A discussion on the research methodology for building a gender-responsive and inclusive education system in a fragile and conflict affected setting: A case of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

SANDERS, ZAGABE

University of Kinshasa, Institut Congolais pour le Développement du Capital Humain (ICDCH)

10 August 2023

A discussion on the research methodology for building a gender-responsive and inclusive education system in a fragile and conflict affected setting: A case of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

By SANDERS ZAGABE
Researcher
Institut Congolais pour le Développement du Capital Humain (ICDCH).

zagabes2014@gmail.com

University of Kinshasa

Abstract

It is widely agreed that gender equality has a huge impact on sustainable economic growth. however, the gap in gender equality is getting larger because of global challenges we are facing creating room for more context-adapted research. Indeed, the fragile and conflicting settings are unique in the way that people perceive life and each other because of violence, injustice, and high alignment with the local culture and beliefs. Furthermore, most research made in this kind of setting is not specific to solving the problem of creating policies and innovations that can be accepted and applied in the education system in the very context. The uniqueness of the D.R. Congo comes from the fact that the education system has been run by the private sector since its very beginning. Thus, the success of research for inclusive and safe schools for marginalized populations cannot be possible without including a variety of bodies, starting from government to religious organizations, and not leaving behind international organizations and other private entities. To cope with this singularity, the study must apply documentary, survey, longitudinal, cross-sectional, and trend methodologies. This methodology will allow the study to dig deep into the beliefs, culture, and habits that make school inaccessible to marginalized people. The method used in writing the article is an analysis of the English and Polish literature on the subject.

Key words: Fragile, Conflicts, methodology, methods, economic growth.

Introduction

According to Imed Bouchrika, Phd, a research methodology is the principle of the problem resolution in research. Furthermore, it tells how the researchers will collaborate with the people involved in the process to discover a hidden knowledge that project seeks to unveil. (Bouchrika, 2023). A bench of methodologies is applied in different cases to undertake and provide a better understanding a phenomenon, or interpretation of an issue. (Cohen et al. 2007). Indeed, the methodology and methods are used interchangeably while they are differents. Thus, the methodology is to be chosen with particular attention by considering to context in which the research is implemented.

In fact, methods are tips, techniques used for collecting data on ground and analyzing them. In the year 2023, the most use technics are the Focus groups discussion (FGD) 58%, followed by in

person in depth Interviews (IDIs) 42%, Telephones Interviews IDIs 27%. (Bouchrika, 2023). For instance, to understand obstacles faced by girls when it comes to accessing school DRC especially in most conflict affected settings, research was conducted using interviews with parents, questionnaires have been sent to 966 in eastern part of DRC in Fizi, Masisi, Uvira. A local organization which is a faith based was involved. (Bolton, 2020).

To conduct and succeed research, there is need to consult reports, annual evaluations, workbook of multilateral donors involved in education including UNESCO, UNGEI, USAID, FCDO, etc. This documentary research is relevant for resorting the historical culture that might prevent girls and other marginalized classes from accessing schools. In other side, the Global Partnership for Education have found that most works devoted to gender responsive education deserve a proper and specific process to be applied to bring the deepest challenges on the table for analysis and spire solutions. This situation triggered the creation of funds for research which aims at finding the most impacting approach, innovations to apply in fragile and conflicts affected settings (FCAS) for more inclusive and equal school for marginalized people. (GPE, 2019).

The "leaving no-one behind" study conducted by the GPE in 2019 has noticed in least developed countries including Kenya, Tanzania, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Central African Republic that although equality access is appearing in primary school, inequalities in terms of gender are still wide. For example, girls born from illiterate mothers a less likely to access school than boys. Furthermore, violence in the way to school or from teachers is a noticeable reason preventing girls as well as other marginalized people to access schools. (GPE,2019). In other countries, parents think that girls should be affected to home chores. (Cohen et al. 2007).

Therefore, there is a need to setup a context adapted, and specific methodology allowing researchers to dig deep and find out what are the obstacles to gender responsive pedagogy and what could be ideas, solutions, innovations, or policies to put in place to promote a more inclusive and equitable school environment for our youth and adolescents.

The obvious link between gender equality on the economic growth of a nation

A sustainable economic growth is a must for a country for which poverty reduction is the aim. Economic growth is the main factor for raising lifestyle, and certain keys component of society such as health, education, employment, and production facilities. (Poliduts 2015). The economic growth of a nation is estimated by the Gross domestic products (GDP), Gross National Production (GNP) as well as the GDP per capita which informs on the income earned by everyone. Although many economists expressed doubt about using the GDP as the main economic growth measurement, the GDP is the best estimator in terms of capturing the volume of goods and services produced by a national economy within a certain period of time. (Piętak, Lukasz 2014).

During her speech given to Korea Gender Equality Forum, Gita Gopinath, IMF First Deputy Managing Director stressed that gender equality is strongly tight to microeconomic and financial

stability. It also has the potential to stimulate the economic growth, boost both private and public sectors and reduce income inequality. (Gopinath 2022). Challenges such as covid-19 pandemic, Ukraine war, and insecurity has widened the gap of gender equality in the world. It is reported that, it may take 130 years to get the gap between male and female participation. (Gopinath 2022). In fact, the cost of economic loss as a result gender inequalities are estimated up to USD 12 trillion which represents the 16% of the global economy. (Ferrant and Kolev 2016).

In 2015, 176 countries have agreed together to end the gap between gender as well as gender-based violence by 2030. That is where the sustainable goals development was raised and adopted which the aim of providing equal access to goods and services in other to ensure that every human being can reach its full potential. From 2015-2019, commitment has been made by bilateral donors to provide more 50 billion US dollars to fight against sexual violence, gender discrimination and provide more space for women to find expression in real issues of their communities. (UNDP 2021).

There is an urgent need for building gender responsive policies that retain girls to schools, promote women work balance and fosters access of every social stratum within economic activity. (Ferrant and Kolev 2016). Bilateral donors should increase their participation in gender equality by financing gender inclusive and equal programs with a high impact on social inclusion. (UNDP 2023).

Fragile and conflict affected settings.

Scholars have different definitions of fragility and conflict, as the two concepts have evolved over time and space. (Green 2017). A working paper written by the Institute for Development Studies defines fragility as a situation in which a government is not able to provide basic commodities such as health, education, justice, etc. to its citizens. On the other side, conflict is a relationship where people are not following the same goals. (Green 2017). A fragile and conflict-affected setting is a context marked by violence in general, tribal violence, injustice, gender-based violence, failed infrastructure, and poor public administration.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the wealthiest countries in the world because of its phenomenal endowment in natural resources and water. Furthermore, the education system of the DRC is unique in the sense that the government has handed it over to religious organizations, among which are the Catholic Church, protestants, Muslims, and Kimbaguiste. In addition to that, the education system of the D.R. Congo is 70% financed by parents, resulting in failed participation of the government, whose role is more policymaking. (KANTE, 2013). It is noted that the demand for education has been growing since 1988, when most parents realized the importance of education for household survival. (World Bank, 2005).

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, gender issues are being addressed by the government as well as the international community. (JICA 2017). Although the rate of employment between men and women is almost equal, up to 70%, women are still experiencing difficulties accessing decent work. In fact, 80% of women's work is focused on agriculture because they have difficult

access to vital assets such as capital, training, materials, etc. Gender-based violence (GBV) is still present, especially in conflict-affected areas of the northeast of the country. Next to that, GBV is also noticed in households, and schools nationwide. (JICA 2017).

Methodology for a fragile and conflict setting and gender.

For a study of this kind, documentary, and survey methodologies, longitudinal, cross-sectional, and trend methodologies should be applied. (Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. 2002) In fact, the aim is to ensure that the study can reveal how the educational system has evolved over time and understand priorities for promoting inclusion and equality in the education system. In the same way, the survey will serve to understand beliefs, culture, social norms, and practices that prevent gender equality and inclusion (GEI) throughout the education system of the DRC. Understanding how gender aspects influence other aspects of life within a community is of huge importance, especially when the body seeks to establish inclusive policies. (Schamp et al., 2022)

The longitudinal methodology could accelerate the process of understanding the beliefs behind each policy, manual, teaching method, or substance sustaining the choice of actors throughout education system. The study shall be a path for understanding the culture prevailing throughout the system, the source of inequalities and gender-based violence within the education sector and providing tools to shift this tendency. Next to that, this research method should provide clear innovations, their scalability, and a pathway towards their implementation within the system.

Gender equality is worthwhile in the sense that it promotes full access to education and the opportunities that are available in a globalized world. Furthermore, this situation creates more wealth and then fosters the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDGs). (GPE 2019). In addition to that, it is known that gender disparities are found in digital platforms. (Ragetlie, Najjar, Oueslati, 2022). In fact, 342 million women around the world do not have access to digital facilities, meaning they do not use a smartphone. It is worth noting that creating a more inclusive and equitable world could not only reduces poverty but also increases the quality of life around the world, especially in FCAS settings.

Methods/techniques

The early stage of the study will be focused on documentary research consisting of gathering key documents including the national law applied to education, national education strategy 2021-2025, policies, communication materials, best practices, education guidelines, training of teacher materials, books, research reports, recorded interviews, videos, audios, discourses of ministers, presidents, and national budgets. The research will collect documents from international education organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, etc.

To secure sound research, the principal researcher is meant to identify and engage all relevant stakeholders in the research to promote smooth scalability. (GPE 2019) The research methods used for this study will consist of interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, observations, tests, and document reviews for historical knowledge about inclusion and gender considerations in the education system of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The study must ensure that all social strata or small groups are fairly represented within the process, including but not limited to students, school officials, teachers, members of the parliamentary house, and members of the ministries involved in education (the Ministry of primary and secondary education, the Ministry of Higher Education, and the Ministry of Vocational Training), as well as the Ministry of Gender and Families. (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007) The study sets up a crucial space for the inclusion of people living in hard-to-reach areas and marginalized subgroups, including but not limited to: people living with disabilities, women, boys, adolescents, orphans and HIV orphans, people with linguistic barriers, girls impregnated, LGBTQI+, etc.

Data collection

Given that the DRC is a fragile and conflict-affected country, it is important to ensure adequate sampling to secure a cost-effective study. (Prakash, Xavier, 2014). It is worthwhile to mention that there are several challenges to be solved along the way, including accessibility, which is due to weak infrastructure, especially in remote areas, insecurity, threatening belief systems, and the like. To build a representative sample of 31 million students, 675.609 teachers, schools, and inspectors, as well as each of the provinces where the project might be implemented, requires a solid team of investigators equally trained and empowered. (World Bank 2023)

Furthermore, key documents such as the statistical yearbook, which is published each year by the government, the data base of the Department of Control and Payroll Services for Teachers (SECOPE), demographics, and health (DHS), shall serve as good points to identify the real numbers with regards to out-of-school students per gender, achievement rate, teachers, salary, and key challenges that the system is currently facing. (Ministry of Education, 2023) To dig deep, investigators must consult reports from UN institutions such as UNESCO, UNGEI, Unwoman, and so on. In addition, the study should cover the Multiple Indicators Clusters Survey (MICS 2001–2021). The operational plans of each educational province will be considered for the study. In fact, the education system of the DRC is divided into educational provinces and each educational province has a specific operational action plan (PAO) that reflect the singularity the province.

The research may leverage the huge experience, documentation, tools, and innovations developed by the Hub Africa of the GPE. In the same vein, the researchers should work collaboratively with Uwezo in the eastern part of Africa, the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium, and the continental educational strategy for Africa to exchange experiences and strengthen knowledge of innovations to be tested to establish an inclusive and equitable educational system in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

To strengthen the veracity of the study, surveys should be conducted through questionnaires conceived around the idea of gender inclusion and equality. A questionnaire will be administered to members of the ministries, provincial departments, the mutuality of teachers, and members of the small groups that bring dynamism to the system. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) will be conducted by the research team throughout the educational system according to each group's gender, social class, role played within the educational system, and even the parents of students.

Team of researchers

The research project would be carried out by a team of investigators who identified communities concerned by the study. The early stage will focus on the recruitment of the team after a rigorous test of capacity. The key skills of members of the project may include local language mastery, knowledge of the local culture and behavior, and working experience with similar types of research programs. Next, the entire team of investigators must go through capacity building so they can administer questionnaires, interview participants, and execute data collection with total respect for the research norms. (GPE 2019)

In addition, the team is to be reinvigorated by the collaboration with international platforms of gender inclusion and equality, such as UNGEI, the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), the UN Statistics Division, and other global frameworks for enriching the research results and data adjustment. The project needs to collaborate with local organizations that work closely with education system for identifying of investigators and key stakeholders.

Innovations

To promote gender-responsive policies and social inclusion in schools or in the entire system, the project needs to identify focal points from the national ministry of gender in each implementing province, the cabinet of the Special Advisor to the President of D.R. Congo on Youth, Gender, and Violence Against Women. Also, local education groups and key decision-makers in areas of sexual health, technology, and the newly installed ministry of digital affairs. This is to culminate in the creation of a multisectoral committee made up of champions identified within the sphere of influence of the education system. The multisectoral committee will make it easy to scale innovation from the top to the bottom, or vice versa.

The next is the holding of a series of capacity-building activities for teachers, inspectors, and champions of gender-responsive pedagogy to foster inclusion and fight against violence based on gender, income level, language, ethnic orientation, or other characteristics. The local media will ensure the spread of innovation produced through this project. Therefore, the project will leverage the power of local media, such as radio in remote areas where people gather to listen to news at certain times of the day and social media in urban areas.

Given that the most important part of the education finances of D.R. Congo come from parents, the project will lead an advocacy effort for a government budget lift in favor of education. This effort will join those from international and local organizations working in the education area in

upgrading the education system by supplying the necessary means towards the implementation of the education strategy. The budget allocation should follow a gender-responsive path by supporting schools, building infrastructure, promoting the sexual health system, and other measures that ensure participation.

The parents surveyed provided more clarity in their choice of "who to send to school". Indeed, in the case of DRC, boys are more likely to go to school than girls, as far as a choice must be made. The project intends to offer capacity building in gender-responsive schooling to men and women to establish a group of ambassadors for them to train and sensitize other parents in the GEI schooling system. This innovation will be tested and presented at an evaluation meeting that is going to gather key decision-makers in education, health, professional training, and so on.

Cross-sectional innovation will be conducted during the project implementation by offering capacity building to students, teachers, and other key stakeholders in the education system in the use of digital technologies to promote an equitable and inclusive education. Although girls' weak participation in school activities is mentioned, the project intends to provide room for other marginalized groups. It is worth mentioning that opening students or teachers to digital could lead to greater access for girls and people with less mobility to education.

Conclusion

To build an insightful research paper on what methodology to choose when it comes to promoting a safe, inclusive, and equitable school system in fragile and conflict-affected settings such as the D.R. Congo, there is a need to reflect on the context. The research must take time to go into the very culture that fuels the habit of preventing access to school for marginalized people. The result of this research should provide innovations and policies that are scalable and easy to adopt by the education ecosystem in general.

Next, embracing the uniqueness of the education ecosystem is one of the keys to bring about the strong results from the research because the most relevant answers about the education system will be found in the private sector, especially the religious movements and parents. In addition, investigators must understand the local culture to organize data collection properly. For instance, in some locations, men and women could not find themselves together for a focus group discussion. Having this in mind would pave the way for more productive research activities.

References

Bouchrika, (2023), Ph.D. How to Write Research Methodology: Overview, Tips, and Techniques.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2002). Research methods in education. routledge.

Bolton, L. (2020). Barriers to education for girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo. K4D Helpdesk Report 750. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies.

Achieving Gender Equality in and through Education, Global partnership for education, July 2019.

THE WORLD BANK Washington, D.C. (2005) , Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo *Priorities and Options for* Regeneration, a world bank country study.

KANTE IBRAHIM, (2013), why has the Democratic Republic of the Congo outsourced its responsibility to educate its people?

Taherdoost, H. (2016). Sampling methods in research methodology; how to choose a sampling technique for research. *How to choose a sampling technique for research (April 10, 2016)*.

Green, D. (2017). Theories of change for promoting empowerment and accountability in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Country Gender Profile, Democratic Republic of the Congo, March 2017, Japan International Cooperation Agency（JICA）.

Schamp, J., Vanderplasschen, W., & Meulewaeter, F. (2022). Treatment providers' perspectives on a gender-responsive approach in alcohol and drug treatment for women in Belgium. Frontiers in Psychiatry, 13, 941384.

Ragetlie, R., Najjar, D., & Oueslati, D. (2022). "Dear Brother Farmer": Gender-Responsive Digital Extension in Tunisia during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Sustainability*, *14*(7), 4162.

UNDP, WeBelongAfrica, UNDP HIV, Health & Development team, Africa, 2022.

Ministry of education of D.R. Congo, SECOPE, https://www.eduquepsp.education/direction/secope.php. 2023.

Remarks by Gita Gopinath, IMF First Deputy Managing Director, Delivered at the Korea Gender Equality Forum, September 27 - 28, 2022.

United Nations Development Programme, Why Gender Equality Leads to Sustainable Economic Growth, December 2021.