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*Ayuk Fenlai Carine & Chongwain Lilly Oyoma J*



## The Relevance of African Indigenous Proverbs in the Development of Pupils' Learning Competencies

 Ayuk Fenlai Carine<sup>1\*</sup> &  Chongwain Lilly Oyoma J<sup>2</sup>

The University of Bamenda<sup>1,2</sup>

Corresponding Author's Email: carinedelphine@gmail.com

Co-Author's Email: chongwainlilly@gmail.com



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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study investigated the impact of African indigenous proverbs in the development of pupils' learning competencies. The objective of this study is to provide an insight of how proverbs can be useful in the development of pupils' cognitive competencies and to find the impact that, the values of African indigenous proverbs have in the education of pupils in the Cameroon educational system. The descriptive survey research design was used for the study and the sampled population consisted of 300 pupils of three primary schools in Bamenda III municipality namely; Government Practicing School Bamenda, Group A, Government Practicing School, Nibung and Government Practicing School Bamenda, Group B in Bamenda III Municipality. The simple random sampling technique was used to obtain participants (pupils) to provide answers to the questionnaire items and the purposive and convenient sampling techniques were employed to get participants (parents) for the structured interviews. Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

(SPSS) were used to analyze the data. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse research questions while regression analysis was used to test hypotheses.

**Methodology:** Descriptive statistics (tables, percentages and charts) as well as inferential statistics (Regression Analysis) were employed for data analysis.

**Findings:** The findings of the study revealed that 32.3% of the variations accounted for by indigenous proverbs.

**Recommendations:** From the above findings, it was recommended that indigenous proverbs should be included in school curriculum content especially in literal studies. And also, teachers should be encouraged to integrate and to make use of them in their teaching methods.

**Keywords:** *Indigenous Proverbs, Indigenous Competences, Learning Competences*

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Indigenous education has existed in Africa for thousands of years long before Western educations were introduced by the European colonialists and missionaries (Abah, Mashebe & Denuga, 2015). One of the elements of indigenous education is the use of cultural resources such as local proverbs, folktales and mythologies to provide a symbolic explanation of the environment. It is a pedagogic and instructional methodology of indigenous learning which enables young learners to imbibe social responsibility, ethics, and community belongingness Aboluwodi (2014), Dei (2014) & Chongwain (2021).

In Africa, proverbs are embellishments of speech. They are symbols of communication and in many cases; they form sub-languages of their own. The language of proverbs opens a whole perspective to the world, and thus constitutes a means of tapping into societies' view of reality. Proverbs are a spur to knowledge, wisdom and morality. They can be prognostic and can challenge assumptions in order to inspire further reflection. Most Africans used proverbs and adages every day and extensively in all forms of communication either to bring out clearly the meaning of obscure points in arguments or as the driving force in a discussion (Nsamenang and Tchombe, 2012).

They serve as a warning in all areas of human activities or relations. They criticize, praise, advice and teach. Proverbs tend to re-familiarize the familiar and function as mini allegories. In Africa, proverbs cover every aspect of human endeavours and relations, and thus there is hardly any African imbued to any measure with the culture of his or her people who has not a good stock of proverbs for ready application, though, like in all things, expertise and refinement in their use vary widely. Proverbs are rich sources of African wisdom and philosophy. Africans, according to Fasokun, (2005), use proverbs extensively. These are usually expressed not only in words but also in the language of the drums and the sound of the horns blown by the attendants of chiefs.

### **The Significance of Proverbs in the Development of Pupil's Learning Competences**

Proverbs are used by African indigenous people as an educational tool. According to Kebede & Alemayehu (2014), proverbs are embodiments of the social facet of indigenous ways of life that were used to develop cognitive competences in young ones and equally to promote virtues of faithfulness, cooperation among people, mutual respect among people in the society. Proverbs encourage good deeds while discouraging bad behaviour, they promote the teaching of accepted social values, moral principles and non-conformity to deviant acts. They can be viewed as expressions that reveal the life-world and values of a given society as well as their attitudes towards their surroundings (Aboluwodi, 2014).

Proverbs carry great potential to initiate behavioural change because they are highly contextual, morally and spiritually infused and carriers of the culture and wisdom. Proverbs in African communities according to McDonnell, (2005) are used and have been used for generations to initiate behavioural and character change that is reflective of the worldviews manifested in various local communities. Proverbs are believed to be symbols of communication that form sub-languages of their own. The language of proverbs gives vent to a whole perspective on the world and thus constitutes a means of tapping into societies' view of reality. Proverbs are spurs to knowledge, wisdom and morality. Etta and Mogu (2012) are of the view that, proverbs are indispensable to knowledge and it forms the core of African epistemology. For them, proverbs can be prognostic and can challenge assumptions in order

to inspire further reflection. Proverbs can also be useful and effective in enhancing teaching and learning in many academic disciplines (Gebregeorgis, 2015; Tedam, 2013).

Competencies can be defined as the ability to use a set of related knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform given task or critical work functions. Nessipbayeva (2012) goes further to hold that, competence is a combination of knowledge, skills and behaviour used to improve performance or as the state or quality of being adequately qualified and capable of performing a given role. Competencies to him would enable learners not only acquire knowledge but also use in ways that help them solve various problems in life, work and family, social and professional situations. This implies that if competencies must be developed, teaching and learning strategies will need to be more student-centred. Another area of competency according to Aguilar and Bridges (2020) that should be developed in learners is Social-Emotional Learning (SEL).

SEL to them is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships and make responsible and caring decisions. In relation to this, the Cameroon Ministry of Basic Education (2004) had distinguished three main components of the competence to be taught: subject competence (knowledge), transversal competence (knowledge resulting from all the subjects in a child's learning) and life competence which results from the development of the right attitudes, behaviour and problem solving skills for real life situations.

### **Proverbs and the Development of Pupils' Learning Competences**

Indigenous proverbs are epistemologies and narratives that are anchored in the traditional communities characterized by complex kinship systems of relationships among people, animals, the earth, the cosmos, etc. from which knowing originates (Abah, Mashebe & Denuga, 2015). Proverbs according to Banda and Banda (2016), are a store of indigenous knowledge which can be used to teach grammar and to sensitize learners on aspects of academic writing. Proverbs typically have two thematically related parts, which can be used to teach aspects of academic writing in respect to appreciation of textual cohesion and coherence in meaning making. They demonstrated how proverbs are typically structured to express evidential, absolute truth and flawless logic, all of which are characteristic of academic writing. They equally concluded that proverbs can be used as resources in the teaching aspects of persuasive language and develop critical and cognitive analytical skills.

Among other indigenous oral traditions, proverbs remain a veritable tool in depicting the overall social and humanistic values of indigenous people. For instance, proverbs are used as a form of literary expressions to encourage, admonish, mock, advice, and console and generally to establish the verbal convention that is significant to their social realities, cultural identities and historical circumstances (Make, *et. al.* 2014). Proverbs are idiomatic expressions that convey ideas about society and people's understanding. They tend to be simple, short sentences that are often witty.

The educational role of proverbs is reflected on social values and cultural teachings within wide range of local contexts such as behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, politics, ecology, spirituality, local cosmology, and worldview. Proverbs also reflect the linguistic and cultural vocabulary used by community elders to affirm their deep knowledge and wisdom of societal



affairs (Dei, 2013). The language of proverbs gives vent to a whole perspective on the world, and thus constitutes a means of tapping into societies' view of reality. They can be prognostic and can challenge assumptions in order to inspire further reflection. They are used to criticize, praise, advice and teach (Omolewa, 2007).

According to Mieder (2004), proverbs have been used and should be used in teaching as didactic tools because of their content of educational wisdom. He justifies his position by viewing that, proverbs belong to the common knowledge of basically all native speakers, and are indeed very effective devices to communicate wisdom and knowledge about human nature and the world at large. Hyland (2011), is of the view that proverbs are of relevance to academics in that; they can be used to sensitize learners about the importance of logical induction and the role of communities in constructing knowledge. The idea here is to focus the learners on the fact that just like in academic writing, proverbs are presented as sound ways of reasoning that can be used in representing the discourse of any reality.

Ngalim and Stanislaus (2020), say that proverbs provide pedagogic techniques that can enable learners to develop and acquire critical thinking skills as a learning competence. While Banda and Banda (2016) view that, one of the educational implications of introducing proverbs in educational systems to learners will be that, learners will acquire cognitive competencies in linguistic skills such as in rhetoric and analytical skills in learning.

According to Ngalim and Stanislaus (2020), oral traditions can provoke critical thinking skills in pupils if appropriate techniques are used. The central argument they advanced is that, in spite of the discernible limitations of African Indigenous oral pedagogies, there is no justification to doubt or dismiss it simply because it is unwritten. For this reason, they exploited African philosophy of education to explain how African thought patterns can be used to enhance the imaginative powers of pupils to think and flourish in moral and intellectual values. They proposed the use of proverbs, riddles and folktales as pedagogic elements of African oral tradition to provoke critical and creative thinking skills in learners. This is because, they believe there is much to exploit in African Indigenous oral pedagogies to enhance the growth of learners in both moral and intellectual values. Furthermore, every culture has something to contribute to arts and science and African Indigenous oral thought is not an exception.

Vygotsky's Socio-cultural theory explains how learning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context. The socio-cultural perspectives on learning are on the roles that participation in social interactions and culturally organized activities play in influencing psychological development (Scott & Palincsar, 2013). According to Vygotsky, (1978), learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and with his peers. Thus learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions.

The main precepts of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning that involve the development of learners' competencies are language, social interaction, the more knowledgeable other and the Zone of Proximal Development. From the Vygotskian perspective according to Shabani, Khatib, & Ebadi, (2010), learners should be kept in their own ZPDs as often as possible by giving them interesting and culturally meaningful learning and problem-solving tasks that are slightly more difficult than what they do alone, such that

they will need to work together either with another, more competent peer or with a teacher or adult to finish the task.

Language according to Vygotsky, is a cultural tool which enables social interaction, and directs behaviour and attitudes, and indeed propagates the development of culture itself. He identified three key stages in the development of language which are: social, egocentric, and inner speech. The social stage is the first stage of language development, and is a means by which young children express emotions or simple thoughts. The egocentric stage describes an intermediate stage of language development between external speech and inner thoughts. While, the inner stage enables children to direct and organize thought making it an important proponent of higher mental functioning (Zhou & Brown, 2015). Thus, proverbs here can prove to be relevant in the development of language competences especially in terms of the social and inner speech development. This is corroborated by Banda and Banda (2016) who viewed that proverbs can be used as resources in the teaching of persuasive language and the development of critical and cognitive analytical skills.

Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. Ellis (2000) believes that the socio-cultural theory of learning starts not through interaction but during interaction. Children finish a task with the help of another person, learn it and then are able to do the same task alone. In this way, the social interaction is a support to intermediate learning. Landis (2013) is of the view that, one of the instructional strategy of indigenous education which involves social interaction are group communication, cooperation and sharing. These have critical survival benefits in developing socio-emotional competences in indigenous children. In this light, proverbs were exercised in groups as a brain teaser, to develop critical thinking in children. This was therefore a way to help children socialize and develop communication skills in sharing their thoughts.

The more knowledgeable other refers to anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level in knowledge or skills than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept. The more knowledgeable other could also be peers or even a younger person (Brooks, 2009). Elders and the community at large in indigenous education, played an important role in the inculcation of values and beliefs in children. They were also considered as knowledge-keepers and more knowledgeable and were given considerable respect in their home communities (Bruchac, 2014). In respect to this, proverbial quizzes were organized by the most knowledgeable indigenous people in the family or community as a play-based instructional approach through which children competed with each other to provide accurate answers. Vygotsky (1978) views this as the “Zone of Proximal Development” (ZPD).

The Zone of Proximal Development is the distance between the actual developmental level of the learner, as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development. The concept of ZPD according to Irshad, Maan, Batool, & Hanif, (2021), relates to the cognitive functioning of children and their development that precedes from interaction with more capable and competent others. What the learner can do with the assistance or guidance of more competent adults or more capable peers, The ZPD is a more dynamic and relative indicator of cognitive development than what learners accomplish alone (Fania & Ghaemib, 2011). It is also a productive interaction which he believes is good when it enables learners acquire well developed competencies. This zone provides opportunities for great learning to take place because the tasks are just beyond the individual’s capability and such challenges tend to be beneficial for cognitive growth.

Abah, Bashebe & Denuga (2015) posit that indigenous education is contextual and the core of community development. Thus, learning in indigenous education is therefore not detached from the learner's realities and experiences within his/her community or environment both physical and spiritual. This was the case with proverbs given that they provide answers around the contextual realities and experiences of indigenous children.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem of this study stems from the fact that, in spite of the educational reforms carried out by the government of Cameroon as can be seen in law No 98/004 of 14<sup>th</sup> April 1998 to lay down guidelines of education in Cameroon and the revised curriculum of Basic Education (2018) which is centred on the Competency Based Approach, there is still some deficiency in the use of indigenous cultural instructional practices which could be relevant in the development of pupil's cognitive competences. Some of the prescriptions of these reforms recommend the need for the valorisation of Cameroon's cultural values in school curricula and the contextualization of educational activities with the use of local tools as didactic teaching materials for the development of learner's competences. Therefore, this research work seeks to determine the relevance of indigenous proverbs in the development of pupils' learning competencies.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study is guided by a lone objective; the relevance of indigenous proverbs on the development of pupils learning competencies.

### **Research Questions**

How do indigenous proverbs affect the development of pupils' learning competencies?

### **Research Hypotheses**

**Ho:** There is no significant effect of indigenous proverbs on the development of pupils' learning competencies.

**Ha:** There is a significant effect of indigenous proverbs on the development of pupils' learning competencies.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

A descriptive survey research design was used in this study. The sample size was 300. A 4 - point Likert scale questionnaire and open-ended questions were used for data collection. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Microsoft Excel and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) were used to analyse the data. Tables and simple percentages were used to analyse the structured interview guide. Variable coding key for pupils and parents was developed. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were applied. The first part of this results presents the demographic data. This is followed by presentation of findings according to research questions and hypotheses.

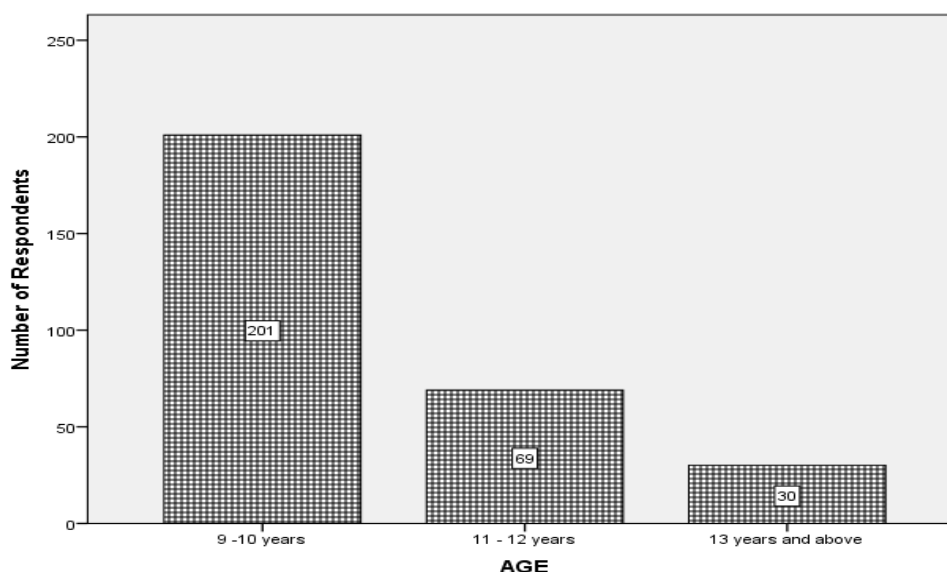


Figure 1: Bar Chart Indicating Ages of Respondents

The regression analysis was used to test hypotheses.

### Verification of Hypotheses

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Indigenous proverbs do not significantly affect the development of pupils’ learning competencies.

**H<sub>a</sub>:** Indigenous proverbs significantly affect the development of pupils’ learning competencies.

### 3.0 FINDINGS

**Table 1: Regression Model Summary for Indigenous Proverbs and the Development of Pupils’ Learning Competencies**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.568	.323	.321	1.173

The model summary table shows that R-Square for the overall model is 0.323 with an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0.321. This suggests that only 32.3% of the variations in the development of pupils’ learning competencies can be accounted for by indigenous proverbs.

**Table 2: ANOVA Table of Regression Analysis for Indigenous Proverbs and the Development of Pupils’ Learning Competencies**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	195.581	1	195.581	142.176	.000
	Residual	409.939	298	1.376		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>605.520</b>	<b>299</b>			

The ANOVA table shows that  $F(1,298) = 142.176$  with  $p = 0.000$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). This suggests that there is a significant influence of indigenous proverbs on the development of pupils’



learning competencies. Consequently,  $H_0$  is rejected. It can therefore be concluded that indigenous proverbs significantly affect the development of pupils' learning competencies.

**Table 3: Regression Coefficients for Indigenous Proverbs and the Development of Pupils' Learning Competencies**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	6.355	.475		13.382	.000
1 Indigenous Proverbs	.441	.037	.568	11.924	.000

The table for regression coefficients indicates that the regression equation is given by *Development of Pupils' Learning Competencies* = 6.355 + 0.441 x *Indigenous Proverbs*. Thus, when indigenous proverbs are at zero, the development of pupils' learning competencies is at 6.355. When indigenous proverbs increase by one unit, the development of pupils' learning competencies increases by 0.441. This increase is significant as indicated by the p-value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### Summary of Findings

As far as the objective of this study is concerned, the findings revealed that indigenous proverbs significantly influence the development of pupils' learning competencies and accounts for 32.3 % of the variations in the development of pupils' learning competencies. In line with the above findings, Banda and Banda (2016) opined that indigenous proverbs can be used to teach grammar and to sensitize learners on aspects of academic writing. They equally concluded that proverbs can be used as resources in teaching aspects of persuasive language and developing critical and cognitive analytical skills.

Ngalim and Stanislaus (2020) uphold that oral traditions can provoke critical thinking skills in pupils if appropriate techniques are used. For this reason, they exploited African philosophy of education to explain how African thought patterns can be used to enhance the imaginative powers of pupils to think and flourish in moral and intellectual values. Dei (2013) on his part holds that, the educational role of proverbs is reflected on the development of the socio-cognitive competencies of learners. Teaching here involves a wide range of local contexts such as behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, politics, ecology, spirituality, local cosmology, and worldview.

## 4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

In our quest to examine the relevance of Indigenous Proverbs in the development of pupils' learning competencies, what is established from this study shows that, indigenous proverbs have a significant influence on the development of pupils' learning competencies in terms of their thinking competencies, communication competencies, and socio-cognitive competencies. This simply affirms the pedagogical role and impact that proverbs have in the development of learners' cognitive and affective competences.

### **Recommendations**

Indigenous proverbs were found to significantly affect learners' development of competencies. It would be suggested that these activities be included in the curriculum and teachers encouraged to integrate and to make use of them in their teaching method especially in literal studies.

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