

International Journal of Educational Review

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Performances of Elementary Pupils in French and Mathematics and Socio-Professional Category and the Formal Education Level of Parents in Togo

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Abstract: This study verified whether there is a relationship between the academic performance of primary school pupils and the socio-professional category of their parents on the one hand, and the formal educational level of the latter on the other hand. The method used to achieve this double objective combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. Thus, 561 primary elementary pupils from six schools in the Savannahs region participated in the quantitative survey by means of a questionnaire and 35 individual interviews were carried out with teachers and parents of pupils. The data collected was subjected to statistical processing using SPSS 20.0 software and content analysis. The results show that the parents' socio-professional category and school performance are related. Likewise, the best pupils' performances, both in French and in Mathematics, are obtained by pupils whose parents have a higher level of education.

Keywords: Socio-Professional Category, Level Of Education, Academic Performance, Parents, Pupils

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the importance of French and Mathematics in primary school is no longer to be demonstrated. French enjoys a privileged position in the French school. It occupies most of the school time, as a discipline and as an instructional language for other school subjects. Its mastery is one of the major conditions for access to academic success (Vigner, 2015).

The importance of good reading skills for later academic success and social adjustment has been widely demonstrated (Statistics Canada, 1996, 2011; Lee, 2002). It is recognized that having good reading comprehension skills promotes success in other subjects (Goupil, 2007; Taboada *et al.*, 2009). Besides, reading comprehension, especially in the last years of elementary school, is essential for success in high school (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Guthrie *et al.*, 2004). In fact, pupils who finish their sixth

year of elementary school with poor reading skills are at risk of experiencing learning problems in secondary school, since there is little formal and explicit teaching of reading (Van Grunderbeeck *et al.*, 2004).

Success in Mathematics in the first years of schooling is also of utmost importance. The understanding of Mathematics acquired during these first years has important repercussions on the mastery of this subject during the years of study which follow. In their Final Report of the study on Early Childhood, McCain & Mustard (1999: 11) said, "We now know that in early childhood, human beings acquire much of the cognitive foundations of Mathematics." A positive attitude towards Mathematics as well as an understanding of key concepts and mathematical skills must be developed from the first years of schooling.

Thus, the mastery of French and Mathematics in elementary school is very

essential. This allows the pupil to have a solid foundation allowing him to continue his academic and later university course without lacunas or shortcomings.

Given the importance of French and Mathematics, efforts are constantly being made by the actors in charge of education at all levels to allow pupils to have good performances in these subjects. As proof, most school textbooks are either calculus textbooks or French textbooks. All of this is to allow pupils to practice and perform well. However, despite all the efforts made, some pupils find these subjects difficult.

According to the Education For All global monitoring report (2014), 250 million children worldwide are unable to read, write or calculate. The proportion of children in great difficulty is relatively large, 12.4% in French and 16.2% in Mathematics, on average, at the international level according to a study by PASEC in 2016.

According to the same study, in ten countries surveyed, more than 70% of pupils on average do not have the necessary skills or competences in French after two years of primary schooling. In other words, more than two-thirds of pupils at the lower levels of primary school have great difficulty deciphering the components of writing and understanding sentences, texts and spoken messages.

In Togo, the situation is very worrying since on average more than 79% of Togolese pupils have shortcomings in French and more than 58% in Mathematics at primary school level. At the end of schooling, in reading, on average six Togolese pupils out of ten do not have sufficient skills to read and understand texts. In Mathematics, on average 20.9% of pupils at the end of schooling always have difficulty performing, for example, at least one of the four operations with whole numbers or identifying the unit of measure specific to lengths (PASEC, 2016).

The Savannahs region is not spared. Pupils also experience difficulties in French and Mathematics there. This has

repercussions on their performances in these subjects. In French, schools in the region (11.3%) have the highest shares of learners reaching the end of elementary school without having acquired the basic skills to read and understand isolated words. These pupils experience great difficulties in decoding, not the least being able to decipher the meaning of isolated words from their daily lives. In Mathematics, after at least six years of primary schooling, the number of pupils experiencing difficulty in acquiring basic skills is very important in the region (37.5%) (PASEC, 2016). In view of these observations, it appears that elementary school pupils have shortcomings in French and in Mathematics.

The problem of differential academic performances in French and in Mathematics has been tackled by quite a number of researchers (Duru-Bellat & Jarousse, 1996; Crozier 2000; Guimond & Roussel, 2001; Van Zanten, 2007; Chatard, Guimond & Selimbegovic, 2007 ; Melhuish *et al.*, 2008; Schneider *et al.*, 2010; Else-Quest, Hyde & Lynn, 2010; Morin, 2012; Jury, Smeding & Darnon, 2015; Bagès, Verniers & Martinot, 2016; Elias & Daza , 2019).

Most of these researchers highlight the influence of the social milieu on pupils' success in French and in Mathematics. The social environment to which the pupil belongs is very determining in his or her success or his or her failure in the abovementioned subjects. The correlation between social origin and academic success is one of the most stable and proven relationships in social sciences (Benbiga, Hanchane, Idir & Mostafa, 2012). Empirical contributions generally tend to estimate social background by socio-economic status, measured by parental education and occupation, and family income (Heyneman & Loxley, 1983; Coleman *et al.*, 1966; Hakkinen *et al.* , 2003).

Indeed, the profession exercised either by the father or by the mother influences the child's performance in French and in Mathematics. Children whose parents are senior executives perform better in French

and Mathematics than children of workers or low income managers (Sirin, 2005).

Also, children who have either a father or mother with an advanced formal education perform better at school than children whose parents are uneducated or have little formal education. Educated parents monitor their children better than uneducated parents because educated parents seem more able to provide their children with significant educational and social support for educational success, compared to parents with low education levels (Schiller *et al*, 2002). Those with higher level of education also have better access to a wide variety of economic and social resources that can be used to help their children succeed in different subjects (Wössmann, 2008; Schuetz, Ursprung & Wössmann, 2008). It generally emerges from these different studies that the parents' level of education is the most significant. It represents a significant source of disparities in pupil performances in French and in Mathematics (Dufur, 2001; Willms & Somers, 2001; Purcel, Schiller *et al*, 2002; Chevalier & Lanot, 2002; Fuchs & Wößmann, 2004; Yayan & Berberoglu, 2004).

Income, being important in all circumstances, also has a relationship with pupils' academic performances in French and in Mathematics. In fact, in elementary school, the majority of the textbooks found are either French textbooks or calculus textbooks. Parents with means buy these books for their children; which allows the latter to practice from time to time and to be more efficient in these subjects. On the other hand, children who have poor parents cannot afford these textbooks and this negatively affects their results in French and in Mathematics (Moreau, 1995; Best, 1997; Ryan & Adams, 1998; Langevin, 1999; Abott & Joireman, 2001; Boutin & Daneau 2004).

From the analysis of the aforementioned works, it emerges that the social environment to which the pupil belongs, characterized in this present study by the socio-professional category of the

parents as well as their level of formal education, impact on his or her performance in French and in Mathematics (Schiller and al., 2002; Sirin, 2005; Ursprung & Wössmann, 2008; Verniers & Martinot, 2016; Elias & Daza, 2019).

In Togo, on the other hand and particularly in the Savannah region, no study, to the current state of our knowledge, has yet been conducted in this direction. With that, we ask ourselves the question of whether the academic performance (in French and in Mathematics) of elementary school pupils in the Savannahs region is not related to the socio-professional category and the level of formal education of their parents. Through this study, we conjecture that there is a relationship between the performance in French and in Mathematics of elementary school pupils and the socio-professional category on the one hand, and the formal education level of parents on the other hand.

This research was based on the theory of educational inequalities of Boudieu and Passeron (1964). Indeed, according to these authors, the education system functions as if it serves to legitimize the domination of the "dominant class". Under the cover of neutrality and equal opportunities, the educational institution leads to the exclusion of children from the working classes, "dominated classes". Thus, it exercises a "cultural arbitrariness" which allows this selection. For them, the school values and legitimizes a so-called learned culture acquired outside its walls by the ruling class. This "symbolic violence" exerted by the education system is at the origin of the success gaps between the learners.

2. Research Method

Framework of the Study and Participants

The study took place in the Savannahs region located in the North of Togo and included six primary schools namely: the Public Primary School Camp Gendarmerie, the Central Public Primary School of Dapaong, the Lay Private Primary School SOS, the Islamic

Franco-Arab Private Primary School, the Bon Pasteur Denominational Primary School and the Shalom Denominational Primary School.

In addition, in Primary school, only the levels of Elementary Course (CE) and Middle Course (CM) classes were investigated since we believe that the Preparatory Course (CP) classes will not be able to adequately answer the questions that they will be asked. Thus, 561 pupils from CE and CM classes, more precisely CE2 and CM2, were interviewed, including 264 boys and 297 girls with an age between 7 and 15 years old. Furthermore, 35 teachers and parents of pupils were interviewed individually.

Measuring Instruments for Variables

The socio-professional category (SPC) and the education level of parents

The data around these two variables were collected using a socio-demographic questionnaire, addressed to the pupils, which also made it possible to obtain information on the age and the sexes of the respondents. On the basis of information around the parents' profession (father and mother), we have formed three socio-professional category groups: the first group concerns the Upper SPC (composed of senior executives from the public or private sector and members of the liberal professions); the second group is the Middle SPC (made up of administrative and commercial employees) and the third group is the Lower SPC which takes into account farmers and artisans, unskilled workers and domestic workers. With regard to the level of education, four groups were formed, namely: uneducated (parents who have never been to school); the lower level (parents with a primary level); the middle level (parents who have a secondary level) and the higher level (parents with a university level).

School performances

They were assessed on the basis of tests in French and in Mathematics for the pupils. These tests were chosen taking into account the current program for each level.

In French, for example, at the CE, the evaluations focused on the order of words in a sentence, the structure of a sentence, the conjugation of verbs in simple tenses of the indicative, the transformation of a sentence in the affirmative form into the negative form and vice versa, the construction of sentences with words and expressions. At the CM, still in French, the questions related to the conjugation of verbs in the perfect tenses of the indicative, the identification of the mode of the verb in a sentence, the transformation of a sentence from the active voice to the passive voice and vice versa, the different forms of sentences, the antonym, the synonym, the homonym and the word of the same lexical family of a word. In Mathematics, at the CE, the tests focused on the arrangement of numbers from the smallest to the largest, the usual calculations with four-digit numbers, the different figures, the conversion of hours into minutes and minutes into seconds, the writing in numbers and in letters from 0 to 999,999.

At the CM, the evaluations concerned the writing in numbers and in letters of numbers going from 999,999 to the greatest number, conversion, the usual calculations with numbers greater than four digits, conversion, common calculations with numbers greater than four digits. Each of the assessments lasted an average of 30 minutes. After evaluations, the copies were marked and scored out of 10. Pupils with a mark between 0 and 4, either in French or in Mathematics, fail and those with a mark between 5 and 10 are successful.

An interview guide was sent to teachers and some parents to understand their perception of the impact of the social environment on school performances. Example of a question taken from the interview guide: what do you think of the influence of the social environment on pupils' achievement in French and in Mathematics?

Data analysis procedures

The input of quantitative data and their processing were made possible using SPSS 20.0 software. The statistics used in this case are the analysis of variances with the calculation of the Fisher-Snedecor test. Qualitative data was analyzed by the technique of content analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

Parents' socio-professional category and performances in French and in Mathematics

Table 1: Relationship between father's SPC and school performance

Academic Performances	Father's SPC	N	Average	Standard Deviation	ANOVA
Average in French	Lower	267	1.44	0.497	F= 9.132 P= 0.000 ddl=2
	Middle	145	1.61	0.490	
	Upper	149	1.62	0.486	
	Total	561	1.53	0.499	
Average in Mathematics	Lower	267	1.42	0.495	F= 8.81 P= 0.000 ddl = 2
	Middle	145	1.57	0.496	
	Upper	149	1.62	0.488	
	Total	561	1.51	0.500	

Source: Survey November-December 2019

It appears from the data, in this table, that pupils whose fathers are from the Upper SPC have the highest average in French (1.62). They are followed by pupils whose fathers have a Middle SPC (1.61). Finally, pupils whose fathers are from the Lower SPC have an average score of 1.44. The F-Snedecor applied ($F = 9.132$) reveals a significant difference at the significance threshold, $p = 0.000$. In Mathematics, the same observations are made. In fact, when the father is in the Upper SPC, the average score of pupils is 1.62, higher than that of pupils whose fathers are of the Middle SPC (1.57). Those whose fathers are in the lower SPC have the lowest average score (1.42). There is a statistically significant difference ($F = 8.81$, $p = .000$). From all of the above, it can be deduced that there is a relationship between the father's SPC and the performances of pupils in French and in Mathematics with the advantage of pupils whose fathers are from the higher SPC. Pupils' performances in French and in

Mathematics, therefore, depend on the father's SPC.

Table 2: Relationship between mother's PSC and school performance

Academic Performances / Mother's SPC	N	Average	Standard Deviation	ANOVA	
Average in French	Lower	354	1.46	0.499	F = 11.098 p = 0.000 ddl = 2
	Middle	138	1.62	0.488	
	Upper	69	1.72	0.450	
	Total	561	1.53	0.499	
Average in Mathematics	Lower	354	1.44	0.497	F = 11.640 p = 0.000 ddl = 2
	Middle	138	1.60	0.491	
	Upper	69	1.71	0.457	
	Total	561	1.51	0.500	

Source: Survey November-December 2019

The data in the table above show that in French, pupils whose mothers are from the Upper SPC have the highest average (1.72). They are followed by pupils whose mothers are in the Middle SPC (1.62). Finally, pupils whose mothers are from the lower SPC have an average score of 1.46. Statistically, the difference is significant with the F-Snedecor ($F = 11.98$) at the threshold $p = 0.000$. In Mathematics, when the mother is from the Upper SPC, the average score of pupils is 1.71, higher than that of pupils whose mothers are in the Middle SPC (1.60). Those whose mothers are of the lower SPC have the lowest average score (1.44). These differences are statistically significant ($F = 11.64$; $p = .000$). There is a relationship between the mother's SPC and the performances in French and in Mathematics with the advantage for pupils whose mothers are in the higher SPC. Pupils' performances in French and Mathematics, therefore also, depend on the mother's SPC.

Parents' level of education and performances in French and Mathematics

Table 3: Relationship between the father's level of education and school performances

Academic Performances / Father's Education Level	N	Average	Standard Deviation	ANOVA	
Average in French	Uneducated	90	1.51	0.503	F = 4.91 p = 0.002 ddl = 3
	Primary	141	1.43	0.497	
	Secondary	164	1.51	0.501	
	University	166	1.64	0.480	
	Total	561	1.53	0.499	
Average in Mathematics	Uneducated	90	1.47	0.502	F = 4.21 p = 0.006 ddl = 3
	Primary	141	1.45	0.499	
	Secondary	164	1.48	0.501	
	University	166	1.63	0.485	
	Total	561	1.51	0.500	

This table indicates that in French, pupils whose fathers have a university level

education have an average score (1.64) higher than that of pupils whose fathers have a secondary level or are uneducated (1.51). For those whose fathers have only a primary level education, their average is 1.43, $F(3) = 4.91$. This difference is statistically significant at the 0.002 threshold. There is therefore a relationship between the father's level of education and the performances of pupils in French in favor for those pupils whose fathers are university graduates. In Mathematics, pupils whose fathers have a university level education also perform better than the others. The average scores are 1.63 for the university level, 1.48 for the secondary level, 1.45 for the primary level and 1.47 for the uneducated. These differences are also significant at the threshold 0.006 for $F(3) = 4.21$. There is also a relationship between the father's level of education and pupils' performances in Mathematics.

Table 4: Relationship between the mother's level of education and school performances

Academic Performances / Mother's Education Level	N	Average	Standard Deviation	ANOVA	
Average in French	Uneducated	174	1.45	0.499	F = 8.06 P = 0.000 ddl = 3
	Primary	174	1.47	0.500	
	Secondary	132	1.59	0.494	
	University	81	1.74	0.441	
	Total	561	1.53	0.499	
Average in Mathematics	Uneducated	174	1.43	0.497	F = 9.40 P = 0.000 ddl = 3
	Primary	174	1.44	0.498	
	Secondary	132	1.58	0.496	
	University	81	1.74	0.441	
	Total	561	1.51	0.500	

Source: survey November-December 2019

From reading this table, it appears that in French, pupils whose mothers have university level have an average score (1.74) higher than that of pupils whose mothers have secondary level (1.59), primary level (1.47), and then pupils of uneducated mothers (1.45). $F(3) = 8.06$ is statistically significant at the 0.000 threshold. There is a relationship between the mother's level of education and performances in French for the benefit of pupils whose mothers are university graduates. In Mathematics, pupils whose mothers have a university level perform better. The average scores are as follows: 1.74 for the university level, 1.58 for the secondary level, 1.44 for the primary level

and 1.43 for the uneducated. These differences are also significant at the 0.000 threshold for $F(3) = 9.40$. There is therefore a relationship between the mother's level of education and performances in Mathematics.

The objective of this work is to verify whether there is a relationship between the academic performances of primary school pupils and the SPC on the one hand and the education level of parents on the other.

The results obtained, after investigations, show that the performances of primary school pupils in French and in Mathematics are related to the SPC of the father or mother in accordance with the data in Tables 1 and 2. In fact, pupils whose fathers or mothers are of the upper or middle SPC have good performances in French and in Mathematics, unlike pupils whose parents are of lower SPC. The latter most often perform poorly in French and Mathematics.

These results are in line with those of Heyneman and Loxley (1983), Coleman *et al.* (1966), Hakkinen *et al.* (2003), Hanushek (2003), Duru-Bellat and Van Zanten (2007), Makoudjou-Tchendjou (2011). From elementary school, pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds feel less able to succeed in Mathematics and French than pupils from more advantaged backgrounds (Wiederkehr, Darnon, Chazal, Guimond & Martinot, 2015). Meuret and Morlaix (2006) find that the father's profession has an influence on children's reading comprehension and writing skills. This observation is similar to that of Vallet and Caille (1996). According to these authors, the performances of Form One students still reflect social hierarchy. In French, the children of executives and company owners come first and precede those of intermediate professions. The sons and daughters of employees, craftsmen, traders and farmers form a third group. Finally, the children of skilled workers slightly exceed those of unskilled workers, then the sons and daughters of the inactive obtain the worst results.

This is apparent from the content of the message from the interview with a teacher: A father who has a well-paying profession has the means to take good care of his children at school. The child has everything necessary to succeed. In addition to the books he can buy, he also hires a private teacher for his child. In contrast, parents who cannot afford it because they are not in a profitable occupation will find it difficult to care for their children who are enrolled in school (interview with a teacher from the Shalom Denominational Primary School).

The relationship between the level of education of parents (especially the mother) and academic success is a subject that has received much priority in the scientific literature (Muller & Kerbow, 1993; Lahire, 1995; Ryan & Adam, 1995; Bronkhart, 1998; Thin, 1998; Glasman & Besson, 2004; Kakpo, 2009). In fact, according to the results obtained, children whose parents have a higher or intermediary level of education have good performances in French and in Mathematics. On the other hand, pupils who have parents with a low level of education perform poorly in these subjects. This is what emerges from Tables 3 and 4 and confirms the following words from a parent of an advanced level pupil: "I often work with my little boy. He has a coach or private teacher but I always have a look at what he does. This is one of the advantages when the mother is educated; she regularly follows her child." (Interview with a pupil's mother of the SOS school).

These results support what the literature has shown on this subject (Epstein, 1992; Alexander, Entwisle & Bedinger, 1994; Zill, 1999; Deniger, 2002; Paquin & Drolet, 2005). Bronkhart (1998) points out that the level of education of parents has a significant impact on the academic performance of adolescents, especially in the subjects of exact sciences such as Mathematics and the physical sciences.

These results corroborate those of Vallet and Caille (1996). For these authors, in

French as in Mathematics, it is moreover the diploma of the mother which creates the most difference between the pupils. Having a mother who has at least the baccalaureate or the A' Level certificate gives an advantage in French and in Mathematics. Fuchs and Wößmann (2004) conclude, using data from the International Program for the Monitoring of Pupil Achievement (PISA), that the effects of parent education on the success of 15-year-olds in reading and mathematics are more significant compared to its impact on their success in other subjects. These findings are similar to those found by Yayan and Berberoglu (2004). They note that when parents' level of education and the number of books at home are high, the performances of pupils, in the second year of college, increase in Mathematics. The results of the two specifications show that parent education always has a positive and significant impact on pupils' performances in mathematics and sciences.

These results find their explanation in the theory of educational inequalities of Bourdieu and Passeron (1964, 1970) and of Bernstein (1975). For Bourdieu and Passeron (1964), children from the privileged social classes have certain advantages linked to their personal research or their curiosity to know more or even their entertainment. What they mean by "free" culture which positively influences their education. They believe that the most advantaged pupils do not only owe to their home environment their habits, training and attitudes that directly serve them in their school tasks. In addition, they also inherit the knowledge and skills, tastes and "good taste" whose academic profitability, to be indirect, is no less certain. The "free" culture, an implicit condition for success, is very unequally distributed among learners from different backgrounds, without inequality of income being able to explain the differences observed. "Cultural privilege is manifest when it comes to familiarity with the works that only regular attendance at the

theater, museum or concert can give" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964: 30).

These two theorists favor expression throughout the educational process, which turns out to be one of the important criteria for classifying pupils. Since children of the lower classes accumulate linguistic deficits, children from privileged backgrounds do better because they are accustomed to express themselves fluently in their family of origin. For Bourdieu and Passeron (1970), style is always taken into account, implicitly or explicitly, at all levels of the curriculum and, although to varying degrees, in all academic careers, even scientific ones.

4. Conclusion

This study first showed that there is a relationship between the Socio-Professional Category (SPC) of parents and the academic performance in French and Mathematics of pupils; secondly, that this same relationship exists between the educational level of parents and the academic performances of pupils in the two subjects.

At the end of our investigation, we can say that our double objective is achieved. Indeed, we have come to the following results: pupils whose fathers or mothers are of the higher or middle SPC have good performances in French and Mathematics, unlike pupils whose fathers or mothers are of lower SPC. There is every reason to believe that parents in a profitable profession have the means to provide for the material and financial needs of their children enrolled in school. This is not the case for parents who lack income because they do not exercise a profitable profession. Also, pupils whose fathers or mothers have a higher or secondary level of education perform better in French and Mathematics than their classmates whose fathers or mothers have a primary level or are not educated.

Like any scientific study, ours also has limits: we only took the SPC and the level of education to characterize the social environment. For an exhaustive research,

taking into account other parameters of the social environment such as parental educational practices, income and geographic location would be interesting.

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