

Socio- Cultural Factors and the Academic Performance of Students in Secondary Schools in Bamenda, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This study examined socio-cultural factors and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Bamenda. The argument for this study anchored on's Socio-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky , 1979), Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and Gender Schema Theory (Bem , 1981). A cross sectional survey research design was used. Both purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used obtained the sample. The sample was made up of 256. Data obtained were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using cross tabulations, frequencies, percentages and multiple response sets. The Spearman's Rho correlation was used to test the specific research hypotheses. Findings on hypothesis one showed that there is a significant and positive relationship between language differences and the academic performance of students ($P\text{-value}=0.027<0.05$). Similarly, findings on hypothesis two showed that there is a very strong and positive relationship between family income and academic performance of students ($P\text{-value}=0.211>0.05$). Finally, findings on hypotheses three showed that there is a relatively significant and positive relationship between cultural beliefs and academic performance of students ($P\text{-value}=0.831>0.05$). Based on the findings, it was recommended, among others, that teachers should be able to meet students' academic, social and psychological needs, use different teaching methods, and be motivational in their teaching. This will help bridge deficiencies for students from unfavourable backgrounds.

KEYWORDS: *Socio-cultural factors, language differences, family income, cultural beliefs, academic performance.*

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The history of socio-cultural factors impacting the education of learners can be traced in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular during the period before 1844, that is, the pre-historic era, of the early man, where parents use cultural norms, values and beliefs, to raised and trained their children in conformity with the socio-cultural practices as evident in daily indoor and outdoor activities and routines (Mbua, 2002). Society and culture have an impact on every aspect of students' academic performance. Fonkeng & Ntembe (2009) revealed in their study that about 40% of women do not have access to formal education or are unable to go through the first year in school. This explains the difficulties faced by learners especially women in education.

Education today is faced with challenges on learners' background factors such as the haves and the have not which has played a considerable part in their education as regards to their performances in school. Hence, their background status could be a predictor of success. Moreover, poor performance of students can leads to serious negative psychological, social, and economic outcomes (Siqueira et al., 2011). In addition, Dev (2016) found out that poor school performance resulted in low self-esteem in children and significant stress to parents in India. Therefore, in an academic set-up, socio-cultural factors are those factors that affect the academic performance of students but originate from the unique circumstances surrounding their school or home. Consequently, Karande and Kulkarni (2005) posited that academic performance is one of the best measure of transfer of knowledge in

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modern society. Their study on the effects of socio-cultural factors on students' academic performance is important as they found that certain socio cultural factors could promote poor academic performance in a school. However, neither Dev (2016) nor Reche et al. (2012) elucidated what those particular socio-cultural factors were. The present study filled this gap by bringing out some specific socio-cultural factors that can contribute to students' academic performance.

Cultural beliefs vary and these have impacts on academic achievements (Afuwape & Oludipe, 2008). For instance, they inform a female student that she cannot afford so many years of study before marriage, she has to start raising children early, she can't be given so much financially for education since she will eventually be married away, she is delicate and should not go through stressful academic programs, she would be unsuitable or constitute a treat to potential suitors if so educated, and her education will be underutilised as she will definitely end up in a man's kitchen. (Lee-Rife et al., 2012) concluded that early marriage deprived a female child from basic education. Early pregnancy is a hindrance to a female child's education, and that a female child who is educated will dominate her husband. Unlike in developing countries, the subject of gender differences and medical education has been studied extensively in many developed countries (Bleakley, 2013). Little research has been carried out to address the influence of cultural beliefs and values on the academic outcome of students in Africa. This is particularly pertinent in this cohort of students who possess great potentials to excel at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, but yet encounter unique challenges.

The socioeconomic status of a parent impacts on the educational development and achievement of the child. Children from low-income families performed poorly in school on standardized achievement tests compared to their peers from high-income families (Lareau, 2000). Despite significant efforts to close this achievement gap, it remains one of the central challenges facing today's educational leaders. Extensive research suggests that a wide variety of factors interact together in different ways, cultures, and contexts to produce levels of inequality that in turn affect student achievement (Fry, 2007; Lareau, 2000, 2011).

Also, learning from socio-cultural perspective, as suggested by Vygotsky stressed the importance of language in cognitive development (Woolfolk et al., 2009). Hence the use of language as a medium of instruction in teaching may affect students' performance on the subject. Many studies have been conducted on factors that affect learning and achievement of students in schools. Previous studies indicated that many factors are associated with students' academic achievement. Among the factors that are given attention by researchers are self-efficacy and achievement motivation.

Statement of the Problem

Socio-cultural factors constitute some of the variables that influence the academic performance of students. For students to be able to succeed and perform well in school, certain socio-cultural factors must not be dominant. But from observation, many students in school speak native languages, some come from low family income, different religious backgrounds, have different cultural beliefs 'and different political convictions. Also, many have different social norms, values among others. As such many students feel isolated, inferior interacting with others, some become violent, rebellious, and mischievous, think they are unloved and feel like they have been treated unfairly. All these factors may exacerbate feelings of hopelessness or negative expectancies towards oneself and the future which have been associated with negative academic outcomes such as repeating classes, failing exams, high dropout rate, violence, depression, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviours', and accidental injury. With such challenges, it is not surprising that students in secondary schools in Bamenda perform poorly. Due to these, they all find it difficult to accommodate, interact and socialize with their peers, teachers and school authorities. Therefore, this study is out to investigate the relationship between socio-cultural factors and the academic performance of students in secondary schools in Bamenda.

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Research Hypothesis

Main Research Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the socio-cultural factors and the academic performance of students.

Specific Research Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between language differences and the academic performance of students.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between family income and academic performance of students.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between cultural beliefs and academic performance of students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural theory (1978)

Theories and previous studies connected to this research are reviewed. The theories explain the variables in the study. The socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky, which focuses on language, social and cultural influences on a child developing mind which are important to the study. To him children use cognitive tools to understand their surroundings and the world. They learn from the beliefs and attitudes modelled by their culture. Language to him was the basis of learning, developed through social interaction and used for communication purpose. Learning to him occurs through social interaction with skilful tutor. It is through these interactions that students can understand themselves better and be able to manage and cope with any challenges on their way. So this theory is relevant to the present study in that Parents, teachers, older siblings and peers are responsible in the training of the younger ones so they can inculcate in them positive moral values that will help mold them positively and once this occurs information is then integrated in the individual level. If poor interaction occurs, learning may be hindered which may lead to poor performance.

Banduras' Social Learning Theory (1977)

The social learning theory of Albert Bandura. Bandura in this theory emphasizes on the importance of observing and modelling the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. He called the process of social learning modelling, and children according to him are surrounded in the society by influential models such as parents within the family, friends within their peer groups and teachers at school. According to Bandura children's learning is heavily reliant on observation (Bandura, 1977). The question that can come to mind at this juncture is: Who do children observe and model themselves on? At the initial stage, these usually are parents and siblings and eventually friends, teachers, sporting heroes, TV characters, religious figures, and even cartoon characters. He further explained that the child who has seen her parents being kind and caring, being charitable, caring for the environment, being kind to animals, will eventually tend to be the same. However, the child who has seen problems being faced with violence, arguments occurring, wrongdoing being punished by hitting, will tend to grow up to be more aggressive or even worse and equally learn violent ways of addressing the Fortunately, most human behaviour is learned observationally through modelling. From observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. This theory is also connected to the present study in that students performance in school are been determined by learning experienced, observation, imitation and modelling when they learn and tried to put it into practice. Therefore learning occurs through socialization and observation which thereby improve on students' academic performance.

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Bem's Gender Schema Theory (1981)

The Gender Schema Theory of Sandra Bem is a cognitive theory of gender development, which holds that gender is a product of the norms of one's culture, (Bem, 1981). In other words, the theory focuses on the way people process and utilize the information that their culture provides about masculinity and femininity. This theory suggests that people process information, in part, based on gender-typed knowledge, children create cognitive schema of gender that they derive from the norms of their culture. According to her, this theory has become one of the important organizational structures in human society and as a result of it, children are expected to learn about their culture's conceptions of gender and incorporate those conceptions into their self-concept. For example, a traditional culture may maintain strict divisions between men and women, such that women are expected to take care of the household and raise children, while men work outside the home and support the family, or a culture where boys are to go to school while girls are to stay behind to assist their mothers in the kitchen. Children raised in such cultures will develop gender schema in line with what they observe, and through such schemas, they will develop an understanding of what they can do as a boy or girl.

On the other hand, in a more progressive culture, the distinctions between men and women might be less obvious, such that children see both men and woman pursuing careers and dividing chores at home. Still, children will look for clues about the differences between men and women in these cultures. Perhaps, they will notice that people respect powerful men but are dismissive of women who strive for power. This will impact children's gender schema and their understanding of the way their culture views appropriate roles for men and women. The gap between men and women is a measure of inequality. For instance, one can measure the gap between boys and girls in terms of health outcomes as well as educational level achieved and labour (Bem, 1981).

An equitable education system helps all learners developed the knowledge and skills they need to engaged and become productive members of the society. More importantly, giving all children an equitable start would lead to better economic and social outcome for individual regions and our nations. Also teachers should explain concepts with clarity and give examples from the children lived realities and use teaching aids as much as possible. They should also make use of eminent thinker on gender sensitivity. In relation to this work, most students conceive the idea that certain cultures are meant for the females while others are to be carried out by the men. This is because as they grow up, they are being restricted by their parents and the society to carry out certain duties and are rather given some other duties that the society considers feminine, for example, assisting the mother in the kitchen, washing the dishes. Consequently, this influences their choices and performance in school as student find themselves choosing feminine related trades such as home economics, fashion clothing and textile, thus influencing their choice of career in the future.

Empirical Review

This sub-section examines the views of other researchers on the relationship between socio-cultural factors and the academic performance of students in secondary schools in Bamenda. Bjorkman (2005) finds out that when families are constrained by fewer resources, children's learning is consequently affected. Lack of adequate resources and time amongst students were found to lead to low scores in class, especially on the girl child who was found to be mostly occupied with household chores making her to attain poor grades as compared with the boy child

Baptist (2004) notes and continues to elaborate that English which is the language of instruction in secondary schools is a problem in which most students are incompetent or have low proficiency in the language since it is mainly a classroom language used only in class and not outside; students are unable to fully benefit their education due to pedagogical hindrances where students understand very little and thus perform poorly in examinations. In relation to this, Jamillah (2016) elaborated that

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many learners could not master the language of instructions and they had very poor knowledge of vocabularies used in various subjects. Thus their poor capability in English limits their ability to understand concepts in various disciplines like Physics and Chemistry. Amir and Williams (1999) conducted a study on language and their findings were that some students think that their results depend on a force, beyond their control, which determines the eventual outcome of an event. They interviewed 38 students in their first year of secondary school (11–12 years old) about their concepts of chance and luck, their beliefs and attributions, and their probabilistic thinking. Some pupils thought God controls everything that happens in the world while others thought God chooses to control, or not control, anything in the world. There were also beliefs directly related to coins and dice, such as tossing ‘heads’ with a coin is lucky. They revealed in their findings that some students believe that their results depend on a force, beyond their control, which determines the eventual outcome of an event, while others think God controls everything that happens in the world, or chooses to control, or not control, anything in the world. There were also beliefs directly related to coins and dice, such as tossing ‘heads’ with a coin is lucky.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross sectional survey research design and was made up of 265 students selected from all the functional secondary schools in Bamenda I, II and III. The purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used in the study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the population since all schools were not functional, and the simple random sampling was used to select the classes and the respondents. The instrument used to collect data was a self-conducted questionnaire on Socio-cultural factors and the Academic performance of students in Bamenda. This instrument was used because it was less time consuming and less expensive. Face Validity, Content and Construct Validity were used to validate the instrument and a Pilot test was carried out using 20 students of GBHS Bayelle who constituted the target population but were not included in the sample. This process was meant to identify cases of ambiguity and other difficulties that the respondents could face in completing the questionnaire and also to check on the validity of the instrument as well as ensure that they had the same characteristics as those of the sample.

4. FINDINGS

Verification of Research Hypothesis One (Ho₁): There is no significant relationship between language differences and the academic performance of students.

Table 1: Relationship between Language Differences and the Academic Performance of Students

Correlations			
		Language differences	Students' academic performance
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient (R-value)	1.000	.027
	P-value	.027	.662
	N	256	256
. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Statistically, there is a significant and positive relationship between language differences and the academic performance of students ($P\text{-value}=0.027 < 0.05$). The positive sign of the correlation value ($R=0.662$) implies that students' academic performance was more likely to be high when they use variety of languages to study or for revision. The null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between language differences and academic performance of students was

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rejected and the alternative, which states that there is a significant relationship between language differences and academic performance of students was retained.

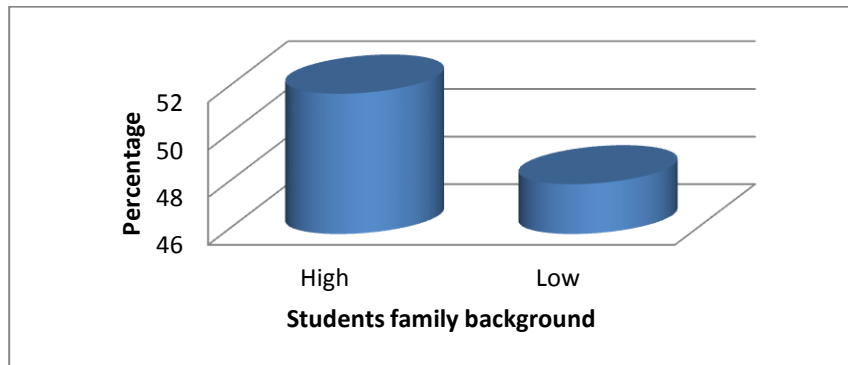


Figure 1: Level of students' family income

Verification of Hypotheses Two (Ho₂): There is no significant relationship between family income and academic performance of students.

Table 2: Relationship between Family Income and Academic Performance of Students

Correlations			
		Family income	Students' academic performance
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient (R-value)	1.000	.079**
	P-value	.079	.211
	N	256	256

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey 2020

Statistically, there is a significant and positive relationship between family income and academic performance of students ($P\text{-value}=0.079 > 0.05$). The positive sign of the correlation value ($R=0.211^{**}$) implies that academic performance of students was more likely to be high when their family income is high (rich). The null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between family income and academic performance of students, was rejected and the alternative, which states that there is a significant relationship between family income and academic performance of students, was retained.

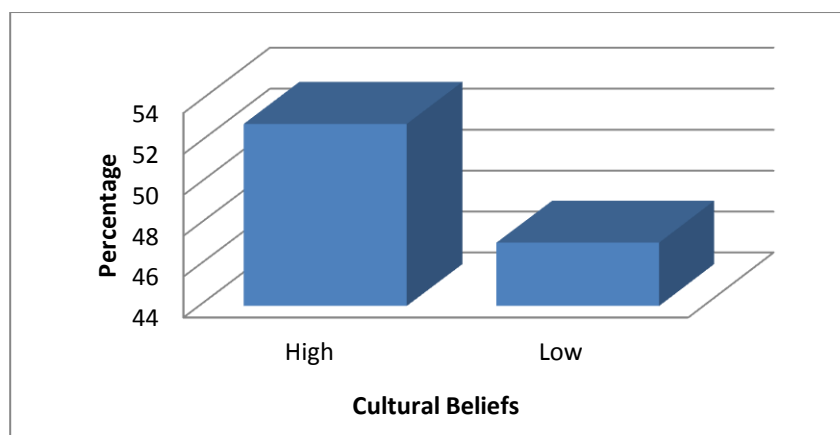


Figure 2: Level of Students' cultural beliefs

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Verification of Hypotheses three (Ho3): There is no Significant Relationship between Cultural Beliefs and Academic Performance of Students.

Table 3: Relationship between Cultural Beliefs and Academic Performance of Students

Correlations			
		Cultural beliefs of learners	Students' Academic performance
	Spearman's rho Correlation Coefficient (R-value)	1.000	.013
	P-value		.831
	N	256	256
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Field Survey 2020

Statistically, there is a significant and positive relationship between cultural beliefs and academic performance of students ($P\text{-value}=0.013 > 0.05$). The positive sign of the correlation value ($R=0.831$) implies that academic performance of students is more likely to be high when students cultural beliefs are considered. The null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between cultural beliefs and academic performance of students was rejected and the alternative, which states that there is a significant relationship between cultural beliefs and academic performance of students was retained.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Language Differences and the Academic Performance of Students

The results of the first research question focused on the relationship between language differences and the academic performance of students. Based on the research question, the findings revealed that, there is a significant and positive relationship between language differences and the academic performance of students. The positive sign of the relationship implied that students' academic performance is more likely to improve when they use variety of languages to study. This corroborates the findings of Collier & Thomas (2004) who observed that there is likelihood for students' academic performance to increase with the use of dual language. This is also supported by Vygotsky's (1978) in socio-cultural theory where he asserts that a person will normally think in his home language before translating into another language where necessary and when this translation fails, learning will fail to take place. Hence, when students use many languages to study, their academic performance will improve.

Relationship between Family Income and Academic Performance of Students

The second research objective focused on the relationship between family income and academic performance of students. From the findings, it shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between family income and academic performance of students. The positive relationship implied that academic performance of students is more likely to increase when their family income is high. Majority of the students in the study sample rejected the fact that they are from rich family backgrounds. This means that most of them come from homes where parents earn very little income which does not enable most of them to provide the basic school needs for their children. This shows that when income status is relatively low, children's academic performance is greatly hindered. For instance when a child gets his or her basic school necessities, including proper nutrition, the chances to succeed are high than a child who is unable to have them. Thus, Social dysfunction in any child may inhibit his or her ability to perform well in education.

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Families with limited resources to promote and support children's education create very stressful environments for their children's education according to the results of this study. This is in accordance with the findings of Ugwuja (2010) who concluded in his findings that students from high-income status parents enjoy considerable advantage in academic achievement than students of low income status parents. Ogwn (2004) went further to lay strong argument in favour of this by asserting that the high socio-economic status parents are able to provide their children with high quality books and other educational material to encourage them in their various learning activities at home.

The relationship between Cultural Beliefs and Academic Performance of Students

The findings show that there is a significant and positive relationship between cultural beliefs and academic performance of students. The positive sign of the relation implied that academic performance of students is more likely to be high when students' cultural beliefs are considered. Students come from diverse cultural background with some having a predisposition towards educational achievement because of cultural values, while others are prone to educational under achievement. Archer (1986) asserted that culture influences many aspects of our lives and once the teacher understands the learners' characteristics, he or she will best know how to manage them to have a significant outcome on performance.

CONCLUSION

The Management of students from diverse socio-cultural background in the school environment has increasingly become a course for concern in the world of today where the harbouring of learners from diverse backgrounds has become a major challenge of educational set ups. The major goal of this study was to investigate the relationship between socio-cultural factors and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Bamenda. From the findings it is therefore concluded that there is a strong positive relationship between socio-cultural factors and academic performance of students in secondary schools in Bamenda. This is supported by Biriye (2011) studies on the effects of socio-cultural factors on the academic performance of secondary school students. Based on the findings it was concluded that socio-cultural factors had effects on students' performance. Added to this, Vygotsky (1978) believed that much important learning by the child occurs through social interaction with skilful tutors who can inculcate positive socio-cultural values on children. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations are made to students, teachers, educational Administration, Parents and government to improvised means to help the students in their educational carrier. Parents should be made to realize the importance of education to their children so as to encourage them to learn and students should give attention to studies in school and at home. The educational administration should ensure that the language of instructions should be given special attention at all levels of Cameroon education and teachers should be motivational in their teaching and use different teaching methods so as to go along with all categories of students and lastly the government as well as members of the community should ensure that both the indigenous languages and foreign languages are promoted and they should also create more employment opportunities for graduates of various institutions of higher learning.

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