

**Education Innovation And Achievement:  
A Comparative Study of the US, China, France and Cameroon**

Yvette Essounga Njan\*

\*Department of Management and Marketing, Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia  
23806 U.S.A. Dean: Dr. Emmanuel O. Omojokun. Phone: *O. (804) 504-7096/ C. (347) 351-  
9494*, Fax 804 524-4685 e-mail: yessounga@vsu.edu and

And

Maurice Fouda Ongodo

Department of Management Sciences, Faculté des Sciences Economiques et de Gestion  
Appliquée, (*Higher School of Economics and Commerce*) P.O.B: 1931 Carrefour Ange Raphaël,  
Douala Cameroon, Dean: \_\_\_Phone: *O. (237) 675-735-580 / Cell: (237) 697-790-580* e-mail:  
fongodo@yahoo.fr

Ayse Balas

Department of Management and Marketing, Virginia State University, Petersburg, Virginia 1,  
Hayden St., 23806 U.S.A. Dean: Dr. Emmanuel O. Omojokun. Phone: *O. (804) 524-5974/ C.  
(804) 334-9655*, Fax 804 524-5110 e-mail: abalas@vsu.edu

Yvette Yollande Njan

Law Student - 12111 Silbyrd Drive, Midlothian, VA 23113 USA. Phone, C.: *(910) 528-4633*;  
Dean: \_\_\_Fax: *(718) 576-2630* e-mail: yynjan@gmail.com

Track: **Innovative Education, Kai Koong, Tuskegee University, kkoong@tuskegee.edu**

Type of submission: Non-Refereed Research Abstract

Abstract:

In this research abstract and later in the full version of its draft, we offer to reflect on the cross-cultural innovative ways with which educational systems are grappling in order to ensure the students not only learn and accumulate knowledge, but also use their education and the training received to become ready and better global citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the interconnected cross-national world in which we all live today. This is a reflection born from earlier studies which centered on taking the time to teach, using care and nurturing; as well as subsequent enquiries pertaining to the most effective ways of engaging millennial students who, as a result of being engaged and frankly involved in their learning process, would be happy to learn, even if only because the instructor took time to prepare and bring to these students a medley of interesting discussions and activities.

Key words: Innovation education, education achievement, higher education, student engagement, cross-cultural study

### *Introduction*

Sometimes, though, to many instructors' dismay, these laudable efforts, regardless of how well-meaning, and innovative, have fallen like dead flies on students who, the more help they received, the less likely they appeared to thrive on receiving such help.

At best, such efforts have resulted in grade inflation, and at worst in students passing classes, receiving accolades too, while still not succeeding in learning effectively. In fact, according to Bloom's taxonomy of learning, real learning starts to occur only when students can successfully analyze, evaluate and even create new understanding from the material to which they are

exposed. However, efforts which aim at tube-feeding students rarely get them pass the understanding stage, if these succeed to help students remember the material, the basic stage on Bloom's categories of learning. This is the reason it is critical to help students get beyond this primary stage and ensure they can take the driver's seat of their learning.

This discussion uses the US as its baseline and compares the US education system of higher learning with (1) that of China, a global world power in its own right; (2) and also that of France, a developed country with a reputed system boasting a long tradition of prominent schools, "*les grandes écoles*" the equivalent of the US Ivy league schools; and lastly (3) this study compares the US education system with that of Cameroon, a developing country south of the Sahara in Africa with a pivotal role as a pole of attraction in the region.

The reason for choosing these four countries comes from the researchers' familiarity with and or exposure to these four education systems. (i) The United States boasts one of the reportedly best system of higher education in the world: In fact, names such as Harvard, MIT, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Columbia, Cornell, University of Pennsylvania, and Dartmouth, listed here in no particular order populate the dreams of many aspiring college students in and out of the US, because of the stellar reputation of these schools' graduates, and these graduates' post-graduation prospects for prominent employment. (ii) Chinese universities may not yet claim to have achieved such status, even though the reforms the Chinese government is implementing in its education system carry the seed of real and promising results, bound to yield an education system of the most prized in the world. (iii) France, in turn, has very little to envy from any country, thanks to its world famous "*grandes écoles*," elitist schools in which only a few are ever fortunate to be admitted. (iv) lastly Cameroon, unbeknownst to many, has often been the *plaque tournante* of education in the African region, offering opportunities to many students in

neighboring African countries, not willing or quite frankly not able to take their higher education endeavors to Europe or the US. At this point, one has to acknowledge that due to its institutions' reputation, the US, for a certainty, has ascendancy over the other three countries discussed in this study. However, the risk that looms over the US continued hegemony in higher education is its students, not its institutions. In other words, the students in US institutions of higher learning, for good or ill, tend to think they have it all made. These students tend to display a rather casual attitude towards their own learning, all things being kept equal, and most important, depending on the student and the institution in which the student is receiving its education. Framed even more clearly, not all students are lackadaisical toward their learning; neither are all students in the US victim of this type of attitude.

For instance, students in Ivy league schools or even in top-tier schools would not dare show an attitude of, *"I am here because I paid and the instructor better make sure I pass this class,"* lest these students want to find themselves totally out of the game, and maybe even out of the said schools as a result of either quitting or having been expelled. At the same time, students in schools other than the former just discussed, are not always eager to strive towards their successful achievement in learning, often convinced they can, not only get by, but even "succeed" with little to no effort. Said differently, these students expect to graduate with rather high GPAs, only to struggle when admitted in higher-tier institutions as they move up to continue either at the Master's or Doctoral levels. For such students, education success will now depend on their personal investment in hard work aimed at lifting them up to the level of only the average student at these higher-tier institutions. At this point, these students realize they will either learn seriously or resort to being contend with failing grades, so far rare phenomenon for these students used to being passed with little effort.

Quite isolated in this category one may term of reluctant learners, and contrary to students from education systems in China, France, and even Cameroon, students in the US are often surprised by the utter voracious appetite for learning they cannot fail to notice in their peers from other educational systems. This thirst for learning is wrongly described by some as an attitude born from the desire to own a piece of the American dream, when it simply translates the intrinsic character of these students for whom studying and learning are too important to leave to chance. To reframe this idea, the fact that students from nations other than the US tend to be high-achievers, all things being kept equal, may not be only motivated by the desire to achieve the American dream, because many more students than imagined, graduate from these institutions, only to decide to go back to their country of origin. Thus, the reality behind this students' seriousness and engagement in their education success is aligned with the fact that these students come from education systems in which students have less of a sense of entitlement, which translates into the following parameters expounded later in this study: (a) They have been indoctrinated on the critical importance of taking one's responsibility for one own's learning. (b) These are students who need no convincing that their successful learning is the pathway to their success in life. (c) Also, they have been convinced that the instructor is not the only person who is going to drive their education success. (d) Rather, they think of the instructor as a mentor, a helper, and a facilitator in their journey towards education success. (e) As a result of this attitude, they eagerly take what they can from their instructor and complement it with personal and diligent effort.

### *Research Question*

The preceding is the reason this study aims to answer the following question: What are the conditions in all these four systems, which are the precursors for students' attitudes toward their

education? In other words, what makes some students eager to learn, as is the case for students in China, France, and Cameroon, when students in the US are so reluctant to take charge of their learning? Said even differently, why is the US the only country in which students are eager to achieve education success, a major concern of theirs, without accepting accountability for their learning?

### *Purpose*

It is pertinent to ask this question because as mentioned above, students in the US like those in China, France and Cameroon are all very concerned with succeeding in their education endeavors. However, not all students are willing to work equally hard towards the achievement of this goal. Thus, investigating the reasons for the lack of engagement from some is one purpose of this study: Indeed, it is about identifying the conditions that precede either active involvement in one's learning or a *laissez-faire* attitude towards this important enterprise.

### *Objective*

Engaging in such a reflection will help instructors understand these different kinds of students in order to better help them succeed in more innovative ways than have been done till now. In other words, grasping the reasons why students in China, France, and Cameroon, and just about those in all other countries but in the US, are enthused with learning more than appears to be the case for US students can bring understanding, awareness, and guidance to the ongoing debate about how to best help the students in the US learn effectively.

A discussion of this nature should reveal itself to be a value added to instructors in the US, China, France and Cameroon. Also, this discussion can bring elements of evaluation to instructors in countries in the world other than those studied in this discussion as well. And just as pertinent, this is a discussion that can bring awareness to policy-makers in the field of

education in the four regions here-under reviewed. This study should gear these different stakeholders towards best practices aimed at facilitating students' learning, regardless of their past and current background.

The full discussion of these issues intends to first explore the education environment of the four counties under review, thereafter delving into the reasons for the differing attitudes towards learning in each country. The subsequent parts of the study will expound on the consequence of these differing attitudes toward learning on the students' part, together with the implications of these attitudes for policy makers, and most important for instructors and students.

## Reference

- Rothstein, R. (2000). Toward a Composite Index of School Performance. *The Elementary School Journal*, 100(5), 409-441. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/1002278>
- Fredricks, J., Blumenfeld, P., & Paris, A. (2004). School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59-109. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/3516061>
- Pearson, L., & Banerji, M. (1993). Effects of a Ninth-Grade Dropout Prevention Program on Student Academic Achievement, School Attendance, and Dropout Rate. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 61(3), 247-256. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/20152375>
- Booth, M. (2011). This They Believe: Young Adolescents Reveal Their Needs in School. *Middle School Journal*, 42(3), 16-23. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/23047627>
- Shea, J., Joaquin, M., & Gorzycki, M. (2015). Hybrid Course Design: Promoting Student Engagement and Success. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 21(4), 539-556. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/24615544>
- Rockoff, J., & Turner, L. (2010). Short-Run Impacts of Accountability on School Quality. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 2(4), 119-147. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/25760087>
- Deming, D., & Figlio, D. (2016). Accountability in US Education: Applying Lessons from K-12 Experience to Higher Education. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 30(3), 33-55. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/43855700>



Jones, S., Barnes, S., Bailey, R., & Doolittle, E. (2017). Promoting Social and Emotional Competencies in Elementary School. *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 49-72. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/44219021>

Juvonen, J., Le, V., Kaganoff, T., Augustine, C., & Constant, L. (2004). Goals, Terms, Methods, and Organization. In *Focus on the Wonder Years: Challenges Facing the American Middle School* (pp. 1-8). Santa Monica, CA; Arlington, VA; Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/stable/10.7249/mg139edu.10>