“Le Goût de Travail:”
Work Value for Bamiléké Children

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Abstract

This research examines the value of work in the Bamiléké context, and explores the psychosocial and cultural factors that influence the transmission of this value to children. Research questions explored included the perception of children within the Bamiléké family, the values that exist within the family and specifically the value of work within these families, how this value is transmitted to children, whether children are motivated to learn the value of work, and the impact of work on the personality development of a child. Data was collected through questionnaires, interview, and observation. 121 questionnaires were collected, and 9 interviews completed. Quantitative analysis was used for the questionnaire through a collection of descriptive analysis, and the interviews and observation notes were analyzed quantitatively. Responses were greatly variable, but it was found that children are considered first a gift from god and a source of wealth. Work, solidarity, and respect are all important values for the Bamiléké families. Parents are responsible for teaching this value to children, and due so mainly through informal means such as imitation and observation. Teachers also play a role in teaching this value. In general, it was agreed that the impact of work on mental, physical, social and cultural development is positive, though it is important to keep in mind that there are types of work inappropriate for children. It is possible to conclude that work is an essential part of the Bamiléké culture, and is always considered an important value to teach to their children.
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Introduction

Throughout the history of man work has been a fundamental element of life, and it is an action that enters into every aspect of the human life. To eat one must search for food and prepare it. To sleep one must find or build a structure for protection from the weather. To raise a family one must care for and teach young ones until they have reached the point where they can care for themselves. Work is not only an economic activity, but a survival mechanism and a way of life of all people. Noupa stated in his thesis regarding the value of work in Cameroonian literature that, « Nous sommes ainsi en droit d’affirmer que le travail est une institution sociale, universelle et qu’il est avec le gain, un problème d’existence qui a toujours retenu l’attention de l’homme depuis la nuit des temps. » It is easy to see, then, the importance of knowing the value of work, but among the cultures of the world there does not seem to be a constant for what that specific value is, nor does there seem to be a constant as to how this value should be passed on to the next generation. In fact, there are so many variations on the understanding of work that UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, has spent much energy focused on establishing this value and specifying the rights of children with regards to work. If we are not careful on how we teach our children we endanger the world’s future. “Investing in children and respecting their rights lays the foundation for a just society, a strong economy, and a world free of poverty.” Much of the energy and research regarding work for the world’s children focuses on the potential for abuse through too much labour; specifically, what is considered too much work for any one individual, and what forms of work should not be performed by children. The positive aspects of work are often ignored, and the positive value of work generally unrecognized. When work is studied in terms of


“In this way, we are entitled to maintain that work is a social and universal institution, and that it is with gain, a problem of existence that has always held the attention of man since the dawn of time.”

children’s participation, it is usually in terms of the abusive nature and harm that can be done to a child. This research is focused, rather, on the positive impact on work and the value that it provides for any given society. The orientation will be a positive one contrasting the majority of research done in this field. Also, this research will have a psychological emphasis exploring the psychological factors of work and the impact on a child’s development. It examines the value of work in the Bamiléké culture, what psychosocial and cultural factors influence that value, how that value is transmitted to children, and the impact on children’s personality development. Before presenting the procedure and results of this research, it is first important to understand: the current perspectives regarding cultural variations in work, the history of the Bamiléké and its culture, and work in the Cameroonian and more specifically the Bamiléké context.

**Current Perspectives Regarding Cultural Variations in Work**

«Universellement, le travail est célébré, encouragé, sanctifié et parfois vu comme étant une fin en soi. ³»

First it is important to understand the difficulty of universally defining any value or principle. With so many different cultures in the world, a plethora of perspectives exists on any given topic. Work poses particular problems because it is generally accepted that at some point work becomes abusive, but determining that point is not an easy process. Cultures disagree on where that line should be drawn. Koramo (2002) explained the danger of such cultural differences. “No one should condone, in the name of culture and tradition, any practice that is harmful to a child. However, there is also the risk that harm may result from inappropriate intervention by ill-informed ethnocentric childcare or health professionals.”


“Universally, work is celebrated, encouraged, sanctified and at times viewed as being an end in itself.”

⁴ Koramo, John; Lynch, Margaret; & Kinnair, Donna. “A Continuum of Child-Rearing: Responding to Traditional
is important to understand that one's personal definition is not necessarily the universal, though it is also important to foster safe and culturally appropriate definitions.

Despite this struggle for a universal understanding of the value of work there are certain things that are understood. We can claim that work is an essential element for survival. It is something that almost every individual participates in at some point in their life, but it is not simply something we are compelled to do. « Le travail humain n’est pas seulement une nécessité vitale ou une contrainte de l’ordre du châtiment, mais une production incessante et réciproque de l’homme et du monde. » Work is an element of order in the world, a means of continual motion and production, and an ever constant presence in the world of man.

This research will approach work in a socio-cultural manner. It will not be studied as an economic devise, but rather as an action incorporated into everyday behaviour. Due to this focus, it is important to make the distinction between paid and unpaid work. Since the focus of this research is on the child, the emphasis will be on unpaid work and the cultural implication of such work. Also, it is important to note that it is being approached from a psychological perspective. Up until this point, the focus on work has been economic, but only recently have psychologists had an increased interest in work. Work and industrial psychologists are becoming more and more common exploring issues concerning the well-being of workers within industries. The orientation of this research is rather toward the developmental well-being of children in performing work.

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“Human work is not only a vital necessity or a constraint in the order of punishment, but a mutual and incessant production of man and the world.”
The Bamiléké are a collection of tribal groups that have been settled in the West Province of Cameroon for approximately five centuries. They are located in the haut plateau of Cameroon, a mountainous region that has a strong emphasis on agriculture. The Bamiléké, highly valuing children, family, and solidarity, are an especially populous group within Cameroon, representing 13.5% of the population. The West Province in particular is the most densely populated province in Cameroon, with a density of 69.8 habitants/km². This high density is clear when compared to the density of the rest of Cameroon, which is only 13.3 habitants/km². Looking specifically at the department of the Menoua, where Dschang is located, the density is even higher: 145.9 habitants/km². Such density has a strong impact on the nature of life in among the Bamiléké.

In the seventeenth century the Bamiléké lived in the Haut-Mbam region in the northern part of Cameroon but were chased out by the Foulbé. At this point the Bamiléké began migrating south to what is currently known as the West Province of Cameroon. Over the next century the Bamiléké came in a wave of three different groups and settled in the West Province, which remains their home still today. The Bamiléké society is structured around what is known as the chefferie, and the west province is currently made up of several chefferies or villages of various sizes. The chief or Fon is the leader of the chefferie, and the rest of the social structure consists of a hierarchy of notables working under the chief. It is an

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“In Cameroon, there is a multiplicity of ethnicities that balance more or less well, not coming from the same start of historical, cultural, economic and political steps.”


inherited position and the predecessor of the chief is indicated by the chief among one of the male member of the family.  

**Work in the Cameroonian Context**

« Work shall be a national duty incumbent on every able bodied adult citizen. »

In the Cameroonian Constitution it states, “The right to work shall be recognized as a basic right of each citizen.” Not only is it a basic right to every citizen it is also a value that permeates political and social life. In 1957, the legislative assembly of Cameroon, ALCAM, chose the three word motto for Cameroon, “Paix- Travail- Patrie” (peace- work- fatherland). Even from its very foundation, Cameroon has recognized and emphasized the value of work. Nationally it is considered not only a right, but also a means for growth for every citizen.

Furthermore, in a nation where poverty is rampant and economic crisis a constant threat, work is viewed as a mode for material gain and the means of fighting against poverty. Ultimately, work is a word of order and a rule of life in Cameroon.

In 1987, Cameroon entered an economic depression. This too has had lasting impacts on the value of work among Cameroonians. Many families lost their means of survival, and due to this crisis, work became even more important. Those few who were able to retain their jobs had to work hard to provide for their families, nuclear and extended, and with a sustained rate of unemployment and low wages, a percentage of Cameroonians have to continually work hard to provide the bare minimum for their family. Also, an appreciation of planning and saving entered the Cameroonian mindset. Preparing for the future through hard work and delayed gratification, individuals are able to save to fight against additional crisis in the

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future. This sentiment is particularly strong in the Bamiléké context, which will be expounded on in the next section.

**Work in the Bamiléké Context**

« *Les Bamiléké ont le travail dans le sang ou que les Bamiléké ont le sang du travail.*[^13] »

Within the region of the Bamiléké, the sentiment of work is even stronger. « Les Bamiléké – c’est les juifs du Cameroun.»[^14] They are reputable for their independence, social promotion, solidarity, material accumulation, sense of investment, and ability to adapt, but in particular they are known for their hard work, entrepreneurship and commercial aggressivity. Certain factors have been attributed to this strong value of work. The most common factors sited are those of constraints. Kemfang noted that the value of work is attributable to environmental, political and social constraints[^15].

The environmental constraints are caused by the physical layout of the West Province. The dense population and the mountains limit the amount of land available for cultivation, and as Warnier (1993) described, « Coupés de la terre, ils n’ont d’autre alternative que le commerce et les affaires.»[^16] Due to this environmental constraint the Bamiléké turn to commerce for work and become hard workers in this domain. Second, the political constraints are heavy within the Bamiléké culture and are tied to the independence of Cameroon. Preceding independence many rebels fought against the direction of the French, and these “maquisards” launched a series of attacks continuing until about 1970, several years after independence. This guerrilla campaign directed by the outlawed UPC party mostly consisted of Bassa and Bamiléké, and to this day, there is still a sense of political


“*The Bamiléké have work in the blood or that the Bamiléké have blood of work.*”


“*The Bamiléké – they are the Jews of Cameroon.*”


estrangement among the Bamiléké, and they do not have the same ease of entering political
life as other ethnic groups within Cameroon.17 The third factor causing the Bamiléké to turn
towards work is the social constraints. Until recently, the Bamiléké dominated most
economic domains throughout the country. For example, among individuals of national
importance Bamiléké consisted of 58% of these individuals, in the economic sector, 87-94%
of boutique owners in Douala were Bamiléké, and among the hotels in Douala and Yaoundé,
owners were 75% Bamiléké.18 It’s been noted that in many other sectors of the working
population the Bamiléké dominate no matter what region of the country. To create a more
balanced representation within these economic sectors, Cameroon has initiated a quota,
limiting the number of individuals from each ethnicity who are able to receive positions. This
augments the skill level required for entry among the Bamiléké, pushing them to work harder
to earn one of the limited positions in any given field. These and other factors distinguish the
Bamiléké has hard workers, and have led to the choice of the Bamiléké for this particular
research.

This research, instead of looking at the Bamiléké as a whole focuses specifically on
the children of this community. It examines whether they adopt these same values, for what
reasons and from whom. Also, it explore the manner in which this value is transmitted, and
what effect it has on the child. From background information it appears that work plays an
important role in this culture, but how important and to what end?

17 LeVine, Victor T., & Nye, Roger P. Historical Dictionary of Cameroon. The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Metuchen, NJ,
1974. p. 13
**Methodology**

**Location**

This project was completed in the West Province of Cameroon, in the city of Dschang. Population of Dschang is approximately 80,000, and natives of Dschang are typically from the Bamiléké ethnic group. Capitol of the Department of the Menoua, Dschang has a rich history and a significant role in the colonial history of Cameroon. It is located in the high plateaus of Cameroon among the mountains forests and is known for its mild climate.

**Evolution**

Before arriving in Cameroon, I did preliminary searches on work that has been completed in Africa in the field of psychology. During this search, I stumbled upon certain articles regarding cultural differences of the value of work. The idea was presented that work for a child is essential to their development, and in fact, depriving work from a child could be potentially abusive and detrimental to their future. Up until this point, I had only imagined that too much work could be considered abusive, and never the possibility of the inverse to be true. From that point on, this notion of work’s vital importance in development stuck with me. Upon my arrival in Cameroon, I learned that for the first month we would be staying among the Bamiléké, reputable for their hard work and perseverance. I couldn’t believe my luck. I would have the opportunity first-hand to observe this phenomenon of industry as a fundamental element of life. In the weeks that followed, I couldn’t help but notice the children at my host home and those who I encountered on a day to day basis had motivation to work more than any American child I had ever seen. For example, during the parades of youth day, a child of five or six years old cleaned up the empty bottles and dirty dishes of six university students and several other children, and then proceeded to wipe down the tables and floor without incentive or insistence from anyone. This incident and others remained me
of the articles that I had read before my arrival in Cameroon. The families of Dschang have clearly instilled a strong value of work in their children, but how and where did this value come from? From that point on, I observed and discussed the value of work with members of the community. From these conversations my desire to complete my independent study project on the value of work among the Bamiléké was fixed. All I need to do was complete some background information and get started.

**Procedures**

For the completion of this project, the first step was to determine a location for completion. Due to contacts already made, easy access to resources provided by the program, and the Bamiléké population, Dschang became the clear choice for execution of the project. Living situations were arranged so that I could stay with a Bamiléké family, permitting me to observe daily activities and to foster relationships with members of the community.

Preparatory activities to collection of data included background research, collection of contacts and contact information, preliminary informal interviews on the topic of research, and creation of questionnaire. Explanation of instruments will be provided in the following sections. Distribution of questionnaires and completion of interviews were completed simultaneously, and with the assistance of sixteen volunteer Psychology students from the University of Dschang, level 1-3. Distribution and collection of questionnaires was completed in five days. Each student was given between 6 and 10 questionnaires depending upon their availability during data collection. Questionnaires were either completed by the participant on their own or responses were written by students due to participants’ unwillingness or inability to write. Three additional interviews were completed following the collection of all data due to participants availability. Following the collection of questionnaires, students were divided into four groups of three students, who analyzed
approximately 30 questionnaires per group. This process took a total of five days as well.

Upon the completion of the group analyses, representatives from each group met to share their findings. A total of eight students participated in this step, and the final analysis was completed after three more days.

**Participants & Sampling**

122 participants were of Bamiléké origin currently residing in Dschang participated in this project. Individuals were found on the basis of availability; therefore, an accurate cross-section of the population could not be ascertained. In most cases, two questionnaires were collected from each family visited. Questionnaires were either given to one parent and one child or to two parents. Participants ranged from the age of 14 to 67 years old. 46 participants were under the age of 25, 62 between the age of 26 and 50, and 6 participants between the age of 51 and 70. 65 males and 52 females participated in this research. 44 participants were students and the rest were adults. During the decoding process, it was discovered that one individual’s village of origin was from the Littoral Province, a non-Bamiléké village, so participant’s responses were discarded. As a result, final data consists of responses from 121 participants.

**Instruments**

Questionnaires, formal, and informal interviews, and observation were the main instruments used for collection of data. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher through the use of psychometric procedures. To develop the questionnaire the researcher first determined the research questions. Five research questions were determined. To insure that each item in the questionnaire was relevant and would collect the desired data, each

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19 Refer to appendix A for questionnaire.
research questions was divided into sub variables. Each item in the questionnaire applied directly to a sub variable and then a research question. A total of eighteen items was created for the questionnaire. There were between one and six sub variables per research question. A combination of open and closed questions was used. Fifteen items were open-ended questions and three questions were closed-questions and insisted on categorical responses and ranking of preference. Ethical concerns were addressed by the inclusion of an agreement at the beginning of the questionnaire insisting on the confidentiality of responses and the right to refuse participation. If participants were in accord with the terms of the agreement, they proceeded with the questionnaire. In addition to the psychometric procedures, sixteen psychology students from the University of Dschang reviewed the questionnaire to confirm that questions were valid, grammatically sound, and culturally appropriate. Questions were scored through descriptive analysis. Open-ended responses were grouped categorically and numerated. Frequency of response was then totaled. Closed questions were scored based on average ranking given. Frequency of response was also calculated.

Formal interview questions were based on the questions developed for the questionnaire. The researcher posed the questions stated in the questionnaire and asked participants to elaborate on responses. Various follow-up questions were also posed. Informal interviews followed a similar structure, but due to their informal nature, these interviews touched on a variety of topics indirectly related to the research and background. Information gathered from interviews was recorded in a field journal and was regarded as qualitative data, due to the casual nature of all interviews and lack of structure to data collected.

Observation was completed casually on a day to day basis and was also considered qualitative data. Daily recording in the field journal was the main source for this data. Most observation was completed in the context of the daily host home environment. The home stay
family served as the main source of observation, but additional observation was completed
during visits to neighbors and friends homes and other interactions with children during the
day. All observation was informal and was not based on variable guidelines or other
structures.

Validity of Data

Unfortunately, due to the investigators lack of experience in developing and
distributing questionnaires, this instrument had several limitations. First, a percentage of
questionnaires were presented orally due to participants’ unwillingness or incapability to
write. As a result, responses were paraphrased interpretations of participants’ oral responses,
and exact meaning of participants’ responses may have been lost. Second, fifteen psychology
students from the University of Dschang assisted in the distribution of questionnaires, and
though the meaning of each question was discussed in advance, discussion following
distribution of questionnaires showed that some confusion still remained regarding the
appropriate and anticipated completion of the questionnaire. Third, there is no certainty that
participants’ opinions do not vary from those recorded in questionnaires; though, using a
variety of instruments, as done in this research, helps to reduce the inaccuracy of data
collected from any one instrument. Also, the study was completed in Dschang; therefore
cutting out much of the Bamiléké population, especially those of the rural population.
Convenience sampling brings the validity of data into question and the representation of the
Bamiléké population. Organized analysis of population stratification and selection of
participants would have been a more appropriate approach to data collection.

Despite these limitations, the data can still be considered valid for various
reasons. First, the sample size is fairly large, thus increasing the likelihood of an accurate
representation of the population’s beliefs. Next, analysis was completed in a professional
manner by individuals educated in the area of decoding and analysis. It can be assured that decoding and analysis was completed in a diligent and scientific manner. Despite the limitation of time, analysis was given the appropriate amount of time for it to be done properly. Also, a variety of instruments were used, eliminating possible change of attitude created by one particular instrument. Permitting participants to give responses orally also may have allowed them to express their ideas more freely and give a more accurate representation of their beliefs on the research subject. Assistance of students knowledgeable in psychological procedures improved the structure of the questionnaire, and reduced the number of potential limitations of the instrument.

**Analysis**

Questionnaires were analyzed through manual decoding, and analysis was completed by the researcher and eleven other psychology students in level 1-3 from the University of Dschang. Analysis was completed through descriptive statistics. The 121 questionnaires were divided among four groups of three students each for initial analysis. Each group consisted of at least one level 3 student. Upon completion of group analysis, the four groups came together to discuss and condense findings into one document. Decoding was completed categorically for all questions and frequency of response was recorded for each category. Microsoft Office Excel 2007 was used to analyze data.

Observation and interviews were analyzed as qualitative analysis, and data was collected from daily field journal entries. The researcher reviewed entries finding data that was applicable to quantitative data found and used the qualitative data from observation and interviews to reinforce ideas found from that data.
Findings

Perception of Children and Family Values

To start this research, it is first important to understand the concept and perception of the children in the cultural context. Once this understanding is established, it is then possible to advance to the next step of understanding the transmission of work values within the family unit. In the Bamiléké context, the children are an essential element within the family. Not only does a child bring security and happiness to the family, but it is also the uniting element of two families in marriage. Without children, marriage is without purpose. As one respondent stated, « il est le lien qui consolide la famille. » When asking participants to list the most important values in their family, 20% of respondents sited either number of children, or a sense of unity and solidarity, and these were the values most often sited. A sense of solidarity demonstrates that the family unit and unity within that unit is highly regarded in the Bamiléké context. One academic noted that other countries de-emphasize the importance of children, but for Africans and specifically the Bamiléké, children are essential for spiritual, and temporal reasons, and lead to a sense of joy, happiness, security and prestige within the family. They are essential for the growth and existence of the family. One respondent poetically described that « L’enfant est une graine que l’on semé dont on recevra le fruit dans le futur. »

In addition to understanding the concept of the child within the Bamiléké context, it is also important to understand how the family views the child in terms of resourcefulness. According to UNICEF, “households function as a unit in which family members pool their

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20 Respondent # 5. “[The child] is the link that consolidates the family.”
21 Refer to Appendix B for additional data
23 Questionnaire # 27 “A child is the grain that one plants in which the fruits are received in the future.”
time and resources to achieve a common set of goals. Each individual has a specific role to play in the family unit, but what is the specific role of the child? Are they a burden to their parents as one who simply consumes the family resources or do they play a greater role as an asset or an investment for the future? It was generally found that children are considered an asset or a contributor to the family. In fact, approximately 44% of respondents stated that they perceived the child as a direct asset or investment for the family, and another 24% of respondents explained that children were essential contributors to the family unit and were an invaluable human resource. In the words of one individual, « ils sont des entreprises dans lesquelles les parents investissent. »

**Work Types and Significance**

The next step to this research was to understand the Bamiléké perception of the value of work and what types of work are performed by the children of the family. In Bamiléké households, 46% of participants sited domestic work as important work performed by children. Farm work, too, was listed as an essential work performed by children with 32% of responses citing this type of work. In addition to these activities, children were also listed as participants in income generating work, academic work, artisanal work, animal rearing, tailoring and wine tapping. The purpose of asking what types of work are liked and disliked by children was to see what kind of value is given to each type of work performed by children. 63% of positive responses dealt with various forms of domestic work, whereas only 20% of negative responses dealt with forms of domestic work. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the different responses given by participants.

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25 Refer to Appendix B for additional data.
26 Questionnaire # 21 “They are the enterprises in which parents invest.”
27 Refer to Appendix B for additional data.
Study of these Figures shows that most energy is focused on the domestic work performed by children. Not only is it the most often mentioned, but it is the most desired form of work. For families much time and energy must be invested in the teaching of domestic work and encouraging children to appreciate its value.

Following this inquiry, the research work focused on reasons why work was valued as a whole. Out of a list of possibilities moral obligation and mastery of something were the two choices most often sited by participants. Moral obligation was selected by 83% of participants, and based on participants rankings from 1-6 of what reasons were most
important the average ranking was 2.5. Mastery of something was also selected by 83% of participants with an average ranking of 2.75, the two highest rankings of importance. From interviews and responses from the open-ended questions regarding work, many responses supported the importance of these two values. Participants often sited the importance of education and explained that mastery of something often represented education for children or savoir-faire for life in general. One participant summed it up by saying that « le travail est l’éducation de base par l’enfant.» Another participant noted, « En travaillant qu’on gagne de quoi vivre et qu’on peut aider les gens dans la société.» It is education that extends beyond the classroom and that encompasses aspects of life that are essential for a child’s development. In addition, the moral obligation of work cannot be ignored within the Bamiléké context. One is not only morally obliged, but work also protects from moral vices. Several respondents shared the words of Voltaire, stating « Le travail éloigne de nous trios grand maux; l’ennui, le vice et le besoin.» How important it is to the Bamiléké people to avoid laziness, boredom, vice and want!

Free responses reinforced the importance of mastery in terms of acquisition of knowledge and moral obligation. Responses pertaining to general acquisition of knowledge, preparation for the realities of life, and learning of cultural values consisted of 40% of all responses. In addition, 15% of responses reinforced the moral value that work provides, and the avoidance of vice that comes with hard work. Figure 3 presents all response made regarding the importance of teaching children the value of work. One respondent nicely tied together the significance of both of these values by stating that work is important, « parce

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28 Questionnaire # b/w 79 and 119 “Work is the foundation of education for children.”
29 Questionnaire # 72 “By working one gains the know-how of living and one can help others in society.”
30 “Work distances from us three great evils: boredom, vice and want.”
31 Refer to Appendix B for additional data.
qu’il n’y a pas de place pour les paresseux, surtout dans une société qui tend vers une nouvelle ère, celui du développement comme le notre.32 »

![Graph showing reasons work is an important value to teach to children and rate of responses](image)

**Fig. 3: Reasons Work is an Important Value to Teach to Children and rate of responses**

**Transmission of Values**

Data showed that it is almost unanimously agreed that work is important to teach to Bamiléké children, but the reasons why were highly varied. In addition to the need to teach, respondents also agreed that the responsibility lies first with the parents to teach the value of work to children. In fact, 99% of participants agreed on this fact. It is possible to say that, “the family is the basic unit of society... [and] the primary responsibility for the protection, upbringing and development of children rests with the family.33” In addition to parents, participants sited several different individuals also responsible for teaching children, the second greatest emphasis being placed on teachers at school. Indeed, education is one value that receives great emphasis in the Bamiléké culture, and a value that reaches beyond the classroom. “The development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential... [and] the preparation of the child for responsible life in a

32 Questionnaire # 72 “Because there is no place for laziness, certainly not in a society that is moving towards a new era, one of development such as our own.”

free society\textsuperscript{34}, are both essential aspects of the education of a child. Interview with one student revealed the importance of education at school. He noted that it is impossible to succeed in examinations if one is lazy. If you are lazy you’ll fail in sports, in practical work and in the general studies. There is no room for laziness at school; they teach that value strongly there. Figure 4 presents the other responsible parties for teaching children work and the frequency of each response.

![Figure 4](image)

\textbf{Fig. 4 : Those who have the responsibility to teach children the value of work (excluding parents) and frequency of responses.}

In addition to the family and school, participants were asked if there were other factors that influenced a child’s desire to learn the value of work. Some of the strongest influences listed were that of economic reasons (12\%), ambition for life in the future (12\%), and influence of peers (11\%) and the nature of life in society (17\%).\textsuperscript{35} Though the focus of this paper is to understand the nature of the transmission of work from parents to children, it is also important to know other factors that may play a role as well. This data show that learning the value of work includes multiple factors and cannot be limited to one event or one set of events.

\textsuperscript{34} UNICEF. (2006). \textit{A World Fit for Children}. New York. p. 42

\textsuperscript{35} Refer to Appendix B for additional data.
Why Children Learn

This question was motivated by my understanding of the American children’s motivation to work. Placed in the Cameroonian context, I was shocked to see so many children working on their own volition, so I wanted to understand whether children are really motivated to work in the Bamiléké culture, and if they are what motivates them. In questionnaires, 80% of respondents agreed that, yes, children are motivated to work, whereas the rest responded otherwise. The reasons for this motivation varied greatly, but the most popular response dealt with overcoming the difficulties of life. Almost one in four respondents listed this as the reason for children’s motivation to work, but out of those who felt that children were not motivated to work, one of the most common responses was the opposite; that children are unaware of the importance of work in overcoming the difficulties of life. These responses, too, were approximately one fourth of all negative responses. It is possible that such contrary findings are due to age of children in the home at the time, and at a certain age within childhood, children realize the importance of work, but there is no data to confirm this hypothesis.

Other ideas explaining why children are motivated to work include an understanding that work is a necessity for all people, belief that work is a source of happiness and reward, and a source of social interaction and independence. Also, the ideas contrary to children’s motivation include laziness in the child and a sense that work is punishment. To see a list of all ideas and frequency of responses refer to Appendix B.

Impact on Personality Development

Out of all the elements studied regarding the transmission of work values, the impact on the development of a child is probably the most important. Unfortunately, this is a difficult concept to measure, and the best method for measuring such an impact is through a
long term study of child development. Instead, this research asked participants about their understanding of how work effects the mental, physical, social, and cultural development of a child. By asking about these four areas, I hoped to gain a broader understanding of the general impact on personality development. Following these four questions, and to conclude the research, participants were asked to list any types of work considered inappropriate for children. Though this research has a positive approach toward work, it is important not to neglect the negative aspects of work. This final question allowed for a small understanding of the negative impact on a child’s development as well.

*Mental*

By looking at responses given, mental development includes both emotional and intellectual development for participants. Responses varied between ideas such as development of memory to an increase of humility. In general, 50% of responses dealt with development of cognitive capacity either through increased knowledge or greater capacity to think. This reinforces the ties between work and education, and the strong emphasis given to both of these concepts in the Bamiléké society. Many other concepts, though not as often cited, gave a more vivid idea of the effect of work. One participant described that because of work, « L’enfant a un esprit plus ouvert, plus développé. » Other participants as well noted this concept of a working spirit that is fostered in the child. Another concept presented was that of moral strength. « L’enfant qui travaille a une grande confiance de soi. Le travail de l’enfant s’éloigne de la peur et de l’angoisse. » Though these ideas do not conventionally connect to mental development, 28% of participants insisted in one way or another on the development of a child’s spirit.

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36 Refer to Appendix B for additional data
37 Questionnaire #9 “The child has more open and developed spirit.”
38 Questionnaire #112 “The child that works has a lot of self confidence. The work of a child distances from him fear and anguish.”
Physical

Responses to physical development were fairly direct, and the majority of responses fell under two domains: health and fitness. Also, this was the only category of the four that received a significant percentage of negative responses. 16% of respondents stated that work either inhibits growth or has a negative impact on health. It is possible to conclude that most of these negative responses are attributed to those types of work inappropriate for children stated at the end of the questionnaire. Positive effects on physical development were increased physical fitness, more energy, better health and improved senses. An emphasis was also given to how this physical development helps children in their future. One participant stated, « Le travail rend l’enfant prêt à tout obstacle.» 39 Another participant stated, « Ils s’acquèrent des capacités de réactions importantes.» 40 Both of these statements imply that their physical development is important for their future roles in life. A summary of all findings can be seen in Figure 5 below.

![Fig. 5 : Impact of work on physical development and frequency of responses.](image)

39 Questionnaire # 69 “Work makes a child ready for any obstacle.”
40 Questionnaire # 6 « They acquire important capabilities of reaction. »
Social

Responses regarding social development were fairly general with 62% of responses stating simply that work increases socialization. From data it is clear that the participants agree that work has a positive impact on social development because only 2% of responses indicated that work decreases socialization. One theme that was prevalent throughout responses was a sense that work is essential for proper integration into society. One participant stated, « l’enfant apprend les activités de son milieu. Ce qui lui permettra de s’enfuir rapidement de la société. » It is a means of smoothly entering into future roles, and becoming a productive member of society. Some participants noted how it creates in the child a sense of service to society. Work causes the child to have «le goût de servir. » Whether by increasing the child’s understanding of the social world, preparing him for future social roles, or preventing children from adopting negative social attitudes, it can be agreed that work has a positive impact on social development and integration.

Cultural

When replying to the question regarding the impact of work in terms of cultural development, participants presented how important work is culturally. One participant explained, « Le travail permet de se familiariser avec sa culture parce que le travail est la culture en Afrique. » Another respondent also explained its essential role by saying, “It helps the child be culturally mature because culture means hard work.” Many responses were as powerful as these here, and 45% of responses stated that work increases a child’s

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41 Refer to Appendix B for additional data.
42 Questionnaire # 114 “The child learns activities of his group. That which permits him to enter quickly into society.”
43 Questionnaire # 60 “the taste to serve.”
44 A table of data can be found in Appendix B.
45 Questionnaire # 72 “Work permits the child to familiarize with the culture because work is the culture of Africa.”
46 Questionnaire # 85
knowledge and understanding of his culture. In addition, 15% of responses insisted rather on the increase of cultural values in the child. Not only does work play a role in the cultural development of the child, but also for many Bamiléké, work represents the very foundation of their culture, and without the knowledge of work, their children will lose their understanding of the culture. For additional data regarding the impact on cultural development refer to Appendix B.

**Negative Impacts**

Inquiring into the types of work inappropriate for children produced responses varying from the challenging domestic chores of every day life to the extreme of prostitution and exploitation of children, but the largest percentage of respondents simply stated that work above the child’s capacity and strength is inappropriate. The frustrating aspect of this response is that individuals can have varying definitions of what is beyond a child’s capacity. In any case, it is an important limitation for the work of a child. Another category mentioned was that of abusive work or forced work. For children to develop it is essential that they have “ample opportunity to develop their individual capacities in a safe and supportive environment.”\(^{47}\) Despite all the positive impacts of work on a child’s development a certain amount of prudence is necessary to ensure a child’s health and safety. Among reasons for why listed type of work are inappropriate for children was the negative impact on a child’s growth (14%), health (17%) and even the total destruction of the child’s whole personality and being (22%)\(^{48}\). UNICEF summarized all the negative impacts that should be avoided and included them in their Convention on the Rights of Children ratified by 192 countries including Cameroon. They noted how important it is “to protect children from...performing any work that is likely to be... harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual,


\(^{48}\) Refer to Appendix B for additional data.
moral or social development.\textsuperscript{49} This data regarding work inappropriate for children showed that the Bamiléké have a definition of what is considered abusive work to children, and with Cameroon’s ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Children, it is clear that efforts are made to assure children’s safety with regards to work. Work cannot be considered something that is harmful to children. When taught appropriately, work is critically important to a child’s personality development in that it shapes their mental capacities, physical fitness, ability of integration into society, and their very understanding of their culture.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Through use of questionnaire, interview, and observation, this research has examined the value of work in the Bamiléké culture, why it is important, how it is transmitted to children and what impact this value may have on a child’s development. It was found that children are extremely important within this cultural context often being described as a gift from god or a source of wealth or happiness. Among other values, work is one of the most important values that families wish to teach to their children, and parents take first responsibility for teaching that value to children. Others, too, play an important role in shaping children’s understanding of work, in particular the teachers that children encounter at school. Through participation in work that parents due at home and in the fields, children generally learn the value of work and understand its importance for their future roles and for overcoming the difficulties of life. Looking at all the data found it can be concluded that work is an essential and fundamental part of the Bamiléké culture, and in reality they do live up to their reputation as an industrious people. In the words of one of the participants of a Nigerian focus group who had a similar perception of work, “[Our children] need to be part of whatever we do as their parents so that they will know that work does not kill but not working is a terrible killer.\textsuperscript{50}” It is understood that it is difficult and probably impossible to generalize

\textsuperscript{49} UNICEF. (2006). \textit{A World Fit for Children}. New York. p. 44
any belief within a group context as shown by the variety of responses collected by the questionnaire, but some themes were clear. Work is an important and permanent part of the Bamiléké culture that will ever be defining of the Bamiléké people.

**Limitations and Constraints**

The greatest limitation to this project was time. Just less than one month is not sufficient time to adequately define and analyze any research question. Due to this limitation, time given to both collection and analysis of data had to be reduced. In addition, a pre-test for the questionnaire was not able to be completed. It would have been greatly beneficial to complete pre-testing, to eliminate many of the limitations to this instrument such as poorly phrased and inadequate questions. With more time, additional follow-up and in-depth interviews could have been completed, clarifying many of participants’ responses, and assuring that the two instruments acquired the same perspectives from participants. Also, time limited the amount of analysis that was able to be completed. With more time the researcher could have examined age and gender differences in questionnaires and explored the differences found there. Another limitation to this research was the researcher’s limited knowledge of the French language, and the Bamiléké culture. It is possible that some ideas expressed during interviews and in questionnaires were misinterpreted or lost in translation. Fortunately, University of Dschang students fluent in French were able to explain any confusion and clarify any problems encountered in data analysis.

**Possibilities for Further Research**

The topic of work is vast and there are many approaches that are still open for further exploration. To expand on the research that was already completed with this project, one could look at the different perspectives of men and women, and also the different perspectives
of children versus adults. Do children really learn the value that the parents teach them? Also, it would be beneficial to do a long term study looking at the effects of work on children’s development. With such a study, effects could be better understood and would be more reliable. In addition to these ideas it is also possible to explore the difference between the role of family versus the role of the teacher or the formal education sector in teaching the value of work to children. Work is a domain that has been heavily researched, but rarely has it been done in a positive light. It is important to continue to research work positively to better understand its positive effects in preparing children for their future in the world of work.
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Books and Articles


**Interviews**


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Appendices

Appendix A: Questionnaire

Les Facteurs psychosociale et culturelles qui ont un effet sur la transmission de la valeur du travail selon les enfants Africain: une étude des familles Bamiléké au Cameroun

Questionnaire

L’étude dans laquelle vous participerez est pour les études de Diana Carlson, une étudiante américaine affiliée avec l’université de Dschang. Il faut que vous compreniez les points suivants :

- Le but du projet est de mieux comprendre la transmission de la valeur du travail dans les familles Bamiléké.
- Si vous voulez, vous pouvez obtenir les résultats du projet (demander à Diana).
- N’hésitez pas de poser des questions avant, pendant et après le questionnaire.
- Vous êtes libre de refuser votre participation.
- Il n’y a aucune réponse qui est incorrecte.
- Il n’y a aucun risque attendu de votre participation. Vous restez anonyme, et toute information est gardée complètement confidentielle.

Si vous comprenez bien ces accords et vous êtes prêts à participer, commencez le questionnaire.

Le numéro de contact pour Diana : 564-5551

1) Quelle est la définition d’un enfant dans cette famille? ______________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

2) Comment est-ce que vous voyez les enfants en termes de ressource dans la famille ?
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

3) Quels sont les valeurs principales de la famille ? ______________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

4) Quels sont les types de travaux exercés par les enfants dans la famille ?
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

5) Quels sont les types de travaux que les enfants de la famille aiment faire ?
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

6) Quels sont les types de travaux que les enfants de la famille n’aident pas faire ?
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

7) Pourquoi est-ce que le travail est important pour les enfants? Choisissez les réponses qui vous conviennent et rangez-les par ordre d’importance. 1, 2, 3 …

[ ] Les obligations morales
[ ] Les raisons économiques
[ ] L’indépendance
[ ] Le succès et la reconnaissance
[ ] La maîtrise de quelque chose
[ ] Les obligations sociales
[ ] Autres _________________

8) Est-il important d’apprendre aux enfants à travailler? [ ] oui [ ] non
Pourquoi? ________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
9) A Qui bénéficie le travail des enfants ? Choisissez les réponses qui vous conviennent.
   [ ] L’individu
   [ ] La famille
   [ ] La communauté
   [ ] Autres _______________

10) Quels sont les facteurs en dehors de la famille qui encouragent les enfants à apprendre la valeur du travail?
   __________________________________________________________________________

11) Qui a la responsabilité d’enseigner la valeur du travail aux enfants?
   __________________________________________________________________________

12) Comment est-ce qu’on enseigne la valeur du travail ? Choisissez les réponses qui vous conviennent et rangez-les par ordre d’importance. 1, 2, 3 …
   [ ] L’observation
   [ ] La littérature (les contes/ les proverbes)
   [ ] L’éducation formelle
   [ ] L’imitation
   [ ] La récompense
   [ ] La punition
   [ ] Autres _______________

13) Est-ce que les enfants sont motivés de connaître la valeur du travail? [ ] oui [ ] non
    Pourquoi ? __________________________________________________________________

14) Quel est l’effet du travail sur le développement mental des enfants? _________________
    __________________________________________________________________________

15) Quel est l’effet du travail sur le développement physique des enfants ? ______
    __________________________________________________________________________

16) Quel est l’effet du travail sur le développement social des enfants ? ___________
    __________________________________________________________________________

17) Quel est l’effet du travail sur le développement culturel des enfants ? ___________
    __________________________________________________________________________

18) Est-ce qu’il y a les formes du travail qui ne sont pas appropriées pour les enfants ?
    Lesquelles ? __________________________________________________________________
    Pourquoi ? __________________________________________________________________

Sexe : [ ] masculin [ ] féminin
Age : ______
Village d’origine : ______________
Votre travail : ______________
Nombre d’enfants élevés : ______
Est-ce que je pourrais vous contacter pour faire une interview ?
   [ ] Oui [ ] Non

Numéro de Contact : ______________
Appendix B: Tables and Charts from Questionnaire Analysis

Fig. 1 Perception of Child in the Family and Frequency of Responses

Fig. 2 Perception of Child in terms of Resource and Frequency of Responses

Fig. 3 Types of Work Performed by Children and Frequency of Responses
Fig. 4 Reasons why Work is Important to Teach to Children and Frequency of Responses

Fig. 5 Factors outside of the Home that Influence Children to Learn the Value of Work and Frequency of Responses

Fig. 6 Reasons why children are Motivated to Work and Frequency of Responses
Fig. 7 Reasons why Children aren’t Motivated to Work and Frequency of Responses

Fig. 8 Effects on Mental Development and Frequency of Responses

Fig. 9 Effects on Social Development and Frequency of Responses
Fig. 10 Effects on Cultural Development and Frequency of Responses

Fig. 11 Types of Work inappropriate for Children and Frequency of Responses

Fig. 12 Reasons why Types of Work are Inappropriate for Children and Frequency of Responses