Resilience and care: How teachers deal with situations of adversity in the teaching and learning environment[1]

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the notion of teacher resilience, which has attracted much attention on teaching and teacher education in contemporary research, this article discusses manifestations of resilience and care in the professional practices of teachers in one school in Uganda, while navigating the challenging and competing demands of the job, their personal welfare and social needs. I draw on in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) with 32 teachers to show that teachers are not always indifferent to their job obligations and do not lack commitment to quality teaching as oftentimes presented in public discourse. I examine acts of professionalism such as care for learners and resilience that manifest both implicitly and explicitly, when faced with adverse conditions. By exploring their working lives, I present the various factors that lead to the successful and sustainable long-standing careers as teachers. I argue against the dominant discourse of criticism that is harmful and counterproductive to their self-esteem, morale and enthusiasm. The article suggests positive feedback that motivates self-evaluation of both strengths and weaknesses, and recognition of small acts of resilience and initiatives undertaken by individual teachers as a way of uplifting the public image of teaching.

Keywords: resilience, care, emotional competence, teacher motivation, school-based practices

INTRODUCTION

…For us, you cannot lecture to a primary 1 kid. You can't. You have to make a lesson plan. Then you have to make attractive teaching materials. You can't stand before a primary 1 child and you expect that child to look at you without a material in your hands. You have to involve those children in a lesson. In other words, it has to be a practical lesson for such a child to learn…Then every day you have to lesson plan even the teaching materials… which teaching materials you do not even have, because the school can't provide the materials you need…It doesn't have money there. Because [with] UPE [grant] takes months and months without coming…They can provide some markers, manilas, yet for you, you need specific things for specific learning areas and for specific concepts to be grasped. Then you start saying I have to be creative. I am a teacher; I have to be creative. Then you start thinking of which instruction material to use. Then you begin behaving like a mad woman…going to the dustbins to look for used straws, plastic bottles… (Lisa)

In the excerpt above, Lisa, a teacher of primary one children emphasises creativity, a resiliency strategy that she employs while going about the complexities of her work of teaching in a stressful and deprived school environment. Research has helped explain the challenging nature and conditions of schools in Uganda such as heavy workloads, lack of support, challenging learner behaviour, meeting the complex and diverse needs of learners and low public image (Aguti & Fraser, 2005; Busingye & Najjuma, 2015), but little is done to understanding the actual dilemmas or difficulties encountered and the different acts of resilience and care that teachers depict in dealing with the complexities in their daily professional encounters. Cognisant of most countries' policy agendas that put top priority on teacher quality, this article is concerned with the phenomenon of criticism that tends to dominate contemporary public discourses on the teachers in most Sub-Saharan Africa countries where the image of teachers is presented as 'failing' (Bennell, 2004; Jansen, 2004; Rogers & Vegas, 2009; Griffin, 2012; Tao, 2013). The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ 2005-2010) blames teachers for taking more interest in personal welfare and for lacking commitment and dedication to quality teaching (SACMEQ 2005-2010). Studies in the Republic of South Africa and Tanzania position teachers at the forefront for declining education quality and the collapse of the education system (Bennell, 2004; Halsey & Vegas, 2009; Griffin, 2012; Tao, 2013).

In Uganda, contrary to the above excerpt that presents Lisa as a resilient and caring teacher who plans, and reflects creatively before conducting her lessons, teachers are criticised for lacking practical skills, creativity, knowledge and motivation to engage meaningfully with the communities or influence change in society (Kasente, 2010; UWEZO Uganda, UWEZO 2013; *Daily Monitor*, 2019). My thesis is that it is not possible to improve teaching and the status of the teaching profession with disregard for the struggles that teachers encounter in their professional practices. Acknowledging and honouring the work teachers do, including their abilities, achievements and strategies for dealing with adversity, are vital for cultivating a sense of worth and continued commitment to the profession (Ellis & Bernhardt, 1992). Scholars point to a substantial link between the teacher's emotional competence (SEC) and wellbeing to classroom teaching and learner outcomes (Jennings et al., 2013).

Jennings et al. (2013) believe that social recognition improves the teacher's ability to develop and maintain a well-managed learning environment that provides optimal and instructional support to learners. Accordingly, social emotional competence (SEC) mediates the teacher-student relationship as well as classroom management; SEC also impacts social emotional learning (SEL). Hargreaves (2001) contends that the emotional practice radiates through a person's body and streams of experience, leading to the culmination of thoughts, feelings and actions. Similarly, Fullan (2009) and Sahlberg (2011) point to the importance of strong public support and a broad agenda that enhance teachers' emotional wellbeing and competence. It is argued that teachers who experience more positive recognition develop positive emotions in their work lives, are more resilient in responding to work stressors, and able to create and maintain supportive learning environments.

In contrast, negative discourses and standards-based cognitive reforms, although perceived as being significant for school improvement in some circumstances (Dworkin, 2001; Hargreaves, 2001; Jansen, 2006), contribute largely to challenging professional contexts that exacerbate individual teacher demotivation, burnout and loss of morale (Dworkin, 2001). The article is concerned with highlighting the acts of resilience that sustain teachers working in adversity. The picture that emerged from interactions with this group of teachers showed that some of the assumptions held about the teachers are overgeneralised, biased and misleading. Thus, the article aims at sharing school-based practices on what makes a difference in the lives of teachers who persist in adversity, which could help overturn the dominant negative discourse about the teaching profession.

RESILIENCY, CHALLENGES AND DILEMMAS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept 'resilience' according to Masten (2014) has roots in the Latin verb 'resilire' which means to rebound. Rooted in research and theory in child development, clinical sciences and the study on individual difference (Masten, 2014), it has been adopted by many fields concerned with how complex systems anticipate, adapt, recover and learn in the context of major threats, surprises and disasters. In the social sciences, resilience is used in studies that attempt to understand how people escape harmful effects of severe adversity, cope well, bounce back or even thrive (Masten, 2014: 8). In psychological studies, resilience is defined as a personal quality of individuals faced with challenging circumstances such as chronic illness, abuse, or poverty (Yonezawa, Jones & Singer, 2011: 916). For Rutter (2012), resilience involves processes and turning points where engagement with stress serves to prepare the individual for better subsequent adaptation.

Research on teacher resilience is a relatively recent area of study mainly triggered by the growing problem on improving teacher motivation and retention (Beltman, Mansfield & Price, 2011; Mansfield et al., 2012; Clara, 2017). In Uganda, as mentioned earlier, more is documented about the challenging nature of schools, but no data are available on actual practices of teachers in enduring unfavourable circumstances (Wabule, 2017). And as practitioners in which various stakeholders – citizens, taxpayers and consumers – have interest (Kennedy, 1991), all these construct for them work environments with multiple rules to follow and expectations to meet. Of course, most demands on the teachers are often contradictory and difficult to meet as they practice their crafts. Consequently, as frontline workers in delivering education services (Kennedy, 1991), teachers have to negotiate compromises among varying interests, constraints, and regulations as well as balancing the need for survival with the need to grow and develop over time. Yet the much needed support for teachers is lacking, and little attention is paid to understanding the actual dilemmas encountered in their daily professional practice (Fullan, 2010; Wang, Spalding, Odell, Klecka & Lin 2010).

Specifically, in Sub-Saharan Africa economies, little is documented on what sustains and enables teachers to deal with the challenges faced in their daily work encounters (Tao, 2013). A question of concern, thus, is how the public expects teachers to maintain their self-esteem and efficacy when no one seems to understand their dilemmas. Whereas teachers have a responsibility in sustaining some level of professionalism that could improve the image of teaching (Campbell, 2003), they in part feel embarrassed due to continued criticism and in part abandoned because there is no space created for them to share information on either their challenges or school-based good practices (Razer & Friedman, 2017).

Situating my argument in the international research literature that emphasises appreciation and recognition as important incentives for enhancing morale, enthusiasm and a strong connection between teachers and the communities in which they work (Sahlberg, 2011; Fullan, 2009; Ellis & Bernhardt, 1992; Schön, 1987; Renz, 2006; Dworkin, 2001), I argue for appreciation of the acts of resilience and care among the teachers as being beneficial for enhancing their motivation. Research shows that recognition offers a valuable contribution to overcoming teacher isolation as well as the lack of connection and fragmentation in their practices (Heikkinen, 2003; Willis & Varner, 2010). Renz (2006) contends that lack of emotional, political and social recognition undermines the factors that build moral capacities and ethics, which prevents individuals from performing well or from developing their full potential. For Schön (1987), professionals are participants in a large societal conversation, whereby the public image and policies can either give a sense of pride, or serve to put down the profession. Thus, in situations where teachers are portrayed as playing their part well, it has a positive effect on their self-perception and supports self-reflexiveness. In contrast, negative feedback leads teachers to judge their effectiveness in the same way as they are evaluated by the public (Schön, 1987; Van Veen, 2008).

Understanding resiliency for the teaching profession

Resiliency is believed to be a key factor in school and teacher reform and has emerged as an important field of inquiry in contemporary research (Patterson, Patterson & Collins, 2002; Mansfield et al., 2012; Clara, 2017). Mansfield et al. (2012) acknowledge that different circumstances influence how resilience is described by the community and the teaching profession, thus, accounting for the complexity and multifaceted understandings of the concept. This article acknowledges the link between teacher resilience and particular contexts to show that there is no standard measure of teacher resilience. Rather, it examines the different approaches that are adopted by Ugandan teachers by valuing their own perspectives on their practice, their insights and their reflections on their lives (Stanford, 2001) depending on the situation and their state of distress.

In the teaching professions, Mansfield et al. (2012) identified four broad dimensions of teacher resilience based on Kumpfer's (2002) framework: professional related dimension, emotional dimension, motivational dimension and social dimension. From these, they conceptualise resiliency as a process that emerges in the interaction over time between the individual and the external environment. According to Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker (2000), resiliency involves a dynamic process encompassing position and adoption within a context of significant adversity, while Patterson, Patterson and Collins (2002: 3) regard resiliency as the ability of teachers to use energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adverse conditions. A common thread is that resilient teachers are those who see themselves as having a positive capacity to cope with stress and direct their own lives. Characteristics such as insightfulness and independent relationships, initiative, creativity, humour, morality, persistence, determination and optimism are all linked to resilient teachers (Patterson et al., 2002).

Patterson and others identified seven key strengths that bolster teacher resiliency: 1) being positive in spite of adversity; 2) staying focused on what you care about; 3) flexibility in how you achieve your goals; 4) taking charge; 5) creating a climate of personal and professional support; 6) maintaining high expectations for success for students, teachers and parents; and 7) creating a shared responsibility and participation. These characteristics acknowledge professional resilience as an involving process, mode of interaction with events, and interplay between individuals and their supportive contexts. The positive elements portrayed of resilient teachers also resonate with Ungar's (2012) thesis of resilience being embedded in the local opportunities for adaptation.

According to Mansfield et al. (2012), teachers who possess characteristics of resilience are more likely to persevere in adverse conditions, find it easier to adapt to change, and are more inclined to the profession. In their view, attributes such as a strong sense of competence, efficacy and accomplishment, purposeful career decision making, self-insight, professional freedom, agency and the use of coping strategies manifest. They identify factors that contribute to teacher resilience and sustain them in the face of difficulties to include personal strengths such as altruism, strong intrinsic motivation, perseverance and persistence, optimism, willingness to take risks, emotional intelligence, and flexibility. Literature also identifies particular coping skills associated with teacher resilience as proactive problem-solving and help-seeking skills, strong interpersonal skills that enable the development of social support networks, and the ability to accept failure and move as enablers for teachers to bounce back despite the challenges encountered (Mansfield et al., 2012; Oswald, Johnson & Howard, 2003).

From another angle, Pollard et al. (2014) and Campbell (2003) emphasise self-reflection as specifically vital for developing sociocultural awareness, contextual, interpersonal skills, self-understanding, risk taking and professional efficacy for teachers. Borrowing from the abovementioned framework for teacher resilience, this article is concerned with explaining the qualities that enable Ugandan teachers to maintain commitment to teaching, the strategies they use to adopt in the face of adverse conditions, including

the ability to solve problems, and the capacity to successfully overcome personal vulnerabilities and environmental stressors.

METHODOLOGY

The article uses part of data generated from a larger qualitative study undertaken between 2012 and 2015 on teacher professional integrity (Wabule, 2017). Because of the range of data, this article is largely based on a question that aimed to understand the challenges and dilemmas encountered by the teachers and to share experiences and examples of how they manoeuvre through dilemma situations (Wabule, 2017).

Six institutions – four primary schools, namely, Nakasero, Kabojja, St Edward and Bunyinza primary schools and then Nyondo teachers and Ggaba teacher training colleges – were selected to represent the rural and urban divides. However, this article is based on findings at Nakasero, an urban public primary school where the major part of the study took place. The intention of the study was neither to draw a comparison between rural and urban schools nor to generalise data but rather to cater for the urban and rural differentials (Krueger, 1997). The article mainly draws on cases derived from in-depth interview narratives and focus-group discussions with 32 teachers purposively selected. Most teachers had over 20 years' experience (Creswell, 2015) and had taught in more than one school. The majority of them had education past the Grade 3 teaching certificate, as required by government for one to teach in a primary school (Aguti & Fraser, 2005; Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), 2012). The interviews were unstructured (Creswell, 2015; Riessman, 2008) and started by asking general research questions such as: What are your perceptions on the conduct of teachers?; Why do the teachers behave the way they do?; and, What school-based practices help bring about improvements in the teacher's conduct? (Wabule, 2017).

All participants involved in the study voluntarily gave their informed consent (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2010) and were informed that they were free to withdraw at any time. This is grounded in the view that the views and decisions of participants are honoured (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010). Besides, I was conscious about balancing my own interests as a researcher against any threat or harm that the research could cause, given the authoritarian and hierarchical nature of the school's management. The interviews that lasted for 60 to 90 minutes were audio and video recorded so as to avoid any distortions in the data generated (Flick, 2018). These were transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were then uploaded to the analysis software ATLAS.ti (Flick, 2018). Engaging with basic questions of what, how, who, and for what (Flick, 2018) during open coding led to familiarity with data, facilitated making comparisons, clarifying relationships and merging codes that appeared to be similar. The meaning-making process generated concepts and rich descriptions that were grouped into themes from which the study results were presented. Data were validated at four different workshops conducted at different phases of the study and at feedback meetings with a smaller group of selected teachers and other education stakeholders before writing the chapters to ensure that the themes adopted during data analysis were relevant to the study problem (Wabule, 2017). The validation exercise also facilitated interactions and provided useful insights that guided the entire research process (Wabule, 2017). I use excerpts from interviews and Focus Group Discussion FGDs to illustrate the participants' voices and pseudonyms are used to conceal their identity.

FINDINGS

The findings in this article emanate from a range of views from the teachers that demonstrate multifaceted approaches employed in coping with adversity in their career. The frustrations with the low status and harsh conditions often found in schools lead many teachers to stray from their professional obligations. Thus, although some of their strategies may seem to be detrimental to effective teaching and learning, they

were nevertheless interpreted by the teachers as mechanisms through which they adapt to the challenging nature of their work. Such strategies enabled teachers keep a positive outlook despite the odds, rather than being disgruntled, filled with rage and hopelessness.

General elements of resilience in the way the teachers perceive their role

The teachers that participated in this study perceived their role as being crucial to the country's development. This strand of thinking was emphasised by the majority of the teachers who felt that they were the makers of society. Thus, expressions depicting teaching as a noble profession featured prominently in interviews (Wabule, 2017). Many participants highlighted the key roles of a teacher as that of a guide who is responsible for enforcing change among the young, a moral generator who instils discipline in children, a parent, advisor, counsellor, planner and role model. Some teachers equated their role to that of a 'babysitter', explaining that they had the responsibility to ensure a holistic transformation of the life of the learner. Similar to what Patterson, Patterson and Collins (2002) emphasise, the teachers indicated that the purpose of teaching is to prepare the child for a holistic life in society. Thus, for teachers like Noel, values such as self-drive, being concerned about the children, mental preparation, having a sense of duty and understanding one's role as a servant, cultivated in him a positive attitude despite the challenges that he faced:

> I have a self-drive in me and I have feelings for the child… I also have mental preparation before I meet children… I may not get monetary values per day but I have a sense of duty. It is just a question of adjusting one's thinking… why I am here. (Noel)

The teachers were found to be particularly committed to the social justice aspect of teaching children (Patterson et al., 2011), despite the lack of emotional support from stakeholders in the environments where they work. While stressing the importance of teachers, they fondly mentioned the National Teacher's Union slogan: 'The nation is, because teachers are' by explaining that they had a responsibility to nurture children into becoming productive citizens who could create a positive change in society. Their submissions conform to international goals which stress the developmental roles of teachers (UNESCO, 2014) such as imparting knowledge and skills to help learners develop both the desire and ability to learn and to develop their individual personality through the formation of positive and acceptable social values. Such positive identity with their roles serves as a protective factor that sustains the teachers in the professions despite the odds (Clara, 2017) as discussed next.

Qualities that enable Ugandan teachers to maintain commitment to teaching

Although specific teaching contexts and cultures influence the mode of resilience (Beltman, Mansfield & Price 2011; Hargreaves, 2001), at a more personal level, most teachers revealed that their love for the job motivated them to teach. Their interpretations were inclined to the intrinsic factor of gaining job satisfaction after doing a 'good' job and attaining desirable outcomes (Noels, Clément & Pelletier, 1999; Guay, Boggiano & Vallerand 2001). Racheal explained that she found her job fulfilling and loved it more especially when the children performed well:

> I love teaching, I love teaching… I love the profession especially when children do well, I get motivated, and when they are performing poorly I feel bad and I normally look for ways of making them improve. That is the motivation. I think… I like my job. I don't know why I like it, but I like it. I come, teach and go away and the things which make me very happy is when those learners pass. When they perform well, that is when I get encouraged. (Racheal)

Enjoying the job, according to Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011), provides an important motivational and emotional dimension of resilience in that it helps the teachers to adapt using a range of strategies

when responding to different situations. For Racheal above, love for the job enables her to focus on things that make her happy, thus, maintaining enthusiasm. Racheal defined her success in terms of student achievement, which resonates with studies (Noels, Clément & Pelletier, 1999; Guay, Boggiano & Vallerand, 2001) that point to student's achievement as a motivation for the teachers to push on.

A considerable number of teachers shared positive experiences in their careers and counted themselves as successful, even though their conceptions of resilience differed by career stage, experience and achievement (Mansfield et al., 2012). Teachers who had stayed longer in the profession assert that through commitment and hard work, they had achieved as much as their colleagues in other professions. Personal narratives showed that the teachers who embraced positive elements such as respect and the value of hard work brought about improvement in their lives and gained material and educational benefits. Kintu, who had worked as a primary school teacher for the preceding 37 years, advised younger teachers to take charge of their destinies by having, for example, realistic expectations and goals. In his view, teaching is rewarding with proper planning. He considered the values of creativity, discipline and self-reliance as earning teachers respect in society:

> I have got a house in Kampala [city]. I live in my own house. I bought 10 acres of land out of my job, but I didn't cheat anybody. Other people fail to live within the limits of their economy because they stretch to live other people's lives. Teachers should adjust and live within their own means… they should not live the life of other people. (Kintu)

Further, Kintu urged teachers to be more creative and innovative while budgeting for their limited resources by reminding them that no amount of money is enough. Dani, a headteacher, advised teachers to utilise their free time by engaging in constructive activities that could supplement their income rather than presenting themselves as vulnerable. Many teachers disclosed that they benefited greatly by engaging in a range of activities such as farming and private businesses, which of course, had negative repercussions such as giving less priority to the teaching responsibility (Worldbank, 2007).

Wilhem, another participant, acknowledged the value of peer guidance and healthy competition as important for leading a focused life. He urged fellow teachers to strive towards socioeconomic development by learning and adapting certain practices from their colleagues. He revealed that collegial guidance and advice had motivated him to work hard:

> There is this issue whereby, when you get to a certain community, sometimes community influences you. When I got here someone told me, 'You have come here a teacher, you need to work hard, you need to make your life better'. So that trickled my mind. (Wilhem)

Wilhem's and Kintu's narratives point to the importance in the school community of role models who would guide and inspire other teachers to take a positive direction. Willingness to seek help and take advice from others is an important aspect of social resilience and for strengthening emotional bonds (Hargreaves, 2001). Mansfield et al. (2012) contend that constructive advice was specifically necessary for novice teachers to adapt to prevailing circumstances. Wilhem, while declaring his personal achievements, advised that teachers should endeavour to exploit the available opportunities within their work environment instead of being afraid and self-pitying. By holding that teachers should embrace hard work and healthy competition, Wilhem pointed to the idea of self-belief and confidence, which according to Clara (2017) are necessary for effective goal setting.

Similarly, Racheal believed that teachers may achieve great benefits if they are more creative and innovative. While recounting experiences on the differences between teachers of her school time and the teachers of today, she commented:

These teachers are so instrumental. They are so instrumental in that some… most of them have come from one level to another. For example, they have interest in studying. You find a teacher… in fact in the villages you find people saying, 'A mere teacher having a degree?' They are so instrumental that they even have some small businesses running aside with their salary so that they can improve on their wellbeing. They are not stagnant like the teachers of those days… (Racheal)

Whereas several strategies that were undertaken by the teachers to improve their wellbeing often led to negative consequences for job effectiveness, multitasking and adjusting to different roles keeps teachers positive and optimistic despite challenges, as pointed out by Clara (2017).

Strategies teachers use to adjust in the face of adverse conditions

a) Connecting with significant stakeholders

Firstly, holding school events such as music, dance and drama, open days, science fairs and sports days and inviting parents to participate helped to bridge the relational and communication gap between the teachers and parents. Although not all parents turned up for school events, parental participation in school events boosted the morale of both the teachers and children, and provided opportunities for the teachers to meet with parents to discuss children's concerns.

Secondly, in-depth interviews with the teachers indicated that teachers established connections and networks with peers and teachers in other schools. This helped in providing each other with the emotional support necessary for career development and growth into durable and reflective practitioners:

We look at other schools, what do they do? You know you cannot be an island. What does Greenhill do that can be brought this way? Much as it is a private school that promotes its own standard, but somehow, somewhere we meet… 'What made you get these good first grades?' Sometimes when it is like teachers' day or you meet anywhere, you discuss and you get those tips… when we give extra time to these children, even the slow learners catch up, slowly by slowly. (Susan)

Seeking out what colleagues in other institutions do to improve performance mirrors an element of care and willingness to help children do well (Campbell, 2003). It also shows teachers in different spaces seeking different expertise to collaborate with one another on issues and problems emerging from teaching practice, which is vital for professional improvement.

b) 'Exploiting the available opportunities' and 'making ends meet'

The above phrases were frequently used by the teachers to describe how they deal with adverse times. Exploiting the available opportunities enabled them to survive in the complex system. To elaborate on this, they disclosed that they engaged in a wide range of activities side by side with their normal work routine in order to 'make ends meet', by, for instance, engaging in small businesses inside or outside the school. Most common was that teachers undertook the 'risk' of private tutoring of learners at an extra cost. It was regarded as a risk and unprofessional because teachers were aware that the government did not approve of the practice.

Other teachers had attempted writing books but were frustrated because primary school textbooks never attracted a large market. For those with gardens, as is the case with their village folks, they spent time cultivating their gardens in order to get something to eat. Others sought more qualifications through upgrading with the optimism of finding better paying jobs to improve their living conditions. Although these practices actually reduced the presence of teachers at schools and led to committing less time to their professional duties such as forging friendships or taking interest in the non-academic needs of the learners, the teachers perceived exploiting available opportunities as a worthy risk. On the other hand, 'making

ends meet' was nuanced by the teachers to mean the socioeconomic distress that they encountered, as well as their daily struggles to cope with the situation. In essence, this concept was used to imply difficult experiences but also to explain the different survival mechanisms. Susan narrated that the teachers were 'chasing deals' to make ends meet, implying that it was inevitable for them to sacrifice their professional duties in order to attend to personal problems.

> There is no way you can sit comfortably in class whole heartedly when you have your own child who is in secondary, because if it is primary a teacher can take his child here [primary] but a child who is in secondary and is still at home or a child at university and he would be asked to apply for a dead semester because his fees has not been paid… So, because we feel that we are lacking a lot… somehow one has to make ends meet. (Susan)

Other teachers just like Susan admitted that they found considerable difficulties when budgeting their modest income so as to fulfil their personal needs and, at the same time, meet work-related costs. For instance, most schools in the country did not provide accommodation to teachers. Therefore, 'making ends meet' was even more challenging for those teachers who lived away from school premises. For instance, James explained that he woke up earlier to catch a morning bus despite the inconveniences:

> I come from far and I have a problem of traffic jam, and the moment you delay, you find that a vehicle takes about two hours on the way. For my case, I come from (place). I wake up very early in the morning and because of the little money… I use the bus. However, they can stop there [bus stop] for other people to fill the bus, and sometimes I reach here very late… The bus delays at the stage. You have left early but the bus delays, and you cannot walk out because you have already been issued a receipt. (James)

James' conclusion indicates that he values being at school on time, a quality of many teachers, which the public often overlooks.

Manifestations of resilience through care for children

Contrary to the negative public discourses, teachers perceived their role as parental and understood the school to serve as children's second homes. Many teachers just like Lisa were found to act as loving parents and their work highlighted virtues of care and passion (Noddings, 2015; Fried, 2001) and concern for learners. Teachers made efforts to understand a child's circumstances and made every effort to assist them in tackling their problems.

Susan pointed out that the teachers had the goal of helping children excel academically. Although her narrative indicated that complying with school regulations like providing extra lessons to children had elements of benefiting teachers, it had a positive influence on the teachers' conduct and benefited the children to a certain extent. By assigning extra time, children were guided and counselled on both academic and social issues. Successively, children were inspired to be open, confident and assertive. The teachers also encouraged them, especially the girl children, to report issues that violated their rights. Attending to children's problems had facilitated a trusting relationship between children and teachers. A case in point was narrated by Patrick, a teacher of Shallot, a young girl of 12 years whose mother had forced her into prostitution for survival. Confiding in her teacher showed the trust that learners have for their teachers (Wabule, 2017). It is the sort of trust can only be achieved when the teachers have genuine interest in the learners and if teachers are seen to be approachable, kind and willing to help. Creating ample time with the learners according to Susan, helped teachers to understand the children's problems, leading to a successful learning environment:

Actually here we stress that when you see something wrong in class and it is affecting children, then you must spare some time to counsel these children. It is not only academics. We emphasise that to an extent we should go informal, play the role of parents. So I say, 'Each one of you should be disciplined. You are supposed to behave like this as a girl and like this as a boy.' We go back to what the parents are supposed to do and the moment you do this then your lesson becomes successful. (Susan)

The teachers disclosed that they used private schools that were performing well as benchmarks and borrowed their best practices in order to keep the academic standards high. Creating peer networks with colleagues in well-performing private schools as commended by Beltman et al. (2012) facilitated sharing information on new strategies. Consequently, daily morning work, homework and weekend assignments were given to pupils in order to keep the performance at a relatively higher standard. Furthermore, children were required to have extra exercise books for practising spelling and handwriting, and they were encouraged to do independent study and research. Giving extra time and work to children helped them, especially the slow learners, to improve. Although extra assignments were given to children at an extra cost and did not benefit all of them (Wabule, 2017), the teachers reasoned that it was inevitable to charge a modest amount of money due to the costs incurred in printing.

Additionally, the teachers stressed that they checked pupils' books regularly to ensure that all assignments were done and marked. They pointed out that it was compulsory for parents to comment and sign the children's books on a daily basis in order to get them involved in monitoring the academic progress of their children. Besides signing children's books, the new parents were initiated into the school's culture at the time their children joined the school. The headteacher reported that specific meetings were conducted with new parents and then separate meetings with parents of children in all classes to introduce them to the teachers of their children. The parents were also occasionally invited to discuss issues concerning individual learners, like making decisions on promotion of a child to another class. Communication and interaction encouraged dialogue between parents and teachers on children's issues, including those children who were identified as academically weak. Teachers reported that children conducted themselves well when they understood that closer relationships existed between their teachers and their parents.

The deputy headteacher explained that teachers endeavoured to help children with poor academic grades and those with other social challenges. She narrated that teachers often intervened to establish reasons for the behaviour of children, which efforts helped children to adjust both socially and academically:

This is a Universal Primary Education (UPE) school, children are supposed to be welcomed anytime. As a result, the school has a collection of children with different academic backgrounds and different ways of behaviour. So as a teacher, I struggle to make sure that we put this child somewhere and fit in society and fit in that very class. (deputy headteacher)

The narrative from the deputy head teacher indicates the readiness of the teachers to welcome and help children, thus, confirming a caring attitude that teachers have for the learners. Showing a caring attitude according to Pollard et al. (2014) helps in the development of positive experiences in children. They also become better learners when they feel welcome in the school or classroom.

Apart from responding to children's academic needs, the interviewed teachers explained that individual teachers extended material help to vulnerable children. They did this by encouraging well-wishers who were more advantaged to contribute material items that they no longer needed to those in need. The teachers were glad that the children occasionally contributed modest amounts of money to buy shoes and clothes for a friend in need, which in their view, was instrumental to inculcating in children a spirit of giving, sharing and concern for others.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Often when discussing how to improve the quality of education and schools, explanations via tangible resources such as infrastructural development, teaching and learning equipment as well as teaching skills are emphasised (Sahlberg, 2011; Tao, 2013). However, it also true that due to resource constraints, the promises to the teachers of providing the requirements are often not fulfilled. Yet, the teachers do not give up their work, implying that resilience is a significant factor for their perseverance.

Literature suggests that resilience is multi-dimensional and includes personal qualities of teachers and dispositions that impact the strategies used in adverse conditions and the capacity to bounce back from difficult situations (Mansfield et al., 2012; Beltman et al., 2011). The article has shown how Ugandan teachers develop professional resilience, sustain optimism and foster healthy relationships with colleagues and learners that support them in their professional tasks. Reflection on their lives, having a positive attitude, creativity, multitasking and peer support were among the common approaches that were adopted by the teachers when working in a context of significant adversity.

The introductory excerpt presented Lisa as a resilient teacher who reflects and responds creatively to the challenging nature of her classroom teaching. Her actions relate to what Mansfield et al. (2012) refer to as the profession dimension of organising, planning, use of effective teaching skills and being reflective in the teaching practices. Also, as pointed out by Clara (2017), resilient teachers were those who saw themselves as having a positive emotional attitude to cope with stress, adjust to different roles and direct their lives. The conclusion drawn from this is that intrinsic motivation is a significant factor for teacher resilience, manifesting through both explicit and implicit acts. Positive attitudes for the interviewed teachers were invoked to make ends meet not only in terms of negotiating the difficult terrains of their work lives, but also in designing innovations for survival and for embracing hard work as a value for improving on personal welfare socially and economically. The narratives of the teachers also show the emotional dimension of resilience, specifically teachers who imagined their role in line with social justice and nation building, thus, maintaining commitment to the learners. Altruism, as pointed out by Patterson et al. (2002), acts as motivation for the teachers to push on despite the stress. Other narratives present teachers as possessing a strong ability to manage their emotions, for example, by living within one's means and having realistic goals and expectations, which, according to Mansfield et al. (2012), give the teachers some form of emotional stability, a sense of competence and accomplishment. Moreover, the ability to live within one's own means as a resilience strategy used by Ugandan teachers resonates well with the ability to accept failure and move on, as pointed out by Beltman et al. (2011). Thus, understanding the limitations and accepting life's realities is vital for guiding the teachers on how to take charge of the challenges they encounter in their work and what counts for their socioemotional well-being (Rutter, 2012).

Of course, we have also seen that some teachers in Uganda struggled to upgrade from one level to another as an avenue for purposeful career development, optimism and self-insightfulness. Being optimistic was a factor that kept the teachers going because they viewed additional qualifications as a form of creativity and innovation that gained them social status and exposure to job opportunities outside the teaching career (Wabule, 2016). In the same vein, as also pointed out by Mansfield et al. (2012), the teachers valued hard work, good communication, peer support, continued learning, persistence and perseverance as vital motivational factors. Thus, social support as also pointed out by Ungar (2012) was significant for building resilience. Beltman et al. (2011) remind that seeking and taking advice as well as healthy competition and risk taking are critical for creating a resilient teacher. This is why, for the teachers who persist longer in the profession, commitment to positive problem-solving approaches, affirmative emotional attitudes and love for the job override the strength of extrinsic rewards.

In conclusion, strategies for teacher resilience are contextual, and may even appear to be counterproductive in terms of meeting professional obligations. For the participants in this study, the attributes of resilience

highlighted above deserve recognition given the range of elements in the environment under which they work, even if they appear to be small and ordinary. Rutter (2012) and Masten Ann (2001) note that the processes and attributes of resilience are ordinary processes and basic human adaption systems. In any case, having to collect used drinking straws for teaching aids as in the case of Lisa, having to wake up very early to catch a morning bus or engaging in extra income generating activities may not make much sense to teachers in other contexts, but for those in this school, it is an indication of critical consciousness and a skill of problem solving. What appears in both the literature and the narratives of the teachers is that the individuals who embraced positive personality dispositions feel empowered and confident to venture into diverse activities which enable them 'make it' even when their socioeconomic welfare is threatened. The article also acknowledges the importance of positive rather than maladaptive means for dealing with adversity (Rutter, 2012). It emerged from the interviews that appreciation of small acts of resilience and care showed by the teachers boosted their morale and enthusiasm to strive harder in an effort to create school improvements. Therefore, the hardships encountered in their daily work practices can only be understood when teachers are presented with opportunities to share actual mechanisms that keep them going and the resilient strategies they employ for successful adaptation to the profession.

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