research instruments were reviewed prior to data collection to enhance clarity and relevance. Quantitative data were checked for completeness and consistency before analysis, while qualitative findings were strengthened through triangulation of multiple participant perspectives and documentary evidence. The integration of different data sources improved the credibility and dependability of the study by enabling comparison and verification of findings across methods.

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional authorities before fieldwork commenced, while administrative authorization was secured from the prison authorities responsible for Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and no identifying information was included in the presentation of findings. Data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes in accordance with accepted research ethics governing studies involving human participants.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study sought to examine the extent to which mediation measures are implemented by prison authorities in Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison. To achieve this objective, both quantitative and qualitative data were integrated using a mixed-methods approach, allowing the statistical findings to be explained through participants' lived experiences. The findings indicate that prison authorities employ a variety of mediation and conflict-resolution measures, including dialogue, complaint-handling procedures, disciplinary hearings, educational and sensitisation programmes, socio-cultural activities, and informal mediation involving prison staff, inmate leaders, chaplains, and external organisations. However, the implementation of these measures remains uneven because of institutional and operational challenges such as overcrowding, staff shortages, resource limitations, and security pressures. The integrated findings are presented under five broad themes that collectively explain the implementation of mediation measures within the two correctional institutions.

➤ *Dialogue and Mediation as the Primary Conflict Resolution Mechanism*

The findings indicate that dialogue and mediation constitute the principal approaches employed by prison authorities in resolving inmate conflicts before disciplinary sanctions are imposed. Quantitative results show that slightly more than half of the respondents acknowledged that prison officers generally attempt to settle disputes through dialogue before punishment is applied. Of the 378 respondents, 190

(50.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that conflicts are first managed through dialogue or mediation, while 169 (44.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, with only a small proportion remaining neutral. These findings suggest that although mediation has become an important feature of prison conflict management, its application varies considerably across different situations.

The qualitative findings explain why respondents expressed these mixed perceptions. Participants consistently reported that prison officers encourage disputing inmates to discuss misunderstandings and reconcile before disciplinary action is considered, particularly when conflicts involve minor disagreements. As one participant explained, *"when conflicts are minor, officers usually try to make the inmates talk and settle the issue peacefully."* Another respondent observed that *"staff sometimes separate the inmates first and later bring them together for discussion,"* illustrating that temporary separation is often followed by dialogue intended to restore peaceful relationships. Participants further indicated that officers frequently encourage inmates to apologise to one another before punishment is imposed, demonstrating that reconciliation forms part of everyday prison conflict management.

Interview participants equally revealed that mediation is not undertaken exclusively by prison staff. Experienced inmates and block leaders occasionally intervene before prison officers arrive, helping to calm disputes and prevent escalation. One respondent noted that *"older inmates or block leaders sometimes intervene before officers arrive,"* while another explained that *"certain conflicts are resolved among inmates themselves without formal punishment."* These accounts demonstrate that informal mediation structures complement official prison conflict-management mechanisms and contribute to maintaining institutional order.

Despite these positive experiences, respondents consistently emphasised that mediation is applied mainly to less serious disputes. Participants explained that incidents involving violence, security threats, or heightened institutional tension frequently lead to immediate disciplinary action without prolonged dialogue. They further attributed this inconsistency to overcrowding, staff shortages, heavy workloads, and the absence of specialised mediation training for correctional officers. Consequently, while dialogue and mediation are recognised as important components of prison conflict management, their implementation remains constrained by operational realities that reduce their effectiveness in promoting sustainable peace within the prison environment.

➤ *Effectiveness of Prison Grievance and Complaint-Handling Mechanisms*

An effective grievance mechanism forms an important component of institutional mediation because it provides inmates with opportunities to resolve disputes through formal administrative processes before conflicts escalate. The quantitative findings reveal divided perceptions regarding the effectiveness of complaint-handling mechanisms within the two correctional institutions. While 179 respondents (47.4%)

agreed that complaints are handled fairly and within a reasonable time, 181 respondents (47.9%) expressed the opposite opinion, indicating that participants remained almost equally divided regarding the responsiveness of existing grievance procedures.

The interview findings provide important explanations for these contrasting perceptions. Participants explained that complaints generally pass through prison officers, warders, or cell leaders before reaching senior administrators. However, respondents indicated that the speed and fairness of responses depend largely on the nature of the complaint. One participant explained that *"when complaints involve violence or security issues, staff usually respond quickly, but other complaints can take a long time before any action is taken."* This suggests that urgent security matters receive priority, whereas less serious grievances may remain unresolved for longer periods.

Participants further identified weaknesses in communication during the complaint-resolution process. Some respondents explained that inmates frequently submit complaints without receiving information regarding the outcome of their cases, creating uncertainty and reducing confidence in institutional grievance mechanisms. Others noted that certain complaints receive attention only after they develop into serious security concerns, indicating that prison authorities often respond reactively rather than preventively. Respondents equally attributed delays in complaint handling to overcrowding, staff shortages, and increasing workloads, explaining that prison officers frequently lack sufficient time to investigate every complaint thoroughly.

The findings also reveal that perceptions of fairness differ among inmates. Several participants believed that complaint outcomes sometimes depend on the officer responsible for handling the case or the individuals involved. Such perceptions reduce confidence in institutional grievance procedures and discourage some inmates from relying on formal mediation channels. Nevertheless, respondents acknowledged that complaint structures remain important because they provide recognised administrative avenues through which conflicts can be addressed before escalating into violence. Overall, the integrated findings suggest that although complaint-handling mechanisms constitute an essential mediation measure within the two prisons, their effectiveness remains limited by institutional capacity, procedural inconsistencies, and operational constraints.

➤ *Confidence in Reporting Conflicts without Fear of Intimidation or Reprisal*

The effectiveness of mediation depends not only on the existence of institutional grievance mechanisms but also on inmates' willingness to utilise them. The findings reveal that respondents generally lacked confidence in reporting conflicts without fear of intimidation or reprisal. Quantitative results indicate that 199 respondents expressed negative perceptions regarding their ability to report grievances safely, compared with 151 respondents who believed inmates could report complaints without fear. These findings demonstrate that concerns regarding victimisation and retaliation remain

significant barriers to effective conflict reporting within the two correctional institutions.

The qualitative findings explain the reasons underlying these perceptions. Participants consistently indicated that many inmates hesitate to report conflicts because they fear retaliation from fellow inmates or negative treatment after complaints become known. One participant observed that *"some inmates avoid reporting issues because they think they may later become targets,"* while another explained that *"certain inmates prefer silence because they fear being labelled as informants."* These responses demonstrate that informal social dynamics within the prison environment discourage many inmates from using formal grievance procedures even when such mechanisms are available.

Respondents also expressed concerns regarding confidentiality during the complaint process. Several participants indicated that complaints are not always handled privately, allowing information to circulate among inmates and exposing complainants to intimidation or hostility. Others explained that overcrowding and limited staff make it difficult for prison authorities to provide adequate protection to inmates after complaints have been submitted. Participants further noted that informal prison hierarchies sometimes discourage weaker inmates from reporting incidents involving influential inmate groups, thereby weakening confidence in institutional conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Although some respondents acknowledged that prison officers encourage inmates to report conflicts before they escalate, the findings indicate that fear, mistrust, and inadequate protection continue to undermine the effectiveness of institutional grievance procedures. Consequently, the willingness of inmates to participate fully in mediation processes remains constrained by broader social and institutional conditions within the prison environment.

➤ *Preventive Peacebuilding Through Educational, Socio-Cultural and Sensitisation Programmes*

Beyond responding to conflicts after they occur, prison authorities also employ preventive strategies intended to reduce the likelihood of interpersonal disputes. The quantitative findings reveal generally unfavorable perceptions regarding the implementation of socio-cultural, educational, and sensitisation programmes within Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison. While 160 respondents agreed that prison authorities encourage socio-cultural and educational activities to prevent conflicts, 193 respondents expressed the contrary view, indicating that a larger proportion perceived these initiatives as inadequate or inconsistently implemented. Similarly, respondents expressed divided opinions regarding regular sensitisation on acts of indiscipline and interpersonal conflicts, with 175 respondents indicating that such activities occur and 183 expressing dissatisfaction with their frequency and consistency. These findings suggest that although preventive programmes exist within the prison system, their implementation remains irregular and insufficient to meet the needs of the prison population.

The qualitative findings provide a clearer understanding of these perceptions. Participants explained that prison

authorities occasionally organise vocational training, religious programmes, sports activities, counseling sessions, and awareness campaigns aimed at reducing inmate idleness and promoting peaceful coexistence. One participant observed that *"there are vocational activities and religious programs that help inmates stay engaged,"* while another explained that *"sports and recreational activities are sometimes organised, especially during special events."* Respondents further indicated that programmes such as tailoring, carpentry, counseling, and behavioral guidance provide constructive opportunities for inmates and help reduce tensions arising from prolonged idleness within the prison environment.

Despite these positive experiences, participants consistently highlighted significant limitations affecting the sustainability of these interventions. Many explained that educational and socio-cultural activities occur irregularly because of inadequate resources, overcrowding, and limited institutional support. One respondent stated that *"these activities are not regular because there are not enough materials or resources,"* while another remarked that *"only a small number of inmates benefit from the programs because of overcrowding."* Participants also indicated that security concerns frequently interrupt planned activities, with one respondent explaining that *"maintaining discipline and security usually comes before organising educational activities."* These accounts demonstrate that preventive peacebuilding initiatives are often subordinated to immediate operational priorities within the prisons.

Interview participants equally acknowledged the contribution of external stakeholders to prison peacebuilding. Religious organisations, chaplains, and non-governmental organisations were reported to support counselling sessions, vocational training, awareness campaigns, and rehabilitation activities. However, respondents emphasised that such interventions occur only occasionally and are insufficient to address the broader rehabilitation needs of inmates. Participants further observed that prolonged idleness contributes significantly to conflict within the prison environment and stressed that regular educational, vocational, recreational, and sensitisation programmes could substantially reduce interpersonal tensions if implemented more consistently. Collectively, the integrated findings indicate that preventive peacebuilding initiatives are recognised as valuable conflict prevention measures but remain constrained by institutional limitations, inadequate resources, and irregular implementation.

➤ *Overall Assessment of the Implementation of Mediation Measures*

The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study provide a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of mediation measures within Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison. Collectively, the evidence demonstrates that prison authorities have adopted multiple conflict-resolution strategies aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence among inmates. These include dialogue and mediation before punishment, formal complaint-handling procedures, disciplinary hearings, educational and sensitisation programmes, socio-cultural

activities, counselling, and the involvement of chaplains, inmate leaders, and external organisations in supporting conflict management. However, the extent to which these measures are implemented varies considerably across the two correctional institutions, resulting in differing perceptions among respondents regarding their effectiveness.

The quantitative findings consistently revealed mixed perceptions across the indicators examined under this objective. While a slight majority of respondents acknowledged that dialogue and mediation are frequently employed before punishment is imposed, opinions remained divided regarding the fairness and timeliness of complaint handling, opportunities to report grievances without fear of intimidation, and the regular implementation of preventive educational and sensitisation programmes. Similarly, respondents expressed concerns regarding the consistency of disciplinary procedures and the accessibility of conflict-resolution mechanisms. These variations indicate that mediation measures exist within both correctional institutions but are not implemented uniformly across all aspects of prison administration.

The qualitative findings provide important explanations for these quantitative patterns. Participants consistently acknowledged the commitment of prison authorities to resolving conflicts peacefully whenever circumstances permit. Interview respondents described numerous situations in which prison officers encouraged dialogue, facilitated reconciliation, promoted apology between disputing inmates, and relied on both formal and informal mediation to restore order. Participants also recognised the contribution of chaplains, experienced inmates, religious organisations, and non-governmental organisations in supporting peacebuilding efforts through counselling, awareness campaigns, vocational activities, and behavioral guidance programmes. These accounts demonstrate that mediation has become an established component of prison conflict management within the two correctional institutions.

Despite these positive efforts, participants equally identified persistent institutional and operational constraints limiting the consistent implementation of mediation measures. Across all themes, respondents repeatedly referred to overcrowding, staff shortages, inadequate resources, increasing workloads, security pressures, irregular educational programmes, limited mediation training, and fear of intimidation when reporting grievances. These factors were consistently identified as reducing opportunities for sustained dialogue, delaying complaint resolution, limiting access to preventive programmes, and encouraging greater reliance on disciplinary responses during periods of institutional pressure. The qualitative evidence therefore explains why respondents expressed contrasting perceptions regarding the effectiveness of existing mediation measures despite acknowledging their availability within the prison environment.

The statistical analysis further confirms these observations. The One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) produced an F-value of 237.2363, which exceeded the critical F-value of 2.578739, while the significance value ($1.28 \times$

10^{-29}) remained far below the 0.05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating statistically significant differences in respondents' perceptions regarding the implementation of mediation measures within Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison. This statistical evidence reinforces the qualitative findings by demonstrating that the implementation of mediation measures is neither uniform nor consistently experienced across the prison population.

Overall, the integrated mixed-methods findings demonstrate that mediation measures constitute an important component of prison conflict management within the two correctional institutions. Dialogue, complaint-handling mechanisms, educational programmes, counseling services, and informal mediation structures all contribute to reducing tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence among inmates. Nevertheless, their effectiveness remains constrained by institutional, administrative, and operational challenges that affect consistency in implementation. The findings therefore suggest that while significant progress has been made in integrating mediation into prison conflict management, strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring more consistent implementation of existing mediation measures remain essential for improving conflict resolution and supporting sustainable peacebuilding within Cameroon's correctional institutions.

Foundations for mediation-based conflict resolution, strengthening institutional capacity, improving consistency in programme implementation, and expanding preventive peacebuilding interventions remain essential for enhancing the effectiveness of mediation measures in reducing recurring inmate conflicts.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ Conclusion

This study examined the implementation of mediation measures in managing inmate conflicts within Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison, Cameroon. Using a mixed-methods research design, the study integrated quantitative and qualitative evidence to assess the extent to which mediation mechanisms are implemented and how they contribute to conflict management within the two correctional institutions.

The findings demonstrate that prison authorities have incorporated a range of mediation measures into their conflict-management practices. Dialogue and mediation before punishment, complaint-handling mechanisms, disciplinary hearings, counseling, educational and sensitisation programmes, socio-cultural activities, and the involvement of chaplains, inmate leaders, and external organisations collectively form part of the existing prison conflict-resolution framework. These interventions reflect an institutional commitment to resolving inmate disputes through both formal and informal mechanisms rather than relying exclusively on punitive approaches.

However, the study equally established that the implementation of these mediation measures remains inconsistent. Although respondents acknowledged the existence of conflict-resolution mechanisms, both the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed considerable variations in their accessibility, fairness, and effectiveness. Dialogue and mediation were generally applied to minor disputes, while more serious incidents frequently resulted in immediate disciplinary action. Similarly, complaint-handling procedures, educational programmes, and sensitisation activities were found to exist but were implemented unevenly because of institutional and operational constraints.

The qualitative evidence further demonstrated that overcrowding, staff shortages, inadequate resources, increasing workloads, security pressures, irregular educational activities, limited mediation training, and fear of intimidation when reporting grievances significantly influence the implementation of mediation measures. These institutional challenges reduce opportunities for sustained dialogue, limit access to preventive peacebuilding programmes, and affect inmates' confidence in existing grievance mechanisms. Consequently, mediation measures, although recognised as valuable components of prison conflict management, have not yet achieved their full potential in promoting consistent and sustainable peace within the correctional environment.

Overall, the study concludes that mediation has become an important component of prison conflict management within Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison. Nevertheless, strengthening institutional capacity, improving the consistency of mediation practices, expanding preventive peacebuilding programmes, and enhancing confidence in prison grievance mechanisms remain essential for improving the effectiveness of mediation measures and fostering a more peaceful correctional environment.

➤ Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

First, prison authorities should institutionalise mediation by developing clear operational guidelines that promote the consistent use of dialogue and mediation before disciplinary sanctions are imposed, particularly in cases involving minor interpersonal disputes.

Second, prison administrations should strengthen complaint-handling mechanisms by ensuring timely responses to inmate grievances, improving transparency throughout the complaint process, and providing regular feedback to complainants in order to increase confidence in institutional conflict-resolution procedures.

Third, measures should be introduced to enhance confidentiality and protection for inmates who report conflicts or submit complaints. Creating greater confidence in grievance mechanisms would encourage early reporting of disputes and facilitate timely mediation before conflicts escalate.

Fourth, prison authorities should expand educational, vocational, socio-cultural, counseling, and sensitisation programmes aimed at reducing inmate idleness, promoting behavioral change, and strengthening peaceful coexistence within correctional institutions.

Fifth, regular capacity-building programmes should be organised for correctional personnel to strengthen practical mediation and conflict-resolution skills, thereby improving the consistency and quality of mediation interventions across different categories of inmate disputes.

Finally, greater collaboration should be encouraged between prison authorities, chaplains, social workers, non-governmental organisations, and other rehabilitation partners to strengthen preventive peacebuilding initiatives and support the effective implementation of mediation measures within Cameroon's correctional institutions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author acknowledges the authorities of Buea Central Prison and Douala New Bell Central Prison for granting access to conduct this study. Appreciation is also extended to all prison staff, inmates, and stakeholders who voluntarily participated in the research and shared their experiences. Their cooperation made this study possible.

REFERENCES

- [1]. J. M. Ruiz, *An introduction to prison management*. Madrid: Directorate General of Penitentiary Institutions, 2006.
- [2]. M. S. Fleisher and S. H. Decker, *An overview of the challenge of prison gangs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2001.
- [3]. A. Liebling and H. Arnold, *Prisons and their moral performance: A study of values, quality, and prison life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- [4]. C. Haney, *Reforming punishment: Psychological limits to the pains of imprisonment*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006.
- [5]. V. M. Ríos, *Life on the outside: The prison system and social reintegration*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007.
- [6]. E. Kimmet, "Prison conflict and conflict resolution: A review of theory and practice," *Journal of Correctional Administration*, vol. 43, no. 2, pp. 115–130, 2018.
- [7]. J. P. Lederach, *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997.
- [8]. S. Byrne, "Mediation and conflict resolution in correctional institutions," *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 299–321, 2007.
- [9]. K. Edgar and T. Newell, *Conflict resolution in prisons: A manual for prison staff*. Winchester, UK: Waterside Press, 2006.
- [10]. M. Cañada-Pancorbo, "Prison mediation as an alternative conflict resolution mechanism," *European Journal of Probation*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 112–126, 2015.

- [11]. K. Peart, J. Wallace, M. Brown, L. Smith, D. Johnson, and R. Thomas, "Mediation practices in correctional institutions: Contemporary perspectives on prison conflict management," *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, vol. 20, no. 1, pp. 35–52, 2024.
- [12]. R. Walmsley, *World prison population list*, 11th ed. London, UK: Institute for Criminal Policy Research, 2016.
- [13]. A. E. Bottoms, "Interpersonal violence and social order in prisons," *Crime and Justice*, vol. 26, pp. 205–281, 1999.
- [14]. P. Nfor, "Challenges of prison administration in Cameroon," *African Journal of Criminal Justice Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 41–58, 2020.
- [15]. T. Enoh, "Correctional reforms and prison management in Cameroon," *Cameroon Journal of Law and Society*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 66–84, 2019.