

Resilient Strategies and Education of Non-Displaced Students in the Midst of Socio-Political Crisis in the Northwest Region of Cameroon

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Abstract

Socio-political crisis tends to push students out of their communities causing them to seek for safer sanctuaries elsewhere but a good number of them still do not want to move out despite the unscrupulous happenings. Understanding how students extenuate coping strategies in such unbecoming atmospheres becomes pivotal. The crisis in the North West Region of Cameroon has propelled non-displaced students to venture in new life styles in order to acquire education amidst crisis without being repulsive. It is against this premise that this study sets out to investigate students' resilient strategies within the current crisis in the North West Region of Cameroon. Data for the study was amassed from secondary and primary sources. The secondary sources involved soft and hard copies of both published and unpublished documents while primary data was gleaned from field interviews and observation. With the help of snowball sampling technique, 40 interviews' guides were administered in some sampled Divisions of the North West Region of Cameroon. Extra data was gotten through direct observations and focus groups discussions. Results revealed that, for non-displaced students to effectively negotiate and obtain secured education amidst crisis; community-based learning centers were created, religious convictions was used as a mechanism for confronting insecurity, adjustment in school institutional cultures, Shifting paradigms in disciplinary practices/majors in schools and adaptability potentials towards food insecurity in the crisis zones.

Keywords: Socio-political crisis, education and resilient mechanisms.

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INTRODUCTION

During socio-political crisis, students are compelled out of their communities to other communities seeking for safer sanctuaries. But is completely opposite in the North West region where a good number of them still do not displace from their communities despite the unscrupulous events. Cameroon The most recent and ongoing in Cameroon is the Anglophone crisis which is causing both national and international concern. SODEI (2019) reported that Non State Armed Groups (NSAGs) imposed a boycott on education in the North West and South West Regions of Cameroon, using threats, abductions, and killings to prevent children from attending school. This actuality has cultivated an environment of fear and uncertainty preventing many students from going to school. The New Humanitarian (2020), underscored that some students are seeking for formal education elsewhere by moving to other safe regions as internally displaced while others are returning. This is because of the fact that not everyone has the

ability to adapt to new environments especially when compelled. It is in this light that Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2020) conveyed that about 360.500 people returned to the war zones due adaptability constraints despite tragic consequences they might face amidst war areas.

Afu (2019, 2020) opined that the quest for security, education, and better future, has propelled many students to pursue different educational options in other more peaceful areas. It is comparatively unusual in the North West Region where some students have taken an audacious step by staying despite the insecurity that hovers around their lives instead of seeking secured education elsewhere. Undoubtedly, the situation that prevails now in the North West Region of Cameroon shows that, not every individual abscond from war zones during unstable periods because not everyone has the opportunity or desire to displace in times of war. Some people even after absconding insecurity, still return in the crisis zones due to their inability to adapt and integrate in

new areas (OCHA, 2020). It is against this melancholy that this study sets out to investigate students' resilient mechanisms amidst crisis as well as how they are geared towards negotiating and obtaining a secured education. To attain the objectives of this study, a qualitative research was conducted in some sampled areas of the Tubah Sub-divisions in the North West Region of Cameroon. This area was chosen for its strategic location, school infrastructure, and a galaxy of educational and religious institutions such as the government owned Institute of Agricultural Research and Development (IRAD), Polytechnic Bambui and the University of Bamenda. Moreover, this community inhabits so many operational schools unlike other Divisions that do not have any. This study portrays students' actions towards educational security amidst violent eruptions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For better insights comparing the past and current conditions of non-displaced students in the North West Region, a qualitative research approach was effectuated. Documentary data were gleaned from soft and hard copies of published and unpublished documents; Newspapers, journals, archives, reports relevant to crisis and educational resilient strategies. Semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews were organized with some key informants like; teachers, quarter heads, parents and students. Key informants were gotten through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. We equally observed the behavior and the activities of students in school. Field data was collected, analyzed using content analysis methods and interpreted using the theory of cultural dynamics.

Theoretical Framework

This study is circumscribed in to the "Cultural dynamics" of Balandier (1971) and resilient theory of Panter-Brick (2014). The theoretical stand point of Cultural dynamics theory postulates that culture is an ongoing process constantly reviewing, remaking and transforming itself. Therefore, all cultures are inherently predisposed to change as well as their cause and degree to change varies from one culture to the other. This change could be slow or rapid, total or partial, voluntary and involuntary. Cultural change confronts people with new situations and compels them to create new forms of actions. The non-displaced students of the North West Region, confront and reconstruct their educational security by fashioning new forms of action rather than relocating. Despite schools shutdown, killing, abduction, destruction of schools and school equipment, non-displaced students have ventured into new behaviors. This can be seen in their ways of dressing, eating, plaiting and learning.

Panter-Brick (2014) understood resilience across different cultures and so defined as a process to harness resources to sustain well-being. Emphasizing on the word "process" it implies that resilience is not just an attribute or even a capacity to go through a trauma, the

phrase 'to harness resources' implies identifying the most relevant resources from students communities according to the nature of the crisis, their ways of coping without being repulsive incorporation with their judicial and educational system. From this view, it is clear that, international efforts of remedying the situation was seemingly unworkable since the resources proposed for the remedy were from external sources.

The Socio-Political Crisis and Education in the Anglophone Regions

The 2016 Anglophone crisis that escalated in 2017, had far reaching consequences in the lives of individuals and the Anglophones communities as a whole. Bang *et al.*, (2022) underscored that, since 2016, valid grievances by the lawyers' and teachers' trade unions in Cameroon's Anglophone regions urging the government to revamp the Anglophone legal and education systems quickly degenerated into an armed political crisis due to government's intransigence. Fanson (2017) added that, the crisis was initially based on claims laid by lawyers denouncing the appointment of French-speaking judges or magistrates to English courts who were not familiar with the Common Law across English Cameroon. This claims were later tailed by teachers defending the integrity of the Anglo-Saxon system of education. In reality, the Anglophone crisis is rooted in past grievance that stems from colonial period, partition and reunification of the two unequal states of Cameroon where the minorities (Anglophones) recurrently felt marginalized by the majority (francophone). In 2016, Human Right Watch (HRW) underscored that, there have been violent armed confrontations between armed groups commonly called Ambazonians and the regular military.

Bang *et al.*, (2022) re-counted that this socio-political crisis bears heavily on Cameroon's capacity to deal with the crisis. This is because this crisis, have significant negative impacts on the education of non-displaced students given the disruption of learning, coupled with the destabilization of the educational sector. The results incurred from the hitch of students basic rights to education is severe and might no longer be controllable if care is not taken. United State Agency for International Development (USAID) (2019) opined that the crisis in the Anglophone regions has led to the closure of many schools in the Anglophone regions, leaving many children with no access to education. Children have been compelled to stay at home due to the conflict, missing out on valuable learning opportunities following the armed groups' boycott of former education. Although some are attending home classes, the continuity of this crisis keeps making it difficult for students to attain lessons regularly.

Moreover, the risks of violence against female students, includes sexual and gender-based violence yet male students suffer from force recruitment in to arm groups, detainment and abrupt killing and threats from

either conflicting parties. The Protection Cluster (2019) opined that violence against students have increased in the crisis regions as the conflict deteriorates over time. Perceptibly, education in these region is very treacherous for students attending learning classes and students out of school. This is because, according to UNOCHA (2020) students attending learning classes has an increased risk of experiencing attacks, harassments, kidnappings, or killings while students out of school face a different set of risks including sexual violence, child labor, early marriage, forced recruitment in to armed groups, arbitrary detainment and arrest by the military. Beyond reasonable doubts, violence have caused significant trauma and psychosocial distress among students as USAID (2018) underscored.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

It is essential to note that before the Anglophone crisis, students had a way of life that could be seen as the replica of the English system of education, their cultural and ancestral lineage. Following the challenges encountered, non-displaced students have turned to adapt to the new life conditions presented to them by the crisis. The purpose of this change of life style is to fit in the new cultural context created by crisis resulting from the disparity that exists between cultures due to socio-political instability (Afu 2020). Hence, crisis situations has propelled many non-displaced students in to adopting new ways in order to be involved in the schooling learning process amidst crisis zones without being repulsive to the armed groups. These adaptive coping strategies are made up of mental processes and physiological adaptations which involves the following:

Creation of Community-Based Learning Centers

Within the sub-Divisions of the North West Region of Cameroon, community based learning centers have been established in some selected sub-Divisions like Tubah to make obtainable education for non-displaced school students. These centers are consistently controlled by volunteer teachers and function in secured areas within the community yet under the regulations of the armed forces. The Guardian Post (2019) unconfined that, local members of civil society are working to privatize education, by organizing public demonstrations, campaigns and publicly calling for ceasefires. In reality, this strategy was unworkable since it was quickly discovered by armed groups who still did not want students to school despite the fact that this schools were not government schools. An informant reported that;

From the beginning of this crisis, we thought the issue was just with public school, as private institutions but after some time, although private schools where allowed to function, going to school was still a problem... to the armed groups the government was still having some little control over this schools which was never the desire of armed groups.... And as a result lock downs did not exempt private schools. We still tried to our best just for

school to hold anyhow... but were asked some sums of money which we paid to function still with lots of challenges like impromptu holidays we prefer than to be stopped at all (A teacher in the Tubah sub-Division 21st November 2022)

From the above word verbatim, before considering the community based learning centers as one of the most effective ways to cope with education in the crisis hit areas, diverse coping were tested before reaching this conclusion. From all indications the previous students resilient to be enrolled in private institutions failed because the Government still had much authority over them. It is clear that this coping strategy, underwent a progressive transformation from private to underground classes before reaching the final and most acceptable less repulsive coping method. The aspect of stay home was encouraged as online learning through social media were encouraged after the outbreak of COVID-19. This was clearly released when (UNICEF, 2020) underscored that students should use social media like television, Radio stations, WhatsApp and amongst others to study so as to reduce the effects of the crisis. In reality, this was unworkable in the North West Region since not all students had the means to study via social media talk less of how to use it.

This strategy failed in the Anglophone regions because of context given that problems and solutions are sometimes very relative in nature, culture was bound to undergo transformation. This is because culture is an ongoing process constantly reviewing, remaking and transforming itself. Thus this could work in the developed worlds but never in less or developing ones since their available resources and way of life cannot be compared to that of the less developed students in Anglophones regions. Effective Change can only be implemented by non-displaced victims since they have the full knowledge of what they are experiencing in the ongoing crisis. This is because they know the bases of the crisis, know what it means to live there not what people think or imagine and so, from the dimension of living the situation and not supposing facts to the foundations of the crisis they can create coping ways to survive the blows from the crisis. Thus, Cultural change antagonizes people with new conditions and compels them to create new forms of actions by means of adapting to the new changes (Balandier, 1971).

Therefore, for community schools to exist and remain operational in the North West Region of Cameroon, head teachers and principals paid allegiance to the armed groups. This allegiance involves, no hoisting of the Cameroon flag on school premises, no singing of the national anthem, French subject is not taught in this community schools and some subscriptions are cede to the armed groups.

Students Food Security amidst the Crisis

Food insecurity and violent conflicts are mostly found in regions with a high degree of fragility particularly Africa with about: 66% of the population globally facing food crises or worse (Kemmerling *et al.*, 2022). Food supply is of strategic importance to any war victims like the non-displaced students amidst crisis (Justino and Stojetz, 2018). This explains why armed groups via the numerous imposed ghost towns, the usage of bushes as hind outs directly influence local food production thus food insecurity becomes avoided. Leeuwen and Der-Haar (2016) underscored that during war times, land ownership and right of entry to land is often a problem since ownership right always change in times of crisis. As a result, means of students survival with education becomes threaten as they become food insecure. This also attest for massive displacement and school drop outs in the North West Region of Cameroon. An informant noted that:

Our parents now rarely goes to the farm... because our only source of livelihood has been in habited. Given that the area is so bushy, we can't go there to cultivate because we might not come back safe ... that land is now own by the real owners of this community... so our survival mood now is mainly based on charitable gifts from NGO... (A student in the Tubah sub-Division 21st January 2023).

According to this word verbatim above, it is crystal clear that during war times land ownership is being shifted from rightful owners to warriors. Leeuwen and Der-Haar (2016) highlighted that the right of entry to land is often a problem since ownership right always change in times of crisis. This reality that plagues the North West Region has greatly influenced students' education and as a result it has been used as a weapon of war since the crisis is directly against this social fact (Messer and Cohen 2015). To some great extents, arm groups disruption of agricultural activity is a means to discourage students' education since it would be difficult to study with hunger. Nutrient survival is a basic requisite necessity for war sufferers especially those with inopportunity or means to escape to safer zones like the non-displaced student in the North West Region of Cameroon.

Addressing food insecurity in crisis hit areas requires inclusive resilient actions for students' means of survival. These actions are basically main to reduce food insecurity as an upshot of crisis and consider the reduction of crisis risks on itself (B. Kemmerling *et al.*, 2022). To cope with this situation that plagues students' education, the Northwest population have mitigated means to confront this reality by cooperating with armed groups. B. Kemmerling *et al.*, (2022) citing Martin-Shields and Stojetz (2019), opined that to protect students' livelihoods and food security, they might voluntarily or under coercion cooperate with armed groups. Given that food crises during socio-political crisis undoubtedly play a decisive role in students'

educational security, instructors/parents have developed new adaptive strategies. This coping strategies are derived considering the contextual identity of the problem without jeopardizing their children's' educational security. It is in this light that a key informant revealed that:

A difficult experience occur here were a family was killed in their own house by the military... our boys in response to tis heart breaking news was imposed the whole village to an internal lock down... they whole village in homage mourned for continues two weeks... to this effect farm work talk less of activities were halted to the extend where parents watched their food crops like beans, vegetables getting rotten and grass hampering the growth of crops like maize... so we had to improvise by embarking in watching of bitter leaf and cabbage so as to afford children feeding rights (A parent in the Tubah sub-Divison, 20/4/2022).

From the above quotation, parents/students means to confront this reality is by cooperating with armed groups at some level. Instead for instructors/parents to break rules by protecting their food crops on farm lands, they prefer to collaborate with armed groups so as to maximize their children's educational security. Some have changed their crop production to a low-risk, low-return strategy by switching from perishable to less perishable crops, as the latter provide food for subsistence (Arias *et al.*, 2017; Martin-Shields and Stojetz 2019). Also electricity insecurity in the Norwest has hampered food security with respect to storage and grinding/blending of some food stuffs. So, in order to make ends meet in such situations, parents have invested more on durable food stuffs like bitter leaf and cabbage since they are less perishable like hackberry and can be conserve and preserve by sun drying.

Hence, Cultural change alienates people with new conditions and compels them to create new forms of actions by means of adapting to the new changes (Balandier, 1971). Addressing food insecurity in crisis hit areas requires inclusive resilient actions for students' means of survival. This includes adaptabilities by letting arm groups ownership of their lands, parents/students confronting this reality by cooperating with armed groups at some level and finally, cultivating crops that are less perishable. At this level, the movement can make sure that she provides food for the students on ground in the war zone like the UN is doing. So the government can join hands with such organization to make sure this students have food since farms has been destroyed and food production is low.

Religious Convictions as a Mechanism for Confronting Insecurity

This study in attempt to scrutinize how sociopolitical crisis affects individuals' religious convictions, unveils the upshot of crisis on non-displaced

individuals religiosity can be demanding (Iyer, 2016). This is true because students, parents/instructors religious convictions has increase or decrease due to diverse reasons influence by the crisis in The Anglophone region of Cameroon . Religious beliefs and activity might influence individual attitudes toward social insurance for a number of reasons (Scheve and Stasavage, 2006). Explanations about religious convictions emphasize differences in attitudes between individuals of different religious denominations, since some students may cope with violence-related trauma by increasing praying frequency while others are traditionally inclined (Sosis and Handwerker, 2011). An informant opines that

Na God ooh!!! Cause all think here na medicine. If you no strong you no go survive this area. All side na medicine... wa boys them di use medicine... military di use medicine we no fit dey way we no di do nothing for wa own security. (A parent in Bambili, 13/4/2022).

According to this above citation, it is crystal clear that the quest for spiritual protection has escalated among the non-displaced students. Zussman (2014) underscored that during times of crisis, those with greater exposure to war casualties becomes more religious as the case of the Jews and Muslim in Israel. This is because, the reality experienced in the battle field is that man's natural power can no longer protect but supernatural can preserve human lives. Religious convictions here lays emphasis on the different religious belief, since some students might believe in charms made by witch doctors while others in God /Allah. Based on observations, one may possibly say that the increasing number of Pentecostal churches in the North West Region is mainly due to individuals' quest for protection. Note should be taken that religious settings like churches, mosques and traditional sacred areas like shrines served as security platitudes for individuals (student's/instructors) during fights instigated by fighters.

Thus, results revealed that following sociopolitical crisis in the Northwest region of Cameroon, most individuals have increase their engagement according to their diverse religious convictions as a way to cope with education amidst crisis. Adapting to this new system of life makes them being cultural dynamic since the fighters' convictions to supernatural powers has compelled them to be more engaged with their own diverse religious beliefs.

Adjustment to School Institutional Cultures

Perterson and Spencer (1991) defined institutional cultures as deeply embedded patterns of and organizational behaviors and shared ideologies that members have about their organization. Previously, school institutional cultures according to the English system of education, required students to dress in uniform, black shoes, white socks, and restricted hair styles. Hair styles were permitted in some private schools

while all students kept low cuts in public schools. Culture is most clearly seen in the way people relate to and work together; the management of the school structures, system and physical environment (Stoll and Fink, 1998). At the level of school institutional cultures, the problem of students staying home would have continued till date if some readjustments were not made.

At the level of modification of syllables, observations and data received from some key informants showed that, primary and secondary education syllables has been modified in the North West Region of Cameroon. French mainly to be and obligatory subject as English subject is no longer taught openly in the communities schools except in hiding, since students might take the information homes to their parents. Some Chapters or better topics in subjects like moral education, civics, and history that can reveal some aspects of peace building are taught with caution since some parents might see it as a way of brain washing their children. Moreover, teachers methods of teaching has been readjust to competence based approach than objective based approach that was being used before the outbreak of the crisis. To this effect, students do not repeat a class as they are not rate on theories but more on practice.

At the level of school environments, it was observed that no flag was hoisted on school campus. The outbreak of the crisis coupled with the terrified happenings, individuals were aware of the potential consequences proliferating from the sociopolitical crisis. No hoisting of the flag and singing of the national anthem were some of the methods students used to survive with education with being repulsive in the community. It was in this light that. Some students mentioned that;

Assorted that was a means us to hide and study has now become the new and acceptable dressing style for us.... You will hardly identify an operational school from afar unless you see students or benches when you come close. We don't hoist flags talk less of singing the national anthem. Respecting the orders imposed on us especially is very essential for our survival ... (A secondary school student in Bambui, 20/6/2022).

From this citation, students in order to school in crisis without being offensive have decided to follow the rules impose on them. By dressing in assorted as students receiving tertiary education. Before, students Moreover the Anglophone crisis has compelled students to readjust school institutional cultures by replacing uniform wears to assorted dressing in class rooms. All this to make ends meet as they avoid breaking rules imposed on them. This new way of dressing.

Shifting Paradigms in Disciplinary Practices in Schools

The educational sector in the North West Region has experienced tremendous changes since the beginning of this ongoing crisis. These changes has been

precipitated by unparalleled lock downs of schools, sudden public holidays imposed by armed groups depriving students from their rights to education. This fundamental change in the basic concepts and experimental practice in the school milieu is as a result of this crisis. Fundamentally, students were submitted to discipline so far the purpose is main to call them to order. But with the outbreak of the crisis, teachers/educational stakeholders have in considered appeasing and tolerating students' wrongs as a means to limit violence and thus encourage them come to school

From observations, students' are scolded with lots of precautions making sure they not left with grouches that can lead to hatred or a cultivation of a revengeful thought. To this effect, beating students as an aspect of discipline has been simplified to counseling in the North West Region of Cameroon. Also, students late coming and absenteeism is not sufficiently checked by educational stakeholders since students might have tangible reasons as gunshots or tension in their quarters. In this kind of situation though student can still sometimes lie just to avoid the webs of being scolded, teachers don't really mind cause their intension is for them to keep coming to school. In till light a secondary school teacher reported that;

This children are wild... I can't talk to them any how... some are even older than me oo... Cause even amongst them, some of their parents are in the bushes so one needs to be careful.. As it is, here no one repeats a class cause we consider their age... and factors that can affect the continuity of this school...(a teacher in CHS Bambui 12/5/2022).

From the above verbatim, even in class teachers teach with fear too. So fear is not only out of school premise right in their class rooms operationally of the schools are being threaten. Reasons being that, students have tested wild life within the crisis, maladaptive coping strategies like consumption of narcotize gives them courage to minimize teachers, some of their parents instigate fears in the lives of teachers by their personality, age too is become a factor. In order to avoid a scenario where school can be shut down or students being discourage to come to school, teaches have adopted a resilient strategy of appeasement and tolerance by shifting paradigms in disciplinary practices/majors in schools. However, reinforcing discipline in schools and giving due sanctions will go a long way to reduce deviancy in school, promote good learning environment and of course good results from students won't be inevitable.

Financial Sustainability

The ability to understand and make use of different financial abilities is pivotal in students coping strategy. Students do not only need safe environments to study, they also need finances to study. Following the ongoing crisis, lock downs many parents has lost their jobs concerns sustenance. This has brought about

difficulties among families and so in other to create a healthier financial situation, many have change by developing new ways to make money. This is because money is needed for student's school kits like fees, bags, books, shoes dresses and amongst others. In order to make ends meet many students and parents have picked up site jobs, other involved in agricultural activities in a bit to cover their financial expenses without being repulsive in the community.

Moreover, students plaiting styles has been modified to long terms ones like dread and knotless braids since going to a salon is a problem and sometimes very expensive if one happens to be open . Before students were entitled to few braids, dreads was seen as rascality amongst youth's talk less of Rasta braids being accepted on school premises. But today, in order to survive with education, educational stake holders have considered durable hair styles like dreads, since the former one cannot be attained most frequently due to hygiene and financial reasons. Since spending on children's' hair turns to be less cheap as student don't frequent salons. Thus, resilient is a process to harness internal resources to sustain well-being (Panter-Brick, 2014). Financial literacy for sustenance can give secured education to the students since they are on ground; economic activities are not turning, most parents have lost their jobs, parents are unable to finance students. So creating possibilities for students to go to school may be via giving educational assistance by way of paying their school fees and taking care of their didactics.

CONCLUSION

Note should be taken that before the above resilient were successfully administered and adopted, students had ventured into many others which failed. Referring to coping as a behavioral effort in managing a situation of anxiety involves that, there is no particular way of coping. Therefore being a dynamic process of change, a variety of coping ways can emanate from people's character following the context of the situation. Harnessing internal resources to cope with education amidst socio-political is very important since it requires inclusive resilient actions given that what works for one must not necessary work for all. From the analysis of field results, it is clear that within the proper cultural context of Anglophones and experienced situation, students are able to go to school without being repulsive whereas previous proposed resilient with external methods ended with heavy penalties. Thus, resilient/coping strategy is not only complex but there is no one-size-fits- resilience for everything. Resilient approaches used by highly income countries cannot necessarily work in the same way for low income countries. The study therefore, argues that in a moment of crisis, the most effective means of implementing change is subjective to the knowledge of those who stays and face the reality in the field within the time frame. This research is limited to the North West Region of Cameroon due to the experienced Socio-political crisis

but it can also be extended to other places and communities going through a similar crisis. Building resilience amongst student amidst crisis is optimal and worth stimulating since such gives students an excellent capacity to deal with insecurity amidst any mischievous happenings

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