

Cultural Impediments to the Advancement of Universal Primary Education in the Mbororo Community in Cameroon: The Case of the North West Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This study stems from the poor advancement and achievement of Universal Primary Education (UPE) goals and objectives in the Mbororo communities of Cameroon". The aim of the article was to assess the Cultural Impediments to the advancement of Universal Primary Education in the Mbororo Community of Cameroon. The study was informed by Charles Darwin's Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunity and Bourdieu's Theory of Cultural Capital. Through the sequential explanatory design, all the Mbororos in the North West Region were targeted and 315 pupils as well as 63 parents from 7 divisions were sampled using the convenience and snow-ball sampling techniques. With the aid of a questionnaire and an interview guide, first hand data were collected from the sampled participants and subsequently analysed using the SPSS version 23.0. The descriptive statistical tools used were frequency count and percentages while the hypotheses of the study were tested using the Chi-square test. The findings revealed that the P value was less than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$) and the respective Nagelkerke value for culture was 0.320. This indicates that the culture of the Mbororos impede the advancement of Universal Primary Education in the Mbororo communities.

On the basis of the findings, the study concluded that the culture of the Mbororos is an impediment to the advancement of UPE in the Mbororo communities of the North West Region of Cameroon. It was recommended that, cultural content in the current curriculum should be improved and efforts should be made to sensitize teachers about the Mbororo culture so as to motivate Mbororo children to enroll in school. Government policies on the education of the indigenous people should be reviewed under the Universal Primary Education framework.

Introduction

The Mbororos are semi-nomadic cattle-rearing communities who have faced discrimination since their arrival in Cameroon in the early 1900s. They are a sub ethnic - group of the largest nomadic cattle rearers in the world. The Fulanis are spread across West, Central and North Africa (Pelican, 2004). Many Mbororos live in isolation, in small remote communities and speak a dialect of Fulfulde called "kano-katsina Mbororo fulbe". Many of them prefer Arabic to western education and they are mostly found in the grassland areas of Cameroon, where they undertake cattle rearing as their main economic activity.

According to MBOSCUDA (2005), the Mbororos have four lamidats in Cameroon, their paramount traditional institution. The four lamidats are found in Sabga in the North West Region, Didango in the West Region, Lompta in Adamawa and Figuil in the Northern Region of

Cameroon. Social facilities like schools, hospitals, pipe-borne water, electricity are limited in the Mbororo communities. The Mbororos are found mostly on hilltops and fringes of the savanna zones in Cameroon. These hilltop and fringe locations make it difficult for educational facilities and other basic necessities to be made available to them.

The Mbororos of Cameroon are identified with the Mbororo cows. Mr. Issa a Fulani pastoralist (personal communication, October 14, 2018), describes a respectable Mbororo as one who lives on the hills and owns cows as well as a family; he noted that to a Mbororo, cows are a source of life and wealth from God, and anyone who abandons the hills for town life is a Sinner (Kaddo). He feels that the teachings of the Koran are better than those of Western education. He grieved that Mbororo youths living in towns are irresponsible and not “Allah-fearing”. This gives the impression that Mbororos are comfortable with their isolated life style. Considering the fact many Mbororos live in self-isolation, they do not easily access basic facilities like portable water, electricity, health care services and are far off from educational facilities.

The Mbororos represent one of the minority groups of Cameroon with a unique culture and traditional practices. Some of their religious, cultural norms and practice are dissenting with those of formal education; they are mostly Muslims, living a nomadic lifestyle. Some of them believe that formal education is a strategy to brainwash, discourage and wipe out their rich cultural heritage in an attempt to convert them to Christianity (Dah, 1986). Some Mbororos still have a negative view about western education and see little benefit in school, since the content of what is taught often conflict with their cultural beliefs and values. They tend to be less concern about formal education, thereby making the advancement of UPE in the Mbororo communities difficult.

Culture is the social heritage of a people that is passed on from preceding generations, through learning (Aletum, 2008). It involves the customs, values, beliefs, and way of thinking and behaviour of the people. Culture is inherent in the way of life of groups of people, that is, their beliefs and ways of doing things.

UNESCO recognizes the importance of culture in the promotion of education across the world, and advocates for the right of cultural preservation to promote the advancement of education in a pluralistic but unified world. This, therefore, means that cultural diversity is a push factor to the advancement of education.

This study is developed on the premise that in the Mbororo Communities of the North West Region of Cameroon, the culture of the Mbororos, which supposedly ought to have been promoting education as stated by UNESCO (2023) on the rights of cultural preservation, instead perturbed the advancement of education. The Mbororos are mostly found in scattered self-isolated settlements on hilltops and valleys in the savanna areas where it is hard-to-find schools. This research therefore seeks to assess the cultural impediments to the advancement of UPE in the Mbororo communities of the North West Region of Cameroon.

Background

Mbororo Culture

Culture is the traditional mode of conduct practiced by a given group of people and transmitted from one generation to another as a body of traditions either by writing or by oral transmission. Therefore, the sum totals of the traditions of people make up their culture. Culture is the social heritage acquired by a people from preceding generations through learning, which is distinguished from the biological heritage that is passed on automatically through the genes (Aletum, 2008). It is the way of life of a particular group of people at a particular time. Culture is a word for the 'way of life' of groups of people, that is, the way they do things or how they behave.

Different groups may have different cultures. While culture is passed on to the next generation through learning, genetics is passed on by heredity. As Aletum (2008) notes, culture is expressed through people's writing, religion, music, clothes, and cooking. The concept of culture is therefore very complicated, and the word has many meanings. The word "culture" is most commonly used in three ways.

1. Excellence of taste in the fine arts and humanities,
2. An integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behaviour,
3. The outlook, attitudes, values, morals, goals, and customs shared by a society.

In a general sense, 'culture' includes all human phenomena which are not purely results of human genetics. Cultures constantly change as people move and communicate with new groups of people and they are the embodiments of ethnic groups, communities and countries. Each ethnic group has different cultural activities and cultural rituals. Culture includes material goods, the things the people use and produce. It is the beliefs and values of the people and the ways they think about and understand the world and their own lives (Graham, 1921).

The culture of the Mbororos is guided by "pulaaku", which is a code of conduct that guides them and it is respected by Mbororos of good morals. "Pulaaku" is divided into three aspects consisting of the following:

Sempede: This implies respect for "allah" the almighty, respects for oneself and be humble for others, abide to the cultural norms and values of the Mbororos (MBOSCUDA, 2005).

Munyal: Meaning patience, i.e., to be patient in all your endeavours. Avoid blind competition and imitation, and finally; do not run more than your shadow (MBOSCUDA, 2005)

Hackizo: Meaning knowledge and wisdom, i.e., to think before you leap, understand and respect the culture and the tradition of the Mbororos; the youth should respect the culture; be intelligent and have a sound knowledge about "Allah" the creator of all and a sound knowledge in cattle rearing which is a gift from "Allah" (MBOSCUDA, 2005).

Pulaaku provides both a moral framework and a code of conduct to the pastoral Mbororo Fulani. This code of conduct is intimately bound up with nomadic pastoralist and with good animal husbandry. It is also bounded by the fulfilment of duties to elders, wives, the lineage group, and the proper arrangement of marriages (MBOSCUDA, 2014). The four dominant pillars of "pulaaku" have been identified as fortitude in adversity and the ability to accept misfortune (munyal); sound common sense and manners (hakkiiilo); reserve and modesty in personal relations (semteende); and dignity (neddaaku). To the Mbororo Fulani, "pulaaku" makes them unique and different. It is about dignity and hiding problems. Pulaaku functions as a means of maintaining an ethnic boundary around the Mbororo category, such that it describes an ideology of racial and cultural distinctiveness and superiority that ranks the Mbororo Fulani above all other ethnic groups (MBOSCUDA, 2005; Pelican, 2008).

The Mbororo Fulani equate their distinctive pastoral way of life with their ethnic origin, to the extent that "there is a strong attachment to the idea of ethnic exclusiveness" (Steening, 1959, p. 388). There is also a continued tendency to marry within migratory groups, often with close cousins, as a means of preserving "pulaaku".

According to Bouba (2012), the Mbororo tradition gives little recognition to a woman. This explains why they are often subjected to early marriages (12-13) years, which affect their education. To Bouba, the illiteracy rate of Mbororo Fulani women is around 98% according to data collected in 2011 by the Cameroon Indigenous Women Forum. Their lack of education hinders them from playing any major role in the social, economic and political affairs of the country. The situation is worst and a very sad one for the girl child whom at times is forced into underage marriage.

The Mbororo culture is different from that of other Fulani groups. A majority of them live in the suburbs and the level of illiteracy within them is too high. They keep their children beside them to teach them their culture, before they integrate with the wider society. The few wealthy parents in the suburbs hire the services of a Maloum (master of Quranic school) to teach their children Arabic. Many of the Mbororos keep their children at home because of the fear that their culture can be eradicated by Western education (formal education). However, the few educated parents send their children to school, even when they are living in the suburbs; they make sure their children go to school. They send them to dormitory schools or to relatives, where school is accessible (Mohammed, 2014).

In the past, the Mbororos reared cattle primarily not for economic reasons, but for their cultural identity, which limited the education of the Mbororos as some of them were unable to raise money to properly educate themselves and their children. Thus, the more cows one had, the more respect they were accorded in the community (Pelican, 2008). A Mbororo man without cows was culturally not respected irrespective of the wealth they might have accumulated. When a boy is put to birth, a female cow is immediately identified for him with the intention that before he attains maturity; he would be in possession of a herd (40-50 cows) (Song, 2022). This wealth at birth, could be used to afford good quality education to Mbororo children. Rather, the contrary is true as many of them are encouraged to go after their cattle and get married at a young age. It therefore goes without saying that this cultural state of affairs in Mbororo communities negatively affect the advancement of UPE.

Universal Primary Education

Universal Primary Education (UPE) is a global developmental growth literacy campaign which aims at giving every child irrespective of your physical status the opportunity to receive fundamental basic education. This will help fight illiteracy, poverty, gender discrimination, and promote the externalities of basic education. It constitutes the second of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and goal four on the Sustainable Development Goals. Achieving UPE is a priority to many nations especially developing countries like Cameroon. This educational commitment was inspired by the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education for All (EFA) and the Dakar framework of action Senegal (2000). Many developing nations today, Cameroon inclusive, include UPE in their priority option of their educational projects and development agenda.

The provision of education and literacy for all is the focus of UPE advancement. This is in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on Basic Human Rights and the Jomtien Declaration of 1990 (Galabawa, 2001). UPE is a national programme implemented by various ministries, departments and agencies. It is offered to parents who want their children to attend free public primary education. The government guarantees access, equity, quality and relevance of basic education, which is affordable to the majority of the people. The advancement of UPE is done through:

1. Establishing, providing and maintaining quality education standards;
2. Providing the minimum necessary facilities and resources;
3. Making basic education equitable in order to eliminate disparities and inequalities;
4. Equipping every individual child with the basic skills and knowledge with which to exploit the environment for self and national development.

The UPE that started as political pronouncement and commitment is now considered as government priority project (Government of Uganda, 2016). All stakeholders have embraced the programme to meet its intended objectives and outcomes. Both the central and local governments play important role in the advancement of UPE. UPE is a major transformation in the lives of the world's youngest children, especially in relation to schooling. Education is now recognized as a universal human right with every child's right to education re-affirmed by the

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28 (United Nations, 1989), “Make primary education compulsory and available free for all. This principle was translated into the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1990) and in the targets set out in the Dakar Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000). The main objective of UPE, is that all children have access to inclusive good-quality primary education.

Research Methods

A mixed method approach was used to collect data from the Mbororos in the seven Divisions of the North West Region of Cameroon. Primary data were collected using questionnaires administered to the Mbororo-Fulani primary school children and complemented with an interview guide with Mbororo parents and education stakeholders in the Mbororo communities. Their views and opinions were used to complement other findings of the study. A four-point Likert scale questionnaire pertaining to the variables of the study was used. A total of 315 questionnaires were administered using the purposive and convenient sampling technique and all 315 questionnaires were filled and returned on the spot.

Data were analyzed using two approaches, the qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The descriptive statistical tools used were frequency count and percentages while the hypotheses of the study were tested using the Binary logistic regression model test which works in association with the Chi-square test. The Binary logistic regression model was preferable over the normal Chi-square test because the overall score of UPE was computed from the test items used and each of the test items for culture were correlated to find out the influence of the items on the advancement of UPE.

The study was informed by Charles Darwin’s classical liberal theory of equal Opportunity and Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital. These theories were reviewed because of their input on the role of culture in educational advancement. The proponents of classical liberal theory argued that each person is born with a given amount of capacity, which to a large extent is inherent and cannot be substantially changed. Thus, educational systems should be designed so as to remove barriers of any nature such as economic, gender, cultural and geographical barriers (Sherman and Wood, 1982), as cited in Orodho (2004). The theory demands that everybody be given access to education to develop intellectual skills relevant to the society in which they are found, which helps to reduce class struggle. The theory further states that social mobility can be promoted by equal opportunity of education.

The cultural capital theory on its part, argues that cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society and the ability to understand and use “educated” language. The possession of cultural capital varies with social class, yet the education system assumes the possession of cultural capital. This makes it very difficult for lower class pupils to succeed in the education system. Bourdieu’s view is that cultural capital is inculcated in the higher-class home, and enables higher class children to gain higher educational credentials than lower class children. This enables higher class individuals to maintain their high class position at the detriment of lower class children.

Finally, findings were presented using frequency distribution tables, thematic tables with all inferential statistics presented at a 95% confidence interval with alpha set at 0.05 levels, missing value analysis (MVA). The missing value analysis was computed to calculate the proportion of data that were missing, given that the participants did not respond to all the test items. $MVA = \frac{\text{Total number of missing response}}{\text{Total number of expected responses}} * 100$. The total number of missing responses = 79 and the total number of expected responses = 8,820. Therefore, the percentage of missing responses was 0.9%, which is less than 1%. The implication here is that only 0.9% of the data were missing, which is far below the recommended threshold of 5% (Nana, 2012). Therefore, the 0.9% of missing data has no effect on the findings of the study;

hence none of the test items with missing responses was discarded for analysis.

Presentation of Findings

The Findings of the study were presented using the stretched and collapsed format. In the stretched format, the participant's responses were presented based on the four-point Likert scale meanwhile, in the collapsed format, responses for strongly agree and agree were grouped together and that for disagree and strongly disagree grouped together. The main objective of the study was to examine the cultural impediments to the advancement of UPE in the Mbororo communities of the North West Region of Cameroon.

The findings revealed that, Mbororo children in their majority still hold tight to their cultural values. For instance, a majority of the Mbororo children 216(69.0%) disagreed that the distinctive ethnic nature of Mbororos hinders education. Also, while 142 (45.7%) of the children agreed that the rate of early marriages in the Mbororo communities has greatly reduced, a significant proportion of the children 169 (54.3%) disagreed. Findings equally showed that a majority of the Mbororo children 210 (67.3%) and 182 (58.3%) respectively pay adequate attention to their traditional dances within their communities and pay less attention to official languages (French and English). Finally, while 145 (46.5%) of the Mbororo children disagreed that little attention is given to women, 167(53.5%) of the Mbororo children agreed. The results are presented on table 1 below.

Table 1: Cultural impediments to educational advancement in the Mbororo communities

Test items	Stretched				Collapsed	
	Strongly agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Strongly disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	SA/A	D/SD
The distinctive ethnic nature of Mbororos hinders education.	33 (10.5%)	64 (20.4%)	100 (31.5%)	116 (37.1%)	79 (31.0%)	216 (69.0%)
The rate of early marriages (children getting married at 11-14 years) has greatly reduced in the Mbororo communities.	32 (10.3%)	110 (35.4%)	113 (36.3%)	56 (18.0%)	142 (45.7%)	169 (54.3%)
Pastoral nature distresses education.	28 (9.0%)	74 (23.7%)	152 (48.7%)	58 (18.6%)	102 (32.7%)	210 (67.3%)
We are obliged to attend cultural feasts, marriage ceremonies and practice traditional dances, and to speak only our dialect (Fulfulde language).	57 (18.3%)	73 (23.4%)	148 (47.4%)	34 (10.9%)	130 (41.7%)	182 (58.3%)
Little consideration is given to women in the Mbororo communities (marriage ceremonies, cultural feast, tender cattle, dance etc).	63 (20.2%)	104 (33.3%)	110 (35.3%)	35 (11.2%)	169 (53.5%)	146 (46.5%)
Multiple response set	213 (13.7%)	425 (27.2%)	623 (39.9%)	299 (19.2%)	638 (40.9%)	922 (59.1%)

Source: Research 2020

To gain more inside on the matter under investigation, interviews were conducted on Mbororo parents on the possibility of using the Mbororo culture to influence the advancement of UPE

within the Mbororo communities. When parents were asked if they think providing children the opportunity to marry when they are matured and ready would lead to the advancement of UPE in the Mbororo communities, majority of the participants agreed and further explained that children, particularly the girls will stay at home with their parents and it will help them complete their primary education as depicted in some of their statements

“Yes. This is because many girls will stay with their parents and go to school.” Many girls love school, but as our culture demands, we get married at younger ages, because Islam doesn’t require the faithful to chase men or women”. “Yes, when girls are allowed to attain the age of marriage as stated by law, they will have finished primary school and certainly transcend to another level”.

Another explanation from the participants is that allowing children to get married when ready and mature will help some children to even enroll into secondary and high schools. As depicted in some of their statements; *“Some parents who are viable would even continue to afford for education at the next level which is secondary. All these will lead to advancement of UPE”.*

Besides these reasons, some participants said presently, children in the Mbororo communities have developed the desire to become teachers, medical doctors and nurses, as depicted in some of their statements; *“Some of our girls now even talk about what they will like to become in future like doctors, nurses, and teachers.*

The above suggestions are controversial, given that the responses point positively to the advancement of UPE in the Mbororo community. But, the responses are not supported by immediate action to modify some aspects of their culture that may have been a hindrance to UPE advancement in their communities.

The summary of their views is presented on table 2 below.

Table 2: Parents opinion as to whether if children get married when they are ready and matured, it will promote the advancement of UPE

Question: Do you think that providing children the opportunity to marry when they are matured and ready would lead to the advancement of UPE in the Mbororo community?	Justifications		
	Themes	Groundings	Sampled quotation
Yes	Result to the completion of primary school	7	<p>“Yes. This is because many girls will stay with their parents and go to school.” Many girls love school but as our culture demands, we get married at younger ages, because Islam doesn’t require the faithful to chase men or women.”</p> <p>“Yes, when girls are allowed to attain the age of marriage as stated by law, they will have finished primary school and certainly transcend to another level.”</p> <p>“Certainly yes. This is because when</p>

			<p>girls are allowed to attain the age of marriage as stated by law 15 and 18 years for girls and boys, they would have finished primary education”</p> <p>Yes, this is because when girls are allowed to really get to their marriage ages as per the law, they would have finished primary education and even proceed to the secondary level.”</p> <p>“Yes, this is because many girls will stay with parents and because they are with their parents, they will have developed interest in schooling. Many of our girls now love schooling, but as the culture demands, woman should get married earlier because it is a bad practice in Islam to fornicate.”</p>
	Lead to enrolment into secondary and high schools	4	<p>“Some of the parents are even ready to send their children to secondary and high schools.”</p> <p>“Some parents who are viable would even continue to afford for education at the next level, which is secondary. All these will lead to advancement of UPE.”</p>
	Children now desire to become medical personnel and teachers	4	<p>“Many of our girls now even talk about what they like to become tomorrow like nurses, doctors and teachers.”</p> <p>“Some girls are even planning for a future carrier in professions like nursing, doctors and teaching.”</p>

Source: Researcher 2020

Conclusion

To conclude, the study aimed to examine the cultural impediments to the advancement of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the Mbororo Community in Cameroon. Findings revealed that, the majority of Mbororo children still hold tight to their cultural values, pay adequate attention to their traditional dances within their communities as regard official languages. Based on these, the study concluded that the culture of the Mbororos is an impediment to the advancement of UPE in the Mbororo communities of the North West Region of Cameroon. The purpose of this study was not just for intellectual discovery, but to motivate educational stakeholders to step up their efforts towards the advancement of UPE in the Mbororo communities. The Mbororos need to be adequately sensitized on the fact that education is a basic human right and a guarantor of upward social mobility, since it is only through education that the children of the rich and those of the poor can come to a common level. In fact, if culture must play a role in the education of the Mbororos, it should complement their educational efforts and not stifle them. Education gives a voice to the voiceless and offers equal opportunities for all. The elitist Mbororos should sensitize their fellow brothers on the fact that culture is dynamic, and can better be practiced if the masses are well educated.

Recommendations

In other to achieve UPE in the Mbororo community in particular and Cameroon in General, education stakeholders need to double their efforts and resources for basic education. Sensitization campaigns should be carried out in the Mbororo communities to increase interest in schooling by the Mbororos.

It was recommended that, in other to achieve UPE in the Mbororo community in particular and Cameroon in General, education stakeholders need to double their efforts and resources for basic education. cultural content in the current curriculum should be improved and efforts should be made to sensitize teachers about the Mbororo culture, to create awareness on the importance of education to individuals and the society and the important link between culture and education so as to motivate Mbororo children to enroll in school. Some of the cultural aspects of the Mbororos should be included in school extra-curricular activities. Mbororo Children should not be forced to do manual labour when fasting during the period of Ramadan and provision should be made for a prayer place in school premises and time allocated for prayer.

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