Factors Favouring the Resilience of Girls Victims of School Inequality in Brazzaville, Republic of Congo

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Abstract

The present article seeks to understand factors that promote the resilience of girls who are victims of educational inequalities in Brazzaville. The aim is to understand the factors that push some girls to persevere and not to drop out of school despite the socio-cultural difficulties and educational inequalities they encounter in their school career. The target population of this study is composed of girls who are still in high school (final year of senior secondary school), all sections combined. The quantitative method we adopted enabled us to identify the difficulties faced by these girls and to know how they manage to get by. The results obtained reveal that the factors favoring the girls' state of resilience are as follows: willingness, courage, the ability to overcome difficulties, motivation, perseverance in continuing their studies, and not letting themselves be overwhelmed by difficulties.

Keywords: resilience, inequality, schooling, enabling factors

Introduction

For some girls, staying at school, in spite of an adversarial school environment, means fighting, solving, and overcoming these difficulties. From this perspective, the notion of resilience is defined as "the capacity of a person or group to develop well, to continue to project itself into the future in the presence of events, destabilizing, difficult living conditions, sometimes severe traumas" (Cyrulnik, 1999). The concept of resilience currently occupies a gratifying place in the scientific literature supporting the care of people in difficult situations (mistreatment, sexual abuse, war trauma, delinquency, disability, chronic diseases, poverty, forced migration, family and social breakdown, etc.). Numerous experts on resilience (Emmy Werner, 1989; Rutter, 1990; Garmezy, 1985; Cyrulnik, 2001; Manciaux, 2001) in both English and French literature are interested in this concept, which reflects a vision focused on the strengths of the person in a situation of suffering. It is about helping young people in difficult situations to give meaning to life, to have projects, to set long-term goals. One can discover the meaning of life through a work or a good deed; by experiencing something or someone. Thus, resilience is a phenomenon that can be part of the dynamics of a girl's school career when she is confronted with situations of inequality. It is characterized by resistance, overcoming and perseverance, initially marked by adversity.

PROBLEMATIC

I, Context

In Congo, as in many other African countries, girls do not seem to have the same educational background as boys. Very often, under the influence of various factors, they tend to drop out of school earlier than boys and are

victims of gender stereotypes. In spite of the principles of equality contained in the law on educational guidance, the various surveys carried out at national level reveal the existence of gender inequalities, which are particularly prevalent in secondary schools. It is noted that the net enrolment and access rates of the female population to secondary schools show an overall increase in the number of school- drop-outs (2.7%), with a greater trend among girls (3.1%) than among boys (2.3%). A higher than national average school drop-out rate can be observed among girls (4.0%), from the age of 14 onwards, and among their elders aged 17 and 18, representing 3.1% and 4.3% respectively (ECOM2, 2014).

The Republic of Congo has developed an Education Sector Strategy, 2012-2025, officially ratified by the country's authorities in December 2010. This strategy is based on a diagnosis of the national education system (RESEN), validated in 2007. Progress has been made towards achieving these objectives, particularly those relating to gender parity at primary school level, on the one hand, andon the other hand, difficulties still persisting in some areas of education sector development, particularly at the second cycle of secondary education. There are very high failure rates, especially among girls, and a fairly large number of pupils who drop out of school without having achieved a certain level of consistent and sustainable literacy. This is partly due to parental attitudes that favour boys' studies and stereotypes in the division of labour. Moreover, inequalities in access to education are still marked in the Congolese school system. Girls' schooling is still influenced by their gender, their environment and the level of economic well-being of their families. Girls living in poor households are the most disadvantaged strata

Girls in Congolese schools continue to be discriminated against as a result of teachers' pedagogical practices, the attitude of the school administration and the behaviour of their peers. Pedagogical and assessment practices administered by teachers do not give girls the opportunity to express themselves and speak out in the classroom. The didactic and pedagogical organization of the classroom does not always take into account the principle of co-education. Relations between boys and girls are often tense and fraught with insults of all kinds. We also note the absence of measures or sanctions against the perpetrators of harassment and other forms of prejudice against girls. This reality opens up a research perspective on the resilience of girls in Congo Brazzaville where a minority of girls continue their schooling up to the final year, with the understanding that many girls who enter school stop on the way. However, there are girls who succeed, resist and do not drop out. Faced with this observation, it is necessary to understand the motives behind their motivations and the factors that shape their resilience in spite of the educational inequalities and the socio-economic, institutional and cultural difficulties encountered in their school career.

I.1 Research questions and hypotheses

- Research questions

In spite of the constraining situations of adversity they have encountered, why have these girls been able to overcome the difficulties, mainly linked to the family socio-economic situation, disparities, gender stereotypes, to which they have been exposed without being overcome by them? What were the mobilizing and determining factors that enabled these girls to continue and succeed throughout their school career?

- Research hypothesis

We start from the hypothesis that the "resilience" of these girls is based on their will, courage, "capacity" or "strength" to overcome gender-related difficulties, which they have encountered in making them "fighters". Overcoming educational inequalities for girls would be the reason likely to legitimize their willingness to overcome the adversities encountered in their school career.

I.2 Research objective

This paper intends to understand the factors that promote the phenomenon of resilience among girls in the face of educational inequalities in order to encourage the enrolment and development of girls' resilience in the Congo.

II. Methodological approach

II.1 Data collection procedure

To carry out our survey we have chosen the quantitative method. A questionnaire was drawn up and distributed to the female pupils of all general education series. This questionnaire was given in written form with the type of open and closed questions, to be filled in according to the declarative model. The other answers simply consisted of ticking the box and giving one's opinion.

II.2 Data analysis instruments

The data were processed using the following software: EXCEL, STAT, SPSS, CSPRO and WORLD. The processing method is inspired by that proposed by Huberman and Miles (1994) and includes the codification, organization and linking of the data by themes.

II.3. Target population

The target population is made up of female learners in the final year of secondary school, all general education classes, in the six (6) high schools out of the thirteen (13) in the Brazzaville school department. Girls in this age group (16-18) were chosen because they are capable of self-reflection on the educational inequalities they suffer from.

II.4 Sample

For the sake of efficiency and for time and financial reasons, we have only considered the population of female pupils in the final year of all six (6) high schools. The sample was taken using the empirical sampling method, including quota sampling. In other words, from the parent population of four thousand five hundred and thirty-seven (4537) female pupils, we took a sample of five hundred and forty-six (546) female pupils, i.e. a population of 12.03%. The sample selected is presented in Table 1 below.

Table n°1: Proportional distribution of girls by high school

School	Target population	Sample population	Percentage
Lumumba	1091	110	2,42%
Chaminade	429	74	1,63%
Thomas Sankara B	968	111	2,45%
Mafouta	777	72	1,59%
NgangaLingolo	197	90	1,98%
Agostino A. Neto	1075	89	1,96%
Total	4537	546	12,03%

Source: PresentserveyV. Kouyimoussou, 2020

1. Justification

The present research finds its justification in various aspects: scientific, socio-cultural, socio-economic, educational and psycho-affective. The issue of girls' schooling has been the subject of much research. So far, most of them have focused on the causes and consequences in interaction with the girls' socio-familial environment. Despite these numerous investigations, little attention has been paid to the resilience of girls in the face of inequalities in secondary education. Most research focuses on the effects or predictive factors of girls' schooling. It would therefore be essential to question the factors that promote girls' resilience in the school career in Brazzaville department. Research in this field allows for the development of more effective prevention programmes aimed at reducing the impact of factors related to obstacles of all kinds, difficulties linked to gender stereotypes and school inequalities, while providing resources and support adapted to the needs of girls in addition to strongly encouraging the educational success and development of resilient girls. With regard to the socio-cultural and economic level, the results of this research will provide a better understanding of the factors that promote the resilience of certain girls in Brazzaville department. They will be used as a support in the development of programmes in the area of equity and parity in education.

III. Presentation, Interpretation and Discussion Of The Results

1. Presentations of results

This research is part of the well-defined framework of girls' resilience in the face of inequalities in their schooling. It is interested in exploring the factors that promote their resilience. Thus, we have obtained tangible results that have been confronted with the representations of the girls interviewed via the questionnaire.

Table n°2: Breakdown % of girl pupils surveyed per high school according to elements favouring the resilience of girl pupils

School	Factors favouring the resilience of girls victim of school inequality					N
	Courage	Willingness	Ability to overcome difficulties	Motivation	Other	
Nganga Lingolo	30,00	64,44	35,56	15,56	2,22	**90**
Mafouta	33,33	63,89	22,22	20,83	2,78	**72**
Chaminade	25,68	51,35	28,38	22,97	1,35	**74**
Lumumba	27,27	60,00	36,36	21,82	5,45	**110**
A.Agostino Neto	30,34	62,92	21,35	7,87	2,25	**89**
Thomas Sankara B	22,52	65,77	30,63	11,71	3,60	**111**
Total	**27,84**	**61,72**	**29,67**	**16,48**	**3,11**	**546**

Source: V. Kouyimoussou, 2020.

The data in the table above on elements that promote resilience in girl students are as follows:
- willingness (61.72%);
- courage (27.84%);
- the ability to overcome difficulties (29.67%);
- motivation (16.48%);
- other elements (3.11%).

With regard to these elements between high schools, we note that;
- the pupil-daughters of Thomas Sankara B (65.77%), NgangaLingolo (64.44%), Mafouta (63.89%) and A. A. Neto (62.92%) are much more willing than those of Lumumba (60.00%) and Chaminade (51.35%);
- for courage, the most visible pupil-daughters are those of Mafouta (33.33%), A. A. A Neto (30.34%) and NgangaLingolo (30.00%) compared to those of Lumunba (27.27%), Chaminade (25.68%) and Thomas Sankara B (22.52%);
- on the other hand, for the ability to overcome difficulties the most perceptible pupil-girls are those of Lumumba (36.36%), NgangaLingolo (35.56%) and Thomas Sankara B (30.63%), compared to the other high schools: Chaminande (28.38%), Mafouta (22.97%) and A. A. Neto (21.35%) and for motivation those of Chaminade (22.97%), Lumumba (21.82%), Mafouta (20.83%) and NgangaLingolo (15.56%).

2. Discussion

In the context of this research, it should be pointed out that the participating girls are trying to overcome the difficulties linked to educational inequalities and their repercussions by trying to build a normal life. This is thanks to their will (61.72%); their ability to overcome difficulties (29.67); their courage (27.84%) and their motivation (16.48%). Indeed, self-esteem is a source of energy that the will implements and re-actualizes. For them, continuing their studies represents a means of achieving the goals they have set for themselves and making a place for themselves in society. Likewise, continuing their studies stems from an awareness of the socio-cultural reality of their living environment and the search for solutions to the various problems they face. As a result, perseverance and commitment are characteristics found in resilient individuals (Poletti and Dobbs, 2001; Vanistendael and Lecomte, 2000).

The pupil-daughters of Thomas Sankara B (65.77%), NgangaLingolo (64.44%), Mafouta (63.89%) and A. A. Neto (62.92%) from the peripheral districts of Brazzaville, and generally from poor households, show much more willingness to work than those from the average households in the high schools of Lumumba (60.00%) and Chaminade (51.35%). The ease with which these girls can study is one of the factors that have contributed to their resilience at school. This assertion echoes that of Anaut (2003), who emphasises that the school environment can support resilience, for pupils who do well in school, despite a poor or inadequate family environment, poor or different. To this end, the experience of academic success can strengthen the girl's sense of efficiency and competence, which in turn will promote her more global adaptation. Similarly, Vanistendael and Lecomte (2009) see resilience as an adaptive disposition that some individuals have to overcome obstacles, difficult conditions and continue along the normal path of life. These authors formulate that resilient children share a common temperament that infers positive responses from their environment. Resilience as adaptive capacity would depend on the "subject-environment" interaction. This ability enables the individual to perceive and act on his or her environment in a meaningful way (Anant, 2003).

School is an institution of the future for these girls, whose social representations are positive despite educational inequalities. For these girls, success at school is explained by individual, family and environmental resources. Girls.

Further education revolves around their future life. The responsibilities they are called upon to assume encourage them to continue their studies, because they see through studies and especially their results as a means of solving a host of problems and making progress on a personal and social level. These characteristics corroborate those that researchers in the field of resilience find in resilient people. In this logic, Manciaux et al (2001) emphasise that resilience goes beyond the idea of overcoming trauma and includes a positive life dynamic. Resilience is a phenomenon that can be part of the dynamics of a girl's school career by defying the inequalities of which she is a victim. It is characterised by resistance, overcoming and perseverance, initially marked by adversity. Applied to girls' willingness to succeed in their studies in spite of inequalities, resilience can be understood as the ability to mobilize resources that can overcome obstacles that can disrupt a girl's educational path. It is a student who resists pressures, insults and disparities, and situations of adversity, without losing sight of her goals for academic success, and who finds her way back to success through adaptation, perseverance and mobilized resources.

Conclusion and Suggestions

It should be remembered that the aim of this research was to understand the reasons that push some young girls to continue their studies, despite the educational disparities and gender stereotypes they face. The aim was to understand the phenomenon of resilience in their school career in order to help encourage the schooling of girls in Congo Brazzaville. The main concern for this type of study was the observation of the particularly difficult living conditions in which some young girls live, and more particularly the fact that few of them continue their studies up to secondary and university level. This situation has been of great interest to us, as their experience could help to support or encourage other girls who find themselves in the same situation. From these results, we note that the resilience of the young girls who are in the final year of general secondary education is the consequence of their will, courage, determination and ability to overcome the obstacles and difficulties linked to educational disparities and the poor socio-economic conditions of their family environment. This has been made possible by overcoming the educational or socio-cultural inequalities of which they have been victims.

- S1/- In the same vein, more extensive research could be undertaken with a large number of participants and, consequently, high schools with a view to generalizing the results. For example, boys could be included in the study to compare their ability to overcome difficult situations with that of girls;
- S2/- A national policy for the care of resilient secondary school girls should be developed to encourage them to continue their studies up to university and in training schools. Strategies should be put in place to help girls with academic difficulties in order to encourage the retention of girls from various backgrounds.
- S3/- In order to support the development of resilience, it is also important to give the girl the opportunity to experience success in order to increase her self-esteem. Offer the girl the opportunity to participate in sports, cultural or professional activities that allow her to get to know herself better and feel valued.

Resilience is not seen as a fixed attribute of the person, but rather as a characteristic that can develop over time and therefore may be subject to intervention from peers or the family environment. This is what makes it an active concept and avoids considering resilient girls as inaccessible characters.

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