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Understanding school dropout among children of economic immigrants in the context of compulsory education in Côte d'Ivoire

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Abstract

The main objective of this contribution is to analyze the factors of school dropout among children of economic immigrants in the context of compulsory schooling. Indeed, Côte d'Ivoire has included in its vision to build a quality and merit-based school in order to have human capital to ensure its harmonious development. With this in mind, education benefits from a significant share of the country's resources, ie 5.2% of GDP. The efforts made have certainly made it possible to observe a clear improvement in the education/training sector, in this case access to school, but the school dropout rate is one of the major concerns for the education authorities. In 2021, the school dropout rate at the national level was 12.9%. In rural areas, it was 15.9% compared to 9.8% in urban areas. The methodology deployed was based on documentary research associated with data collection in the field using interview guides. Field research was conducted among primary and secondary school students, teachers and parents of students in the localities of Duékoué, Soubré and Béttié. The results of the study reveal that school dropout among children of economic immigrants in rural areas is explained by various factors including peer influence, low interest in school activities at home, poor school monitoring of children at home, priority given to agricultural and domestic work to the detriment of school activities, violence at school and poor results of children.

Keywords: School dropout, Compulsory school, Students, Rural area, Ivory Coast

Introduction

In Côte d'Ivoire, education is one of the sectors that receives significant interest. Since 2015, the share of the budget devoted to education has been increasing. According to the 2021 statistical analysis report of the Directorate of Strategies, Planning and Statistics (DSPS) of the Ministry of National Education and Literacy (MENA) of Côte d'Ivoire, the budget allocated to the Education-Training sector in 2018 amounted to more than 1,285 billion FCFA, or 19% of the country's overall budget. In addition, the country devotes 5% of its GDP to education. This proportion is significantly higher than the African average. In addition, according to the Education-Training sector performance report of the 2018 Education-Training Sector Plan Review (PSE), current education expenditure represents 41% of the State's operating budget excluding debt. Thus, Côte d'Ivoire has included in its vision "to build a school of quality and merit in transparency" in order to have human capital to ensure its harmonious development.

The country's adoption of the Compulsory Schooling Policy (PSO) in 2015 is a response to the demand for education and is part of the context of school for all (Education/Training Sector Plan, 2017, UNICEF 2023, p18). Since the adoption of this policy and the accompanying measure relating to free education provided by the distribution of school kits, the education system has seen many improvements in various respects. The efforts made by the Government since 2011 have made it possible to observe a clear improvement in the education/training sector, characterized overall by an increase in access, completion rates and success rates in the various examinations. The impacts of these efforts are reflected in the following statistics:

- The repetition rate in primary education fell from 18.8% in 2010 to 8.70% in 2018;
- The gender parity index increased from 0.86 in 2011 to 0.99 in 2018 in primary education and that in secondary education improved from 0.74 in 2011 to 0.86 in 2018;





- Girls represent 44% of the population in general secondary education, or 928,485 girls;
- The gross enrollment rate (GER) for girls in the first cycle of secondary education is 66.3% in 2018-2019 compared to 46.2% in 2014-2015;
- The TBS for girls in the second cycle of secondary education is 31.4% in 2018-2019 compared to 19.5% in 2014-2015:
- The TBS increased from 89.30% in 2011/2012 to 100.6% in 2017/2018;
- The net enrollment rate (NER) increased from 72.6% in 2011-2012 to 91.06% in 2017-2018;
- The CEPE success rate increased from 58.78% in 2010 to 83.57% in 2018, including 83.74% for girls;
- The BEPC success rate increased from 16.88% in 2011-2012 to 60.14% in 2017-2018, including 60.87% for girls;
- The baccalaureate success rate increased from 20.25% to 46.09%, including 48.75% for girls over the same periods.

While progress has been made in terms of access to school, the retention of students or school dropouts is a major concern for the educational authorities. Indeed, a "multidimensional and cumulative phenomenon that refers to a sum of unovercome learning difficulties, a tormented personal and family history, the cohabitation of two cultures, repeated academic disappointments associated with a feeling of injustice, non-recognition and even humiliation", the fight against school dropout has now become an Ivorian educational priority. In 2021, the school dropout rate at the national level was 12.9%. In rural areas, it was 15.9% compared to 9.8% in urban areas. Analysis by gender indicates a score of 13.9% for men compared to 11.8% for girls (UNICEF, 2023). For the 2022-2023 school year, out of all 3,249 students (girls and boys) identified at risk of dropping out by the psychotechnical test, "high school interests me" (LYCAM) and supported by the CPLDS, 2,827 were kept in the system, i.e. a retention rate of 87% of potential dropout students. This situation raises the question of what are the explanatory factors for the dropping out of school of children of economic immigrants in a context of compulsory schooling?

The work is structured around methodology, results and discussion.

1. Methodology

This research was conducted in three (3) localities namely: Duékoué, Soubré and Béttié. This was an essentially qualitative approach and based on a participatory process. The study primarily concerned students primary and secondary teachers and parents of the children. Data collection was based on three techniques: documentary research, in-depth individual interviews and focus groups. A total of nine focus groups were conducted, including six with children and three with children's parents, three individual interviews were conducted with teachers. For data processing, the interviews were first transcribed and then entered into Word.

Subsequently, the data analysis was done using the content analysis method based on a predefined analysis grid. The triangulation of the information was carried out to ensure its quality in terms of reliability and validity.

2. Results

The school dropout rate of children of economic immigrants can be explained by various factors: individual, family and school.

2.1. School-related factors

These are internal factors within the school. Examples include violence at school and poor academic performance of children.

2.1.1. Violence at school

In Côte d'Ivoire, article 362 of the Ivorian Penal Code punishes all forms of violence against a minor under 15 years of age, including those committed by parents, guardians or any other person responsible for their care or having authority over them. In addition to these achievements, there is Order 0075/MEN/DELC of 29 September 2012 prohibiting physical and humiliating punishment of children in schools. Also, Order No. 0111 MENET/CAB of 24 December 2014 establishing the code of conduct for staff of public and private structures under the Ministry of National Education and Technical Education prohibits in its article 5.9 "any form of physical, psychological and humiliating punishment of the student" - this being punishable by disciplinary sanctions. Although violence against students is prohibited by legal provisions, during the interviews, some children interviewed said that they were exposed to forms of violence that pushed them to drop out of school. These are physical and verbal violence. To speak of physical violence is to allude to the whip. This is really deplored by the children who do not approve of it.

"It is not good to scold children because we have come to learn. When we are scolded we are afraid of the teacher." **CM1 student**

Moreover, some teachers interviewed maintain that even though a decree has been issued to prohibit violence in schools, they continue to resort to violence in order to force children to take an interest in their education: revising lessons, attending class regularly, doing exercises.

"Currently there is a decree that has been taken by the government. So, we must not even hit children. But we teachers sometimes hit. We must whip children because if we do not touch them they will not learn their lesson." CM2 teacher

These physical violences to which they are exposed make children develop a negative mental attitude towards school. They maintain, to this effect, that they are always afraid of the teacher and do not have the mind set for lessons when they are in class.

"It's not good to bully children. It was bullying myself that made me leave school. There was a teacher here who would hit me until she hurt me." Student who dropped out of school

In terms of verbal violence, it takes the form of insults and mockery from teachers towards students.





"The teacher insults us in class when he asks a question and we don't find it. And then the little godiés also insult us because we are Burkinabe." Student in CM1

Faced with the fear of acts of violence at school, some students are absent a lot or play truant. This is also a significant factor in the abandonment and school dropout of students of economic immigrants at school.

2.1.2. Poor academic results and repeating grades

When immigrant children frequently do poorly on assessments, they prefer to drop out of school rather than continue. Once they repeat a grade once or twice, they tell themselves that they do not have the skills required to succeed in school. With the teasing, verbal and physical violence they face, children have only one desire or one solution: to drop out of school.

"My friends who no longer come find that paper is not important when they have repeated twice they say they no longer come to school" pupil in CM2

"It's the children themselves who don't want to leave anymore. If they've done their composition exam and they don't get the average to pass, next year they start again, if they haven't gotten the average yet, they say they're not going to school anymore, they're ashamed." Burkinabe immigrant parent

In other cases, it is the parent himself who stops sending the child to school.

"The children are useless, they don't know anything. I'm the one who took them out of school. They don't earn their average." Togolese immigrant parent

2.2. Child-related factors

It is about peer influence and low emphasis on school activities

2.2.1. Peer influence

Most children of economic immigrants who have dropped out of school or who have not experienced schooling engage in farm work or small jobs. This sometimes provides them with small financial resources. Some school-age children are often tempted to imitate their non-schooled or non-schooled friends on weekdays to also get money.

"When we were still going to school, we followed our friends who didn't go to school. When they did their little jobs, they had money. But when we went to school, we had nothing. It made us jealous, bitter. So we skipped classes to be like them and also have money. It's the same thing during the fishing season." Student who dropped out of school

2.2.2. Low interest in homeschool activities by children

During the interviews, many children of economic immigrants interviewed said that they were more preoccupied with extracurricular activities and entertainment when they returned home. They did not revise their lessons in the evenings before going to sleep. This is evidenced by the words of a respondent in the locality of Béttié:

"When I leave school and come home, I play, wash, eat and sleep. I don't study. There's no electricity and there's no one to show me around."

This situation is exacerbated in localities that do not yet benefit from electricity, particularly in Tiémélékro in the departments of Béttié and Duékoué. Children are unable to learn their lessons properly in the evenings. Here are the words of a community leader on this subject:

"Our neighborhood is not electrified, the electric poles were put in the godiés (natives), so we don't have electricity. Our children can't study. If there was electricity, it would motivate them. And then we also didn't go to school to say that we're going to teach them at home. It's really complicated."Togolese community leader

2.3. Parental factors

At this level, it is a question of the poor school monitoring of children at home by parents, the priority given to rural activities by parents and the low investment of parents in school expenses.

2.3.1. Poor academic monitoring of children at home

Children are not supported or supervised by parents for their revision at home. Indeed, many parents claim not to be educated, which means they cannot help their children with their revision. They claim not to be able to provide support to children when they have difficulties with reading, writing or exercise. Also, children do not benefit from school support (tutors) to help them with their revision and other school tasks. This is a real problem that causes children of immigrants to drop out of school.

"We put our children in school because we know that school is good. But school is not the only thing that happens at school. The child must also study at home. But at home there is no one to help him either. All of us did not go to school. That means that the child cannot study at home. Even if we tell the child to study at home, if he does not know that there is no one to show him, it is not his fault, I think it is the parents' fault. If we had not gone to school, our children would not have problems at school either." Head of the Burkinabe community

2.3.2. Priority given to agricultural work to the detriment of school activities

In rural areas, economic immigrant parents are more concerned about agricultural work than about their children's schooling. Indeed, it is with the aim of earning money by doing agricultural work (coffee, cocoa) that they arrived in Côte d'Ivoire. Therefore, their primary concern is agricultural activity.

"In any case, I put my child in school because school is good. But for me, it's my work in the bush that concerns me. When I go to the field every morning, I come back in the evening around 6 p.m. I'm tired, I wash, I eat and I sleep because tomorrow morning very early I have to go back again. And it's like that every day." Togolese immigrant parent





Some send their children to school with the aim of teaching them to read and write. They see in these children, especially the boys, their future heirs to the plantations they will leave behind.

"Immigrant parents send their children to school. They do it because they think they came to the village for agricultural work. It's good that children go to school to learn to read and write. But in the minds of parents, children must replace them tomorrow in the fields. Even when he goes to school, he must sometimes accompany me to the field to learn about work." President of

At certain times of the school year, during working days, parents send their children to the fields to help them with their tasks. Sometimes, they allow themselves to come on working days, ask permission from the teachers or the director to go with the children to the fields.

"At certain times of the year, if the work is too much or if the parent is harvesting his produce and needs the children to help, the children do not even make it to school. I even know a Togolese, even if it is a school day, he takes the children and takes them to the field with him." School Director

"Sometimes, there are some parents who go to the field with their parents. They even pass in front of the school while their friends are in class. They go and pound rice. It happens periodically, they often come and beg us to take the children to the field. Since coming to school is a freedom and it is the parents who pay, we let the children go. But it happens periodically." CM1 teacher

2.3.3. Low parental investment in school expenses

Even though the state shares school kits, children often lack certain notebooks and materials work not supported by the state. Parents prefer to direct the money to other expenses such as food etc.

"We have nothing, the little we earn there we can't take it all to put towards school. Otherwise what are we going to eat? So we take the money to pay for food and then get medical care. If there is any more, we pay for school." Togolese immigrant parent

As a result, children are often sent back because they do not pay certain fees, the most important of which is the COGES fee. Children do not have money to cover their expenses and even pay for school meals.

"We don't have enough money, there's no way. The child, if there's no money, is forced to stay at home until we earn money for him to go to school. That makes him late. And when that's the case, he can be discouraged by the grades he's going to get."Togolese immigrant parent

3. Discussions

The study made it possible to explain the different explanatory factors for the dropping out of school of children of economic immigrants in rural Ivorian areas. First of all, it should be noted with K. Brou and Y. Charbit (1994) that IThe migration policy of Côte d'Ivoire has long been characterized by ultra-liberalism, which has made the country the leading host country in Africa.

Indeed, for many years, the country has been the scene of significant migratory movements, both internal and external. According to the IOM (2020), we must go back to the 14th and 18th centuries to see the waves of migration of peoples at the origin of the settlement of Côte d'Ivoire. As for the modern period, they were first the work of the colonial administration, which initiated and developed them before the national authorities extended and expanded them upon the country's independence. This policy of openness implemented by the authorities in the 1960s allowed immigrants to settle and work in Côte d'Ivoire. Today, the country is, according to B. Zanou et al, (sa), considered the African country south of the Sahara with the highest proportion of foreigners on its soil. Already in 2014, the results of the RGPH indicated that external migrants represented 10.10% of the total population, with a majority of men (57.7%) compared to women (42.2%); 54% resided in rural areas compared to 46% in urban areas. By country of origin, 61.5% of external migrants come from Burkina Faso, 17.4% from Mali, 4.7% from Guinea and 4% from Niger. These four countries alone had the largest number of nationals (91.6%) in Côte d'Ivoire. In 2021, the results of the RGPH estimated the foreign population living on the national territory at 22% of the population with a predominance of nationals of countries in the West African sub-region, particularly ECOWAS (98% of non-nationals). The countries with the highest weights are Burkina Faso (62%), Mali (17.2%) and Guinea (4.7%).

The study demonstrated that the dropping out of children of economic immigrants in rural Ivorian areas can be explained by academic, individual and socioeconomic factors. However, it should be noted that J. Alladatin and MA Gnanguenon (2018) distinguish two types of school dropout, namely external dropout and internal dropout. These authors define external dropout as abandoning a school career without obtaining a diploma or qualification. As for internal dropout, it refers to the situation of students "who have dropped out of school within the establishments". This results in abnormal behavior such as repeated absences or lateness. In the same vein, L. Fortin and Y. Picard (1999) note that the typology of dropout students is clearly different from that of persisters by more social delinquency, more behavioral disorders and more assertive behavior. It is in this order that P. Potvin and M.-M. Dimitri (2012) point out that, in general, students at risk of dropping out have negative relationships in class and at school in general. Their perception of the classroom climate and interactions with other students is negative. In addition, they judge their relationship with their teachers less positively and feel they receive less support from them.

LS Glebelho and AE Kacou (2018), citing UNESCO (2015) also point out that generally in Côte d'Ivoire, throughout the school career of children and adolescents, a large drop-out rate is observed. They point out that in current education conditions, out of a cohort of 100 children, nearly a quarter (24.6%) never enter school, 19.8% do not complete primary school, 14.5% do not enter the first cycle of secondary school, and 23.9% do not complete this first cycle. At the educational level, according to B. Zanou et al (1996), The conventional Ivorian education system has since then





offered children of immigrants the same opportunities for access to primary and secondary education.

In terms of dropout factors, our results highlight academic, individual and socioeconomic factors. Indeed, our results indicate that children's poor results, peer influence, children's low interest in school activities at home, parents' low academic monitoring of children and parents' low investment in school expenses are all explanatory factors for children of economic immigrants dropping out of school. On this point, our results are consistent with those of J. Alladatin and MA Gnanguenon (2018). These authors note that students aged 15 and over are more likely to drop out during the transition than younger ones. To this they add the frequency of repeating and academic difficulties. Along the same lines, P. Potvin and M.-M. Dimitri (2012) establish a link between dropping out of school and academic performance. They rightly note that academic failure or low performance in basic subjects is the main predictive factor for dropping out of school. Conversely, J. Alladatin and AG Mankponse (2018) observe that academic performance and the presence of a school support worker in the household reduce the risk of dropping out during the primarysecondary transition. To this they add that good parental involvement in children's schooling promotes and improves students' engagement and mobilization in tasks and reduces the risk of dropping out.

On the issue of low parental investment in children's schoolwork, our results are consistent with those of P. Potvin and M.-M. Dimitri (2012). These authors reveal that children whose parents have a precarious socioeconomic situation are more likely to be less educated, which is also a variable linked to dropping out of school. For them, these parents may experience more difficulty supporting and helping their child academically (homework and lessons). To this they add the quality of the family climate as another factor associated with dropping out of school. According to them, the lack of cohesion and support between family members, as well as a lack of parental supervision of the child's activities are components of the risk or experience of dropping out. In addition, these authors mention other factors linked to the teacher and the school. These authors reveal that the classroom climate, the teacher-student relationship, the quality of teaching practices and the school climate are factors closely linked to the phenomenon of school dropout. Moreover, C. Blaya, (2010) indicates that although there are many explanatory factors for school dropout, the most determining are the problems encountered by students at school, so important for them that they end up deserting.

As for the low academic support of children by their parents at home but on the contrary parents would pay more attention to rural activities, our results are in the same direction as those of B. Zanou et al (sa), J. Alladatin and MA Gnanguenon (2018). B. Zanou et al (2016), They affirm that for immigrants, most of whom were illiterate, the objective of migration was above all economic. And from this point of view, a child is more useful in a coffee or cocoa plantation than between the four walls of a classroom.

For the ILO (2015), in addition to the factors highlighted, the issue of mobility between the host country and the country of origin is another factor. Indeed, the r2021 contribution of Participatory Community Diagnosis in the convergence zone of UNICEF interventions (2021) in Côte d'Ivoire indicated that the frequent mobility of non-native children between their country of origin and the host environment seriously handicaps their schooling and their retention in the school system. Indeed, the non-native sees himself as having a dual mission: that of personal accomplishment in his host environment on the one hand and that of the obligation to maintain the cultural relationship between the members of his family and those of the country of origin.

The results of the study reveal that peer groups contribute to the school dropout of many children of economic immigrants. Our results are in line with those of M. Esterle-Hedibel (2006). Indeed, this author maintains that irregularity, absenteeism and even school dropout in the French context are multifactorial phenomena that depend on the interactions between school agents, the students themselves and their close circle (family, peers).

Finally, the issue of violence was raised by our interlocutors as another factor in dropping out of school. On this point, our results are confirmed by the study by François FJ Azoh and P. Yameogo (2016). Indeed, these authors indicate that violence persists in the school environment. They mention corporal punishment, verbal violence, theft, sexual violence, not to mention repetitive violence. Among the perpetrators of violence, we find more students in secondary schools and teachers in primary schools. If physical violence is still dominant, it is because it benefits from social and cultural legitimacy as a means of education for parents (33%) and teachers (20%).

Conclusion

The school dropout rate of children of economic immigrants is part of a context where precarious socio-economic conditions and the priority given to agricultural activities predominate. This phenomenon is not specific to Côte d'Ivoire. Studies conducted in other countries, such as France, show similar trends among children from immigrant backgrounds, where the cultural and economic capital of families plays a crucial role in their educational path. The marginalization of immigrant children in schools, combined with limited parental support, makes it difficult for them to succeed in school. These different causes intertwine and reinforce each other, creating a vicious circle that makes it difficult to reduce school dropout in rural Ivorian areas without an integrated and multisectoral approach. These findings highlight the importance of specific measures to support these children and their families in the educational process.

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