

Determinants of the Resilience of Teachers Working in Difficult Conditions in Mbama School District in Congo Brazzaville

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Abstract

The particularity of this article lies in the identification of the determinants of the resilience of teachers working in disadvantaged environments in Mbama school district. This research aims to examine these determinants of resilience in order to contribute to the development of teacher resilience in Congo Brazzaville and to request the political decision-makers' participation for the improvement of their working conditions. The quantitative method, based on the questionnaire we used, enabled us to identify the difficulties these teachers face and how they cope. The results reveal that the courage, the will, the conviction, the vocation, and the ability to overcome difficulties are the determinants, which contribute to the resilience of these teachers. Given its importance, resilience deserves to be encouraged in teachers, in order to be prepared for it, so that, they are no longer surprised by stressful situations in both their professional and social lives.

Key words: Teacher, resilience, determinant, difficult conditions.

I. Introduction

Education is considered as an essential factor in human development. Most developed countries, in order to achieve their current level of development, have made education a major focus of public policy. Generally speaking, for African states from south of the Sahara, education has been one of the priorities in the last five decades in the battle to push back the frontiers of ignorance. Teachers, at their level, play an important role in the development towards quality education and thus constitute a vital element for an adapted and inclusive development. The sustainable development objective (SDO), especially the 4th.c., notes the need for a significant increase in the "number of qualified teachers, through international cooperation and through teachers training in developing countries, especially in less developed countries and small island developing states" by 2030 (Incheon Declaration, 2015). However, many teachers still working in precarious conditions. Some of them develop resilient behaviour in spite of the adverse conditions in which they operate. The notion of resilience is defined by Cyrulnik (2007) as: "The ability to succeed, to live and develop positively in a socially acceptable way, despite stress or adversity that normally carries the serious risk of a negative outcome". In the same context, Roskam and Vendenplas-holper (2000) state that: "Resilient men are those who do well, despite the presence of resources of stress or deprivation in their environment". For our research, professionally resilient teachers do not drop out, they persevere and do their best to advance in their careers and do the work required to them as best as they can.

Context and issues

Congo Brazzaville 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 (DESEN), validated in 2007. Progress has been made towards achieving these objectives, particularly those relating to gender equality in primary education. However, difficulties persist in some sectors of the education system, in particular the precarious working conditions of some teachers working in the countryside. Indeed, the working conditions under which teachers perform their duties are deplorable. Lack of textbooks, multi-grade classes, lack of reliable childcare facilities, housing exposed to bad weather, unmet basic needs of pupils, lack of family and community support, are among the problems they face. Taking all these parameters into account, some teachers give up their profession or constantly change their workplace. Others, on the other hand, resist, create the conditions for adaptation and evolve positively. The latter exhibit resilient behavior as teachers, because they have effectively adapted to the circumstances of their profession. What does explain this resilient behavior of these teachers?

In other words, despite the restrictive socio-professional conditions in which they work, - why do these teachers manage to overcome these difficulties, particularly those linked to the lack of teaching materials, textbooks, multigrade, overcrowded classes, and the absence of reliable reception facilities, without abandoning their teaching profession? However, it should be noted that, in the Congolese context, few researchers have questioned the resilience of teachers working in difficult environments.

These teachers who work in disadvantaged environments also face the social, economic, and educational problems mentioned above. In the face of this, we want to understand the reasons why some teachers persevere despite the unfavorable working conditions. This research aims to identify the determining factors that may or may not contribute to the resilience of teachers practicing their profession under adverse conditions.

Research Question

Despite the restrictive socio-professional conditions in which they work, - why do these teachers manage to overcome these difficulties, particularly those linked to the lack of teaching materials, textbooks, multigrade and overcrowded classes, the absence of reliable childcare facilities, without abandoning their teaching profession?

Research hypotheses

We have made the following assumptions in response to these questions:

The phenomenon of resilience would be fostered directly by determining factors of a socio-cultural, socio-economic, socio-professional and environmental nature, via individual factors.

The resilience of these teachers would stem from their will, courage, motivation, love of work and ability to overcome difficulties.

Objective of the research

The aim of this research is to examine the determinants of the phenomenon of resilience of teachers working in the countryside and in difficult conditions in order to contribute to the development of their resilience in the Congo.

Justification and interest of the research

The present research work is fully justified on many levels: pedagogical, professional and scientific. From a pedagogical point of view, the research provides a reading grid that makes it possible to account for the difficult conditions in which teachers work. The aim is to highlight the experiences, aspects and contours in which teachers work. From a scientific point of view, the research will make it possible to highlight the determinants that strengthen resilience among teachers working in difficult conditions. These determinants, once updated, will reward policy makers for improving teachers' working conditions. The results of this research will provide a better understanding of the unfavorable conditions under which some teachers in rural areas work. They will serve as a support for policy makers in improving teachers' working conditions. Indeed, studying the resilience of teachers means wanting to contribute to the development of the people entrusted to them; in this case, we are talking about young people in a learning situation.

II. Methodological approach

This research adopts a quantitative method whose investigative techniques consist in combining the literature review on the difficult conditions of teachers' work and explain this social and school phenomenon.

Field of investigation

Our research was carried out in the school district of Mbama, which is part of the school department of the west basin. We chose this locality because this school district is one of Congo's disadvantaged areas. It highlights the difficult realities in which teachers work.

Study population

Our research focuses exclusively on teachers holding classes from grade one to grade six (from CP1 to CM2), pedagogical supervisors and supervisors of public schools in the following villages: Mina, Doubandjo, Abana, Talas, Essoura, Avoura, Oka-bambo, Endouo, Obélé, Odia, Mbamacentre 1, Mbamacentre 2 and teachers working at the primary education inspectorate in Mbama.

Sampling and samples

- Choice of samples

We worked on three (3) types of samples:

- Sample 1 composed of thirty-three (33) active teachers among whom thirteen (13) women;
- Sample 2 is made up of two (02) teachers, taken as office secretaries, among whom 00 woman;
- Sample 3 is composed of fifteen (15) supervisors, that is, twelve (12) school headmasters, two (02) pedagogical advisors and one (01) chief inspector of the school district.

For the construction of these samples, we used the simple random technique. These are procedures in which the sample selection is based solely on randomness from which the units were drawn. For sample 1 composed of active teachers, we first drew from twelve (12) public schools out of eighteen (18). From these twelve (12), we drew thirty-three (33) teachers out of seventy-six (76). For sample 2, made up of office secretaries, we drew two (2) teacher secretaries out of four (4). For sample 3, made up of supervisors, we drew a sample of two (2) teacher secretaries out of four (4):

- From school headmasters (draw of 12 headmasters out of 18);
- From pedagogical advisers and inspectors (draw of 02 advisers and 01 inspector out of 8). This sample is summarized in the table below:

Table n°1: Sample population

Samples	Participants	Hombres	Femmes	Total
Sample 1	Teachers	20	13	33
Sample 2	Secretaries	02	00	02
Sample 3	Supervisors	11	04	15
TOTAL		33	17	50

Source : Kouyimoussou V., Survey2020

Data collection instruments

We used the questionnaire as a means of data collection. For the purposes of our research, we developed one (1) questionnaire for teachers. This enabled us to collect the following information:

- Information related to the teacher-professional relationship;
- Information related to the teacher-student relationship;
- Information related to the teacher-environment relationship;
- Those related to the resilience of teachers working in disadvantaged conditions;
- Those related to the identification of the causes that are at the origin of this teacher resilience.

Data analysis techniques

Following the overall data analysis, the data will be presented, analyzed and interpreted, based on the quantitative analysis of the data. These data will be presented in statistical tables with the percentages and their comments

III. Presentation, analysis and interpretation of results

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents by order of difficulty according to gender

Type of difficulties		Teachers' gender				Total	
		Male number	%	Female Number	%	Number	%
Individual	Yes	33	100,0	16	94,1	49	98,0
	No	0	0,0	1	5,9	1	2,0
Psychological	Yes	31	93,9	17	100,0	48	96,0
	No	2	6,1	0	0,0	2	4,0
Financial	Yes	25	75,8	10	58,8	35	70,0
	No	8	24,2	7	41,2	15	30,0
Social	Yes	10	30,3	5	29,4	15	30,0
	No	23	69,7	12	70,6	35	70,0
Family	Yes	10	30,3	8	47,1	18	36,0
	No	23	69,7	9	52,9	32	64,0
Professional	Yes	33	100,0	17	100,0	50	100,0
	No	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
	Total	33	100,0	17	100,0	50	100,0

Source : Kouyimoussou V., Survey2020.

This table shows us that:

- Thirty-three (33) men surveyed and sixteen (16) women have individual difficulties, i.e., a percentage of 98%;
- Thirty-one (31) male respondents and seventeen (17) female respondents have psychological difficulties, i.e., a percentage of 96%;
- Finally, all the respondents have difficulties of a professional nature, i.e., a percentage of 100%.

Table N° 3: Percentage distribution of respondents by elements to overcome difficulties by gender

Elements forovercomingdifficulties		Teachers' gender				Total	
		Male Number	%	Female Number	%	Number	%
Courage	Yes	32	97,0	17	100,0	49	98,0
	No	1	3,0	0	0,0	1	2,0
Capacity to overcomedifficulties	Yes	24	72,7	16	94,1	40	80,0
	No	9	27,3	1	5,9	10	20,0
Will	Yes	33	100,0	17	100,0	50	100,0
	No	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
Vocation	Yes	32	97,0	15	88,2	47	94,0
	No	1	3,0	2	11,8	3	6,0
Conviction	Yes	29	87,9	13	76,5	42	84,0
	No	4	12,1	4	23,5	8	16,0
Economicreason	Yes	14	42,4	6	35,3	20	40,0
	No	19	57,6	11	64,7	30	60,0
Filiation	Yes	24	72,7	13	76,5	37	74,0
	No	9	27,3	4	23,5	13	26,0
	Total	33	100,0	17	100,0	50	100,0

Source : Kouyimoussou V., Survey 2020

This painting authenticates that:

- Thirty-two (32) men surveyed and seventeen (17) women have courage as a means of overcoming difficulties, i.e., a percentage of 98%;

- Twenty-four (24) male respondents and sixteen (16) female respondents have the ability to overcome difficulties as a determining factor in overcoming difficulties, i.e., a percentage of 80%;
- Overall, the respondents' motive for overcoming difficulties was willingness to overcome difficulties, i.e., 100 per cent;
- Thirty-two (32) male respondents and fifteen (15) female respondents had vocation as a reason for overcoming difficulties, i.e., a percentage of 94%;
- Finally, twenty-nine (29) male respondents and thirteen (13) female respondents said that the reason for overcoming difficulties was conviction, i.e., a percentage of 84%.

Table No. 4: Percentage distribution of respondents: people helping to adapt by gender

Person helping to adapt		Teachers' gender				Total	
		Male Number	%	Female Number	%	Number	%
Parents	Yes	25	75,8	12	70,6	37	74,0
	No	8	24,2	5	29,4	13	26,0
Friends	Yes	16	48,5	5	29,4	21	42,0
	No	17	51,5	12	70,6	29	58,0
Colleagues	Yes	30	90,9	17	100,0	47	94,0
	No	3	9,1	0	0,0	3	6,0
Chiefs	Yes	28	84,8	17	100,0	45	90,0
	No	5	15,2	0	0,0	5	10,0
	Total	33	100,0	17	100,0	50	100,0

Source : kouyimoussou V., Survey 2020.

This table shows that:

- Thirty (30) men surveyed and seventeen (17) women were assisted by their colleagues, a percentage of 94%;
- Twenty-eight (28) male respondents and seventeen (17) female respondents were assisted by line managers, i.e. a percentage of 90%.

Discussion of results

These results allow us to identify the variables likely to contribute to building teacher resilience: the family environment, help from friends, colleagues, hierarchical leaders and the perseverance of teachers to succeed in their profession, despite difficulties.

a. The family environment

The results of this research tell us that despite the difficult conditions in which teachers work, they have been able to adapt to the environment in which they have become resilient. They have benefited from strong family support from childhood. From this perspective, the use of the literature refers us to the work of Cyrulnik (1998, 2003) who, in an effort to show the support coming from the family environment, with regard to the construction of resilience, believes that resilient people are those who have been able to benefit from a secure and confident attachment during their childhood. This secure attachment gives the child a solid foundation for all future relationships. Hence the importance of the family environment in building the resilience of any individual. Along the same lines, Anaut (2003) believes that in children, as in adults, resilience results from a balance involving the dynamic interaction between various protective factors present in the subject himself, but also in his family and social environment.

Vanistendael and Lecomte (2000) add that resilience does not only depend on individual resources, it also involves the specific resources of the family and, consequently, of the community. These specific characteristics of the family have a positive or negative impact on the individual. It should be noted that family understanding, harmony and cohesion are the basic elements in building resilience.

b. Help from friends, colleagues and supervisors

The results of this research, in terms of help from others, reveal that teachers in their profession have been able to achieve this degree of resilience, thanks to the help of friends, colleagues and supervisors. When one practices the profession with love, conviction and willingness, one is likely to be helped by others. This help from others pushes the individual to persevere and succeed in what he or she does.

Using the literature in this area of resilience, Bernard (2004), Vanistendael and Lecomte (2000) believe that encounters with people who inspire confidence, who accept the other person fundamentally with his or her strengths and weaknesses, are likely to promote resilience. Along these lines (Anaut, 2003; Bernard, 2004; Bouteyre, 2004; Poletti and Dobbs, 2001), argue that the school environment is in the best position to foster resilience in general, and that of teachers in particular, thanks to the relationships that develop between teachers, pupils, supervisors and the community as a whole. However, Rutter (2002) reviewing the work of Bell (2001) indicates that social networks provide support in building resilience, but they can also generate tensions. From this perspective, therefore, it is not the extent of social ties, or the fact of having acquaintances or friends that counts, but the quality of the relationship built with individuals and the usefulness of these relationships. Rutter's (2002) observation in this respect challenges the conscience of every individual who wants to be resilient, because discernment, the choice of relationships and their usefulness play an important role in building resilience.

c. Perseverance to succeed in the profession despite difficulties

Within this framework, despite professional, environmental and individual difficulties, the teachers have shown courage, will, conviction and determination to carry out the educational work. From this perspective, (Poletti and Dobbs, 2001; Vanistendael and Lecomte, 2000) indicate that perseverance and commitment are characteristics found in resilient individuals.

Resilience as adaptive capacity would depend on the "subject-environment" interaction, which enables the individual to perceive and act on his or her environment effectively. To this end, Cyrulnik (2000) states that resilience is "the art of navigating through torrents, a trauma to push the injured person in a direction he would have liked not to go. However, since he has fallen into a rolling stream and carries him towards a cascade of bruising, the resilient person must make use of the internal resources engraved in his memory, he must fight not to get carried away by the natural slope of the traumas that make him sail from blow to blow until the moment when an outstretched hand offers him an external resource, an emotional relationship, a social and cultural institution that will allow him to get out of it".

Suggestions

Our research focuses on the determinants of resilience of teachers working in difficult conditions in Mbama school district is taken as a sample. Since research is never complete, we believe that we have identified the main factors that have enabled teachers to become resilient in their professional lives. In order to situate the reader, with regard to the phenomenon of teacher resilience that we have just dealt with throughout our work, we make the following suggestions:

For teachers

Develop a programme to promote resilience for teachers in disadvantaged environments.

For teacher training schools include the notion of resilience in teacher training programmes as a key element of success.

With regard to school district leaders

Strengthening the resilience of the staff under supervision through advice, support, supervision, encouragement, monitoring, providing schools with textbooks, teaching materials and the permanent organization of all forms of educational activities.

To the Ministries of Education

Become aware of the phenomenon of resilience and develop an education policy based on promoting the resilience of education personnel in Congo in general and in particular in disadvantaged areas;

Take into account the difficulties faced by teachers working in disadvantaged environments and strengthen their resilience by providing concrete solutions.

Conclusion

The aim of this research is to understand the reasons why some teachers are resilient, despite the difficulties. The hypotheses put forward have been tested and confirmed. The results of this research show that the different factors that have led some teachers to be resilient are: the courage, the will, the conviction, the vocation and their ability to overcome difficulties. The suggestions we have put forward are directed towards improving the working conditions of the teaching staff on whom the education of our children depends. In order to do this, approaches as contributions focus on preparing teachers for resilience from training schools have been suggested. For the authorities in charge of education, it is a question of implementing strategies that encourage teacher resilience and awareness of the phenomenon of resilience, so as to improve the working conditions of teachers working in underprivileged environments. As we know, the research work on resilience is large. For our part, we have been interested in understanding the reasons why some teachers who practice their profession in disadvantaged conditions develop a state of resilience. Much remains to be done in this area; other researchers who will have the opportunity to address this issue will be able to develop aspects such as: education for resilience, resilience and sustainable development.

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