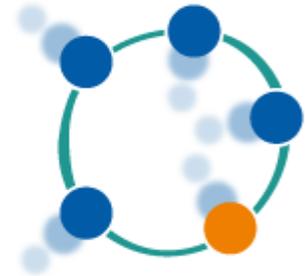


Literacy Development and Impact: The Case of the Mbororo Women in Cameroon



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Abstract

Enter abstract here “Literacy Development and Impact: The case of the Mbororo Women in Cameroon” is a sociolinguistic study which sets out to investigate the importance of mother tongue literacy in the lives of Mbororo Women in the North West, East and Adamawa Regions of Cameroon where they are predominantly found. The Mbororo community is a marginalised community as members do not fully integrate in the mainstream society activities due to their cattle-rearing nature. The Mbororo Women in particular have no decision making powers in the family and in the society, they are denigrated by their customs, they have little potential for political participation and are bereft of economic security. They cannot read medical prescriptions for their children or the adverse effects of medicines. Their prestige is only recognized in the number of children they bear. Their dependency on men is very high. This study aims at knowing whether mother tongue can help them to solve the above mentioned problems. The research is conducted on the bases of the following theoretical frameworks: functional, critical and mother tongue literacy. The methodology used for this work is based on the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The random sampling technique is used in the selection of the population under study. Research instruments that are used in carrying out this study are questionnaires, test questions and direct key informant interviews. These instruments were administered looking at ten factors. They include: The impact of literacy at the personal, community and family levels, reasons for being literate, income-generating activities, health-related issues, attitude towards children’s education, decision-making, perceptions of the status of the woman, engendering change, communication and the ability to read, write and calculate basic operations. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) women answered the test questions and questionnaires and seventy-five (75) were interviewed. The frequency distribution technique is used for analyzing data. An analysis of the data collected reveals that Fulfulde is a good medium of learning for the Mbororo Women and makes them more successful in their daily lives than literacy in Arabic and French. The findings also demonstrate that reading, writing and calculating basic operations in Fulfulde is a great factor of development to the Mbororo Women than literacy in Arabic and French. To enhance literacy activities among the Mbororo Women, the work also presents and examines major barriers to effective literacy and proposes strategic orientations for surmounting them. On the basis of the findings the researcher made some recommendations amongst which are the following. To begin, Fulfulde should be taught to Mbororo Women first and Arabic or French should be taught only after they have thoroughly acquired the reading, writing and calculating skills in the mother tongue. In addition, the government should fund literacy programmes in the mother tongue because funding them will be funding the development of the nation. Finally, Mbororo men should be sensitised on the importance of being literate in the mother tongue. The researcher also made some suggestions for further study. Among these suggestions is the need for an appropriate methodology for the teaching of the mother tongue to the Mbororo community.

Keywords

Mbororo women, Cameroon, literacy, development

1. Introduction

This work is a sociolinguistic study that deals with literacy development and impact looking at the case of the Mbororo Women in Cameroon. The Mbororo society is a marginalised society as its members do not fully integrate in the main stream society activities. They are nomads and their main activity is cattle-rearing. They are a minority group wherever they are found and are often considered as strangers. Traditionally, Mbororo Women have come to believe that marriage and home making is their vocation and their husbands will look after them and their children. This assumption has not always been true due to the harsh economic situation in Africa. These women need to know the methods of malaria prevention, do petty trading, rear animals, attend meetings and public manifestations, keep records of their business, read dosages of medical prescriptions, make use of cell phones, know different family planning methods, child care and take active part in family decisions. These activities can be optimally conducted through mother tongue literacy. This study therefore aims at underscoring the link between mother tongue literacy and development.

1.1 The Problem

UNESCO (2008) indicates that there are 774 million non-literate adults in the world making about 1/5 of the world's population. Over two thirds of this cohort is female. In Cameroon, the provision of education as measured between the sexes significantly disfavours the female population. The Mbororo Women are also victims of this egregious state of affairs of chronic illiteracy amongst the female population.

Bitja Kody (2001:102) holds that there are 280 national languages in Cameroon. Among these languages is Fulfulde which is spoken by the Mbororo people. It is their main language of communication. They speak it at home, in the market, in social gatherings, in the farm and in public places. Some Mbororo people were taught to read and write English by some workers of the Ministry of Youth and Physical Education in the North West Region of Cameroon. Despite these lessons, they felt that their needs had not been met because they could not read and write the language well.

This work sets out to answer the following research questions: Is the use of the mother tongue a good medium of learning for the Mbororo Women? Which factors associated with mother tongue literacy enhance development? What are some of the barriers to effective literacy among the Mbororo women? How can these barriers be surmounted? Is being literate in the mother tongue synonymous to being functional from a development perspective?

This study is based on the following theoretical considerations: functional, critical and mother tongue literacy. Functional literacy advocates that people should be taught how to read and write focusing on

the things they already know and do, so that they can do them better (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994; Nforbi, 1999; Bhola, 1988; Egbo, 2000). Critical literacy regards literacy as an instrument of liberation or domestication as propounded by Stromquist (1992) and Ballara (1991). Mother tongue literacy proponents hold that national languages are of paramount importance in the life and development of mankind (Chumbow, 1997; Tadadjeu 1977b; Dunningan, 1989). Taking the cue from the latter theoretical strand it is salient to note how counter-intuitive it may be to regard received languages (rather than mother tongue) as the main channel for communication. This study affirms this departure from conventional wisdom as the research conducted finds a strong correlation between mother tongue and development for the Mbororo women.

1.2 The Situation of Mbororo Women in Cameroon

The Mbororo women are a part of the Fulani ethnic group. Their origin has been traced to the Futa Toro region in Northern Senegal as stated by Jumbam (2012: 1). They are all Muslims and Fulfulde speaking. They are generally light-skinned with slender bodies. They usually have thin lips and long noses and their hair grows quite long.

Their religious edicts and mores do not countenance a public and exhibited role for women. Hence their religion and traditional practices do not embrace the fact that these women be exposed. They can only do any trade on permission from their husbands. They depend on their husbands for feeding and clothing. Most of them live in polygamous setups. They are discriminated against and put in subordinate positions to men. A majority of them do superficial learning through their children. They are highly respected in their communities when they give birth to a boy child than a girl child.

In an evaluation report on building civil society in Cameroon Shei (2009:2) spells out some problems faced by these women. They include their lack of access to basic services; the fact that they do not take active part in decision making in the family and in the community; the fact that they have little knowledge on income generating activities; their own poor mentality towards the education of the girl child; and their lack of knowledge on how to read road signs, medical prescriptions and dosages. These factors all corroborate the fact that Mbororo women have problems that need to be redressed.

1.3 Word on methodology is worthwhile

The methodology used in this study is both quantitative and qualitative. The population that was involved in this study was made up of Trained Mbororo Women in Fulfulde in the North West region of Cameroon, Trained Mbororo Women in Arabic in the Adamawa region and Trained Mbororo Women in

French in the Eastern region of Cameroon. These women were trained for two years. In the North West region they were trained in Fulfulde by the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA) using the Regenerated Freirian Literacy Through Community Technique (REFLECT). In the Adamawa region they were trained by the Franco-Arabic institution and in the Eastern Region by the Association for Assistance in Development (ASSAD) and the World Food Program (WFP or PAM) using the National literacy programme. A total of one hundred and fifty (150) women answered the test questions and questionnaires. Fifty (50) women per region were involved in this exercise. Seventy-five (75) women were interviewed. Twenty-five (25) women per region were involved in this exercise. Their ages ranged from thirty (30)-sixty (60) years. The simple random sampling technique was used in the selection of the population. This technique was used because it is believed to be unbiased. With this technique, each element of the population has an equal and independent chance of being included in the sample.

To collect data for this work, the researcher negotiated her way into the Mbororo communities through the help of MBOSCUDA. She met the presidents of the associations of each of these regions thanks to the North West Regional Coordinator Mr. Sali Njango. While there, she had to explain the purpose of her visit to the women. In doing so much a key ethical component of research (consent) was met.

The data was collected using three types of instruments: questionnaires, test questions and direct interviews with key informant interviewees. To assess the literacy of women and development, Ballara (1991) and Egbo (2000) looked at eight variables. They include the impact of literacy, reasons for being literate, attitude towards children's education, perception of the status of women, engendering change, income generating activities, decision-making and health-related issues. In addition to these variables, the researcher added communication and the reading, writing and calculating skills.

Ten variables were used in this study. The reading, writing and calculating skills were tested using the test questions. Furthermore, a pilot study was carried out on nine (09) trained Mbororo Women in Fulfulde, Arabic and French. The research was carried out for a period of one month each, in all the regions. It was done with the help of literacy instructors and MBOSCUDA presidents in each region. The instructors pleaded with the trained Mbororo Women to meet in selected literacy centres on a given date to answer the test questions.

Mindful that the author was deep in her pregnancy period, the women were very happy to see a pregnant woman carrying out research on their issues. This state of the researcher encouraged and motivated the women to respond freely and happily to the interviews and questionnaires. To ease understanding literacy instructors translated the questionnaires in to Arabic and Fulfulde. Interviews

were also carried out with the help of literacy facilitators. Looking at reading, the women were given a long text on the life of a young girl who was forced into marriage. Writing comprised of producing an essay of one hundred and sixty (160) words on any topic of their choice. In the realm of calculation, they were tested on basic operations and arithmetic. The scripts got from these exercises were marked by literacy instructors. The researcher gave the scripts to be remarked by other qualified persons to confirm the scores. The interviews sought to know the skills acquired best during their training which were most helpful to them. It also inquired if their lives had improved after attending literacy classes and the problems they faced during the classes.

The frequency distribution technique is used for analysing the data. A cross indicates the frequency of each activity. To bring out the percentage for each activity, the researcher added the number of ticks per activity and divided the same by the total number of activities involved multiplied by a hundred.

$$\frac{\text{frequency of activity}}{\text{Total frequency of all activities}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

An arbitrary but amply objective grading system was used to qualify the performance of Mbororo Women: the 0-9.99 point range fell below average and those in the 10-20 point range were regarded to be above average.

Having explored preliminary considerations, part two presents and discusses the findings of this work. Part three considers the government's reaction towards the development of Mbororo Women and the usefulness of language skills to them. Part four then deals with barriers to effective literacy development among the Mbororo Women. Part five situates this study in international trends. Part six further elucidates the relevance of the research and makes recommendations and suggestions for further research.

2. Presentation and Discussion of findings

Following the analysis of the results a number of statements can be made. First, mother tongue literacy is more useful to Mbororo Women in the following areas: personal, family and community life, health-related issues, income-generating activities, attitude towards children's education, decision-making, perception of the status of a woman, engendering change, reading, writing and communication than literacy in Arabic and French. Second, trained women in Fulfulde perform better in reading and writing than trained women in French and Arabic. Third, trained Mbororo Women in French perform better in

calculating basic operations than those trained in Fulfulde and Arabic. Fourth, reading, writing and calculating basic operations in the mother tongue constitute a great factor of development to the Mbororo Women and to their society as revealed by the external correlation between questionnaires, tests and interviews. Fifth, barriers to literacy in the Mbororo community include: lack of pedagogic material in teaching, late coming on the part of learners, lack of textbooks, irregular attendance of learners, the fear of being laughed at by others and the refusal of women's participation in literacy classes by some husbands. In discussing the findings the researcher has examined ten variables used in the study.

2.1 The impact of literacy

The impact of literacy on the lives of Mbororo Women was examined looking at the personal, family and community lives of these women. The analysis of questionnaires revealed that literacy in Fulfulde has helped more women to assist their husbands financially in their homes than literacy in French and Arabic. 86%, 50%, 65% of trained women in Fulfulde, Arabic and French respectively do assist their husbands financially. More trained Mbororo Women in Fulfulde take active part in group discussions and activities in the community than the trained women in Arabic and French. This shows that literacy in the mother tongue is more beneficial to the Mbororo Women than literacy in French and Arabic.

2.2 Health-Related Issues

More trained Mbororo Women in Fulfulde read pamphlets on how to treat diseases like cholera, diarrhoea and how to prevent sexually transmissible diseases than those trained in Arabic and French. 80%, 50%, 60% respectively of these women do these activities. More trained women in Fulfulde follow their children's vaccination regimens, read pamphlets on how to purify water and birth control methods than those trained in Arabic and French. Here literacy is seen as a process of bolstering awareness or "conscientisation." If people can read a text on the dangers of sexually transmissible diseases, this will appeal to their consciences. Knowing better family planning methods will help these women not to give birth to many children who they will not have the means to feed.

2.3 Income-Generating Activities

From the questionnaires, more trained women in Fulfulde do farming, rear animals and milk cows than those trained in Arabic and French. A majority of the women trained in Fulfulde learnt these activities from the literacy classes, while those trained in French and Arabic learnt more of their activities from

parents or friends. This difference shows that women trained in the mother tongue are more performant in their daily activities than those trained in Arabic and French. Looking at trading, we found that more trained women in French do this activity very well than the trained women in Fulfulde and Arabic. This could be linked to the fact that they speak French and so serve a wider population in business.

2.4 Engendering change

Most of the women see education as one of the panacea for redressing their social problems. At first Mbororo Women depended on their husbands for everything, but with an increase in the levels of literacy, more women trained in Fulfulde no longer depend on their husbands for food and clothing than those trained in Arabic and French. One of the trained women in Fulfulde asserts this as she says: "Yes my life has improved because I am now the secretary of a women's association in Ndop. In this group, I teach women certain aspects of family life and they pay me. This has really helped me to support my husband in taking care of the house needs."

2.5 Communication

Looking at communication, more trained Mbororo Women in Fulfulde communicate with their children using Fulfulde than those trained in Arabic and French. They also write letters to their children more than those trained in Arabic and French. Communication is a very important aspect of life, in that it keeps a person informed about the happenings around him or her and in the world. A person who reads newspapers; listens to the radio; and participates in different meetings is likely to be more enlightened than one who always confines himself or herself to their homes.

2.6 Attitude towards children's education

The questionnaires reveal that the trained women in Fulfulde, Arabic and French have a positive attitude towards the education of their children. They link education to better life options for their children. All the women have very positive and forward leaning intentions with regard to their children's education and future well-being. Academic ability rather than gender should be the deciding factor in ensuring the education of children.

2.7 Reasons for being literate

A majority of the women attended literacy classes to improve on their lives. Fifty per cent of the trained women in Fulfulde, Arabic and French gave this reason for attending the classes. Fifty per cent of all the women say that they attended the classes to improve on their reading, writing and calculating skills. From the interviews some have acquired the reading skills more than the writing skills and others have acquired the calculating skills. These skills have helped them to be able to read roads signs and health pamphlets, write letters, minutes of associations and even to teach their peers. The calculating skills have helped them to excel in business.

2.8 Decision-making

Decision-making of a woman is particularly important in a society where a woman's value is inextricably linked to her role within the household. More trained women in Fulfulde make decisions in the household than women trained in Arabic and Fulfulde. The proportions of 80%, 60% and 50% trained adults in Fulfulde, Arabic and French respectively do make decisions within the family. Kasadra et al (1986:123) assert that literacy provides a woman with a sense of independence and more power than the illiterate women to influence family decisions.

2.9 Perception of the Status of Women

In the Mbororo community, a woman is considered the subordinate gender by the husband. Women who are literate are not prone to discrimination in this community. They have tried to move away from beliefs that hinder the progress of women. More trained women in Fulfulde affirm that literacy has given them a higher status in the community than women who are literate in Arabic and French. This is because they can write Fulfulde during meetings and even teach their other peers. Kasardra et al (ibid: 88) argue that literate women are more likely to acquire dispositions that favour more liberal, independent and less dogmatic thinking.

2.10 Reading, writing and calculating

This aspect of reading, writing and calculating basic operations has been put on a table for easy discussion (see appendices). From the test questions more trained Mbororo Women in Fulfulde can read and write long texts than those trained in Arabic and French. A proportion of 60% of these women have above average in writing as opposed to 40% and 20% of the trained women in Arabic and French respectively. These differences could be associated to spelling mistakes and wrong expressions. In

French, for example the women say “*je garde mes poules dans mon maison*” (I keep my fowls in my house) instead of “*je garde mes poules dans la maison.*” The use of the possessive adjective poses a problem here. Despite this, more trained women in French performed better in calculating basic operations than those trained in Fulfulde and Arabic.

2.11 Summation: External correlations between questionnaires, tests, interviews and findings

From the test findings, we notice that trained women in Fulfulde read long texts more than those trained in French and Arabic. This in turn helps them to read the time, newspapers, calendars, keep diaries, read weights and measures than those trained in French and Arabic as revealed by the questionnaires and interviews. The test also reveals that the trained women in Fulfulde can write long essays than those trained in Arabic and French. The acquisition of this skill has helped these adults to take down notes during social gatherings, write down the recipes of food, riddles, proverbs and tales more than those trained in Arabic and French.

Furthermore, the tests show that trained women in French calculate basic operations more than those trained in Fulfulde and Arabic. This helps them to keep a good account of fowls and other animals that they keep. It also helps them to calculate their sales after trading more than those trained in Fulfulde and Arabic as revealed by the questionnaires. The interviews also show that some women trained in French excel in business and nobody can cheat them. They do well in trading because they serve a wider community: foreigners and the Mbororo people.

From these external correlations among research instruments used in this work, we can say that literacy in the mother tongue enhances development in the Mbororo Women and in the society. The researcher also looked at the Government’s reaction towards the development of Mbororo women and the usefulness of language skills in their lives.

3. Government’s Reaction towards the Development of Mbororo Women and the usefulness of language skills to them.

3.1 Government Reaction towards development

The Cameroonian government has made clear its plans of making Cameroon an emerging country by 2035. One of the key planks in reaching this goal is education. Bringing education to rural communities is a fundamental pillar in this respect. In its development strategies engineered in cooperation with international development partners such as the European Union, the German Technical Cooperation (GIZ), The Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the US Agency for International

Development (USAID), the British Department for International Development (DfID) and above all the World Bank, education and with special focus on rural women is an important ambit.

The government has been helping the Mbororo community through some of its ministries. The ministries of Agriculture and Rural development, and Social Affairs have been promoting the growth of the Mbororo Women in Cameroon. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MINADER) has organised seminars on better methods of farming among the Mbororo Women. This has helped them to improve on their yields. The ministry of social affairs has been supporting the Mbororo Women to become emancipated through seminars and workshops.

The Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MINAS) and MINADER have helped in providing technical advice on the REFLECT Literacy program. Despite all that the government has done MINESEC and the Ministry of Sports and Physical Education verbally encourage literacy programs in the national languages among the Mbororo women but do not take any active part in its promotion. This is unfortunate because it undercuts the usefulness of efforts made by local community associations and NGOs to enhance the usefulness of language as a development tool for Mbororo women.

3.2 The usefulness of language skills to Mbororo women

A good number of the trained Women in Fulfulde feel quite positive about themselves particularly because they can read and write in the mother tongue. As underscored earlier these skills have helped these women to read prescriptions easily, read pamphlets on how to prevent AIDS and sexually transmissible diseases, read newspapers written in the mother tongue, read messages on how to purify water and sanitation, and read sign posts. Through the writing skill, some women are able to write minutes during meetings or social gatherings and even teach their peers. This skill has helped them to write letters easily without calling on someone to help them, particularly when they do not want their husbands to see the contents. The calculating skill has helped them to do business very well. Through this skill they have become financially independent and no longer depend on their husbands for clothing and feeding. Three of the participants express their joy through the interviews by affirming that: "I acquired the reading skill. Through this skill, we read how to use better methods of farming. I have been applying these methods on my farms and my crops are doing well." Another participant asserts that: "I acquired the writing skills. Through this skill, I write the minutes of our meetings in Fulfulde in the secretary's book." Looking specifically at calculation one of the women states that, "The counting skill that I acquired from the literacy classes has helped me to do my business well. I am even planning to

increase my business next year because it is really prosperous.” This shows that the acquisition of the reading, writing and calculating skills is vital for development. The researcher also looked at some barriers to effective literacy among the Mbororo women.

4. Barriers to effective literacy and solutions

The barriers to effective literacy among these women will be discussed looking at five key hurdles. They include: The lack of time, lack of pedagogic materials and textbooks, lack of remuneration for literacy instructors and the negative attitude of husbands towards literacy and cultural barriers.

First, the traditional roles that Mbororo Women carry out rarely leave them enough free time to devote to educational activities. Fatigue; frequent or early pregnancies; caring for children and families; agricultural and cultural activities are among the reasons for lack of time. This is also reflected in the high rate of absenteeism, irregular attendance and dropout rate of some Mbororo Women from literacy activities.

Second, most literacy instructors lack pedagogic materials to use in teaching like the course books, chalk and rulers. Some women do not even attend classes with basic text books and pens. This makes learning difficult. In fairness efforts have been made by the government to ensure a minimum package for basic education institutions such as primary schools but this does not amply serve the needs of the rural women in their communities.

Third, the funding of literacy instructors is still not encouraging. This issue discourages most literacy instructors from continuing the teaching exercise. It makes little sense in engaging in very onerous social / educative activities which are not optimally remunerated. These instructors need to be better motivated and appreciated by state officials.

Fourth, Mbororo men have negative attitudes towards their women’s education as they believe that a woman’s role is to bear children and take care of the family. To them, literacy gives women a new role in the family. They think that better earning prospects tend to give Mbororo Women more independence and change their economic status in the family. This gives rise to family tensions particularly where the earnings are controlled by the husband.

Finally, the Mbororo custom denigrates the woman. Most parents believe that investing in a girl child is wasting resources because daughters are seen as additional sources of household labour, who once married will become part of the productive labour force of another household. So the general mind frame of this community is that women should be discriminated against. This idea and associated praxes hinder women from partaking in literacy activities.

Some solutions to these problems could be the following. First, the few men who know the value of literacy should be assigned to encourage their friends to send their women for literacy classes. Second, more women need to be trained as adult literacy instructors because when they teach other women how to read and write they go deep into their needs especially matters related to family planning are handled with much ease. Third, the community needs to implement practical fundraising strategies for literacy instructors with emphasis not only on external funding but also on internal sources. Finally, Mbororo Women attending classes should be encouraged to pay some tuition fees which could be used to buy pedagogic material and pay instructors.

5. International organisations and Women's literacy

International organisations like United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nation Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Women, The European Union (EU), and the World Bank are paying attention on the role of women and their education on development. Through the United Nations, nations came together and developed the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets that recognise the importance of the education of the girl child. It is widely recognized that when societies focus only on education males and derelict the education of the girl child, efforts to attain desired levels of development are duly diluted. This has been one of the main messages of the young Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai who braved Taliban bullets in Swat Valley to stand up for the right of girls to education and not be confined only to the rural heaths.

UNESCO has organised many workshops on the literacy of women in the world. UNESCO(2006) reports that the National Non-formal and Distant Education Centre with the help of UNESCO in Mongolia organised a work shop that aimed at assessing the learning needs of illiterate girls and women and the provision of basic literacy skills to nearly 9000 learners. UNESCO has been active in literacy activities in Cameroon since the years following independence in 1960. Materially it provides assistance to non-governmental organisations operating in various domains of Women's education and literacy. UNESCO and Plan Cameroon have collaborated with MBOSCUDA within the framework of the Ambassador's Girls Scholarship program (AGSP) to grant scholarships to some Mbororo girls . However, it is worthy to note that the contribution made by this institution for the development of national languages as a major strategy in the attainment of quality and equitable access to basic education has not been visible.

MBOSCUDA has worked with the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) to sensitize the Mbororo women and other farming neighbours on issues of access to, and control over land and other pastoral resources. Other important international outfits that have been active in Cameroon include the

Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), Village Aid, the German Foundation for International Development (DSE) and the Swiss Literacy Fund (SLF). The Mbororo women have benefited in particular from village Aid which is an International Organisation that provides literacy in the world. It has provided training and support for business development including the provision of micro-credit loans (£30.000) to Mbororo women. Income generated has reduced women's economic dependency on men and enhanced their ability to meet basic family needs and access vital services such as education. Mbororo Women have become more assertive and it has also increased their participation in household and community decision-making.

In Cameroon, MBOSCUDA is the main NGO working with the Mbororo people. The Association and the village Aid have been implementing the project titled "Building Civil Society Capacity in Cameroon" with funding from Comic Relief. This project aims to support the Mbororo people of the North West Region of Cameroon in addressing their complex and interrelated development problems, and overcome marginalization and exclusion of Mbororo people from political, social and development processes. Among these objectives is the improvement of Mbororo women's assertiveness, resulting in increased participation in household and community decision-making and greater access to basic services. Shei (2009:12) reports that from this project, literacy circles have been established and are functioning in 34 communities. Through the REFLECT program, basic skills have been learned in writing, reading and calculating. Much has been achieved in terms of the transformation of relationships between the Mbororo people especially women and other communities and state services. Through the program the number of women in the executive bureau of the association has increased from three to six.

The Association for Assistance in Development (ASSAD) and the World Food Program are funding a literacy project in the Eastern Region of Cameroon with Mbororo women. They are being taught how to use the French language. Through this program the women have learned basic skills in reading, writing and calculating in French. They have also been helped with basic necessities such as rice, palm oil and corn to feed their families. Through the help of the Egyptian Government many Mbororo women have been trained in Arabic in the Adamawa region of Cameroon.

Local NGOs in Cameroon like Sistersshare and Lovely sisters have empowered women to help themselves and their families through loaning schemes and educative talks which help to improve their lives. Sistersshare has provided scholarships to female primary school children from underprivileged families in the rural areas of the Bui-Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. This scholarship covers tuition, uniform and other school accessories.

Beyond Cameroon, in Niamey-Niger, Mamane and Yacoulaba (2004: 24) present the use of literacy to the women fish mongers of Niamey. Literacy has helped them to sell their fish well. In the past, this group of women got loans from money lenders to buy fish and to meet their families' food and health care needs. With the help of the sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Program (SFLP) an NGO, their lives have changed. The program has helped women to take loans on credit which can be used to increase their fish and diversify their activities instead of only selling condiments, sweets, biscuits and sugar. The Niger National Co-ordination Unit (NCU) also conducted a participatory appraisal with the women. The appraisal highlighted gender inequalities and laid the foundation for a community project supported by the SFLP. The project emphasized literacy training for the poorest women. Training in improved fish storage techniques and the introduction of a credit and savings scheme was done. Alliance Nature Niger (ANN) another NGO also helped these women particularly with management and basic accounting. Training helped the women to approach other credit unions or microfinance institutions to explore possibilities of partnership with a view of assessing more sustainable loans. One of the women overjoyed with these activities said: "The various training courses to help us in our activities have really opened our eyes. We have learned how to manage the organization better and now we know how to read, write and calculate." This is testament to the fact that literacy has really been helpful to these women.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown that mother tongue literacy has a positive effect on Mbororo Women and on their society. This is seen through the following aspects: the impact of literacy, health-related issues, income-generating activities, reasons for being literate, engendering change, communication, decision-making, attitude of the status of women and reading and writing.

This research therefore provides an important chronicle as to why it is useful to upscale and ameliorate the literacy levels of Mbororo women in their own mother tongue first before being literate in other languages because it is better to learn in the language one speaks so that one can be performant in it before learning other official languages.

The main limitation of the study is that it was carried out only on Mbororo Women in Cameroon. But the results are equally relevant and tenable for women living in similar local contexts in Cameroon and in Africa as a whole. That being said, in as much as the Cameroonian context is concerned for the Mbororo women, the researcher advocates the following actions to be considered by the state.

Firstly, the Government should fund literacy programmes for rural populations because funding them will be funding the development of a nation. Secondly, since educating a woman is educating the family, there is the need for developing and training more women in the mother tongue. This will help in making them decision-makers in the society. Finally, trained Mbororo Women in the mother tongue should attend seminars to improve on some of the skills they lack.

This study does not claim to be complete or have covered everything on the impact of literacy on development. The following suggestions for further research are therefore important. The impact of the implementation of the mother tongue as a tool of instruction on both primary and secondary school in Cameroon is patent and crucial. Identifying the appropriate methodology for the teaching of the mother tongue to the Mbororo community could be one of the apposite spin-offs of this study.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATIO	MEANING
AGSP	Ambassador Girl Scholarship Programme
ANN	Alliance Nature Niger
ASSAD	Association for Assistance in Development
CAMCCUL	Cameroon Cooperation Credit Union League
DSE	German Foundation for international development
MBOSCUA	Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association
MINAS	Ministry of Social Affairs
MINESEC	Ministry of Secondary Education
NCU	Niger National Co-ordination Unit
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
PAM	World Food Program
REFLECT	Regenerated freirian literacy through community techniques
SFLP	Sustainable Fisheries Livelihood Programme
SLF	Swiss Literacy Fund
SNV	Netherlands development organisations
UNICEF	
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VA	Village Aid

GENERAL PERFORMANCE OF TRAINED MBORORO WOMEN IN FULFULDE, FRENCH AND ARABIC IN READING, WRITING AND CALCULATION (BELOW AND ABOVE AVERAGE)

Table 1

	Activities	Trained women in Fulfulde		Trained women in Arabic		Trained women in French	
		Above average	Below average	Above average	Below average	Above average	Below average
No of women	Reading long texts	35	15	20	30	20	30
	% frequency	70	30	40	60	40	60
150	Writing long text	30	20	20	30	10	40
	% frequency	60	40	40	60	20	80
	Calculating basic operations	25	25	15	35	35	15
	% frequency	50	50	30	70	70	30

Questionnaires for trained Mbororo Women

Please answer the questions spontaneously and truthfully. Put a mark () on the appropriate box to indicate the right answer for each multiple choice questions. Thank you in advance for your cooperation

Name of learner _____

Age 15- 25 25-45 above 45

1) In which domain has literacy been of help to you?

- a) Religion
- b) Health and sanitation
- c) Rearing of animals
- d) Milking cows
- e) Politics
- f) Trade
- g) Others

Do you take part in group discussions and activities in the community?

Yes No

3) Do you offer financial support in your homes? Yes No

4) Why did you attend the literacy classes?

- a) To improve on my life
- b) To know how to take care of my family
- c) To acquire knowledge on hygiene and health
- d) To improve on the writing ,reading and calculating skills
- e) Others

5) What is your attitude towards the education of your children?

- a) Female positive Negative
- b) Male positive Negative

6) Do you read pamphlets on how to treat diseases like cholera, diarrhoea and how to prevent sexually transmissible diseases in the language you learned?

Yes No

7) Do you read pamphlets on how to purify water in the language you learnt?

Yes No

8) Do you follow the vaccination of your children?

Yes No

9) Do you write letters to your children in the language you learnt?

Yes No

10) Do you communicate with your children in the language you learnt?

Yes No

If yes, how often do you do this?

Often	Sometimes	Once a week	Once a month	Never

11) Has literacy helped you to have a higher status than those who are not literate? Yes

No

12) Do you think literacy is a solution to women's problems? Yes No

13) Do you depend on your husband for clothing and feeding? Yes No

14) Which are the rights of a citizen that you know?

a) Right to liberty

b) Right to property

c) Right to life

Which other rights do you know _____

15) How well do you practise the following activities?

a) Below average 0-9/20

b) Average 10-11.99

c) Fairly good 12-13.99

d) Good 14-15.99

e) Very good 16-17.99

f) Excellent 18-20

	Below average	Average	Fairly good	Good	Very good	Excellent
Farming						
Trading						
Rearing animals						

Milk cows						
Sewing						
Teaching						
Others name them						

16) Where did you learn this activity?

- a) From parents
- b) From literacy classes
- c) From a friend or relative

How well can you do the following?

	Below average	Average	Fairly good	Good	Very good	Excellent
Read long text						
Write long essay						
Calculate basic operations						

17) Can you read the time, days of the week and months of the year in the language you learnt? Yes

No

18) Can you write out dates in the language you learnt? Yes No

If yes write some _____

Interview questions

- 1) Did you acquire any skills during your training which has been helpful to you?
- 2) Has your life improved after attending literacy classes?
- 3) Were there any barriers to your literacy?

TEST QUESTIONS

DURATION: 2HRS

SECTION ONE: WRITING

Write an essay of one hundred and fifty (150) words on any topic of your choice (10 marks)

SECTION TWO: READING COMPREHENSION

THE YOUNG GIRL WHO DID NOT WANT TO MARRY

There lived a young girl, Tuutu, she did not want to be married. She stayed at home. They tried hard to marry her to someone until she grew up. Until she got big breast, they tried hard to marry her.

Then the girl's would be parents-in-law persuaded the girl's mother and so forth. They took all her belongings, and sent them to the bridegroom's hut. They rolled up things and prepared for the marriage.

Then the bridegroom's younger brother came. He said to her. "Come on. Come and stay with us for a long time, friend" she said "I won't go". Her mother said. No, it's your friend come. You always go there please go there".

Then, the girl followed the road. Actually the brother-in-law was going to take her to the hut of his elder-brother whom she refused to marry.

Then a pigeon flew, followed her and knew what was going on. It went and sat in front of them;

You're married you don't know Tuutu

You're married you don't know Tuutu

You're married you don't know it

The containers went away a long time ago.

You're married you don't know it

The water pots went away a long time ago.

You're married you don't know it

The bed went away a long time ago.

You're married you don't know it

Your decorated vessels went there a long time ago.

Then, kellu said

“My Allah what did the pigeon sing? No indeed it’s a bad pigeon. Don’t listen to the words, my friend come, let’s go”. The pigeon kept singing. Actually the bridegroom’s brother knew the truth. Again, the pigeon flew up and went forward. Then she went away by herself, came into the bush and said. Then she was pregnant, she gave birth. Then she said to her baby’s father “Hold the baby so that I can go and draw some water; She went away by herself and disappeared there. She left the baby’s father and her baby behind. That’s the end of the story.

(source Fulfulde Tales of North Cameroon by Aysatu Diyawa)

Questions

- 1) What is the name of the girl in the text? (1 mark)
- 2) Did she like the marriage? Why (2 marks)
- 3) Which animal sang to the girls? (1 mark)
- 4) Was the girl pregnant? (1 mark)
- 5) What trick did she use to go away? (2marks)
- 6) Are Mbororo girls forced into marriage? (3 marks) How? (10 marks)

Fulfulde

Derkeejo mo yidaa Baneego Aysatu Dujawa

Be ndanyi derkeejo O aisah ^ƙa ^ɲataako kanto o

Y’daa Ba ^ɲeego. O don joodi ^ƙe tulli no ba ^ɲa ha a o

Mawni. Haa wadi ennga ^ƙe tulli no ba ^ɲa

Suy, esiraabe ndawri bee daa da maako’en

^ƙe adi innde kuuyji maako pat be njahari haa

suudu gorko

be talli be mbo”ini

suy, derdiraayel.. minyiraayel goriiko goo

wari o wi’l mo “war nee pabboyen amin,

sappayel “o wi’i: “aum sappa maa. War on

njajarata. Use ni njehe”

suy, ngel tokki Jakan boo, eekiraayel goo

hooran mo suudu mawnu nge Sali baneego

jam poolel firri

tokki, anndi Ngel yohi ngel joodi yeso

mabbe

Baŋaama annd a a Tuutu

Baŋaama andaa

Baŋaama andaa taasaaje ndilli booymaa

Baŋaama andaa giram cenndiri booymaa

Baŋaama andaa leeso dilli Booymaa

Baŋaama anndaa kaseeje ndilli Boyam

Kadiboo, klli goo: "Allah am heey. Dum dume

Poollel yimata?" " aa, heesi poollel malaayel

Ngel taa nan kaa sappayel am. War ndillen

Naa "Ngel yiman non

Suy, ngel wadi reedu ngel danyi

Suy, baaba binngel goo o wi'i. joganam

Binngel haa mi nyadoya!"Baa binngel goo jogi

Ngel suuki ngel halki ton. Ngel dalti beeba

Binngel bee binngel um

Takalmulus

SECTION THREE

CALCULATING BASIC OPERATIONS

- 1) In the morning, I found 5 mangoes. In the evening I found 4 more. How many mangoes do I have? _____
- 2) A fowl had 13 eggs, 7 were broken, how many eggs does it still have? _____
- 3) Amina has 7 trees in her compound. Jamila has 2 times as many. How many trees does Amina have? _____
- 4) Useni has 60frs, he gives half of that to his friend, how much remains for him?

- 5) If I have 36 kolanuts and I divide them between 2 children. How many kola nuts does each have? _____
- 6) I bought some oil for 370frs and some local onions for 145frs. How much did they cost?

- 7) Yaya bought kerosene for 125frs and 2 cartridges at 300frs, how much did all cost? _____
- 8) Isa buys 3 mangoes, each mango costs 30frs. How much do they all cost?

- 9) How many weeks are there in 14 days? _____
- 10) I divide 56 things into 7 places. How many are there on one place? _____