Resilience for Academic Excellence through Distance Education Lifelong Learning Strategies in Victims of the Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon

BY

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Context and Problem

Taking International Action for Education in Cameroon is now our days essential. The education crisis which was already a feature in many regions in the world has been exacerbated by Anglophone Crisis. The English-speaking Regions of Cameroon consisting of the Northwest and Southwest formal British Colonies have been restive since 2016. This is caused by a sociopolitical Crisis which has deteriorated overtime and led to violent clashes between armed forces and separate fighters, loss of life and property, internal displacements of inhabitants, human right abuse, climate of fear and uncertainty (Sodei,2021). Reports holds that, since the beginning of the crisis over 790, 000 people have been forcibly displaced and over 4,000 tortured and killed. Calls for school boycotts and spontaneous lockdowns of schools have had terrible consequences on students' ability to attend schools and learn. Defiance of calls for school boycotts have led to kidnaps, killing of students, parents and teachers and attacks on infrastructures. Such instances have led to the suspension of school activities for more than three academic years. The crisis has specifically affected the Distance Education Program of the University of Buea whose student population consist of about ¾ of students living in these restive regions. These students have reported challenges in carrying out their academic work especially during periods of lockdown. Despite the complaints, the Program continues to run with classes going on and examination conducted even in the heart of the crisis. Notwithstanding the exposure to significant threats or severe adversity they face due to the socio-political crisis, the students remain resilient. They still struggle to meet up with deadlines. The study therefore aims at highlighting supportive social actions that can contribute in building resilience for academic excellence in at-risk students studying in the Distance education program in the University of Buea. These activities will be geared towards using problem solving models of Social connections, Supportive relationships and Social agency to produce desired academic outcomes for at risk students from the restive anglophone regions enrolled in the Distance education program.

Theory and Concept

Resilience refers to the dynamic process of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity based on exposure to significant threat or severe adversity (Margalit, M., &Idan, O. 2004), as well as a universal capacity possessed by an individual, group, or community to prevent, reduce and overcome the adverse effects of adversity (Grotberg, 1995). In relation to students, it is seen as an important skill because it relates directly with students mental health, psychological well-being, commitment, achievement, quality of attention, self-efficacy, creativity (Gulbay, 2016). The dynamic interactions between personal (inner) and the environment (contextual) factors may modify the learners' responses to adversity predicting their hope for change, their ability to adapt through various development paths regardless of major assaults.

The concept of Resilience is grounded in the notion of Human Agency postulated by Bandura in (1986) in his social cognitive Theory. It is the sense of the Capacity for meaningful, intentional action. Human as agents can intentionally influence their functioning and immediate circumstances (Bandura, 2000, 2006). Adopting the model of emergent interactive agency, the study argues that individuals make causal contributions to their own motivation and action within a system of inadic reciprocal causation whereby action within, cognitive affective, other personal factors and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants (Bandura, 2016). Thus, in promoting academic resilience, it becomes necessary to identify individual mechanism that help resilient student reach achievement and then promote them. Novonty (2011) categorizes these into personal characteristics such as self-efficacy, work, ethic internal locus of control. the second are the influence from surrounding such as supportive teacher, school programs and extra-curricular activities, help and support from family.

Additionally, Shengli Yang and Weirong Wang (2022) opined that protective factors, are significant in academically resilient learner's accomplishments and they result in positive adaptation (Rojas, 2015). Thus, protective factors, including the quality of learner's characteristics, social context or his/her interaction, and so on are critical to be examined. Corroborating Shengli Yang and Weirong Wang (2022) this study claims that

recognizing and specifying protective factors help learners save themselves in uncertainties surrounded by their academic life.

In this context, hope reflects the capability of Distance education students in the University of Buea, to derive pathways (despite their exposure to significant threats) to motivate themselves through agency thinking towards achieving academic excellence. Hope is strongest when it addresses valued goals that promises an intermediate probability of attaining due to challenging obstacles. this therefore means that goals provide the target of mental actions sequences that could be described through visual and verbal properties (Synder, 2002).

Academic Resilience:

Academic resilience is defined as a construction of resilience in the educational field and reflects an increase in individual success in the learning process despite experiencing difficulties (A. Martin, 2002). To academic resilience is an experience that individuals go through in the learning process, which is dynamic and reflects their strength and resilience to rise from negative emotional experiences when facing a stressful and challenging situation (A. J. Martin & Marsh,2006; Morales and Trotman, 2004; Hendriani, 2018). Nirwana P., Farhana R. A., Nursyamsu, I.(2021), argued that academic resilience can be influenced by internal factors as well as external factors from the individual. These internal factors, e.g., self-esteem or good feelings related to the worth felt by the individual, individual's curiosity or the about something and decisiveness or individual determination in achieving success. The study examines both factors that can influence academic resilience, e.g., individual, family, teachers, peer relations, and the social environment (Everall et al., 2006). Theseare categorized as social connections, supportive relationships, and social agency.

Social Connections:

Social connectedness is defined by Bahtiyar, E.C., (2016) as an aspect of an individual self that reveals how a person judges his/her closeness with the social surroundings. It is associated with one's belief of self in relation to others. It is how one understands and views his/her closeness with others, the social and outside world. Social connectedness involves all aspects of social interaction including family, friends, and the community. It is the kind of relationship that one has with others in general. (Lee & Robbins, 2000; Lee & Robbins, 1995). Social connectedness is associated with trusted relationships with others, safe attachments, social competent, support accessible to an individual through social ties, a smaller number of difficulties in the relationship with others, adopting characteristics of social groups. (Williams, K.L., Galliher, R.V.,2006; Moller, N.P., Fouladi, R.T., McCarthy, C.J., & Hatch, K.D, 2003. Social connection achieved through social support from peers, family, and teachers contributes to academic resilience and makes students face various demands and high academic burdens in higher education. Perceived social support gives a feeling that someone is loved, worthy, and part of a social network that can help them in times of need (Sarafino & Smith, 2014).

Supportive Relationship:

Research have shown that people benefit from supportive relationship. Bun &Surapee (2017) Contend that through supportive relationships, students feel that they are respected and their concerns are heard and such relationships enhance student autonomy. The relationships would help students feel confident and motivated to try harder and perform better and to reduce negative attitudes towards schools. Moreover, positive relationships really have impacts on student achievement and behavior adjustment. According to Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood (2000) the provision of financial aid, material resources, or services to those in need allows them to cope with problems in life. Supportive relationships such as a friendly environment, openness, a sense of trust and caring provide emotional benefits in terms of feelings of security (Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Crockenberg, 1981; Hazan & Shaver, 1990; Ybarra, Lee, & Gonzalez, 2012) This is in line with the studies' contention that supportive relationship may enable students to persevere and achieve academic excellence.

Social Agency:

Human agency is critical in determining how individuals, households, and communities respond to different types of environmental stressors. Agency is generally understood to mean the capacity of individuals to act independently to make their own free choices as well as the power to act on those choices (Naila Kabeer 1999). This can be expressed through direct actions or through experiences of choice, decision-making and reflection. According to McLaughlin & Dietz (2008), adult agency is influenced by a range of aspects including; self-efficacy, self-esteem, mattering, self-confidence, self-reflectiveness, Intentionality, self-awareness as well as their experiences of connectedness (at home, in schools, communities, and through digital and other networks.

With regards to the Distance Education program, students try to adapt to a new and stressful life, they strive to fulfill their tasks related to occupation, academy, and personal development. During this period, their psychological and physical well-being, and displaying functions at an optimum level will help them adapt to their new environment and successfully fulfill their developmental tasks more easily. People who have a high sense of connectedness feel themselves belonging to a family, friends or a social group and they define themselves as warm and positive (Lee R.M & Robbins, S.B.,1998) (Lee, R.M.,Keough, K.A & Sexton, J.D, 2002) These people also

have a high level of self-esteem, self-worth, purpose and meaning in life since they receive social support and social acceptance from a close environment (Thoits, P.A., 2013). They have the ability to develop more meaningful relationships (Kaminski, J.W., Puddy, R.W., Hall, D.M., S.Y. Cashman, S.Y., A.E. Crosby, & Ortega, A.G., 2010). When students experience this type of relationship, they are likely to excel well in their academic endeavors.

Participants and Instrument

The research was carried out on third and fourth year students currently enrolled in the Distance Education program for the 2021/2022 academic year in the University of Buea, living in the restive regions of northwest and south west region where the conflict is most active. Out of the 63-study participants 34 (54%) of them are internally displaced (IDPs) who have moved from their original place of residence. The mean age was 41 Years and most of the participants were woman (N =57 females).

This study used a questionnaire survey method. Using the convenient sampling procedure, 63 questionnaire were self-administered face to face to and completed by the students. The goals of the study were explained to the students. They were informed that participation was voluntary and that the responses would be treated with a high level of confidentiality and would be used only for academic purposes. Participants responded to the items in the questionnaire package at their own pace and it took around 12 minutes to cover all the sections

Findings

The study was aimed at finding students perception of how social support received through the study variables of social connectedness, supportive relationship and social agency affect resilience for academic excellence. Responses to items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale that measured students' levels of agreement to the variables. The descriptive statistical analysis was used to arrive at the results. For the purposes of this study, only the mean and standard deviation have been indicated. In order to interpret the mean the study adopted frame of reference based on a predetermined maximum and minimum range applicable to each response. These were

From 0 to 1.5 represents "Strongly Disagree"

From 1.6 to 2.5 represents "Disagree"

From 2.6 to 3.5 represents "Agree"

From 3.6 to 4 represents "Strongly agree". Based on the above the mean scores were interpreted as represented below

Social Connectedness

	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I Feel disconnected from the world around me	2.13	1.13
2	Even around people I know, I don't feel that I really belong	1.97	1.02
3	I feel so distant from people	2.02	1.02
4	I have no sense of togetherness with my peers	1.87	0.98
5	I don't feel related to anyone.	1.52	0.76
6	I catch myself losing all sense of connectedness with society	1.89	0.67
7	Even among my friends, there is no sense of brother/sisterhood	1.97	0.93
8	I don't feel I participate with anyone or any group	1.86	0.76
9	I do not feel accepted by peers	1.92	1.58
10	I do not feel accepted by my teachers	1.71	0.92
11	I like being in Company of my friends	3.24	0.80
12	I feel trusted by my peer	2.54	1.10
13	I trust my peers	2.29	1.24
14	I feel attached to my peers	2.27	1.25

From the table above, all the negatively worded indicators (items 1 to 10) have mean scores that fall in the 1.6 to 2.5 zone. This means that the respondents generally disagree that there isn't an overall sense of social connectedness. In other words, they averagely perceive some sense of social connectedness. However, three of the four positively worded items (items 12 to 14) also have means in the "disagree" range. This means the perceived sense of social connectedness could be bettered by building a more adequate sense of trust among the students.

Also, the standard deviation for all is generally low: below 2. This speaks to a somewhat homogeniety in the observations given that all the respondents are students within the DED program.

Supportive Relationship

	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I feel cared for by my teachers	2.40	1.33
2	My teachers respect me	2.73	0.97

3	My concerns are heard by my teachers	2.41	1.12
4	I have easy access to internet facilities provided by the school	1.78	0.99
5	I receive financial Aid from my school	1.59	0.82
6	Study Materials are provided for free by my school	1.25	0.69
7	My study environment is friendly	2.29	1.16
8	I have a feeling of security	2.46	1.10
9	I can rely on my teachers for help	2.45	1.15
10	My teachers advice my on academic issues	2.78	1.08
11	My teachers are open to me	2.27	1.42
11	I own a computer for my studies	2.13	1.17
12	I have a healthy relationship with my teachers	2.51	1.19
13	I communicate freely with my peers	2.86	1.00
14	I feel free to go to my teachers for counselling in times of need	2.40	1.39

Items 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 14 have mean scores that fall in the 1.6 to 2.5 zone. This means that the respondents generally perceive the peer to peer relationships as well as the students to teacher relationships to be inadequately supportive. This is really unsettling because it shows that the students consider that they are not receiving the sort of support they need and that could have very negative effects on their academic resilience.
The standard deviation is generally low: below 2. This means that if the statusquo is changed, the relationships become more supportive and benefit all the students.

Social Agency

	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I have hope in my academic achievement	3.27	0.90
2	I do things on my own	2.90	1.28
3	I am self-confident	3.05	1.22
4	I have some internal motivation that pushes me to go ahead in studies	3.13	1.07
5	I like to interact with my friends	3.14	0.74
6	I have a sense of responsibility for myself	3.25	0.84
7	I reflect about the decisions I make	3.35	0.70
8	I am confident about my decision to continue schooling	3.19	1.24
9	I have a sense of self esteem	3.25	0.92
10	I am aware of who I am	3.30	0.85
11	I am aware of the things I can and cannot do	3.39	0.71
12	I believe I am going to succeed in my academic	3.57	0.69
13	I was my decision to enroll in the DED program	3.51	0.72
14	I believe I will be a better person after completing my studies	3.57	0.89

With regards to social agency, the results show that all the tested items have mean scores that fall in the 2.6 to 3.5 zone. Meaning, respondents generally perceive their social agency as being at a desirable level. They have a sense of responsibility and understand that their actions have a bearing on their environment; and perceiving their academic in this light could also significantly boost their academic resilience. The standard deviations of all the items is below 1.5; also a good indication of homogeniety.

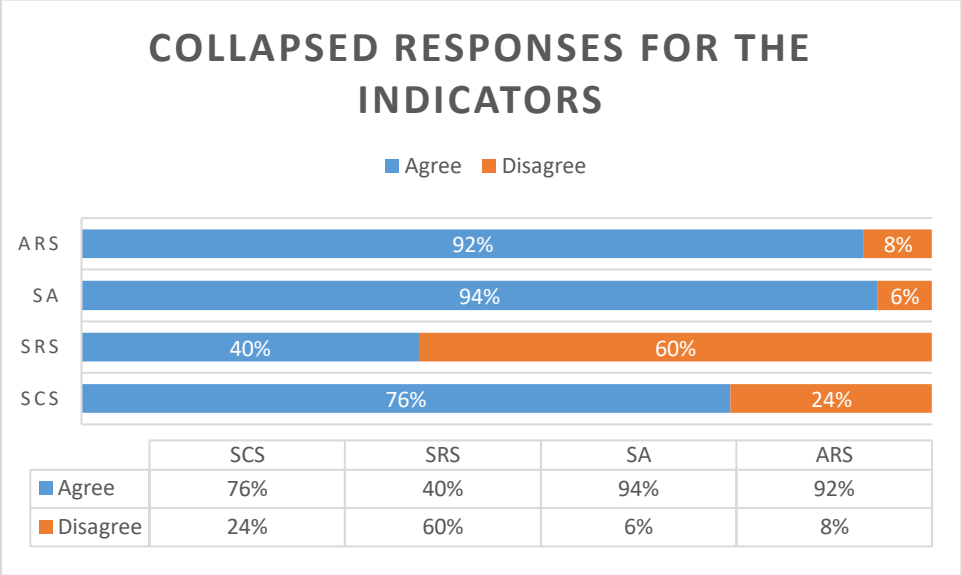
Academic Resilience

	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I do not accept the tutors' feedback	2.57	1.27
2	I use feedback to improve my work	2.84	1.21
3	I just give up	3.03	1.28
4	I use the situation to motivate myself	2.57	1.23
5	I will probably get annoyed	2.43	1.29
6	I will begin to think my chances of success at university were poor	2.65	1.15
7	I see the situation as a challenge	2.54	1.13
8	I will do my best to stop thinking negative thoughts	3.15	1.10

9	I see the situation as temporary	2.75	1.29
10	I will work harder	3.17	1.07
11	I will probably get depressed	2.13	1.28
12	I try to think of new solutions	2.49	1.31
13	I will be very disappointed	2.27	1.29
14	I blame the tutors	2.46	1.40
15	I will keep trying	2.94	1.29
16	I will not change my long-term goals and ambitions	3.44	0.84
17	I use my successes to help motivate myself	3.37	0.85
18	I will start to monitor my achievements and efforts	3.30	0.89
19	I will seek help from my tutors	3.17	0.89
20	I give myself encouragements	3.35	0.77
21	I stop myself from panicking	3.32	0.86
22	I try different ways to study	3.19	0.92
23	I will set my own goals for achievement	3.24	0.86
24	I seek encouragement from my family and friends	3.11	1.02
25	I try to think more about my strength and weaknesses to help me work better	3.24	0.93
26	I feel like everything was ruined	2.49	1.26
27	I will start to self-impose rewards and punishments depending on my performance	2.32	1.46
28	I will look forward to showing that I can improve myself	3.32	0.80

Finally, with specific regards to academic resilience, the results show that almost all the tested items (except items 5, 11, 13, and 27) have mean scores that fall in the 2.6 to 3.5 zone. This means that the respondents generally agree that they have some sense of academic resilience. The fact that the standard deviations of all the items is below 1.5 is also a good indication that if the right dispositions are taken, it could significantly improve the academic resilience of all the students.

The charts and tables below, examine the results of the variables pursuant to a principal component analysis and collapsed into simply "Agree" and "Disagree" responses, as well as some descriptive analysis to shed preliminary light on inferences relevant to gender and the IDP status of the students.



	SCS	*SRS*	*SA*	*ARS*
Mean	2.84126984	2.31746032	3.33333333	2.98412698

This table displays descriptive statistics that lay the grounds for the initial inferences regarding the statistical significance of the results displayed on the above chart. The means of ARS, SA, and SCS are in the zone of 2.6 to 3.5, the zone indicating agreement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Results from the study indicate that, while a significant majority of the students are socially connected to others, have a sense of social agency, they however do not receive adequate support from their immediate learning environment. Many indicated no access to internet facilities, inadequate provisions of study materials, little or no financial support and somewhate unfriendly social environment. Despite the lack of adequate institutional support, they still thrive well in their academic

With regards to the Distance Education program, we see that problems experienced by most displaced students of the Distance Education could be adjustment to the new environment (Utami & Helmi, 2017), further academic adjustments (Mudhovozi, 2012), and new financial arrangements. However, as students try to adapt to a new and stressful life, they strive to fulfill their tasks related to occupation, academy, and personal development. This implies that for life long learning to take place, academic stakeholders must play their roles right. Providing meaningful support to students in terms moral, material, financial, psychosocial, the government is providing academic access to all as stipulated in the SGD4 goals.

It has been sufficiently argued that, People who have a high sense of connectedness feel themselves belonging to a family, friends or a social group and define themselves as warm and positive (Lee R.M & Robbins, S.B.,1998). (Lee, R.M.,Keough, K.A & Sexton, J.D, 2002) also have a high level of self-esteem, self-worth, purpose and meaning in life since they receive social support and social acceptance from a close environment (Thoits, P.A., 2013). They have the ability to develop more meaningful relationships (Kaminski, J.W., Puddy, R.W., Hall, D.M., S.Y. Cashman, S.Y., A.E. Crosby, & Ortega, A.G., 2010).When students experience this type of relationships, they are likely to excel in their academic endeavors

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