Research Article

Integrating traditional stories in formal education in the Cameroonian Grassfields

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Abstract

Informal education in the Cameroonian Grassfields continues to rely heavily on oral storytelling. In this regard, storytelling occupies an important place in Grassfields oral traditions, functioning as a means of education as well as entertainment. Older individuals use the oral story medium to transmit knowledge to younger ones throughout the region. Unfortunately, this practice is quickly abandoned or neglected when children integrate formal schooling systems. Traditional Grassfields stories are discouraged or relegated to the background in the school system and stories from foreign cultures are introduced, reflecting a consequence of colonial influence and habits. Like in many oral cultures worldwide, formal learning tends to build more on foreign stories, a practice which contributes heavily to the endangerment and loss of traditional stories alongside their languages and other cultural elements. Drawing on stories from two Grassfields communities: Babanki and Medumba, this study demonstrates that since storytelling is the way Grassfielders pass down knowledge and experience through generations, it is necessary to integrate these traditional stories into formal education in the region to ensure holistic learning experiences and development for younger generations. The underlying motivation which will be demonstrated in this study is that traditional stories can most effectively be used as a springboard to impart modern concepts in both the sciences and arts.

Keywords: *Traditional stories, formal education, curriculum, Grassfields, Cameroon*

Résumé

L'éducation informelle dans la région Grassfield du Cameroun continue de s'appuyer fortement sur les contes oraux. À cet égard, les contes oraux occupent une place importante dans les traditions orales de cette région, servant à la fois de moyen d'éducation et de divertissement. Les personnes âgées utilisent ce médium pour transmettre des connaissances aux plus jeunes à travers la région. Malheureusement, cette pratique est rapidement abandonnée ou négligée lorsque les enfants intègrent les systèmes scolaires formels. Les contes traditionnels Grassfields sont mis en mal et relégués au second plan dans le système scolaire, et des récits issus de cultures étrangères sont introduits, reflétant une conséquence de l'influence coloniale et des habitudes qui en découlent. Comme dans de nombreuses cultures orales à travers le

monde, l'apprentissage formel tend à s'appuyer davantage sur des récits étrangers, une pratique qui contribue largement à la mise en danger et à la perte des histoires traditionnelles ainsi que de leurs langues et autres éléments culturels. En s'appuyant sur des contes de deux communautés Grassfields : Babanki et Medumba, cette étude démontre que, puisque la narration est la manière dont les habitants du Grassfield transmettent les connaissances et expériences à travers les générations, il est nécessaire d'intégrer ces contes traditionnels dans l'éducation formelle de la région afin d'assurer des expériences d'apprentissage et un développement holistique pour les jeunes générations. La motivation sous-jacente, qui sera établie dans cette étude, est que les histoires traditionnelles peuvent être utilisées de manière plus efficace comme tremplin pour transmettre des concepts modernes tant dans les sciences dures que dans les sciences humaines et sociales.

Mots-clés : *Contes traditionnels, Education formelle, Curriculum, Grassfield, Cameroun*

1. Introduction

Just as in many oral cultures around the world, informal education in the Cameroonian Grassfields continues to rely heavily on oral storytelling. In African communities, the vehicle of orality in storytelling has been used to pass down knowledge and experience from generation to generation. Stories have remained the principal means of entertainment, transmission of indigenous ways of knowing, and shaping worldviews. They are used to teach community members how to live their lives, navigate social reality and manage communities. Okpewho (1992) identifies four basic social functions of oral literature in Africa: "entertainment and relexation" (106-109), "asserting interests and outlooks" (110-115), "teaching ideals and conduct" (115-18) and "recording life" (118-124).

Although largely proven to be efficient and commonly used for educational purposes in the Western world (Egan 1986, Banister & Ryan 2001) and some African settings that follow an endoglossic policy and use autochthonous oral literature for educational purposes, e.g. Ethiopia (Amharic), Tanzania (Swahili), South Africa (Zulu, Xhosa and other national languages), storytelling is not equally developed and exploited for educational and scientific purposes in Cameroon in general and in Grassfields communities in particular. Traditional African stories have remained largely oral, seen only as part of informal education, and not exploited intentionally in formal education. With the impact of colonialization and in the face of globalization, traditional storytelling is highly threatened by the prevalence and dominance of external (European and Anglo-American) stories which have become particularly popular under colonial influence and due to the expansion of social media. African languages and cultural practices are facing the threat of extinction as the tendency has been to abandon African traditional stories for foreign ones, thereby losing the role of this essential tool of knowledge cultivation, production, and transmission to future generations. We have observed that in the Grassfields region, traditional stories are quickly abandoned or neglected when children integrate the formal schooling systems. The stories are discouraged or relegated to the background in the school system and stories from foreign cultures are introduced instead, in keeping with former colonial dictates and habits. This is especially so because teaching in schools in the Grassfields region is done in English and/or French which are the official languages of Cameroon and, therefore, of education. Each language contains an immense system of cultural knowledge, notably with respect to philosophy and spirituality, oral history, songs, dances, art, environmental systems, biodiversity, subsistence techniques, fishing, hunting, use of plants, medicinal knowledge, among others (Hinton 2001, Harrison 2007). The colonial impact of shifting

from local languages to the official languages, as well as switching to foreign stories in schools undoubtedly contributes significantly to the endangerment and loss of traditional stories alongside their languages and other cultural elements. Although efforts have been made in the past to introduce African tales (e.g., Diop 1947, Binam Bikoi & Soundjock 1984) in schools in Cameroon, such initiatives have not been sustained. Drawing on stories from two Grassfields communities, namely, Babanki and Medumba, this study demonstrates that since storytelling is the way Grassfielders pass down knowledge and experience through generations, it is necessary to integrate these traditional stories into formal education in the region to ensure holistic learning experiences and development for younger generations. Integrating stories in education will enable and enhance the utilization of African oral literature as a tool and vehicle to impart modern concepts to kids in schools within the frame of mother tongue education. As long as liberating African languages is regarded as the final act of decolonization (Wolff 2016: 244), localising school curricula by recurrence to autochthonous tools of knowledge transmission would go along with it as means of implementation. It will serve as a means of integrating mother tongues in education in Sub-Saharan Africa as addressed and emphasized by many scholars in African applied sociolinguistics (Bamgbose 1976, 2000, 2004, Wolff 2016), thereby contributing to the decolonization of the mind project (Ngugi 1986). The underlying motivation for integrating Grassfields traditional stories into formal education in the region is that traditional stories can most effectively be used as a springboard to impart modern concepts in both the sciences and arts. This point will be developed as follows: In the next section, the Grassfields region is presented alongside the languages of this study. In §3, motivation for stories as a potent tool of teaching is provided,

followed by a brief discussion of the use of oral stories to address societal issues, and the influence of the environment on Grassfields stories in §4. In §5, the place and role of stories in Grassfields educational systems is presented, followed by a conclusion in §6.

2. The Grassfields Region

The Grassfields is a dynamic area covering primarily the North-West and West regions of Cameroon. The region is characterized by high relief, cool temperatures, heavy rainfall and savanna vegetation. It lies along the Cameroon volcanic line and consists of mountain ranges and volcanoes made of crystalline and igneous rocks. The region borders the South Cameroon Plateau to the southeast, the Adamawa Plateau to the northeast and the Cameroon coastal plain to the south. It has many volcanic peaks such as the Bamboutous Mountains (2,740m), Oku Mountains (3,001m) as well as volcanic lakes such as Lake Oku, Lake Wum and Lake Nyos. The location of the region is shown in Map 1.

The Grassfields region was once heavily forested. However, repeated cutting and burning by human beings has forced the forest back to areas along the waterways and has allowed grasslands to expand into the area. Sudan savanna forms the dominant vegetation.

Linguistically, the Grassfields region is quite complex, being one of the linguistically most dense areas of Sub-Saharan Africa (Stallcup 1980). In "an area roughly the size of Belgium, one finds dozens of southern Bantoid languages, with speaker populations ranging from the hundreds to the hundreds of thousands. Moreover, underlying this diversity of languages is a much larger number of locally distinctive varieties" (Di Carlo & Good 2023: 75). Map 2 shows the geographical distribution of the Grassfields Bantu languages differentiated by their sbgroups.

Map 1: Location of the Grassfields Region
Source: Open Street Map adaptation from Cameroon's National Institute of Cartography (2014).

The two communities whose traditional stories are discussed in this work are located in the Grassfields region. Both communities, Babanki in the Mezam Division of the North-West region and Medumba in the Nde Division of the West region, are organized in chiefdoms under the political and spiritual leadership of a Fon or chief. Linguistically, Babanki belongs to the Western Grassfields Bantu subgroup while Medumba is from the Eastern Grassfields branch (Watters 2003, Hyman 2018).

Through the school orientation law of 1998, the Cameroonian government is committed to the gradual introduction of national languages into school curricula. Efforts have been made to introduce languages such as Fulfuldé, Basaa, Duala, Ghmala', Ewondo and a few others in primary and secondary schools, and even at university level. Both successes and failures, are reported for these efforts (see, for example, Trudell 2005, Chiatoh 2014, Henry 2017), and several languages have not yet been included in the school system due to the lack of financial and material resources including pedagogical and didactic materials (Echu 2004). Wolff (2016) proposes a concrete agenda of ten steps towards integrating indigenous languages into national education systems in Africa. One of them pertains to curriculum development and teacher training. In his opinion,

> *Existing curricula must be modified or replaced and teacher training must be reorganised correspondingly. The cultural conditions of the respective local communities must be considered for teaching the respective indigenous*
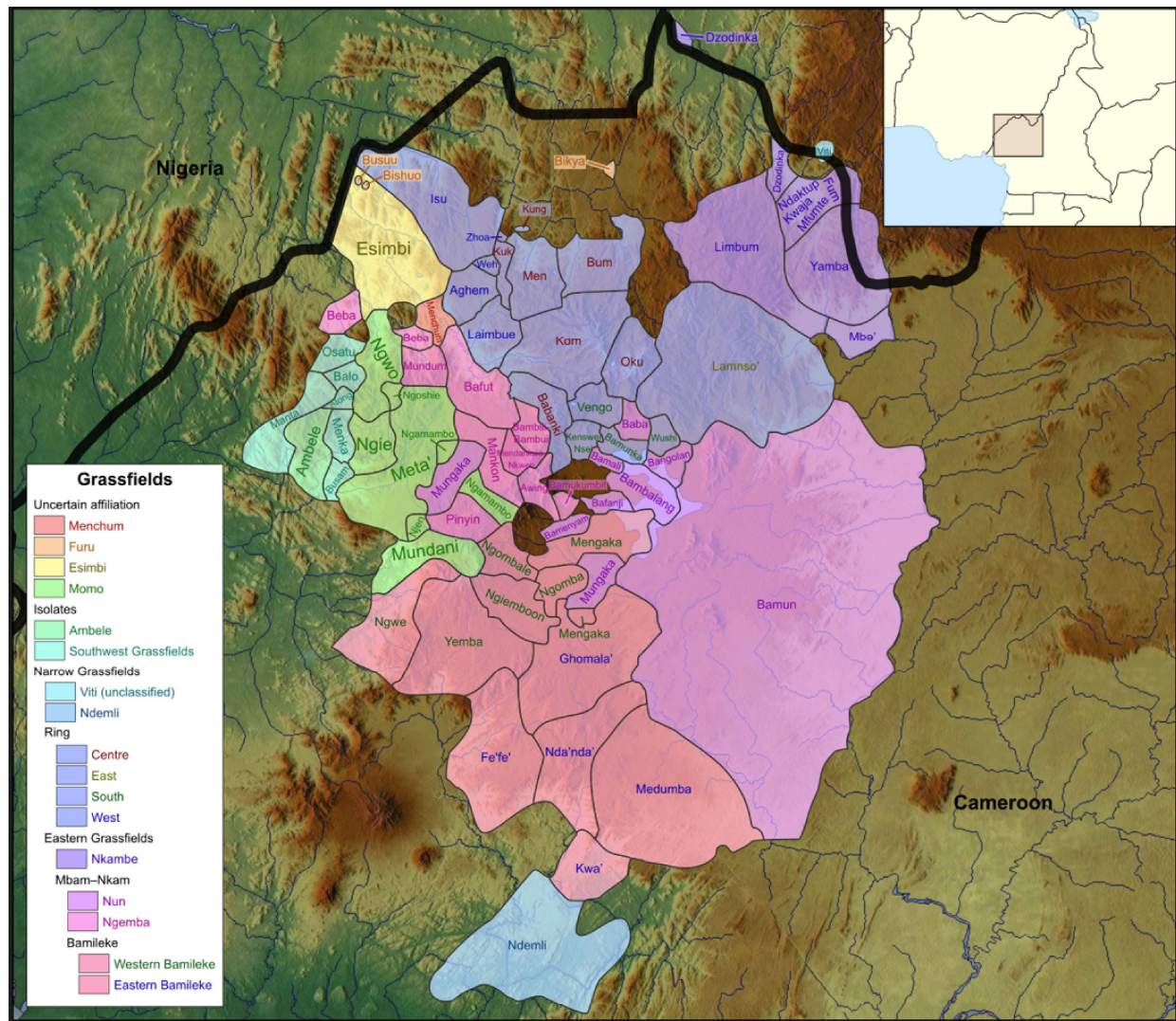
Map 2: Grassfields Bantu languages (Wikimedia Commons 2022: https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Map_of_the_Grassfields_languages.svg&oldid=694567122) modified by Pierpaolo Di Carlo

languages and through them, later to be complemented by elements of various national cultures. The innovative input from local and national cultures requires and enhances the participation of the respective representatives, which allows for the creation of culture-sensitve materials to be used for teacher training and use in local classrooms, not least in order to create respect for the collective cultural imagination of ethnic and cultural groups other than one's own (Wolff 2016: 281).

In designing such a curriculum, it will be helpful to take into consideration the cultural experiences and knowledge of potential users. In the next section, we present storytelling and narratives since they form part of the culture of the Cameroonian Grassfields and should be taken into consideration while designing a curriculum for learners from this region.

3. Storytelling and narratives

3.1 Pedagogical tools

"Storytelling is an art developed during the beginning of human history, probably to teach the wisdom of generations past" (Hirst and Raffin 2001: 27), and considered as a pedagogical tool

(Bruner 1990, Kromka & Goodboy 2019). Indeed, stories are the "most powerful communication and teaching tools available to humans" (Haven 2007: 17), as confirmed by researchers in various fields of study such as education (Egan 1989, Sousa 2006), medicine (Sunwolf & Keränen 2005), organizational management (Haven 2007, Silverman 2006). Likewise, "story predates logical thinking and argument […], every culture, tribe, and nation has developed stories" (Haven 2007: 113). Davidhizar and Lonser (2003) found that nursing instructors who shared stories with their learners were better evaluated because the students were able to associate medical facts with the stories told to them by these instructors.

Regarding higher education, Strangeways and Papatraianou (2016) conducted research in which pre-service teachers were trained with narrative teaching skills in view of showing them how to help students connect theoretical concepts to practical knowledge. They argue that a hybrid model of case-based learning, involving the writing and interpreting of local 'case-stories,' can offer preservice teachers meaningful engagement with 'real' teaching experiences and build context-dependent knowledge. In this perspective, stories allow the preservice teachers to experience a 'lived experience' of their peers and allow the narrator and the listeners to identify the meanings within the story (Goh 2019). The purpose of stories according to Green (2004) cited by Landrum et al. (2019) is to (a) create interest, (b) provide a structure for remembering course material, (c) share information in a familiar and accessible form, and (d) create a more personal student–teacher connection. Thus, stories appear to be an innovative approach to supplement conventional teaching practices and have the potential to promote learning (Kromka & Goodboy 2018).

In addition, as a means of public expression of the past, which is usually delivered orally (Mitchell

et al. 2003:228), oral literature genres are useful in addressing societal issues. This literature is highly valued in Africa mainly because of its didactic nature (Nnyagu 2017: 1149). Oral literature genres include narratives, songs, poetry, and short forms which comprise proverbs, tongue twisters, and riddles (Finnegan 1970, Okpewho 1992). Narratives are further classified into myths, legends, aetiological tales, trickter stories, and fables. The analysis in this study highlights some of the moral values and life lessons that emerge from these narrative genres shared by the Grassfields communities and which are in line with Cameroonian primary school curricula and thus can serve in a formal classroom setting in view of inculcating high moral values and developing students' cognitive skills through entertainment.

With the abandonment of moral values, coupled with other factors such as the advent and misuse of social media, Cameroon's society today has taken a big hit. This is observed in increased deviant behavior and the rise of moral decadence among young people (Asongwe & Ashu 2024). Following studies mentioned earlier on the role of storytelling in formal education, we here defend the idea that storytelling is a potentially useful tool to fight against this societal decline and help reinstate moral values in younger generations at an early stage of their lives while contributing to developing their cognitive skills, since storytelling can "change individuals' behaviors and promote social change" (Falk 2021). "It can also serve to empower individuals to make a positive impact in their communities and contribute to the broader movement for sustainability" (Thiga 2024) with the added benefit that students might find the stories interesting or entertaining (Norton & Nussbaum 1980). In the following, we demonstrate how different genres of Grassfields oral literature can effectively be used in classroom settings for

teaching fundamental ethical values and moral lessons in accordance with the school curriculum.

3.2. Teaching life lessons through oral literature

African tales are from oral tradition and are used to teach, pass on cultural values, and make points about life (Hale & Shell 2011). . These anonymous and timeless stories pass down knowledge and wisdom from generation to generation. Through this generational transmission, stories bond the younger ones, impact them and clue them in on how they relate to the world around them. In this regard, stories are said to be powerful (Egan 1986, Greene & Del Negro 2010, Strauss 2006a, b) and are considered a significant tool for education regardless of age (Trostle-Brand & Donato 2001, Haven 2007).

According to Carey (2009), and Gopnik & Wellman (2012), young children unite disparate observations or discrete facts into coherent conceptual systems. This stage of life corresponds to the age of absorption of the knowledge and values which will build the individual of tomorrow. As made clear by the report of the United States National Academies' Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (2015: 89):

> *From very early on, children are not simply passive observers, registering the superficial appearance of things. Rather, they are building explanatory systems—implicit theories—that organize their knowledge. Such implicit theories contain causal principles and causal relations; these theories enable children to predict, explain, and reason about relevant* phenomena and, in some cases, intervene to change *them. It is important to point out that these foundational theories are not simply isolated forms of knowledge, but play a profound role in children's everyday lives and subsequent education.*

Stories sharpen children's imaginations, stirring their emotions in a way that simply reciting the lessons cannot achieve. In this regard, storytelling is a potent tool in early education that helps children gain insights into the world around them in a captivating and memorable way (Akanksha Agnihotri 2023). In the Grassfields region of Cameroon, these stories are generally told by mothers, most often in the evening after a busy day in the fields. Among the tale types of the region are aetiological or explanatory narratives, trickster stories, fables and riddles which we present in detail in the following subsections.

3.2.1 Aetiological or explanatory narratives

Human beings are inherently curious. They always seek to understand the why of things. Aetiological tales respond perfectly to this desire to explain phenomena that are somewhat difficult to understand. Indeed, this oral genre in a poetic and amusing way attempts to explain how things, animals or even human beings are the way they are. These tales relate real facts, social facts with a dose of fantasy and fun. An aetiological narrative is a short story with a simple structure. It reminds people of the mysteries to which they still don't know the answers. Even if they do not always claim to present facts, some seek to explain the behavior of people and animals (Mwangi 2022).

The story of Pig and Tortoise is a perfect illustration of an aetiological tale. This story relates the misadventures of Pig who kindly lends money to his friend Tortoise who is in real need of it. In fact, the story tells us that Pig and Tortoise are part of a micro-credit union (commonly referred to as *njangi*[1]).

In the Grassfields region, people usually constitute such groups for various reasons (either by affinity or because they are in the same neighborhood), to hold meetings in which they contribute money

to assist one another. These gatherings also serve as a psychological support system when one of the members has a happy or especially unhappy event that hits them. Thus, Tortoise, encountering some difficulties, turns to his lifelong friend Pig for a loan. Pig, who has just benefited from the *njangi* money, in his great kindness, grants Tortoise the loan. After a while, Pig needs his money back and Tortoise starts to be shifty. Every time Pig comes to Tortoise's house, seeing him arrive, in order to avoid paying back the debt, Tortoise transforms into a small crushing stone that Mrs. Tortoise uses to grind her groundnuts or other spices. Each time Pig comes, Mrs. Tortoise always says she doesn't know where her husband is and will quietly continue grinding her spices, no longer caring about the disappointed Pig. One day when Pig arrives and receives the same response from Mrs. Tortoise; overwhelmed by anger, he snatches the small grinding stone from Mrs. Tortoise's hands and throws it into the garden.[2] This act causes Mrs. Tortoise to cry. Tortoise, who pretends to be returning home to find his wife crying and screaming tries to find out what is going on. His wife explains to him what has just happened. Tortoise, therefore, tells Pig that he had gone out to find some money and that he actually is ready to refund Pig's money. However, to do that Pig must first return the grinding stone. On hearing this, Pig rushes into the garden in search of the small grinding stone, a stone that the Pig struggles to find till date.

Beyond the moral lessons of misplaced trust and betrayal between friends it conveys, the story attempts to find a logical explanation for the fact that pigs always rummage in the mud. Tortoise has always been known to be cunning and Pig

represents gullibility and blind trust. It is also a story about blind revenge and its unpleasant consequences.

Thus, the story makes us believe that in order to be able to get back the money that he lent his friend, Pig ransacked the garden in search of Mrs. Tortoise's grinding stone that he threw there out of anger, not knowing that it was Tortoise himself. The moral of this story is that people should be patient and exercise self-control. One should be slow to anger in order to avoid unfortunate situations like this one in which Pig is condemned to dig the muddy farm all his life in search of a grinding stone that will certainly never be found. In the following, we explain how a story with a moral such as this may perfectly fit in the school curriculum for the purpose of teaching fundamental ethical values.

In the first two years (Initiation cycle SIL-CP) of the francophone education subsystem, for instance, the social and human sciences module recommends civic and moral education courses in these terms:

> *L'Éducation civique et morale au niveau 1, a pour finalité [...] de faire accéder l'enfant au monde des valeurs positives [...]. Cela dit, l'enfant ne peut pas fonder sa conduite sur l'application des principes abstraits, il a besoin des modèles d'identification* (MINEDUB 2018 : 101).

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[1]The term *njangi* is commonly used in Cameroon to refer to a group of individuals who meet on a regular basis to contribute money and give it to one or more members at a time. During subsequent meetings previous benefactors refund the exact amount the current beneficiary had contributed and those who are still to benefit contribute an amount equal to or greater than an agreed minimum. Whatever they contribute will eventually be refunded to them when their turn to benefit comes.

[2]Generally, in the Medumba and Babanki culture, around each house there is garden space where people plant plantains and some vegetables that they would like to have at hand for cooking and even for traditional remedies.

It is specifically mentioned that teachers should use stories as teaching tools, though no specific storybook related to the culture of the learners is included in the curriculum to facilitate this transmission of knowledge. It is recommended that "the teacher will place the child in a problem situation through images, stories, and local news events related to the areas of interest"[3] (MINEDUB 2018: 102). As the table below illustrates, moral education is distributed in no less than eight units.

Table 1: Moral education resources in the francophone subsystem

UNITÉ D'APPRENTISSAGE 3. CENTRE D'INTERÊT: L'ECOLE					
SIL			**CP**		
La politesse	Enoncer les règles de bienséance.	Être un être sociable qui applique les règles de vie en société et celles des institutions démocratiques	La politesse	Enoncer les règles de bienséance.	Être un être sociable qui applique les règles de vie en société et celles des institutions démocratiques
L'obéissance	Expliquer les caractéristiques d'un enfant obéissant et dire quand, à qui et comment obéir.		L'obéissance	Epliquer les avantages de l'obéissance	
La générosité	Expliquer ce qu'est la générosité		La générosité	Expliquer ce qu'est la générosité	
L'assiduité	Enumérer les caractériqtiques d'un enfant assidu		L'assiduité	Enumérer quelques avantages de l'assiduité	
La ponctualité	Dire comment être toujours ponctuel		La ponctualité	Enumérer quelques avantages de la ponctualité	
UNITÉ D'APPRENTISSAGE 5. CENTRE D'INTERÊT: LE VOYAGE					
SIL			**CP**		
La générosité	Expliquer ce qu'est la générosité	Être un être sociable qui applique les règles de vie en société et celles des institutions démocratiques	La générosité	Expliquer ce qu'est la générosité	Être un être sociable qui applique les règles de vie en société et celles des institutions démocratiques
L'honnêteté	Enumérer les caractéristiques de l'honnêteté (vérité, franchise, etc.)		L'honnêteté	Expliquer pourquoi être toujours honnête	
La ponctualité	Dire comment être toujours ponctuel		La ponctualité	Enumérer quelques avantages de la ponctualité	
UNITÉ D'APPRENTISSAGE 8. CENTRE D'INTERÊT: LES COMMUNICATIONS					
L'honnêteté	Enumérer les caractéristiques de l'honnêteté (vérité, franchise, etc.)	Être un être sociable qui applique les règles de vie en société et celles des institutions démocratiques	L'honnêteté	Expliquer pourquoi toujours être honnête	Être un être sociable qui applique les règles de vie en société et celles des institutions démocratiques

Source: MINEDUB (2018)

Since the government recommends that stories and local events be used for the teaching of moral values, traditional stories related to the students' background could serve this purpose.

These same stories can also serve in the Anglophone subsystem where moral values are taught under the Citizenship module. But as suggested by Table (2) below, storytelling is not proposed as a possible methodology or didactic material to be used to pass on these values. This points to a gap in the curriculum that needs to be filled.

[3] Translated from French by the authors.

Table 2: Contents of Citizenship in class 1 & 2, anglophone primary school subsystem

Civics					
CLASS 1		CLASS 2		Suggested Methodology and Didactic Material	
Unit/Contents	Expected Learning Outcomes	Unit/Contents	Expected Learning Outcomes	Learning/ Teaching Strategies	Didactic Materials
National Emblems -Flag -National Anthem -Motto	-Identify national emblems -Sing the National Anthem -Display respect when singing the National Anthem or during the hoisting of the flag	**National Emblems** -Flag -National Anthem -Motto	-Describe national emblems -Sing the National Anthem -Display respect when singing the National Anthem or during the hoisting of the flag	-Awareness campaign -Field activity -Role-play/ simulations -Singing	Cameroon flag; colour pencils; audio-visual aids, pictures, charts
Personalities -School authorities -Local authorities Political figures -Religious authorities	-Identify various personalities in their communities -Respect authorities and others	**State personalities** -School authorities -Authorities in their localities -Political figures	-Identify the minister in charge of Basic Education -Recognize the President of the Republic -Respect authority and others	-Simulation -Role-play/ simulations -Cooperative learning	-Pictures/ Charts -Relevant newspapers and textbooks -Audio-visual aids
Rules and Regulations -Home -School -Community	-Discuss school rules and home regulations -Apply rules and regulations in daily life	**Rules and Regulations** -Home -School -Community	-Explain school and community rules and home regulations -Respect rules and regulations at all times	-Experimental learning -Case study -Role-play/ simulations -Cooperative learning	-Pictures/ Charts -Relevant textbooks -Audio-visual aids
Universal values -Respect -Obedience -Love -Tolerance -Honesty/ sharing	-Comply with universal values -Display love and respect for others	**Universal values** -Respect -Obedience -Love/Peace -Tolerance -Honesty/ sharing	-Explain ethical values Comply with universal values -Display love and respect for others	-Case studies -Awareness campaign -Role-play/ Simulations	-Food items and fruits -Audio-visual aids -Relevant pictures -Illustrative charts

Source: MINEDUB (2018)

In both the Anglophone and Francophone curricula, mention is made of values such as honesty, and loyalty, themes that we find in the Pig and Tortoise tale and which could easily serve as a conscience awakener for children. The use of tales as a transmission channel has already proven its worth in other places, (see, for example, Bruner 1990, Trostle-Brand & Donato 2001, Haven 2007, Kromka & Goodboy 2019). This teaching method could also be used in the Cameroonian Grassfields context with stories reflecting the culture of the learners.

3.2.2 Trickster stories

African tales interest and amuse audiences, while passing along lessons about preferred social behaviour and practical advice related to daily activities such as hunting, farming, child-rearing, governing, and so forth (Gale 1995: xiv). Many stories feature animal characters representing human attributes, and sometimes involving forms of trickery. The trickster is a cunning figure (animal or human) who manages to outwit and cheat others (who may seem superior at first sight) by virtue of their cunningness. The figure can also be found to act in morally objectionable ways,

e.g., harming others and even causing their death. One such tale is the Babanki and Medumba story of the race between Hare and Tortoise. In fact, this tale features two animals: Tortoise who is extremely slow in its movements but very smart, and Hare who is really fast but boastful and dimwitted. The motif of the race between Hare and Tortoise is very widespread globally (Stückrath 2016) and has been registered under the label "Race between Two Animals (Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) 275)" in current tale type and motif indices of folk literature such as the one of ATU, see Thompson (1955-58), Uther (2004).

The story goes that Hare, having made fun of the slowness of Tortoise, challenged him to a race. The day before the race, Tortoise in his great wisdom convinces other tortoises to partner with him the following day. On the D-day, Tortoise places his friends along the race track and positions himself at the finishing point. This trick helped him to fool Hare and win the race hands down. This tale is used to teach children not to trust appearances and judge a book by its cover. It also teaches children to have humility and know how to think out of the box to get out of situations which at first glance seem hopeless.

This story can help at level II of the primary school of the francophone subsystem (Cours Elementaire 1 & 2) and the anglophone subsystem (Class 3 & 4). In the moral education lessons in these classes, students are taught to respect themselves, respect others and to also have self-esteem. The course contents and the expected outcomes are displayed in Tables 3 and 4 for the francophone and anglophone subsystems respectively.

Table 3: Moral education resources, CE1& CE2

UNITE D'APPRENTISSAGE 1. CENTRE D'INTERÊT: LA MAISON					
CE1			CE2		
Savoir à acquérir	Savoirs à construire		Savoirs à acquérir	Savoirs à construire	
	Savoir-faire	Savoir-être		Savoir-faire	Savoir-être
Le respect de soi et des autres	-Expliquer la notion de respect; -Se respecter et respecter les autres.	Avoir le sens de la vie harmonieuse en collectivité en application des règles de vie en société et des institutions démocratiques	Le respect de soi et des autres	-Analyser une situation et donner les conséquences du respect de soi et des autres; Se respecter et respecter les autres.	Avoir le sens de la vie harmonieuse en collectivité en application des règles de vie en société et des institutions démocratiques
La propreté	-Caractériser la propreté; -Mettre en pratique la propreté de son corps et de sa maison.		La propreté	-Caractériser la propreté; -Mettre en pratique la propreté de son corps et de sa maison.	
L'estime de soi	-Dire comment faire pour avoir l'estime de soi.		L'estime de soi	Expliquer l'estime de soi.	
L'obéissance	-Expliquer les avantages de l'obéissance -Appliquer les recommandations ou des consignes données par un aîné ou un parent.		L'obéissance	-Expliquer les avantages de l'obéissance -Appliquer les recommandations ou des consignes données par un aîné ou un parent.	

Source : MINEDUB (2018). Curriculum de l'enseignement primaire francophone camerounais Niveau 2

Table 4: Moral education course content, class 3 & class 4

Moral Education					
CLASS 3		CLASS 4		Suggested Methodology and Didactic Materials	
Unit/Contents	Expected Outcomes	Unit/Contents	Expected Outcomes	Teaching/ Learning Strategies	Didactic Material
Universal Values -Greetings -Apologies -Love/Care -Obedience -Honesty -Appreciation -Respect	-Practice simple etiquettes -Promote responsible citizenship	**Universal Values** -Greetings -Apologies -Love/Care -Obedience -Honesty -Appreciation -Respect	-Practice simple etiquettes -Explain ethical values -Promote responsible citizenship	-Debates -Enquiries and data collection -Role-play/ simulation -Cooperative learning	-Relevant charts/pictures -Audio-visual materials

Source: Cameroon Primary School Curriculum, MINEDUB, Level II class 3&4 (2018: 75).

Level II students of both the francophone and anglophone subsystems are asked in their curricula to respect others while having a good self esteem of themselves in whatever situation. The story of Tortoise and Hare could, therefore, serve as a perfect illustration. Against all odds, Tortoise, who could have admitted defeat because the forecasts were against him (due to his slowness known to all), had enough self esteem to take on the challenge, using stratagems to win the race. Thus, learners when faced with life challenges, mindful of the fact that brain is better than brawn, will recall the story of this brave Tortoise and think about potential solutions to get out of seemingly dead-end situations.

3.2.3 Fables

A fable is a short narrative which often features animals as characters which are anthropomorphized (Finnegan 1970). Its purpose is to communicate a moral, to teach good behavior, and to show the hurtful side of vice. The Medumba story of Mouse and Cat is a good example of this genre.

This fable attempts to explain Cat's animosity towards Mouse as the result of Mouse's dishonesty towards his friend, Cat. Mouse and Cat get together to cultivate a groundnut farm. After a few weeks, Cat tells his friend Mouse that it will be good for them to go visit their groundnut farm. Mouse replies to Cat that it is not necessary for them to go together. Mouse suggests that Cat should rest and that he himself will go see the state of the farm. Every time Cat wants to go to the farm, Mouse finds an argument to discourage Cat from going so that he can go alone and come back to say that the groundnuts are not yet mature enough to be eaten. Cat, with complete confidence, does not suspect what is actually happening: that Mouse is harvesting the groundnuts for himself and eating them without Cat knowing. The deception lasts for months, until, one morning, Cat, being aware that the groundnuts cannot take so long in the ground and tired of waiting, sets out to go to the farm himself, discovering that the groundnut farm has been completely harvested. Furious, he returns to the village to demand accountability from his friend Mouse. At the sight of Mouse, he jumps angrily on him and bites his head saying "I eat your head like you ate our groundnuts". He bites Mouse's stomach while repeating the same line "I eat your stomach like you ate our groundnuts", and so on, until he has completely finished eating Mouse. Since then, every time a cat sees a mouse, it remembers Mouse's dishonesty and resentment overwhelms the cat who systematically jumps on any mouse to settle his score in retaliation for what happened in the past. While the fable offers an aetiological explanation of cats' behavior towards mice, it also raises moral issues about loyalty and honesty. It makes children understand that it pays to be true, sincere, trustworthy and honest towards others. It teaches that it is not good to deceive one's neighbor and even less a friend at the risk of losing one's life and putting subsequent

descendants into trouble. At the same time the fable can be used as a springboard for biology lessons on the characteristics of mice and cats.

Similarly, the story of "The Tortoise and Panther" among the Medumba offers another interesting teaching tool. Panther and Tortoise were friends. One day, having been too hungry without anything to eat for weeks, Tortoise suggests to his friend that instead of continuing to feed their mothers who are already very old, they should each take turns to kill them for food during this period of scarcity. After careful consideration, Panther accepts the proposal and kills his mother. The two friends eat her together. When it is Tortoise's turn to kill his mother, he asks Panther to go down the river and watch out for an intense red colour in the water which will indicate that Tortoise has killed his own mother. Meanwhile, Tortoise rather takes his mother away to the woods for safety. There he picks red fruits, mixes them with water to look like his mother's blood and releases into the river. Then he prepares something else to share with Panther as a meal. Henceforth, each time both friends eat together, Tortoise slips away for a walk before returning. Panther becomes suspicious and eventually catches Tortoise going to give food to his mother whom he has hidden in the forest. Panther gets furious and kills Tortoise's mother to take revenge for his friend's treachery. Several lessons can be taught using this story. It can be used to encourage learners to cultivate moral values such as honesty and trust. Lessons about chemical promises can draw from Tortoise's ingenuity in extracting the red colour from fruit and mixing with water to send down the stream in place of blood.

In the Medumba story of the "Hare and Girl with a Wound", a young girl goes to collect wood with her friends. She climbs a tree, slips and her hand gets stuck in the tree. Her friends abandon her in the forest because she excels at finding wood.

When they return home, the young girl's mother asks them after her daughter, but they all deny having seen her. Back in the bush, each time the young girl hears any sound, she will sing. A hunter hears the song at first and flees. Then one day the hunter decides to bring this song back to the village. The girl's family recognizes her voice and the population comes out with machetes and tools to rescue the young girl. When they arrive, the young girl's hand is already rotten. The mother then says that the person who succeeds to cure her daughter shall take her as wife. All the animals of the village: Monkey, Panther, Lion, etc try in vain. Out of spite, the young girl's mother also lets Hare try though everyone doubts that he could do any good. Hare succeeds to heal the young girl. Now she is healed and is beautiful, she has to get married. She refuses everyone, even the most noble and rich but accepts Hare because of the service he has rendered her. This story can facilitate lessons about community life and support for one another, a key value in African cultures. The fact that the young girl keeps to her mother's promise and marries Hare also teaches about loyalty and honesty. Since the healing is done only with local elements from the immediate environment, that can be used to teach about traditional medicine which, without doubt, has the power to heal and treat ailments of all types.

The call made here aligns with the recommendation that stories and folktales be used as didactic resources to address ethical topics and teach civil virtues in schools, as prescribed in the Cameroonian curriculum for primary schools, cited in Table 5. In addition, national language courses planned for the level II primary school cycle can be taught through such stories. In this regard, it is said in the Cameroonian primary education curricula that "learning national languages and cultures constitutes a means by which the learner appropriates the language and culture, to express their linguistic and cultural identity. National

languages and cultures are acquired through exchanges between classmates, with the teacher, and during various group activities such as […] stories"[4] (MINEDUB 2018: 56).

Table 5: National languages and cultures course content

National Languages and Cultures					
CLASS 3		CLASS 4		Suggested Methodology and Didactic Materials	
Unit/Contents	Expected Outcomes	Unit/Contents	Expected Outcomes	Teaching/ Learning Strategies	Didactic Material
Polite forms -Responses -Request	-Use appropriate polite responses and requests -Address people appropriately -Listen attentively -Speak in turns using the right intonation	**Polite forms** -Responses -Request	-Use appropriate polite responses and requests -Address people appropriately -Listen attentively -Speak in turns using the right intonation	-Cooperative learning -Flipped classroom -Demonstrations -Illustrations - Role-play/ Simulations	-Real objects -Charts/pictures -Videos and audio clips
Description of significant life events -Birth -Marriage -Enthronment	-Use appropriate word to describe significant events like birth, marriage and enthronments -Draw lessons from life events -Show love for culture	**Description of significant life events** -Birth -Marriage -Enthronment	-Use appropriate word to describe significant events like birth, marriage and enthronments -Draw lessons from life events -Show love for culture	-Cooperative learning -Flipped classroom -Discussions -Demonstrations -Illustrations -Role-play/ Simulations	-Real objects -Charts/pictures -Videos and audio clips
Sketches -Based on context of the various ILTs	-Act roles -Act sketches on various themes -Show love for acting	**Sketches** -Based on context of the various ILTs	-Act roles -Act sketches on various themes -Show love for acting	-Flipped classroom -Discussions -Demonstrations -Illustrations -Role-play/ Simulations	-Traditional costumes -Short sketches -Charts/pictures -Videos and audio clips
Oral traditions -Stories -Folktales -Songs	-Recount short stories -Sing songs -Narrate tales -Develop the art of eloquence	**Oral traditions** -Stories -Folktales -Songs -Sketches	-Recount short stories -Sing songs -Narrate tales -Entertain people using oral traditions -Develop the art of eloquence	-Cooperative learning -Flipped classroom -Discussions -Recitation/ singing -Dialogue -Role-play/ Simulations	-Real objects -Charts/pictures -Videos and audio clips -Folktales and songs -Storybooks

Source: Cameroon Primary School Curriculum, MINEDUB, Level II class 3&4 (2018: 86).

The fact that no official storybooks in Cameroonian languages are available for this purpose makes it difficult for the expected outcomes to be attained. Hence the necessity to make storybooks in Cameroonian languages available and to underscore the importance of these stories in various subjects taught in schools. In addition to tales, other genres of oral literature such as riddles are also used in the Grassfields, serving not only for amusement but also for teaching at all ages.

3.2.4 Riddles

A riddle "is a verbal puzzle in which a statement is posed in challenge and another statement is offered in response either to the hidden meaning or to the form of the challenge" (Okpewho 1992: 239). Riddles are characterized by their fixed formulaic pattern (Bukenya et al. 1994). The riddle often consists of asking questions or making statements whose answers require ingenuity of members of the audience. These riddles which develop thinking, certainly contribute to education and cognitive development but have as their primary aim entertainment.

Sessions where riddles are told among young people in the Babanki and Medumba communities, very often take place around a table or fire preferably in the evening; a suitable time

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[4]Translated from French by the authors.

because the day's chores have been completed. In the Medumba community, the person who wants to start the riddle uses the formula *ŋkɣùt ɛ́ɛ́ɛ́ɛ́* 'pay attention to riddle' and the audience responds *tɑ̌ tɑ̌ (nɑ̀ tɑ́ ŋkɣùt)* 'say a riddle'). Below are some examples from Medumba for illustrative purposes.

(1) Tester: *ŋkɣùt ɛ́ɛ́ɛ́ɛ́*

Respondants: *tɑ̌ tɑ̌*

Tester: *ŋkɣù kɣà kúʔ nǔm ŋkɣù kɣà ŋkɣù kɣà swɑ̀ʔ* 'a four-legged climbs onto a four-legged and a four-legged gets off .'

Response: *bùsì kúʔ nǔm kùʔ tsíkvù swɑ̀ʔ* 'The cat gets on the table and the mouse gets off.'

Explanation: The cat jumps on the table to catch a mouse but the mouse gets off and runs away.

(2) Tester: *ŋkɣùt ɛ́ɛ́ɛ́ɛ́*

Respondants: *tɑ̌ tɑ̌*

Tester: *tʰìŋnǔŋnǐŋ tʰìŋnǐŋnǐŋ* 'sound of joy.'

Response: *ŋkɣù làb mbàb mbàb làb tʃàʔ* 'The trap hits an animal and the animal hits the ground.'

Explanation: The joy of a hunter who sees an animal caught in the trap he has set.

(3) Tester: *ŋkɣùt ɛ́ɛ́ɛ́ɛ́*

Respondants: *tɑ̌ tɑ̌*

Tester: *bá nɛ́n bá tʰə́* 'people go, people return.'

Response: *ntɔ̌ mbìɛ̀ʔ* 'army ants.'

Explanation: Army ants walking up and down in line.

Among the Babanki people, riddle sessions follow a general riddling structure, involving an opening formula, the challenge, and an aftermath that often includes negotiations about symbolic payment for the correct answer for a riddle to be provided (Okpewho 1992: 239-250). Each Babanki riddle is introduced with the formula *mó ə̄ŋgáyn* 'here comes a story', and the audience responds *ʃìŋ ə̄ŋgáyn* 'tell the story'. The riddle is then given for anyone in the audience to guess the answer. When one of the participants gives a difficult riddle and nobody is able to find the answer to it, the others are asked to offer a quality fon, i.e., the traditional leader of a specific fondom in the North-West Region of Cameroon, before the correct answer is revealed. When the person who posed the riddle is not satisfied with the fon given they will reject the offer until someone in the audience offers the fon of a fondom that is considered to have a higher political, economic or social status in the region. Structured this way, this game develops the knowledge of the participants. They learn the names of neighboring communities, thereby increasing their knowledge of the geography of the region. Besides, the person who knows the most has a sense of self satisfaction. Below are some Babanki riddles that could be used to tease students' minds.

(4) Tester: *mó ə̄ŋgáyn*

Respondants: *ʃìŋ ə̄ŋgáyn*
Tester: *tə́m á ɣɔ́ŋ á kə̀ʃí ə̀ tsìʔ á kə̀dʒúʔ* 'Shoot a spear and remove a heap.'
Response: *à dùʔ bɛ́lə̀ŋ* 'It is groundnut.'
Explanation: A single groundnut seed is planted but a lot of them are found when uprooted during harvest.

(5) Tester: *mó ə̄ŋgáyn*
Respondants: *ʃìŋ ə̄ŋgáyn*
Tester: *lù kə̀ndàŋ ə̀ dʒù ə̀ fáŋ* 'Go for a trip and not return.'
Response: *ə̀fù á fə̀kɔ̀ʔ·* 'leaf'
Explanation: A leaf falls from a branch and never goes back to where it was.

Unlike other genres discussed so far, riddles do not convey moral lessons. As demonstrated by the Medumba and Babanki examples above, riddles are meant to help participants push their thinking further to try to guess and uncover the hidden, often metaphorical, meanings. Thus, riddling contributes to the cognitive development of children and trains their skills in analogic thinking and abstraction. As Prado (2019) notes, one of the fundamental goals of education is to nurture critical thinking. Learning to reason logically is necessary for the growth of critical and scientific thinking in children. Therefore, children should be equipped with good reasoning skills necessary when they develop their beliefs. When solving a riddle, students need to "analyze the problem, break it down into smaller components, and consider different perspectives. This process activates various cognitive processes such as attention and reasoning" (Whitmore 2023).

Since riddles require critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and creative thinking, they can serve as didactic material in Cameroonian curricula.

4. The Environment of Grassfields stories

The environment has a significant impact on the stories told in the Cameroonian Grassfields. The region's landscapes, climates, and ecosystems have influenced the development of unique storytelling traditions which reflects the people's relationship with their surroundings.

In the Babanki story "The stone house", for example, a number of features of the environment and culture of the people are revealed. In the story, a woman goes farming far away from home with her three children during the rainy season. In the farm there is a large stone and when it suddenly begins to rain, the stone transforms into a house. Since there are no other houses in the vicinity, the woman and her children happily take refuge in the stone house. To their greatest dismay they meet a big monster inside the house. The monster has made a big fire to keep himself warm and is excited to have prey that would eventually be roasted in the fire and eaten. In this extremely dangerous situation, the woman quickly thinks of a means to escape. She asks the monster to allow her children to go fetch firewood that will be used to rekindle the fire and keep them continually warm. When asking the first child to go fetch wood, she winks at it to escape and not return. After a while, she makes the same hint upon asking the second child to go find out why the first takes so long to return. She tries to do same with the third child after some time but this child is stubborn and would not take instructions from his mother. As the child refuses to go, the mother tells the monster that she herself will go see why the two children take too long. Once she steps outside, the rain stops and the house turns back into a stone and the monster eats the stubborn child. The woman reports the matter to the Fon who immediately sends the youth of his community to go with all tools they could find to destroy the stone and capture the monster.

Several environmental features are revealed in this story. First, the story is set during the rainy season, one of the major seasons of the Grassfields region alongside the dry season. The story must have been set between March and August and the family might have gone to work, plant, weed, or harvest. During this period, the rains can be quite heavy with precipitation ranging from 1,000-2,000 mm. Secondly, it is revealed that the primary occupation of the Grassfields region is farming and mostly involves women and children. It is also shown that farming is conducted at fertile places far away from home and that trekking is the only means of transportation[5]. The presence of the stone also points to the huge inselbergs found in the Babanki territory. One aspect of the life of

[5]Nowadays motor bikes are frequently used for transportation since they can run even on footpaths throughout Babanki.

the people that is revealed in this story is solidarity. On the orders of the Fon, the youth quickly mobilize and create a force that is able to destroy the stone and capture the monster. This kind of communitarian solidarity is a familiar part of life in the Grassfields region and one that is transmitted at an early stage in life, as reflected in the mobilization of the youth.

In terms of political organization, this story reveals that Grassfields communities are well organized around the chiefdoms (fondoms) specific to the North West and West regions where Babanki and Medumba are located, respectively. In the pre-colonial Grassfields, ethnic groups were an agglomeration of mini-states, most of which were constituted and enlarged through conquest. Some had a minimum population of about 300 and others, especially the major chiefdoms, had a population of over six thousand at the time of colonial penetration (Nkwi 1979). The villages were under control of their chiefs. These leaders were the guardians of the customs and traditions of the people. This, therefore, explains why the lady concerned runs to give a report of her predicament to the Fon. On the order of the Fon the youth are mobilized and go together as one man to find a solution to the woman's problem.

Another illustration comes from both the Medumba and Babanki versions of "Tortoise and Pig". This story reveals some economic and cultural background of both the Babanki and Medumba communities. In both versions of the story, Pig throws the grinding stone (Tortoise himself) into the garden close to the family house. This reveals that while Grassfields families go long distances to farm, they also cultivate and maintain large gardens close to the family house where they can grow vegetables and crops that are easily accessible and can be picked and cooked without going to far-off farms. The negative effect exposed in this regard is the heavy deforestation that has taken place in the Grassfields region over the years. This region was once heavily forested. Repeated cutting and burning by human beings has forced the forest back to areas along the water ways and has allowed grasslands to expand into the area. The Sudan savanna now dominates the vegetation and grassfields, short shrubs and trees that shed their foliage during the dry season as a defense against brush fires and dry weather have emerged.

The socio-economic life pattern of Grassfields communities is revealed in this story. The njangi culture is widespread throughout the Grassfields region and people lend and borrow money to each other rather than go to financial institutions such as banks or micro-credit institutions.[6] The fact that Pig lent his money to Tortoise in anticipation that Tortoise will refund the loan when he benefits from the njangi is common practice. Yet, people are expected to honor their obligations without any pressure. It is surprising that Tortoise does not pay back the debt, but it is evident that this twist is meant to encourage Pig to exercise patience when dealing with his fellow brother.

5. The place and role of stories in the educational system

Stories that are rooted in the communal life of villages are essential tools for education and knowledge transmission across generations. This tradition can play a pivotal role in shaping the moral and social fabric of societies, especially in contexts where formal education systems face challenges such as resistance to reform, lack of resources, inadequate curricula, and insufficient teachers which hinder the development of human capital. Conflicts between countries and communities,

[6] Nowadays several credit unions and micro finance institutions exist and people are encouraged to turn to them for financial transactions instead of dealing with one another as in the past. Even so, it is hard to convince people to turn away from njangis that charge lower interest rates.

poverty, malnutrition, and the lingering effects of colonization have deeply impacted the education sector in Africa. These factors have not only marginalized native languages as natural media of instruction but also disrupted the holistic development of education systems, affecting logistics, funding, regulations, services, and the engagement of various stakeholders. In such a context, traditional stories can be pertinent resources in teaching and training so that learners can acquire values of respect, laws, ethics, culture, and traditions. Telling a story for teaching and learning purposes is an opportunity to develop children's attention, and achieve better understanding and performance (Linda & Clement 2023). It is well known that traditional stories are powerful modes of informal education. They constitute dynamic ways and means to exchange ideas, cultural values, ethics, and traditions. Such stories serve as a bridge connecting the past with the present, ensuring the transmission of cultural heritage and instilling a sense of identity and continuity within communities. Through stories, information becomes more relevant and meaningful to students (Ollerenshaw 2006, Haven 2007). The significance of traditional stories extends beyond their role in cultural preservation and highlights other forms of knowledge. In these stories, animals are humanized and their characteristics help to transmit specific knowledge. Characters from the animal kingdom, each symbolizing different societal values and traits encapsulates complex life lessons presented in the following paragraphs.

The "Tortoise and Pig" story in both Babanki and Medumba reveals some physical and biological characteristics about both animals. Both the tortoise and pig are shown to be land (not aquatic) animals in the Grassfields region. The tortoise's carapace is presented to be as hard as a stone that can be used for grinding, while the pig's mouth is hard enough for rummaging the fields in search of the lost stone. The tortoise is portrayed as an herbivore who eats plant-based food among other things. This is why the female tortoise is grinding ingredients for a meal.

The mouse and cat mentioned in the Medumba story present some natural patterns such as having sensitive senses of hearing. They are both mammals and carnivores but cats that are infected or infested with viruses or micro-organisms can transmit diseases to humans even if the cats themselves are asymptomatic. Concerning the mouse also mentioned in the Medumba story, it is an herbivore and eats all types of food scraps. Mice are commonly used in the laboratory for experimental research because they have a high degree of homology with humans.

The "Tortoise and Pig" story in both Babanki and Medumba reveals important principles that could be used to explain the biotechnological evolution of food transformation. In this story, the pig's wife is using the tortoise's carapace similar to the traditional grinding stone to grind grains. This manual process of the transformation of grains for cooking has been improved over the years to crushing machines, and now to modern food processors like the blinder. Grinding stones have been part of daily activities and spiritual lives of communities in Africa for a long time, e.g., the Marakwet in Kenya (Shoemaker et al. 2017). Nowadays, with the advancements of technology, the conversion of raw products into finished or semi-finished products is easier and faster than in the past. The evolution of technology has allowed us to scale up and refine these processes, making them more efficient and capable of meeting larger demands. This story and the biotechnological process is a good example of teaching material in an introductory class to technology in primary schools. It provides an opportunity to introduce concepts of food processing and technological

advancement while creating a more interactive lesson where students can see the link between traditional food processing and new technologies of food processing.

Likewise, the Medumba story of "The Tortoise and Panther" in which Tortoise mixes red fruits with water to look like his mother's blood so as to deceive Panther that he (Tortoise) has actually killed her, can aptly illustrate the principle of natural dyes, important in developing lessons in chemistry. Natural dyes from natural products such as plant materials are used to create colourants or dyes (Ghosh et al. 2022, Singh et al. 2023). Dyes are used for many applications such as clothes fabrics, and painting materials. Removing colour from natural products and applying them to other materials requires special skills. The teacher could use this story to demonstrate that modern industrial techniques have sourced from traditional techniques. Therefore, teachers giving

courses related to chemistry could use this story as a base to explain the science behind colouration and dyes.

The healing of the young girl without any modern medicine in the Medumba story of the "Hare and Girl with a Wound" can be used to teach about the value and uses of traditional medicine and environmental assets for healing. The story demonstrates how Grassfields communities use elements in their environment to treat themselves even from serious illnesses. In fact, 80% of Cameroonian (and African) populations relied on traditional medicine for their primary health care some 2-3 decades ago (WHO report 2003). The teacher of level III, class 5 of the Anglophone subsystem (Table 5) with the unit content "Plants" whose aim is to "identify medicinal plants and flowers" can discuss the role of medicinal plants and expand on this by explaining how modern medicine has evolved from these ancient practices.

Table 6: Lesson on plants and their medicinal uses

CLASS 5		CLASS 6		Suggested Methodology and Didactic Material	
Unit/Contents	Expected Learning Outcomes	Unit/Contents	Expected Learning Outcomes	Learning/Teaching Strategies	Didactic Materials
Insects -Types -Mode of reproduction -Social insects -Characteritics of insects	-Identify various types of insects -Classify insects -Explain the activities of social insects -Describe the usefulness of insects -Protect insects	Insects -Types of insects -Products from insects	-Identify various types of insects -Classify insects -Explain the activities of social insects -Describe the usefulness of insects -Protect insects	-Discussions -Demonstrations -Illustrations -Projects -Outdoor lessons -Presentations	-Relevant charts -Relevant pictures -Insect box
Plants -Types -Flowers -Care (flowers/plants)	-Identify different types of flowers and plants -Identify medicinal plants and flowers -Protect their environment through appropriate use of plants and flowers -plant flowers and trees	Plants -Types of plants in the locality -Types of flowers in the locality -Care of plants and greenery	-Identify different types of flowers and plants -Identify medicinal plants and flowers -Protect their environment through appropriate use of plants and flowers -plant flowers and trees	-Discussions -Demonstrations -Illustrations -Projects -Outdoor lessons -Presentations	-Real objects like hoes, machetes, seeds, seedlings, manure, cuttings -Relevant pictures/charts
Matter -State of matter -Water cycle -Sun -Air -Air pressure	-Explain various methods of purifying water -Describe the water cycle -Explain the importance of air and sunlight -Demonstrate changes in the state of matter -Conserve the environment	Matter -Types of matter -Purification of Water -Air	-Explain various methods of purifying water -Describe the water cycle -Explain the importance of air and sunlight -Demonstrate changes in the state of matter -Differentiate the sources of water -Protect water sources -Preserve food appropriately	-Discussions -Demonstrations -Illustrations -Projects -Outdoor lessons -Presentations	-Drawings -Real objects -Videos -Pictures/charts

Source: Cameroon Primary School Curriculum, MINEDUB, Level III class 5 & class 6

The illustrations from the different stories could be recommended to schools or the ministry in charge of basic education in Cameroon to add or adjust the different curricula in order to train students for a better understanding of the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) field. Koul et al. (2018) demonstrated that introducing STEM lessons in primary school curricula is beneficial and effective for both students and teachers. It is an opportunity to initiate students to the workforce in their future while giving them 21st-century skills like creativity, critical thinking, and innovation (Tomková 2024, Jones et al. 2024). Using traditional stories in STEM lessons can help demonstrate how traditional oral knowledge has contributed to some scientific and technological advancements seen today. This approach adds value to the learning experience while connecting leaners to the past knowledge that has shaped the mindset and behaviour of community members and which, in some cases, has contributed to modern knowledge.

6. Conclusion

Using stories from two Grassfields communities, namely, Babanki and Medumba, this study has demonstrated that, since storytelling is the way Grassfielders pass down knowledge and experience through generations, it is necessary to integrate these traditional stories into formal education in the region to ensure holistic learning experiences and development for younger generations. This is essentially relevant because stories have remained the principal means of transmitting indigenous ways of knowing, and shaping worldviews. Traditional stories are ways to teach the natural laws of the universe.

Members of Grassfields communities use storytelling to share knowledge and experiences and to hold their communities together. Furthermore, stories engage students on multiple levels, enhancing their comprehension and retention of knowledge while fostering a deep connection with the subject matter. This versatile tool not only enriches language skills but also opens doors to a broader, more interconnected world of learning and understanding.

By examining specific stories from the two communities, we have suggested various points in the curriculum at different levels of education in both the Anglophone and Francophone sub-systems of education in Cameroon where traditional stories can be integrated as tools of knowledge transmission. Although efforts have been made in the past to introduce African tales (e.g., Diop 1947, Binam Bikoi & Soundjock 1984) in schools in Cameroon, such initiatives have not been sustained due to insufficient efforts by authorities to adapt the country's educational system to its local realities. Integrating traditional stories into the school system in Africa more generally is one of the ways of tackling the colonial practice which has resulted in individuals shifting from local languages to the official languages, as well as switching to foreign stories in education. This practice contributes significantly to the endangerment and loss of traditional stories alongside languages and other cultural elements. It also contributes to cultural alienation and acquisition of knowledge that is largely irrelevant for everyday life in a Cameroonian context. Integrating traditional stories in education will enable and enhance the utilization of African oral literature as a tool and vehicle to impart modern concepts to kids in schools within the frame of mother tongue education. Localising the curriculum by recurrence to autochthonous tools of knowledge transmission would contribute to bringing African languages and cultures into the curriculum as a means of decolonization (Wolff 2016: 244).

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