

Why girls leave primary school before having passed the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC), and why many of them are never enrolled at school.

A study from three schools of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The present study which is written in French (La sous-scolarisation de la jeune fille au Nord-Cameroun étudiée à travers trois écoles de l'Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne du Cameroun) builds on a 3 months fieldwork from October 2000 until January 2001 in Ngoundéré, a provincial capital in North-Cameroon. The main task was to reveal reasons for the low rate per cent of girls in school in this northern part of the country, and to look at the recent evolution as it is presented through statistics and through an inquiry of attitudes where the inhabitants themselves are talking.

We know that in Africa south of Sahara the low number of children going to school, and some places girls particularly, is more a rule than an exception. In Cameroon, we also find a distinct limit between the three provinces in the north and the rest of the country. The rate per cent of children going to school in South-Cameroon is over 90% in the three central provinces Centre, Littoral and the West, with a distribution between girls and boys in this central part of the country often up to 1:1.

To find accurate statistics of education in Cameroon is difficult, which confirm also the different Internet sources and other documents where I've found some of the statistical informations.

Table n°1: 1969 - 1995: Evolution of statistics in the North compared to the national mean value and according to the sexes

Year	1969	1976	1987			1995		
			B	G	T	B	G	T
Province/sexes								
Cameroon	63,8	68	77,2	70,9	74,2	65,4	59,8	62,7 (73)
The North	25	30	49,1	30,2	40,2	46,5	27,4	37,4 (52)
Adamaoua			47,1	33,9	40,8	43,8	30,7	37,6 (51)

Abbreviation: The values in parentheses in the column of 1995 are from the table of EFA 2000. B = boy, G = girl, T = total.

Sources: Martin 1971: 319 (1969); UNICEF 1998: 6 (1976-1995); and EFA 2000 (1995).

Table n°2: 1989/90 - 1998/99: Evolution of statistics in the North compared to the national mean value and according to the sexes

Year	1989/90			1990/91			1995/96			1996/97			1997/98			1998/99		
	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T	B	G	T
Cameroon	102	90	96	99	87	93	78	67	73	82	71	77	88	72	80	88	74	82(81)
The North	74	41	53	70	40	56	57	33	45	58	33	45	59	35	47	68	38	53(56)
Adamaoua	72	49	61	70	49	60	60	42	51	59	40	50	56	40	48	62	43	53(53)

Sources: CTP 1999: 38, table n°III.2 which has approximately the same statistical values as the EFA-table 2000: VII-2-2, table n°6. The column of 1998/99 (B and G) as well as the total values in parentheses are taken from the table of the CTP, the other values are from the EFA table.

As we can see there is a gap between 1990/91 and 1995/96. The Comity of Technical Pilotage which is responsible for the production of statistics in Cameroon explains this gap with the lack of financial means due to the economical crisis that ravaged the francophone countries from 1987 until 1996/97 and which prevented the realisation of the statistical campaigns. But these same documents underline also the necessity of using statistics with prudence.

In the school year of 1998/1999, the rate of enrolled children in Cameroon was 82% including the Northern provinces, while the total enrolment in the three Northern provinces was only 53%. If we look at the rate per cent of girls only, 74% against 88% boys went to school in the whole country, while the rate in the three northern provinces was 38% girls against 68% boys. It's important to underline that there are big internal differences both in the North and in the South. In Adamaoua (province of the collected data), which is the province situated closest up to the south's provinces, the situation is better than in the two other northern provinces, the North and the Extreme North. In Adamaoua, the rate of girls was 43% against 62% boys.

Through this statistical analysis of the evolution in the north compared with the whole country we can see a progress or a decline the last three decades before the turn of the millennium.

Through public accessible statistics and public accessible sources I've found that as opposed to what often is written, there is a positive evolution in the North compared to the entire country. Also concerning girls in proportion to boys this is the case. Consequently, the North-Cameroon catch up the whole country and the rate per cent of girls is growing more here than in Cameroon in general.

These statistical differences between the north and the south are the results of geographical, historical, cultural and economical factors.

In South-Cameroon, western school was introduced on the coast as early as in the 1840s by christian missionaries, and expanded rapidly the decennials to come, while the first school in

the North opened its doors finally in 1905. This was the only school in this part of the country until the end of WWI.

The country was colonized in 1884 by Germany. At this time the North was already political and economical dominated by the Peul, an expanding Muslim tribe coming from Western Africa. The Germans gained Adamaoua in 1899, 15 years after the colonization and after terrible sufferings for the local tribes. Geographical this area was also very difficult to gain because of the Adamaoua plateau which constitutes a mountainous ark with a mean altitude of 1370 meters going from the border of Nigeria in the west to the border of the Central African Republic in the east. The Germans forbid the establishment of christian missions and consequently construction of western schools in this part of the country by political reasons.

After World War I, the country was shared between the vainqueurs of the war, France and Great Britain, and beneath the authority of the League of Nations France privileged a social evolution in the French area based on the construction of schools (In this presentation there is no time to touch the English system, but I'll mention that in this area the permission of using mother tongue is explicit in statistics showing the rate per cents passing the FLSCertificate which is much higher here than in the French teaching system which forbid the use of mother tongue).

In 1918, the French commissar created the official education system and opened 30 schools dispersed all over the country.

But at independence in 1960, 40 years after the creation of the official teaching system only 6% of the children went to school in the North while the rate per cent in the South was 86%.

Is this lack of a teaching system in the period from the 1840s until the 1920s in the North the only explanation of the low rate per cent between children going to school today in the North compared to the rest of the country?

The school system in Cameroon is based on the western French and English model which is based on the written language. Let's look at this system in relation to the traditional system and the Muslim system.

Because, in my study I also account for the traditional system based on oral delivery – learning by doing, learning by living, learning by saying and especially learning by being, and

the Muslim system which is an intermediate between these two in the combination of the employment of the written language (based on Arabic characters and Islam) and oral delivery.

I distinguish between these three categories of the transmission of knowledge, the modern the traditional and the mixed Muslim system....

According to Santerre, a Canadian researcher, the traditional system is the fundamental teaching form recovered in a particular cultural or ethnic group which allows the reproduction of the group and the surveillance of its culture. Traditional teaching involves manners and attitudes which express essential values of the culture. It gives an important place to duties and prerogatives deeply rooted in the culture's values. Santerre says that this teaching form is neglected in the official teaching system.

Traditional teaching aimed and aims especially at the solving of concrete problems in the everyday life. It formed as well political leaders as workers in different domains, such as agriculture, breeding of cattle, hunting and art. It also inculcated civil sense in the members of the society. In the traditional societies all the institutions are oral.

In view of the traditional systems participating in the maintenance and the reproduction of the social structure as an essential instrument in social control, the introduction of the writing system as a modern teaching system affects in fact the communication between the children and the institutions in a traditional society. These involve great perturbations in all the institutions and separate the children from the rest of the culture. The tide has turned, the situation has changed radically.

Facing the socialization by modern school, these societies can according to Martin only maintain a defensive front and this front resist or is overrun. These two reactions can be spotted in various tribes in North Cameroon.

Muslim societies relying on writing systems in communication or diffusion of knowledge do this based on their islamization.

So is the case for the ethnical group Peul, which is the most represented group in my corpus. Even though they also rely on an oral tradition, and consequently constitute a mixed system, they are different from other ethnical groups by their political centralization in the structure of a state. Because they already know the communication and hierarchical systems the Peul have consciously caught all the implications of the political game introduced by the Europeans.

Owning the most adaptable social structures they were stronger and more important at the independence.

With their own teaching system as well, the Koran schools, there were fewer incompatibilities. The modern school based on writing system entails for this reason significantly less revolutionary and the alterations are modulated.

But for them also the western school represented another ethnical and spiritual culture in which their own influence, knowledge, morality and identity were questioned and menaced.

The Peul adapted all the western hierarchical structures but the school system, which is exposed to a continuous antagonism, today in different groups within the Muslim society opposed to the evolution.

INQUIRY METHODS

The methodical foundation for the investigation of different attitudes among the questioned persons was observations, questionnaires, and interviews. The investigation is made with the point of departure in two primary schools and a college belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon. Five school classes were observed. The question inquiry was done among 184 persons with or without connection to these classes: Three groups of girls: girls going to school, girls having left school before having passed the FSLCertificate and girls never attending school, parents, teachers, three groups of women, the same as for the girls and finally pedagogical authorities. 129 of these persons were also interviewed.

ANALYSES

In the qualitative analysis which consists of new empiric material, the answers of a total of seven questions have been explored. They back up the statistical inquiry: the attitudes of girls' schooling are surprisingly positive considering the fact that they are still a minority at school. Modern points of view extend into groups that previously were not favourable to girls' schooling.

Quality in education emerges as an important factor. This is one of the main factors why so many Muslims send their children to a christian school. Here, the classes are smaller, and the supervision of pupils and the collaboration between home and school is better. Many of the

interrogated also refer to better school results, and several mention that girls are safer in the christian schools.

It comes into sight that fathers' attitudes become important for girls' enrolments and continuation beyond primary school. Their attitudes to girls' schooling were actually more positive than the women's. This can be due to the father's higher level of education. Many of them said that it was the father who decided whether their daughters should go to school or not. On the other hand, this indicates that the fathers are still taking the decisions...

The obstacles are still there. Factors mentioned in previous researches also appeared in my inquiry. In the first place, it concerns the traditions, especially premature marriage, housework, fear of pregnancy before being married, the fear that an educated woman will be less subservient and have less respect for elder and for men. The fact that so many are aware of these factors indicates the result of a growing consciousness which can make the further evolution easier.

I've indicated that it has been an evolution, and that this evolution is still going on in Adamaoua and in Ngoundéré with the help of a case-study where the analytic material was conversations backed up by statistics. Although this study was directed towards girls, the examination showed that the number of boys also sink dramatically with higher classes.

Ignorance is an important factor according to one of the pedagogical authorities questioned: "There is a general problem of childhood in North-Cameroon [...] I state the fact that children are abandoned very early by their parents [...] The rate per cent of abandoned is sometimes higher for boys than for girls, who are often taken care of for the reasons of marriage. Because later, in lack of surveillance the boys go into other activities than school - they go fishing, they go hunting [...] and the parents don't oppose that".

Therefore it is also important to run and direct influencing campaigns not only against the mothers (which is often mentioned in other investigations), but also against the fathers, not only because they tend to be more positive, but also because it's often easier to get in touch with them. At the same moment mother's roles in women's groups must not be underestimated (Women's associations are very important to influence other mothers to send their daughters to school. Often in Muslim societies women are not allowed to leave the polygamy compound, but they are not forbid to meet other women in the same situation as themselves...). Because through the investigation I found that because of a growing poverty,

it appears that the tendency against an ever more understanding for education before marriage, in fact, declines among women today. They prefer to involve them into the informal sector in the need of financial support of the family.

ADVICES

In Cameroon, the education authorities could make profit by taking example of the quality content in the private protestant schools. One of these schools is following the principles of a new pedagogical reform. This project consists of integrating the environments in the teaching systems - «*école intégrée au milieu*». Réseau Ecole et Développement or in English: Network, School and Development was created in 1989 in Abidjan on the initiative of a group responsible for the teaching in different protestant churches in francophone countries. They had stated the fact that the classical school system based on the western model is completely inadaptable in the actual African society. The goal of the project is to create the foundations of a new pedagogical approach where the distance between what the pupils are learning at school and the expectations of the society is removed. The lessons follow the governmental programs as foundation, but integrate various elements, such as agriculture, breeding of goats, chickens etc., art and practical skills. They also teach human rights, children's human rights and democratic principles. These elements are integrated by the mean of pedagogical manuals for the teacher. An offer like that could smooth the progress of several Muslim parents and protectors of traditions who refuse to send their girls to school.

This reform is introduced in so called pilot schools running by protestant churches in Benin, Burkina, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Togo, Chad and Gabon. Other schools, as Catholics are also interested to participate in the project. But how attach the attention of the public schools?

Many of the questioned in my investigation; teachers, parents and women say that the distance between what children learn in the classic western school and what the society expects is too big. As say one of the questioned: "it's a pity that the ordinary teaching which children receive at school sometimes doesn't correspond to real needs in the society". This opinion is also used in a UNICEF report of 1998 to explain why so many parents in North-Cameroon don't send their children to school.

At independence in 1960 the UNESCO in collaboration with the recent decolonized countries chose to continue the western classical teaching systems already installed in the current countries without giving any attention to traditional systems. At same time they invested in

expensive programs to make western school accessible for everyone. They aimed at nothing less than a total school attendance within the year of 1980. The turn over of the 1970s imposed the first defeat. It forced the responsible authorities to question themselves what reforms to do next. This also happened after 1980 and after 2000. Will they continue to ask the same questions after 2015?? I want to ask – what does the tomorrow school look like in a permanent development which is the goal for the collaborators in aid programs.

Looking at Cameroon, the big problem in the public school system is the lack of infrastructure. In the school year 2000/2001 the school attendance became free in public schools. Consequently the rate per cent increased with almost 40% only in Ngaoundéré and environs. This explains something about how dramatically the situation than become in a school that is already overcrowded concerning the number of children in the classes. For Cameroon it's now important to find remedies to follow up the introduction to free school and to fulfil the law's terms of compulsory school attendance with the improvement of the infrastructure.

The Norwegian government has in the year of 2000, after the statement of research results confirming a connection between girl's schooling and social development, increased their financial support to a UNICEF teaching project directed against girls....Can they do this without introducing local culture in teaching programs. Especially with the teaching of girls the content should make the authorities aware of the necessity of involving local culture. Also while looking to the connection between teaching and environs to maintain the continuation of local cultures.