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Schooling and Transformation of the Social Representation of Education among the Baka Natives People of Southern Cameroon

¹Emmanuel Itong A Goufan, ²Pitoulia Asongleack, ³Tegue Jeanne

¹Université Adventiste COSENDAL de Nanga-Eboko, Institut des Sciences de l'éducation, Cameroun

^{2,3}University of Yaoundé 1, Science of Education, Curriculum and Evaluation, Cameroun

Corresponding Author: **Emmanuel Itong A Goufan**

Abstract

The schooling of children is now an undoubtable reality among the native Baka of Southern Cameroon. But, the statistics are far from satisfactory because parents still continue to provide their offspring with an ethno-ecological education based on their centuries-old habits and customs. There are then two different educational practices that referred to two different social representation of education. Thus, the problem of the present study whose the main question is to know if the fact for the parents to send their children to school has led to a transformation of their social representation of education. Based on the central core

theory, we have formulated the hypothesis that the schooling of children acts coercively on parents mind, and led them to homogenize their social representation of education. This has been operationalize into two research hypotheses all confirmed by the test of centrality of empirical data collected through directive interviews conducted with 200 Baka. This led us to conclude that, despite a deep cultural anchorage, the registration and the attendance of young pigmies in publics schools triggered in their parents, a slow but irreversible structural change in their social representation of education and any other related object.

Keywords: Education, Schooling, Social Representation

1. Introduction

Education is very important for society. Indeed, it is through education that society seeks solutions to most of the contradictions, difficulties, upheavals, etc., that affect it. Therefore, it is not surprising that we are witnessing a true explosion of education today. Cameroon is no exception. However, parents seem more concerned with the personal development, social success, economic needs, and socio-professional integration of their children. This is why the state has defined the objectives of the educational system and implemented educational policies to ensure quality education for all citizens, regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds.

These policies are meticulously followed by all sociological groups that make up the Cameroonian population. However, some minority still strongly resist "foreign education" for their children, particularly the Baka pygmies of Southern Cameroon. Nevertheless, for several decades now, maternal and primary schooling has become a reality in their daily lives. At the same time, young people receive from their parents an ethno-ecological education based on their age-old customs and traditions (Bigombé Logo, 1995)^[6]. Thus, there is an unresolved conflict between modern education and traditional education. In these times where the government promotes national unity, social integration, "living together," and especially emergence by 2035, it seems relevant to focus on the issue of European education among this indigenous people of the vast virgin equatorial rainforest that is an integral part of the Cameroonian populace.

1.1 Problematic

All projects aimed at the schooling of "minorities in distress" in Cameroon, particularly the Baka pygmies, initiated since 1970 by various ministries responsible for social affairs, have ended in almost total failure. The main reason is that the pygmies are fundamentally rooted in their culture and closed off from the world. Indeed, convinced that any relationship with the Bantus would lead to a loss of their identity (Althabe, 1965: 15), they respond to governmental solicitations either with a "yes of refusal," total indifference, or by retreating or isolating themselves in the unfathomable depths of the forest. This situation reflects the difficulty of reconciling their traditional logics with official norms, hence the socio-cultural conflict referred to as

the "pygmy problem." Education is part of this.

However, it must be noted that for almost twenty years now, some pygmies have agreed to send their children to school (Boursier, 1991; Nlem Nlem, 1992) [7, 19], and today this practice has become quite common (Mayoh Mboum, 1999) [14]. In fact, more than 9.45% of young pygmies attend either public institutions in cities or public schools established in forest camps or neighboring villages (Abega, 1998) [1]. Moreover, we are already witnessing the emergence of a pygmy intellectual elite. However, this Western education received in public schools is accompanied by an ethno-ecological education provided by parents (Atsiga Essala, 1992) [5]. Based on Flament (1987) [11], who showed that practices are always in line with social representations (SR), this coexistence of two very different educational systems implies two different SR of education. However, Jodelet (1985) [13] has proven that there cannot be multiple SR for the same object within the same social group. This ambivalence constitutes the main problem of this study. In light of the controversy it raises, the question is whether the core of the social representation (SR) of education among parents who send their children to school is different from that of parents who do not. In other words, has the schooling of children exerted a constraining influence on the SR of education for parents to the point of homogenizing them? This concern reveals the main objective of the study, which is to verify the uniqueness of the core of the SR of education among Pygmy parents who are either opposed to or in agreement with national educational policy.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Schooling, Education, and Pedagogy

Schooling refers to the act of enrolling a child in school, allowing them to receive instruction from an educational institution. It typically begins with preschool and primary education. Education is an action aimed at "eliciting and developing in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual, and moral states that are required of him by both society as a whole and the specific environment for which he is particularly destined" (Durkheim, 1985: 63) [9]. Its ambition is to provide young people with the resources they need to integrate harmoniously into their environment (Dewey, 1973) [8] and/or to adapt to it (Piaget, 1967) [20]. Therefore, education can be understood as a set of collective dispositions through which a society initiates its youth into the values that characterize its civilization. It would then be a diffuse, implicit, and spontaneous conditioning. Thus, it can be apprehended as: a) an institution, meaning it becomes an organization aimed at educating citizens, functioning according to specific rules and exhibiting stability; b) an action of socialization for the youth; c) content, meaning a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors to be transmitted; d) a product, a goal that the undertaken action or established institution aims for. It encompasses learning, training, teaching, and instruction.

Pedagogy, on the other hand, encompasses four meanings: a) it is the art, gift, or talent of teaching acquired through intuition or observation of facts and realities or educational situations (Ardoino and Berger, 1989) [4]; b) it is a technique insofar as it refers to a set of processes, methods indicating operations to be performed to achieve an educational outcome; c) it is a theoretical reflection in that it results from thoughts and ideas expressed by individuals at a given time in response to a specific reality (Mialaret, 1983); d) [15] it is a

science because it is based not only on objective and precise data but also has its own object and methods of study (Tsafak, 2001) [21]. It is also understood that education has relationships with pedagogy similar to those that science has with action. Indeed, education results from the application of pedagogy; it is pedagogy that produces education: One cannot educate without pedagogy.

2.2 Multicultural Education, Ethnocentrism, and Nationalism

Multicultural education is an education for pluralism, intended for a population or country that experiences diversity, variety, and sociocultural differences. It is characterized by the coexistence of learners from different cultural backgrounds and by an educational process caused by the internalized coexistence of multiple cultures (Lévi-Strauss, 1983). It is essential for pluralistic countries like Cameroon, where the task of social reconciliation is increasingly current and urgent as multiculturalism faces the forces of two segregationist concepts: Ethnocentrism and nationalism. It is enough for one of the cultural differences between peoples to be associated with one of these two concepts for conflicts to arise that quickly turn into intolerance, violence, identity withdrawal, irredentism, etc. Education sees its importance here. Indeed, Cameroon has not yet truly clarified the concepts of "nation" and "people" in a satisfactory manner, nor resolved the sociopolitical issue of coexistence among its 250 different ethnic groups. To address this, it makes education the central relay of national ideology. However, whenever the nation-state has neglected the demands of ethnic minorities for their full autonomy in the fields of education and culture, it has led to withdrawal and ethnocentric conflicts. This is the origin of the Bantu/Pygmy conflict or the conflict in the Northwest and Southwest regions (NOSO), where the sociocultural issues posed by minorities have called into question the stability of the concepts of identity, integration, and national unity ensured by the educational system in place.

2.3 Roles and Structure of a Social Representation

Not all mental representations are social. We speak of a mental representation when we are faced with a system of interpretation, categorization, and a specific language concerning an object. Social representation (SR) is thus a form of knowledge that is socially elaborated and shared, aimed at practical purposes and contributing to the construction of a common reality for a given social group (Moscovici, 1976, 1989); it is "the product and process of a mental activity through which an individual or group reconstructs the reality to which it is confronted and attributes specific meanings to it" (Abric, 1984: 106) [2]. It is therefore a form of social thought that guides behaviors and communications, generating attitudes, behaviors, and opinions (Ebale Moneze and Itong A Goufan, 2005) [10]. Furthermore, it allows not only for situating individuals within their own sociocultural field but also for interpreting reality, organizing information and thought, recalling, identifying, and designating normal and abnormal behavior, affirming or denying a contradiction between two behaviors, and proposing a rational behavior that can somewhat help to cope with this disagreement. An SR then presents three dimensions: a) the informative dimension related to all the relevant information about an object or situation that the individual or group faces; b) the spatial dimension

concerning the organization and richness of the contents of the representation that allows it to be categorized; c) the attitudinal dimension that enables the individual or group to anticipate, support, and guide their behavior.

The contents or elements of an SR are opinions, prejudices, stereotypes, beliefs, attitudes, etc. These have different statuses: Some are peripheral while others are central. Peripheral elements, which are more numerous, serve as preventative measures for situations and behaviors related to the SR. They ensure the flexibility of the SR. They allow social behaviors to align with the SR without the situation in question being rationally analyzed. They then serve to spontaneously decipher these situations by indicating what is normal or abnormal, feasible or unfeasible, thus allowing for the prediction of behaviors. They act as a buffer or protection in case of external conflict (Flament, idem). Central elements, which are fewer in number, are descriptive of situations and behaviors related to the SR. They are absolute because the removal or modification of even one leads to a radical transformation or total disarticulation of the SR. They then constitute a core that is the very identity of the SR.

2.4 Representations and Social Practices

The process of developing a social representation (SR) involves two phases: a) objectification, which is the process by which an abstract object becomes concrete; b) anchoring, which is the process by which the individual or group appropriates the now evident object and uses it as a framework for interpreting reality, guiding and directing behaviors. A mental representation becomes social if it meets the following two criteria: a) extensiveness, which relates to the sharing of the mental representation among all members of a group, originality, and production, referring to the fact that it results from interactions within a specific group of individuals; b) functionality, which relates to the role that this representation plays. The social representation of an object is said to be autonomous if the discourse about this object and its analysis are specific and do not rely on other different objects. Otherwise, it is not autonomous.

Flament (idem) posits that when a practice slightly disagrees or contradicts a social representation, a weak shockwave occurs that only affects peripheral elements, modifying them but not causing a transformation of the social representation. If the disagreement is profound, a more violent shock occurs that penetrates peripheral elements and affects central elements, thereby causing a radical transformation of the social representation. Guimeli (1988) [12] shows that when the disagreement is strong, explicit, manifest, realistic, and precise, a large number of unusual, abnormal elements

appear in the central core, leading to a brutal and radical transformation of the representation that completely breaks with the past. If the disagreement, although violent, remains implicit, imprecise, ambiguous, and confusing, there is activation of peripheral elements, and practices that were rare become frequent. The social representation changes but does not break with the past.

3. Theory of the Central Core

Abric (1987: 45) [3] suggests that "the central core of a social representation consists of all elements or sets of elements that give this representation its meaning and coherence." These elements taken in isolation do not allow for the extraction of the meaning of the social representation. They thus form a system because the removal of even one completely disarticulates the representation. The central core is therefore generative and organizational for the representation. It allows for determining the uniqueness or difference between social representations. It is, so to speak, generative and organizational of the SR (Abric, idem). It provides specific meaning to the various elements within the field of representation. It is through it that creation or modification of peripheral elements occurs by giving them meaning and valence. In doing so, it assigns significance to the entire structure and allows for the interpretation of reality. It organizes relationships between different elements of the representation and stabilizes them. The elements constituting it are very resistant to attempts at transformation.

This centrality is thus qualitative and structural. Starting from this notion, Moliner (1988) [16] postulates that an SR only allows for reading reality if none of its central elements contradicts practices related to this reality. Thus: Whenever an element of the central core does not allow for reading reality, it will be accepted that this element has undergone transformation and that there is a mismatch between the SR and the object of representation; if an element of the SR in question continues to allow for reading reality relative to this SR, it indicates that this element is central; otherwise, it is peripheral.

4. Study Hypotheses

Based on the conceptualization and theorization presented above, we formulated the following general hypothesis (GH): "The central core of the social representation of education among parents who send their children to school is different from that of parents who do not." This hypothesis has been operationalized into two research hypotheses (RH), as indicated in the following synoptic table:

Table 1: Synoptic Presentation of Hypotheses, Variables, Indicators, and Modalities

Hypotheses	Variables	Indicators	Modalities
GH: The central core of the SR of education among parents who send their children to school is different from that of parents who do so	VD: Central core	Central Elements	- identical - different
	VI: Schooling	- parents who send their children to school - parents who do not send their children to school	- effective - not effective
RH1: The central core of the SR of education is the same with parents who send their children to school.	Idem	Idem	Idem
	VI: Children who are not going to school	Registration and attendance at a school	- effective - not effective
RH2: The central core of the SR of education is the same with parents who do not send their children to school.	Idem	Idem	Idem
	VI: Children going to school	Registration and attendance at a school	- effective - not effective

5. Methodological Framework

5.1 Preliminary Survey, Population, and Sample

The preliminary survey was conducted with 50 Baka individuals from the forest camps of Djoum, Oveng, and Mintom II in the Dja and Lobo department. Its purpose was to assess feasibility, collect information on the social representation of education, evaluate the relevance of the investigated issue, and determine the objectives and working hypotheses. To achieve this, we employed documentary research methods. We also organized "group discussion meetings," group interviews, and "observational" interviews with pygmies, educational authorities, teachers, and students. Based on the results obtained, we immediately proceeded to examine our accessible population. The working hypothesis that the social representation of education had not undergone any transformation allowed us to develop a guide for interviews with subjects. These subjects were pygmy parents from urban areas and forest camps. From this group, we randomly and stratified sampled a representative sample of 200 subjects.

5.2 Data Collection Process and Instruments for Result Analysis

The preliminary survey revealed 24 characteristic elements of education, which constituted the items for the characterization test. During interviews, each subject was asked to verbally indicate the four elements they considered most relevant, which we highlighted in red. Then, from the remaining elements, they indicated the next four they deemed most relevant, highlighted in black, and so on until all 24 items were exhausted. This resulted in six groups of three highlighted items: Red (3 points), black (2 points), violet (1 point), blue (-3 points), green (-2 points), and ordinary pencil (-1 point). Thus, the score for an item ranged from +4800 points to -4800 points. Given that most of our subjects were illiterate, we read each item aloud four times to each subject. Only items that achieved an average of 70% of the points were retained for the centrality test.

The following 14 items were selected: Education is a process of knowledge transmission., Education is a process of socialization, Education is a process of national unity, Education is a process of critical thinking, Education is a process of humanization, Education is a process of upward social mobility; Education is a process of identity affirmation; Education is a process of cultural rooting, Education is a process of self-assertion, Education is a process of emancipation; Education is a process of self-valorization, Education is a process of developing potential, Education is a process of social development, Education is a process of economic emergence.

For the centrality test, we chose the "Moliner Method," in which items are transformed into their opposites. For example, for item No. 1, the question was posed as follows: "One of your brothers from the neighboring camp claimed that pygmies do not see school education as knowledge transmission but rather as a waste of time." Do you agree or disagree with this viewpoint? The subject had to respond with: a) strongly agree; b) agree; c) disagree; d) strongly disagree. Thus, agreeing with this viewpoint means choosing response a or b, thereby admitting that the item is not central.

6. Results and Analysis

The results obtained are presented as follows:

Table 2: Distribution of Subjects' Responses to the Questioning of Items

Items	Reponses	Parents who send their children to school (in %)	Parents who do not send their children to school (in %)	Total (in %)
1	a	0	0	0
	b	0	0	0
	c	35	25	60
	d	65	75	140
2	a	0	0	0
	b	0	0	0
	c	15	10	25
	d	85	90	175
3	a	0	91	91
	b	0	9	9
	c	14	0	14
	d	86	0	86
4	a	0	0	0
	b	0	0	0
	c	18	09	27
	d	82	91	173
5	a	0	98	98
	b	0	2	2
	c	36	0	36
	d	64	0	64
6	a	0	85	85
	b	0	15	15
	c	13	0	13
	d	97	0	97
7	a	65	0	65
	b	35	0	35
	c	0	14	14
	d	0	86	86
8	a	20	0	20
	b	80	0	80
	c	0	22	22
	d	0	78	78
9	a	0	0	0
	b	0	0	0
	c	34	14	48
	d	56	86	142
10	a	0	23	23
	b	0	77	77
	c	46	0	46
	d	54	0	54
11	a	0	0	0
	b	0	0	0
	c	48	45	93
	d	52	55	107
12	a	0	0	0
	b	0	0	0
	c	12	43	55
	d	88	57	145
13	a	0	87	87
	b	0	13	13
	c	25	0	25
	d	75	0	75
14	a	0	82	82
	b	0	16	16
	c	15	0	15
	d	85	0	85

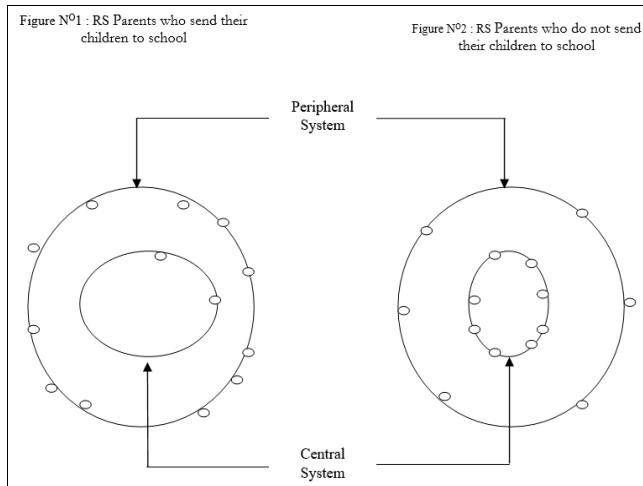
From Table 2 above, it first appears that the subjects do not give the same responses. Considering that responses A (a + b) indicate non-centrality and responses B (c + d) indicate the centrality of the selected elements, we observe that:

1. Responses A and B are not evenly distributed across the two categories of subjects. This means that some

elements of the social representation of education in the two categories of subjects do not belong to the same system but to different systems. Some are therefore peripheral in one category and central in the other, and vice versa. Hypothesis HR1 is thus confirmed.

- The responses consistently distribute in the same proportions within the same modality. This structuring allows us to state that in this category of subjects, the social representations of education are identical. Hypothesis HR2 is confirmed:

We can therefore schematize the social representations of education among our subjects as follows:



These two diagrams allow us to visualize the structural change in the social representation (SR) of education among the Pygmies: a) The SR of education among parents who send their children to school has 2 central elements (7,8) and 12 peripheral one (1,2,3,4,5,6,9,10,11,12,13,14); b) The SR of education among parents who do not send their children to school has 8 central elements (1,2,4,7,8,9,11,12) and 6 peripheral one (14,10,3,6,5,13).

Indeed, it is clear that certain elements that were once peripheral (3, 5, 6, 13, 14) have become central. Similarly, some elements that were once central (2, 9) have become peripheral. Other elements have remained central (1, 2, 4, 11, 12). Finally, some have not changed systems (8, 7). The conclusion that emerges is that the SR of education has undergone a radical transformation. Our hypothesis (HG) is thus confirmed.

Thus, in the collective imagination and unconscious of the Baka, education fundamentally aims at the transmission of knowledge. It serves as a means of socialization and self-affirmation; a tool for developing skills and potential. All nine other elements are peripheral. It is evident that they are more numerous than the central elements, which proves this representation. This means that this social representation of education is flexible and allows for considering various situations as educational.

The pressure for schooling has caused a moderate shock and introduced an implicit contradiction that has shifted certain peripheral elements toward the center, awakening dormant elements by flooding them with meanings and/or drying out others. The representation has thus slowly transformed but without completely breaking with the past. However, it has become more demanding, more rigid, yet more fragile because the central elements outnumber the peripheral ones.

7. Conclusion

Our study focused on the SR of education among the Baka Pygmies of Southern Cameroon. Its objective was to verify whether, due to new educational practices, particularly schooling, it had undergone a structural transformation. At the end of the work, it turns out that this SR is structurally different from one group of parents to another. It has thus experienced a shock, a genuine ideological assault due to the schooling of children. The dispersion of responses certainly betrays the fact that they have not yet assimilated or accepted the innovation. The difficulties encountered by the government project support this idea. This result proves that the Pygmies are indeed engaged in a process of modernization, and that despite some resistance, Western education seems to be inexorably penetrating their habits. This conclusion leads us to propose multicultural education as a solution to this situation of coexistence between two official educational practices: Traditional and Pygmy. In fact, Cameroon is experiencing multiculturalism; it is a nation-state. These two concepts share the coexistence of different value systems, with adherence to one or the other depending on cultural elements that will then serve as the cement for ethnic and national cohesion. However, despite the demands for autonomy from ethnic minorities, the nation-state imposes sociocultural norms on everyone. It is in such cases that multicultural education takes on its full meaning and importance. Its programs, approaches, and strategies help to overcome value conflicts or mitigate them to make them tolerable for the peoples and groups involved.

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