



Traditional Practices Influence Student' Motivation at School and in School Athletics in the Republic of Benin

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Abstract

In their daily activities, men are influenced by various factors. These factors, which can be environmental, social and/or cultural, vary according to the types of activities in which these people are engaged. For the Beninese, everything has meaning, which is why, they regularly practice their traditional cultural heritage, as it strengthens their morale during professional activities. Students from this environment can not escape this reality. Therefore, they do not hesitate to call on traditional, cultural practices to manage stress more effectively and increase their motivation. The results of two questionnaires that were administered to 271 non-sports students and to 138 student athletes, revealed that the Beninese traditional cultural practices (prayers, charms and offerings), are making their entry to school and into school athletic associations. The presence of such practices in secondary schools varies between rural and urban students and between animist, Christian and Muslim students.

Key words: Traditional practices; Stress; Motivation; School; Sport

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INTRODUCTION

Beliefs can be defined as intellectual attitudes that people hold to be true, such as statements, ideas or facts without having any objective demonstration of their existence. These beliefs can be related to the cultural or environmental pasts of the individual (Tanimomo, Wabi & Attiklémé, 2005), and accordingly, these are referred to as traditional beliefs in the context of this study. A belief can positively affect people's behavior and cause them to become more involved in the activities they have selected giving the activity increased importance (belief in personal efficacy) Bandura (1997), or on the contrary, beliefs can cause them to doubt their skills. In this sense, all ideas of failure create, in these individuals, anxieties, that lead them to consider additional resources to improve their chances of success or to prevent factors that may compromise their chances of success. Thus, beliefs can enhance one's willingness adopt practices that will aid people as they seek to manage stress and simultaneously increase their motivation (Diatta, 1999).

In Africa and especially in Benin, beliefs have traditionally given rise to practices that the Beninese consider essential to the success of the activities they undertake. Among these practices are such things as prayers, charms and offerings (Edoh, Cogérino, Garnarczyk & Dosseville, 2009; Adoukonou, 1988).

The prayers, in this context, are words and invocations addressed internally or aloud to gods or God that directly ask for assistance. These prayers are not specific to any religion.

The charms are, for their part, things whose wearing is required because of the protective virtues attributed to them. The charms may also have dissuasive functions and may serve as a means of pressure, causing doubt among potential or imaginary rivals. A charm is called upon to protect the wearer, while simultaneously causing fear in the wearer's opponents.

Finally, offerings are gifts to deities, often made through the medium of insiders to request help for a test or a delicate or important challenge (Edoh, 2011).

It should be noted that the offerings, and especially the making of amulets, require the intervention of diviners, who often work under harsh conditions that sometimes include various deprivations (Apovo, 2005). Personages with powers, such as diviners, are suspected also of using tricks and mystifications on their clients. Therefore, the majority of those requesting the intervention of diviners sometimes have feelings of mistrust toward them, because, as believers they think rightly or wrongly, that the diviners are capable of the best and the worst. This impression that some people have toward diviners has implications for the charms and the offerings, as well (Edoh, 2011). Considering the effects, as the credibility of the practices and the diviners not always free from reproach, both practices, are therefore, discouraged in some areas.

However, these traditional practices are still relevant and important for many Africans in several aspects of their lives (Thomas, 1981; Glèlè, 1981). The practices' main function is to protect and reassure the person requesting support or assistance in the person's various undertaking. Furthermore, such powers or individuals can also serve as a deterrent and impress real or virtual opponents (Tanimomo, 2006).

When a child is born and grows up in this social and cultural environment, he is steeped in a certain tradition. As a consequence, at school and/or in school athletic competitions, the child finds himself faced with two realities: the one which falls within his traditional beliefs, on the one hand, and the one transmitted through the school and the sports, on the other hand.

While, these two approaches may seem contradictory at first glance, in reality, they are complementary. According to Le Guérinel (1993), when two cultures meet, one initially tries to dominate the other, but eventually, type of symbiosis is achieved between them. Thus, the main ideas of each eventually merge to create a new dynamic. To succeed in school and/or win in competitions while at the same time acting in accordance with the social and cultural values of his community, the Beninese student must reconcile these two approaches. The school embraces a program whereby the state expresses its vision for teaching and education (Tanimomo, 2007). An athletic sport is also based on rational standards and strategies that coaches must embrace and teach within the context of their work. Good academic results and athletic victories in competitions require assiduity and continued efforts. However, these results can be influenced by the social and cultural environment and, especially, by the speech of those responsible for overseeing these activities (Agló, 2009). The interpretation of results at school and/or of a school sports competition also appeals to the beliefs and practices that are promoted in the environment where that school is located. In reality, things happen as if an

omnipotent local culture oversees everyday relationships of Beninese citizens and is involved in the assessment of academic performance and/or sports for students. This behavior is not specific to Africa and Benin, however. Indeed, Wang and Biddle (2001), after a study conducted in 49 secondary schools from different regions of England, reached the conclusion that the motivations of students vary from one region to another according to economic, social and cultural factors. Similarly, for Fontayne, Sarrazin and Famose (2001), the French students of North African origin are more motivated by academic disciplines than their counterparts of European descent, who are more attracted by athletic and artistic activities. As for Korea, Williams and Gill (2003) and Gano-Overway (2001), found that the social and cultural environment influences the choice of sports activities among young Americans and South Koreans. The young French girls are drawn more toward such sports as dance, while their male compatriots prefer football or rugby (Chalabaev & Sarrazin, 2009). Finally, (Tanimomo, Wabi & Houngan, 2009) indicated that young Beninese girls engage in football teams of the first division for extrinsic motives.

Benin practices are social, cultural and religious. The use of these practices are subjective and vary from one person to another. Men often tend to establish relationships between the facts involved in their lives. For example, for two events occurring simultaneously or within a relatively short time interval, one is interpreted as the cause of the other (Dubois, 1987). If a person makes use of prayers and charms or seeks the services of a soothsayer in the psychological preparation of an examination or a sports competition, in the event of success, this result is interpreted as a consequence of these practices. Thus, for future initiatives, the individual will seek to repeat the same behaviors. Certain soccer players even believe that their victories and failures are influenced by their uniforms. Accordingly, they may choose to wear one pair of shoes over another, depending on whether they wish imperatively to win or be content with a draw (Lambert, 1993). According to Dubois (1987) and Levenson (1974), certain people trust either in their efforts and, in their ability to achieve the objectives they set for themselves (the internals). These people think they are responsible for what happens to them, both good and bad, and display behavior in accordance with that belief. These people believe less in luck and coincidence. Thus, these people adopt standards and behaviors to manage stress and motivational strategies when they are going to face challenges. These people show greater trust in their competence, they adapt better to emotional situations, and therefore, they are more successful in academic environments and in their professional lives. Ntoumanis and Jones (1998) studies, 83 athletes (45 men and 38 women) who were, practicing different sports and found that interns are more adaptable to pre-competitive anxiety than are those who have many years of experience.

Unlike internal individuals, external persons tend to attribute what happens to them to unstable and uncontrollable factors, such as chance, luck or fate. These people are also more likely to turn individuals with powers who can help them solve problems they are facing. These people rely, therefore, on superstitious considerations to increase their chances of success, justifying, what happens to them suddenly by random arguments.

School success or victory in school sports competition is achieved, through the effective investment in education or training to acquire the intellectual and/or physical qualities and technical resources necessary to overcome the various test or challenge. However, when certain people have uncertainties regarding their chances of success, despite the efforts they have made to improve their capabilities, they rely on their cultural environment. These behaviors that are often seemingly unrelated to the task at hand, are still sources of mental resources necessary for the realization of the choice made by these people (Burn, 1975).

It is likely that students exposed to the hazards and psychological wanderings that occur at various times during one's education or athletic endeavor can be induced to turn to traditional local practices. In doing so, these people may imitate the current practices in civil sport where prayers, charms and offerings are solicited to dispel doubt and be reassured of their expectation of success (Diatta, 1999; Dagrou, Gauvin & Halliwell, 1991). According to Tanimomo (1999), a great football club may project in its operating budget, the financial resources to bind the priests as part of the psychological preparation of athletes during their national and international matches. Formerly, these practices that are considered the exclusive work of villagers have gradually become habits of city dwellers, as a result of several social factors, including rural-urban migration in particular. At present, it is difficult to consider these practices as relating solely to the old order or to villagers because they somehow influence the daily behaviors of the Beninese people wherever they are (Edoh, 2004).

These practices, which are now present in Beninese habit throughout the country, are also solicited by the students in hopes that the charms, prayers or offerings will help them to improve their academic and/or athletic performances. Suddenly, these practices become less inconsistent with the realities of school and school sport, contrary to what once happened once (Glèlè, 1981). Indeed, all that is within the African culture is not recommended in schools, which are, admittedly, of Christian faith for many. Since Benin's independence, church schools no longer constitute the majority of the training centers and schools in the former colonies in Africa. However, the church schools enjoy a great privilege. Thus, these schools take advantage of this situation as they strive for the establishment of Christianity in those territories where the practices of

indigenous cultures and traditions are still less valued. In public training centers, the realities of European culture are best assumed. Nevertheless, if not currently considered to be an accepted practice in schools, the use of prayers, charms and offerings (Edoh, 2011; Adoukonou, 1988), variously implemented in the schools, is not considered as an ancient or backward practice, but as a behavior of the Beninese society, which can, therefore, be tolerated.

In European schools, the young Beninese is implicitly invested with a double mission: to acquire knowledge in a framework with values that are not always his, and to apply that knowledge in a cultural environment that is not that of this school. For these reasons, the Beninese student must strive to retain most of its local cultural values and simultaneously strive to reconcile those values with the realities of school and sports so as not to be or to seem disconnected from the realities of his background. Africa must, in these conditions, reinvent the Beninese school, one that integrates and better fulfills its endogenous values to avoid falling out of synch with itself.

The objective of this study is to assess how Beninese students behave before and integrate the realities of school and sports, on the one hand, with the practices relating to their cultural environments on the other.

Dubois (1987), with respect to the beliefs that reflect the internality and externality, assumes that Beninese students are aware that academic success depends primarily on intellectual knowledge, rather than on prayers, charms and/or offerings.

Similarly, those who play sports in school athletic associations are aware that their performances in sports competitions are primarily related to their physical and technical capacities.

However, though trusting in their competence, Beninese students, according to their origin and religion, also employ traditional practices in school events and sporting competitions.

METHOD

Having taken into account a larger number of subjects, the researcher used a questionnaire in this study as its method of data collection. To determine the level of understanding of the themes of the questionnaire by the subjects, a preliminary survey was conducted prior to the actual study.

Preliminary Survey

This exercise involved 132 students who do not participate in school sports competitions (non-sports students) and 93 students who receive training in school sports clubs and who are likely to participate in school sports competition (student athletes). These 225 students selected from four secondary schools were learners in lower forms (former (levels) one to four). This stage allowed us to pilot the first version of the first questionnaire that addressed the academic achievement of 132 students who were

not athletes and that of the second questionnaire, which addressed sporting events with 93 student athletes. This preliminary survey allowed us to ascertain the reliability of the two questionnaires, which is evidenced by the values of Cronbach's alphas, which are between 0.72 and 0.86 (Cronbach's alpha Test).

Final Survey

Two questionnaires were administered, the first to 271 non-athlete students and the second to 138 student athletes. The items in both questionnaires were developed by taking into account the concerns expressed by students during the preliminary investigation (Table 1). Ultimately, 409 students enrolled for at least three years in one of seven public colleges that were selected from five of six southern departments of Benin voluntarily participated in this survey. In all, the 409 students were aged 16.77 ± 1 , 99 years. Among the students, were rural and urban students of animist, Christian and Muslim faiths.

Table 1
Examples of Items Relative to the Sub Topics of Traditional Beliefs

The sub-topics of prayers	When I pray before a composition or a sporting event, I am not afraid anymore; ...
The sub-topics of offerings	The offerings enable to attract the favor of spirits during exams;...
The sub-topics of charms	I scored the last match thanks to my talisman; ...

Statistical Analysis

The responses of the 409 students surveyed were plotted from a Likert type scale, with five rankings ranging from

total disagreement to full agreement. These ratings were assigned the values 0; 0.25; 0.50; 0.75 and 1, respectively. The scores for intellectual knowledge (competence), as well as physical and technical capabilities, were calculated, respectively, for non athletes and athletes without neglecting those of traditional practices. The Bravais-Pearson's correlations between the various sub-themes in the issues were determined. These scores were scores to derive the behavior of students with respect to each sub theme.

RESULTS

The average score for competence is higher than the average scores for traditional practices (prayers, offerings and amulets) among both athletes and non-athletes. Despite the influence of the social and cultural environment on the behavior of the Beninese in general, the students surveyed mainly referred to the competence when referring to the values attached to their traditions to explain their successes or failures. However, the students also demonstrated that the Beninese traditional practices are likely to come into play as the extra elements that are important to academic and/or athletic success. The average of the sub-theme prayers for non athletes was higher than that of the sub-themes, charms and offerings (Table 2). This finding indicates the importance of prayer which is final step the students engage in when preparing for their academic challenge, for the Beninese students (Table 2).

Table 2
Averages of Sub-Topics of Competence and Traditional Practices Among Students

Subjetscs	Competence	Prayers	Offerings	Charms	Prayers, offerings and charms	Strength	Meaning
Non-athletes	0.85	0.69	0.32	0.14	0.39	271	P<.0001
athletes	0.85	0.70	.25	0.21	0.38	138	P<.0001

Among non-athletes, the sub-theme competence is correlated with the sub-theme prayers (0.09* and 0.10*); it is uncorrelated with the sub-theme offerings (-0.02 ns and -0.05 ns) and is negatively correlated with the sub-theme charms (-0.23*** and -0.24***) (Table 3). In

other words, for non-athlete students, competence does not exclude prayer, but it does eliminate offerings and charms, the contributions of which seem insignificant and negligible.

Table 3
Correlation Coefficients of the Competence and Practices Among Non-Athletes Students

Strength: 271	Intellectual compétence	Prayers/ motivation	Prayers/stress	Offering/motivation	Offering/ stress	Charm/ motivation
Prayers/ motivation	0.09*					
Prayers/ stress	0.10*	0.69***				
Offerings/ motivation	-0.02	-0.23***	-0.18***			
Offerings/ stress	-0.05	0.17***	0.15***	0.66***		
Charms/ motivation	-0.23***	-0.18***	-0.19***	0.28***	0.33***	
Charms/ stress	-0.24***	-0.19***	-0.20***	0.22***	0.25***	0.69***

Correlation coefficients <0.09 are not significant. Correlation coefficients between 0.09 and 0.11 are significant at 0.05 (*), those between 0.12 and 0.14 are significant at 0.01 (**), and those equal or > 0.15 are significant at 0.001 (***).

For athletes, with the exception of the sub-theme offerings as a means to prevent stress, the associations of the sub-themes physical and technical capacities with other sub-themes are not significant (Table 4). From

this observation, we find that the students surveyed use occult practices, particularly offerings, with the intent of protecting themselves from stress.

Table 4
Correlation Coefficients of the Sub Topics of Competence and Traditional Practices Among Student Athletes

Strengt: 138	Physical capacity	Prayers/motivation	Prayers/stress	Offerings/motivation	Offerings/stress	Charms/motivation
Prayers/motivation	0.10					
Prayers/stress	0.00	0.76**				
Offerings/motivation	-0.00	0.12	0.10			
Offerings/stress	0.19*	0.13	0.12	0.74 **		
Charm/motivation	0,01	-0.22 **	-0.25 **	0.50 **	0.38 **	
Charm/stress	-0,09	-0.25 **	-0.23 **	0.50 **	0.40 **	0.72

Correlation coefficients <0.170 are not significant (ns), the coefficients between 0.18 and 0.23 are significant at 0.05 (*) and those > 0.23 are significant at 0.01 (**).

The rural students who were interviewed engaged in prayer, charms and offerings in both academic challenges and athletic competitions, which is a finding quite different from that observed for their urban peers ($P = 0.02 < 0.05$ threshold). There is also a strong inclination for the use of prayers, charms and offerings to differ among animists, Christians and Muslims ($P = 0.06$ close to the threshold 0.05) (Table 5).

Table 5
Analysis of Variance of Traditional Practices Among Rural and Urban Students; Animists, Christians and Muslims

DDL	SCE	CM	F	P
<i>Rurals and urbans</i>	0.90	0.90	5.8	0.02
<i>Animists, christians et muslims</i>	0.54	0.54	3.4	0.06

DDL: le degré de liberté; SCE: la somme du carré des écarts ; CM: carré moyen; P: l'écart des scores entre les différentes sous-populations

DISCUSSION

Based on these results, it appears that the Beninese students surveyed in this study, believe that success in school depends primarily on intellectual knowledge. Similarly, the students who play sports in school clubs recognize that their performances in competitions are based mainly on their physical and technical abilities. However, the students and student athletes do not totally neglect traditional practices, which is a finding that confirms the first hypothesis.

Academic success depends essentially on the mastery of the curricula. The curricula are conceived by the State which expresses its beliefs through its teachings, education and training (Tanimomo, 2007). Thus, the discourse of the mastery of the program content is professed by the school through its official bodies (e.g, teachers and administrator ...). In these conditions, to conform to the official discourse of the school, it is likely that students who are the subjects of this policy have overstated the importance of competence to the detriment of cultural

practices in the assessment of academic achievement and sports (Aglo, 2009), which, in turn, suggests that students are consciously or unconsciously influenced by the school environment, which embraces few traditional practices. However, Benin's traditional practices (prayers, offerings and charms) are not absent from the school or sports, although, except for prayers, which are often requested by students, the presence of amulets and offerings are rarely perceptible in schools. Of the three worship practices selected for this study, prayer is the one most often embraced by the Beninese students. This result suggests also that the students could be influenced by their work environment. Indeed, prayers that refer to monotheistic religions and Christianity in particular are more highly valued than are charms and offerings. It is likely that the subjects interviewed in the aggregate understood the word of prayer in the Christian sense and were perhaps, unaware that with respect to the survey, the term "prayer" was referring to all religious denominations, including those related traditions and African religions "vo gbe" (Adoukonou, 1988). Furthermore, the use of charms and offerings does not seem to be part of the traditions of these students with respect to academic or athletic challenges, unlike what is observed in the civil sports, where the use of such objects is fairly widespread (Dagrou et al, 1991; Burn, 1975).

In accordance with the aforementioned finding, the making of charms and offerings to the spirits and gods are the work of the soothsayers. Characters of uncertain reputation, soothsayers have a double face and would lead a life consistent with this picture (Edoh, 2011). In these conditions, while soothsayers are solicited, they are also feared because they are unpredictable and can easily change from faces. Soothsayers are called on in times of trial, when there is no other choice. For these reasons, these two practices, despite their known presence in the civil world, remain less valued in the Beninese society. This finding could explain the lack of interest that students have in them within the school and environments. It is

also likely that students have chosen not to embrace these practices as they are not consistent with the ideals of the school or school athletics where rationality and modernity are espoused on daily basis.

With respect to charms, they are still less accepted by students, perhaps because their use is primarily considered to be a way of creating a psychological environment unfavorable to one's surroundings in order for one to benefit and assert himself (Diatta, 1999).

Ultimately, like the soothsayer, one who possesses charms and used them is, in reality, more feared than respected. It is possible that the students surveyed did not demonstrate objectivity in relation to this practice.

Regarding offerings, their use may seem to be an admission of a lack of confidence in one's abilities or as a reliance on foreign actors in the educational world. This result is observed because, similar to charms, the use of offerings also makes use of insiders who intercede with the spirits and the unseen forces to grant favor for the one on whose behalf they operate. Accordingly, such reasons may make offering more incompatible with the realities of school.

In contrast to prayers, the talisman would be understood only in a pejorative sense, as it refers, above all, to objects with a port that is required for the protection and benefit that their owners expect, regardless of their confessional or religious background.

Giving more importance to competence than to practices from African traditions to appreciate academic success and sporting victories, the Beninese students surveyed act from an internal (Dubois, 1987; Levenson, 1974). However, because they also have recourse to the Beninese traditional practices, such as prayers to motivate themselves, to help them, face their fears and to increase their chances of sudden success, they behave much like most people in their social and cultural environment. While they remain committed to the fundamental realities of school and sport, at the same time, they show interest in the cultural traditions of their homeland.

The results indicate that these students demonstrate a cultural syncretism in school and in sporting competitions, although the extent and scope of this behavior must be qualified (Le Guérinel, 1993). Moreover, their beliefs and their relationship with traditional practices vary depending on whether they are from a rural or urban area. Additionally, the same trend exists among animists, Christians and/or Muslims. The social and cultural factors influence these believers regarding their choice and how they use these practices to motivate and to prevent stress in school and in sports domains (Wang et al, 2001). However, if the use of prayers by students at school is similar to that of adults in the civilian world (Thomas, 1981), there is a significant difference associated the use of charms and offerings at school and in the civilian world (Dagrou et al, 1991). This difference can be understood if one considers that, unlike prayers, which refer to

monotheistic faiths and are, therefore, better tolerated in school, offerings and especially charms embody the more indigenous traditions of Africa and are, therefore, less accepted in schools, which, for Beninese adolescents, is a place of science and modernity.

CONCLUSIONS

The Beninese students surveyed for this study place greater emphasis on competence when taking tests and competing in school sports. However, the students also rely on their cultural heritage psychological reinforcement and, remain dependent on certain traditions from their homelands. While the environment plays an important role in the beliefs of people, students also adhere to beliefs that differ from those of their parents. Beliefs vary among students; they vary with respect to academics or athletics, they vary from one region to another, and they vary from one religion or faith to another.

Beyond the geographical and religious confessions, it is the influence of cultural values that is demonstrated in this study. The village is more impregnated in traditional culture than in the city. The main objective pursued by this study is to assess how Beninese students balance their subjective cultural values and objective realities of school and sport. Though this study succeeded, an interesting further investigation could be to explore the behavior of respondents with respect to gender. This question has not been addressed because of the reduced number of female students enrolled in the school athletic associations, especially those in rural colleges.

Because beliefs are constantly exposed to the influence of various factors that are, difficult to control, the study of beliefs is complex. Accordingly the majority of Beninese students surveyed do not seem opposed to the notion that school and sport are subjected to the characteristics of the Beninese, cultural environment, nor does an amalgam between competence and cultural practices justify or explain a success or a failure in school sports.

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