

Teachers' Personal Efficacy Beliefs and Practice of Inclusive Education in an Ordinary School Context. The Case of Dja and Lobo Sub-Division

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ABSTRACT: Inclusive education is not effective in most public primary schools in Cameroon. This is particularly evident in the Dja and Lobo division with regard to the schooling of Baka pygmies. The reason given is that nursery and primary school teachers lack the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to effectively support these socially disadvantaged or handicapped children, who, according to them, should rather be directed towards specialised or integrative institutions. However, critics argue that this stance reflects a low sense of personal efficacy. Evidence for this would be the good results achieved by their peers in private institutions. This controversy surrounding the competencies of primary school teachers in both types of education is intense and uncomfortable as the arguments from both sides are relevant and well-founded. Nevertheless, a decision must be made. The hypothesis to be tested here is that Baka pupils in private schools achieve better results in assessments than their counterparts in public schools. To achieve this, we examined the variance in academic performance of these pupils in relation to the level of perceived Sense of personal efficacy among their respective teachers through documentary research. The results we obtained led us to conclude that professional commitment, love for children and childhood, vocation, and professional awareness enhance the competencies of these teachers in inclusive education; that Sense of personal efficacy does not substitute for the knowledge of specialised educators; and that school inclusion in a regular education context depends on the degree and type of disability the child suffer from.

KEYWORDS: Sense of personal efficacy, vocation, disability, inclusive education, mainstream school.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2010, inclusive education has become a reality in sub-Saharan Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular (Ngo Melha, 2013). It has enabled the schooling of a significant number of children with mild physical, psychological, and social disabilities, notably the Baka pygmies who are increasingly modernising and settling in camps along roadsides (Abega, 1998). This is particularly evident in the Dja and Lobo division, especially in the Oveng and Mintom II districts where Baka children attend both public and private nursery and primary schools. However, many teachers from public schools declare themselves incompetent in supporting these atypical pupils, claiming that they have not received adequate training. According to them, these Baka pupils should rather be directed towards specialised institutions. Consequently, they typically deliver their lessons without paying much attention to these socially disadvantaged children. Critics argue that this stance reflects not only a lack of professional commitment, love for children and childhood, vocation, and professional awareness but also, and above all, a low sense of personal efficacy. Evidence for this would be the good results achieved by their peers in private institutions who demonstrate greater effectiveness. This controversy regarding the competencies of Teachers across both educational sectors is intense and uncomfortable as the arguments from both sides are relevant and well-founded. In a context where the government advocates for the social integration of indigenous peoples, national unity, and especially equal opportunities for academic success for all, it seems important and urgent for us to reach a definitive conclusion.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Sense of Personal Efficacy: Definition, Principles, and Sources.

The sense of personal efficacy is the perception, knowledge, and awareness that individuals have of their abilities and competencies to succeed in their endeavours or to carry out actions. In fact, the learning and actions that a person undertakes primarily depend on their judgement regarding their own abilities (Bandura, 2006). Personal efficacy beliefs would thus constitute the key factor in human action and success. Therefore, one might think that if individuals consider themselves incapable of achieving satisfactory results in a given area, they will not attempt to bring about those results. However, it is also observed that some individuals often fail to achieve optimal performance, even though they are fully aware of what they need to do and possess the necessary skills. Here, the sense of efficacy would involve knowing what needs to be done and being motivated to do it.

Effective functioning thus requires both skills and efficacy beliefs. Certainly, the initial level of competence influences the performance achieved, but its impact is significantly mediated by personal efficacy beliefs. Individuals who strongly believe in their capabilities approach challenging tasks as challenges to be met rather than as threats to be avoided, which increases the interest they find in those tasks. They set themselves stimulating goals and maintain a strong commitment to them, investing considerable effort and increasing it in the face of setbacks or failures. They remain task-focused and think strategically when confronted with difficulties. They attribute failure to insufficient effort, which fosters a focus on success, and they quickly regain their sense of efficacy after a failure or decline in performance. Finally, they approach potential threats or stressors with the confidence that they can exert some control over them. This effective perspective enhances performance, reduces stress, and decreases vulnerability to depression.

It is important to note that one should not confuse the sense of personal efficacy with self-esteem. When it comes to activities that hold value for the individual, there is a strong likelihood that these two aspects are positively correlated. It should also be noted that one cannot speak of efficacy in a general sense; there are only specific feelings of efficacy related to particular activities. Personal efficacy beliefs are constructed from four main sources of information: i) active experiences of personal mastery; ii) social learning; iii) persuasion by others; iv) physiological and emotional states.

The Sense of Personal Efficacy of Teachers and Employability

The sense of pedagogical efficacy of teachers determines their approach to teaching. Teachers with a high sense of pedagogical efficacy believe it is possible to teach difficult students through additional effort and appropriate techniques and that, they can seek support from families and overcome negative influences from their environment through effective teaching. In contrast, teachers with a low sense of pedagogical efficacy feel they cannot do much if students are unmotivated and are negatively influenced by their families and surroundings (Skaalvik and Valas, 1999).

Many job opportunities or proposals are found through friends, acquaintances, and professional networks. The ability to recruit support from social networks has become an essential element of the process today. Several longitudinal studies show that perceived efficacy predicts re-employment after redundancy during a recession. Hackett (1995) found that other factors that could contribute to re-employment were also examined: age, quality of work performance, depression, and perceived barriers to re-employment. The sense of efficacy emerged as the only significant factor for subsequent re-employment. The higher the perceived efficacy, the more active the job-seeking behaviour, and the higher the re-employment rate. Shell, Colvin, and Bruning (1995) also found that unemployed individuals who were confident in their ability to find a job were more likely to be re-employed in a follow-up period, while neither the reason for unemployment nor general personality traits had any influence on re-employment.

Based on knowledge related to coping and personal efficacy, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Gagné (1991) developed a multifaceted programme to immunise workers against the demoralising effects of job loss and to restore their efficacy in finding quality employment. These authors also found that the effect of re-employment programmes on job-seeking behaviour was fully mediated by perceived personal efficacy. The stronger the job seekers' beliefs in their ability to perform actions that lead to employment, the more positively they viewed their job search efforts. The mediating role of efficacy beliefs was confirmed after controlling for the effects of age, gender, household income, and education level (Deslandes and Cloutier, 2005; Pajares, 2006).

Inclusive Education in Cameroon: Evolution and Characteristics

Several factors of exclusion have serious repercussions on education, foremost among them being physical, mental, and social disabilities. Nevertheless, one of the fundamental goals of education is to empower individuals to realise the fullness of their potential, no matter how limited it may be. This is where the fight

against school exclusion through inclusive education comes into play. Indeed, inclusive education refers to an educational system where children with special educational needs have the opportunity for education in a mainstream public school, in regular classes with support services and teaching adapted to their needs and strengths. Founded On the right to "a quality education for all," it involves transforming public schools so that they can accommodate children from minority groups, those in rural areas, children affected by war, those suffering from stigmatizing illnesses, disabled children, and those with challenging behaviours, among others. Focused on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, it strives to fully develop the potential of each individual. Its aim is to eliminate any exclusion based on race, economic status, social class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, and so on. This defined inclusive education faces numerous challenges, including resistance from certain teachers. The reasons are many, but a significant factor is the lack of qualifications required for such an approach. Typically, a child with a physical, mental, or social disability is expected to be cared for in a specialised institution.

It has its origins in national and international policies aimed at promoting equal opportunities for everyone, particularly those who are socially and economically marginalised. This trend emerged in successive UN declarations since 1948. However, in reality, the concept of "inclusive education" was born in response to the way disabled individuals were treated in general and in schools in particular. The notion of inclusion proposes reforming educational systems so that they equitably respond to the diversity of learners. It is based on several conventions: the Jomtien Declaration (1990); the Salamanca Statement (1994); the World Education Forum in Dakar (2000); the United Nations Convention (2006); etc. In short, inclusive education concerns any student at risk of having their social trajectory or individual attributes devalued within the school environment.

In Cameroon, school inclusion takes various forms on the ground, and the confusion between different experiences poses challenges for understanding. Indeed, there are: i) specialised schools that provide education for specific types of disabilities (deaf, mute, blind, intellectually disabled, etc.); ii) integrative schools where transitional integration classes exist, within which students with mild disabilities receive specific teaching that prepares them over 3 to 4 years to integrate into a standard school. These pertain to visually or hearing-impaired children, those with speech disorders or motor disabilities, and epileptics; iii) direct inclusive schools that integrate from the first year both children with speech disorders or cerebral/motor disabilities, children from disadvantaged indigenous minority groups, and so-called "normal" children. Public primary schools fall into this category.

Initial Training and Professional Commitment of Teachers

The training of future teachers is provided by the General Teachers training colleges. Admission to these schools occurs through a national competitive examination held annually by the state. The duration of training is three years for holders of the General Baccalaureate. The quotas for student recruitment are set by the state. The competition is open to individuals of both sexes aged at least seventeen and no more than thirty-two years old. The training consists of three main stages: a period of awareness-raising, a period of learning pedagogical methods and techniques, and a period of taking responsibility.

During the first period, the student-teacher receives theoretical lessons accompanied by practical work. In addition to theoretical courses, students attend schools to gain first-hand experience of school realities. They also participate in parent meetings, cultural activities, and so on. The second period involves instilling in the student-teacher the theoretical foundations of the practice of pedagogical methods and techniques. They are taught educational psychology, pedagogical methods and techniques, and the didactics of various subjects. The final period is when the student-teacher takes on the responsibilities of a teacher for a specified duration. Although they are monitored by their instructors, who address any shortcomings and provide solutions, at this stage, the emphasis is placed on the total responsibility of the student-teacher as an educator in the classroom. These practical placements will be numerous and complemented by seminars to enable the future educator to gain a solid mastery of the profession.

Professional commitment is a dynamic set of behaviours that manifest one's professional and personal identity, attachment to the profession, efforts made for it, and the sense of duty well done (Jullien, 1996). This commitment is constructed based on an emotional relationship between the individual and their profession, an intention to persist in the chosen career path that influences their behaviour. Teaching is inherently a profession that requires a great deal of energy and balance. Every teacher is likely to experience moments of intense emotional load and stress and must be able to manage them. Therefore, it is reasonable to expect differences in emotional expression among teachers. Their initial training and very different social contexts contribute to a distinct interpretation of their profession and likely lead to varied reactions to similar events.

It is important to clarify the existence of two forms of commitment: organisational commitment, which refers to an individual's attachment to their workplace, and professional commitment, which concerns an individual's identification with and adherence to their profession (Karnas, 2009). In the case of teachers, those who feel committed to their organisation or profession engage in school activities, demonstrate creativity, are productive and proactive, and develop a positive identification with their tasks and their profession (Lancestre, 2000). The majority of teachers dedicate a significant amount of time to their profession, and their level of commitment constitutes an important dimension of their personal and professional lives (Lemoine, 2004). Professional commitment is negatively correlated with task ambiguity and interpersonal conflicts, factors that can contribute to decreased job performance (Magnier, 2009). In the field of education, it is positively correlated with student success (Bernaud and Lemoigne, 2000).

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura (ibid) posits that individuals benefit from the experiences of "significant others" to acquire knowledge. In doing so, they refer to "models." Based on his observations, he identifies the relevant aspects of the situation to which he will direct his attention. Consequently, the factors that would facilitate learning include: attention, memory, reproduction, and reinforcement. The basic principles of this theory include the principle of mutual influence, the principle of indirect learning or vicarious observation, the principle of perceived self-efficacy, the principle of symbolic representation, the principle of self-regulation, and the principle of modelling.

2. METHODOLOGICAL AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Hypotheses

We have formulated the following general hypothesis: Baka schoolchildren taught by teachers in private schools perform better in sequential assessments than their peers taught by teachers in public schools. This has been operationalised as follows:

Table 1: Synoptic Table for the Operationalisation of the General Hypothesis

Hypotheses	Variables of the hypotheses	Indicators of variables	Modalities of variables
GH: Baka schoolchildren taught by teachers in private schools perform better in sequential assessments than their peers taught by teachers in public schools.	DV: performances	Average scores	- better - worse
	IV: teachers	- in service in public schools - in service in private schools	- very committed - committed - less committed - very less committed
RH: The average scores obtained in sequential assessments by Baka schoolchildren taught by teachers in private schools are higher than those of their peers taught by TEACHERS in public schools.	DV: Average scores obtained in sequential assessments.	Statistics \bar{x}	- higher - equal - lower
	IV: teachers	- in service in public schools - in service in private schools	- very committed - committed - less committed - very less committed

Type of Study and Methodological Approach

Our work is a documentary study. However, we began with participant observation of the professional behaviours of teachers, the relationships between students and teachers, and the pedagogical methods employed. This allowed us to understand the investigated issue from within and the relevance of our topic. To address any biases resulting from our presence, we supplemented this observation with semi-structured interviews focusing on the importance and obstacles of inclusive education in the context of mainstream schools. The documentary study examined various periodic writings and mandatory documents, including comprehensive reports prepared by school administrators and submitted to their superiors. These included: i) the personal files of teachers; ii) monthly (9), quarterly (3), biannual (2), and end-of-year (1) reports detailing evaluations. We first familiarised ourselves with these documents before extracting data from them. In doing so, we limited ourselves to content that was most closely aligned with the indicators of our variables. We then compiled all the collected data, ensuring that it was as up-to-date as possible. This enabled us: i) to understand the possibilities and limitations of this material; ii) to use it easily in order to address the specific research question; iii) to enrich the investigated issue and improve

the categorisation of teachers (Inclusive Education Management Practices). Data were collected from two groups of students in preparatory classes (level 2). We conducted a variance analysis of their scores (individual averages), using the statistic (\bar{x}) as a basis for comparison, with a degree of freedom of 0.95.

Site, Population, and Sample

The study was conducted in public and private primary schools in the Dja and Lobo department, specifically in the districts of Djoum, Oveng, and Mintom II. Our accessible population comprised students in preparatory classes (level 2). From this population, we drew a representative sample of 46 subjects through stratified random sampling. In this sampling process and to control for confounding variables, we considered: i) the professional experience of the teacher by selecting only the files of teachers with more than 5 years of service in their position; ii) the initial homogeneity of the groups by excluding newly enrolled students from the accessible population and ensuring an equal number of schools and students from rural areas as compared to those from urban areas.

3. RESULTS

Table 2: Distribution of Scores (Individual Averages) of Subjects in End-of-Year Evaluations for the 2023-2024 Academic Year

Scores	Pupils in the private school			Pupils in public school		
X_i	f_i	$f_i x_i$	$(X_i - \bar{x})^2$	f_i	$f_i x_i$	$(x_i - \bar{x})^2$
0	0	0	179,56	0	0	97,21
1	0	0	153,76	0	0	78,49
2	0	0	129,96	1	2	61,77
3	0	0	108,16	1	3	47,05
4	0	0	88,36	1	4	34,33
5	0	0	70,56	1	5	23,61
6	0	0	54,76	2	12	14,89
7	0	0	40,96	2	14	8,17
8	1	8	29,16	1	8	3,45
9	1	9	19,36	2	18	0,73
10	3	30	11,56	5	50	97,21
11	2	22	5,76	1	11	1,29
12	1	12	1,96	3	36	4,57
13	1	13	0,16	3	39	9,85
14	1	14	0,36	6	84	17,13
15	1	15	2,56	0	0	26,41
16	1	16	6,76	0	0	37,69
17	1	17	12,96	0	0	50,97
18	3	54	21,16	0	0	78,49
19	1	19	31,36	0	0	83,53
20	0	0	43,56	0	0	102,81
Σ	17	229	1012,7	29	286	879,65
Mode	10 et 18			14		
Median	13			5		
E	11			12		
\bar{x}	13,47			9,86		
V	59,57			30,33		
σ	7,71			5,50		
Z cal	4,56					

The table above shows that: i) the most common scores among private school pupils are 10/20 and 18/20, whereas in public schools, the most frequent score is 14/20. This indicates that the pupils who perform best are found in private schools; ii) the median score in private schools is 13/20, while in public schools it is 5/20. This suggests that private schools are the group with the highest success rates; iii) the range of scores in private schools (11) is roughly the same as in public schools (12). This means that there is an 11-point difference between the highest and lowest scores in private schools, whereas this difference is 12 points in public schools; iv) the average score is higher in private schools (13.47/20) than in public schools (9.12/20). This confirms the viewpoint that there is greater academic success for Baka pupils in private schools compared to public schools; v) the scores vary around the mean much more in private schools (59.57) than in public schools (30.33). Thus,

there is a greater dispersion of scores around the average in private schools compared to public schools; vi) the standard deviation of scores is greater in private schools than in public schools. Therefore, pupils in private schools deviate more from the group average than those in public schools; vii) Z calculated = $4.56 > Z$ critical = 1.96 . The research hypothesis is therefore confirmed. This leads us to conclude that "Baka pupils taught by teachers in private schools perform better in sequential assessments than their peers taught by teachers in public schools."

Interpretation and Discussion

Our results can be explained by the fact that teachers with a high level of sense of personal efficacy (Self-Efficacy Perception) organise their classroom activities effectively, devote more time to academic tasks, provide necessary guidance to struggling students to help them succeed, and recognise their good results. They create mastery experiences for their students, relying on persuasive means and fostering the growth of intrinsic interest and intellectual self-direction among their pupils (Gibson and Dembo, 1985). In contrast, teachers in public schools are often overwhelmed by doubts regarding their pedagogical effectiveness. They create a classroom environment that undermines students' evaluations of their own abilities and cognitive development. They spend more time on non-academic activities, quickly abandon students who do not achieve rapid results, and criticise them for their failures. Consequently, the less time they dedicate to academic teaching, the less progress students make. These teachers are generally inundated with problems in the classroom and are stressed and frustrated by poor student behaviour. They doubt students' motivation, impose strict operational rules to better control behaviour, focus more on the subject matter being taught than on student development, and use extrinsic rewards and sanctions to encourage students to study (Woolfolk Hoy and Davis, 2006).

However, extrinsic rewards carry significant risks of diminishing interest when they are provided merely for improving performance in an activity that is already particularly engaging. Conversely, rewards following mastery of activities contribute to increased interest and a sense of personal efficacy, thereby enhancing performance. When rewards are linked to skill level, individuals show greater interest in an activity if competence is generously rewarded rather than minimally acknowledged (Bernoux, 1985). When material rewards for performance are accompanied by compliments regarding competence, both children and adults maintain a high level of interest in the activity (Curie and Hajjar, 1987). Even the reward for undertaking a task, rather than for completing it well, can increase interest if engaging in the activity informs one about personal competence. Furthermore, according to Bandura's social cognitive theory, the growth of intrinsic interest is stimulated by emotional responses and personal efficacy. Schoolchildren consistently demonstrate a lasting interest in activities where they feel effective and which provide them with self-satisfaction. However, most school activities present increasingly challenging tasks. Thus, within education, the stronger the students' beliefs in their efficacy, the greater the academic challenges they set for themselves and the higher their intrinsic interest in school subjects (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996). Personal efficacy beliefs predict the level of interest in various professional goals as well as in specific academic themes, even when aptitude influences are eliminated (Lee and Bobko, 1994). The effects of rewards on interest can either increase interest in activities, reduce it, or have no effect at all, depending on the situation (Bandura, 1986).

We also observed that teachers in private schools prefer objective-based pedagogy over a competency-based approach. This more readily facilitates the development of personal cognitive efficacy (Schunk, 1996). Indeed, the best way to maintain personal motivation is to combine a long-term goal, which sets the direction of the project, with a series of accessible sub-goals designed to guide and sustain the student's efforts along the way while providing immediate rewards. These proximal goals are also an effective means of reducing the risk of discouragement due to a high goal and increasing the sense of personal efficacy: achieving sub-goals provides increasing indicators of mastery that foster a gradual sense of personal efficacy.

Students in private schools engage in self-directed learning that involves either proximal sub-goals aimed at mastering various disciplinary skills or a distant goal focused on mastering all skills, or even no goal at all. Those motivated by sub-goals progress rapidly, achieve substantial mastery of learning content, and develop a strong sense of cognitive efficacy (Schunk, *ibid*). In contrast, those provided with a distant goal or no goal at all doubt their abilities and achieve less. Thus, this focus on progress rather than distant outcomes is particularly important for students who are convinced of their personal inefficacy and therefore require repeated demonstrations that they possess what is necessary to succeed.

Finally, teachers in private schools provide a great deal of appropriate feedback to their students. In fact, they repeatedly convey evaluations of their pupils, either explicitly (grades, rankings, comments) or implicitly (differential attention given to students, criteria set for different individuals, grouping methods, difficulty levels of tasks). Highlighting the quality of a student's work (and not merely the quantity of work produced without reference to quality) facilitates the development of a sense of efficacy (Schunk, 1983).

However, Carré and Fenouillet (2007) argue that academic success depends more on the cognitive efficacy beliefs of the student than on the pedagogical efficacy beliefs of the teacher. For regardless of the level of aptitude considered, it is those children who have the strongest belief in their efficacy who solve problems most effectively, choose to delve deeper into those areas where they have failed, and abandon tasks less frequently rapidly adopting erroneous strategies. Furthermore, academic success depends on several other factors, such as the characteristics of an "effective school". Indeed, according to Deslandes (2004), there are many commonalities in the pedagogical practices of high-performing schools: (i) strong pedagogical leadership from the headteacher; (ii) high academic standards (Brookover); (iii) a firm belief that students can achieve these standards; (iv) mastery-oriented teaching; (v) effective classroom behaviour management; and (vi) parental involvement in their child's education (Deslandes, Rousseau, Descôteaux, and Hardy, 2008).

Another important aspect that nuances and diminishes the relevance of our findings is that an excessively high percentage of young Baka, despite having high abilities, have been placed in detrimental educational conditions and subjected to watered-down programs and stigma. This has not only weakened them and made them unruly (Pajares, 2002), but has also diminished the teachers' sense of efficacy and led to the perceived ineffectiveness of the students (Raudenbush et al., *ibid*). In contrast, low-achieving students who followed an accelerated program made substantial academic gains.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study focused on the pedagogical efficacy beliefs of the teachers in the Dja and Lobo department following their resistance to inclusive education practices. We started from the premise that public teachers are indeed capable of effectively implementing school inclusion, just as their private counterparts do. Thus, we needed to compare the results of these two categories of teachers. The hypothesis to be tested was that Baka students taught by teachers in private schools perform better in assessments than their peers taught by teachers in public schools. This was confirmed by an analysis of variance of assessment scores drawn from a study of school documents related to these two groups of students. This result led us to conclude that the sense of efficacy is essential but not decisive for the competence of teachers in inclusive education. However, it is worth noting that academic success depends much more on the student's sense of efficacy and the characteristics of an "effective school".

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