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“More than just a number: a deeper look at the
secondary school experience for females in Dabou,
Togo”

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Abstract

This empirical study conducted in Dabou, Togo, uses interview data collected from male secondary school teachers and female secondary school students to realise the local implications of being feminine in the education system. The qualitative data uncovers the difficulties the ten interviewed female students have faced throughout their educational journey and how they have overcome the many inhibiting factors they are faced with. By comparing the responses of the teachers and students, it becomes clear that each party prioritises different contributing factors to girls' education, though both emphasise the importance of parental support. Teachers and students voice their expectations for the students' futures and in doing so, reveal a stark difference between what the teachers expect of their students and what the students expect of themselves. The study draws upon international data and goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals, in order to emphasise the importance of qualitative data which is used here to paint a clearer picture of what being female in Togo actually means. By using qualitative data, we learn more than the enrolment number of female students; we learn that these 118 female students have created their own strategies to persist in education.

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Thank you to the students, teachers, and administration of Lycée Dabou for their sharing their stories and voices and to my translator for making it all possible. Many thanks to my supervisor, Máiréad Dunne, for her guidance and support along the way.

Abbreviations

UN: United Nations

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

WB: World Bank

BAC: Baccalaureate, also refers to the Baccalaureate degree

MDG: Millennium Development Goals

PCV: Peace Corps Volunteer

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

RQ: Research Question

SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa

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1. Introduction

Deemed essential for development by the UN, as spelled out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the six Education For All (EFA) goals, is the eradication of gender disparity in education by 2015 (UN 2014, UNESCO 2014b). Progress has been reported since the goals were set in 2000, however it has slowed to nearly a stop since 2008 (UNICEF 2014). Globally, girls are still more likely than boys to be out of secondary school irrespective of the location or the level of wealth of the household (United Nations 2012). In the sub-Saharan region of Africa (SSA) there is a lack of primary level education completion, especially for girls and the lower secondary school completion rate for the poorest girls in SSA dropped from 11% to 9% by the end of the last decade (UNESCO 2014a). Narrowing focus to Togo, one of the smallest countries in the region, we see gender parity in primary education enrolment, yet high levels of disparity remain at the secondary and tertiary levels (UNESCO 2014a, UIS 2014).

The gender disparity at the secondary level is the focus of this empirical study which was carried out in Dabou¹, Togo. Dabou's population is nearly 35,000 people, with many more moving in and out each day from outer lying rural areas. Lycée Dabou is home to 802 students, 118 of whom are female. Every teacher, including the principal, at Lycée Dabou is male. The samples of interviewees were decided based upon scheduling and previous experience working with the translator, a local Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV). With a focus group made up of female students who have persevered and reached upper secondary school and interview data from their male teachers, I aim to understand what the implications of being feminine are within the education system in Dabou. The international data depicting the reality for females in secondary school in Togo does not explain how the 118 female students at Lycée Dabou have made it thus far or what has supported them along the way. Hence why I use qualitative data to uncover what both teachers and students report as the most severe inhibiting factors to girls education, what factors contribute to their educational success, and what they expect for the students' futures. By comparing the two parties' responses, it becomes clear that what began as a similar discourse, diverged as we spoke about contributing factors and future expectations. I draw on theoretical underpinnings of

¹ Name changed for anonymity

gender posed by Butler (1988, 1990, 2004) and discourse theorised by Foucault (1976, 1979, 1995). Gender performativity, the gender binary, socially constructed gender roles, and society's pressure to conform are all aspects of the production of gender that will be elucidated specific to Dabou.

The first chapter provides an overview of the context of the study while the second chapter reviews the literature selected to support the data analysis. The third chapter outlines the research design of the study and the fourth chapter discusses the findings where I delve into the coded data to answer the three research questions:

- What are the biggest threats/challenges to female students' education persistence?
- What factors have supported female secondary school students to persist/remain in school?
- What do teachers and students anticipate in their (students') future and what are the similarities and differences between the two parties' expectations?

The final chapter of the dissertation summarises the findings, suggests further research and recaps my personal learning as a researcher.

2. Context

Togo Overview

Togo is one of Africa's smallest countries located in Sub-Saharan, West Africa. The latest census estimation from 2014 records the population at 7.3 million and it is considered to be a low-income country (World Bank 2014). Togo has endured colonisation under both the Germans and the French, making it a relatively young country with only 54 years of independence (Ellis 1993, Lawrance 2000). Due to its history as a French colony, the official language of Togo and the language of instruction at all levels of education remains French (Minority Rights Group International 2005), yet there are 13 written languages and over 40 spoken languages on record (Essizewa 2007). The two national languages, Kabyé and Éwé are taught as subjects in school, optional on national exams, and are the medium of instruction in pre-primary education (Essizewa 2007, Ouane and Glanz 2011). Though there is no exact number of ethnic groups in Togo, the rough estimate falls between 20 and 40 with Éwé and Kabyé being the largest. Across the country 33% of Togolese practice a traditional religion, 14% practice Sunni Islam, while Catholicism, Protestantism, and other Christian

denominations make up 48% of the population's religious subscriptions (Minority Rights Group International 2005).

Both traditional and constitutional law are operational in Togo. Often it is the customary or traditional laws and practices that dominate social life and this has specific implications for gender differences and power. Since independence, Togo has enacted various laws to protect women and children, such as the 1980 decree which prohibited corporal punishment in schools, Law No. 84/L4 signed in May 1989 prohibiting continuous sexual relations between teachers and students, and the 1990 ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to ensure appropriate discipline in schools and prohibit physical and mental violence, injury and abuse (Plan 2006). Despite these constitutional commitments, traditional laws and practice often outweigh constitutional law. According to the US State Department's Togo Human Rights Report (2007), laws can be counteracted by traditional law, as often is the case with divorce, child support, pension, inheritance, and education, leaving women powerless and underrepresented in these cases.

Associated with this, there is a lack of quality education options for females resulting in females making up 68% of the 60.4% illiterate population (UIS 2014). With only 38% of the Togolese population living in urban areas (UNICEF 2013a), access to adequate education and health facilities is often very difficult. This may correlate with the low female life expectancy, currently standing at 59 years (WHO 2014). Contributing to female life expectancy is child birth, reportedly expected of all girls in the Dabou interviews. Not only are Togolese females expected to become mothers, as stated in the Discussion of Findings section, statistically speaking one woman will give birth to between 4 and 5 children in her lifetime. This is compared to the two-child average for a woman in the United States (UNICEF 2013b). The workforce participation in Togo for persons over the age of 15 stands at 52% for women and 87% for men. This may be due to many factors, not limited to motherhood, domestic expectations, unofficial work, and lack of agency. Women are underrepresented in parliament in Togo with only 11% participation rate as opposed to a 17% participation rate for women in the United States and 20% in the United Kingdom (United Nations 2010).

Education in Togo

Education in Togo is comprised of four categories: primary, middle, secondary, and higher education. Due to the recent universal primary education initiative, primary school fees were eradicated for all children in Togo in the 2008-2009 school year (Bonnaud 2013). There are private and public schools, as well as religious schools (Lawrance 2007). The largest differentiating factor to education for males and females is wealth, especially prevalent with regards to education outcomes in reading and mathematics (Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2014). International data used to make the following chart does not differentiate between middle school and secondary school for all categories, therefore, I have used three categories instead of four: primary, secondary (average of middle school and secondary school data), and tertiary (non-vocational). The most recent data available was used for all categories.

Table 1: Most recent Togolese education statistics by sex (UIS 2014)

	Access Intake ratio (%)	Gross Enrolment Ratio (%)	School life Expectancy (years)	Repetition (%)	Gross Graduation Ratio (%)
Primary	2012	2012	2012	2012	2012
Female	133.7%	127.42%	7.67 years	20.04%	54.72
Male	139.98%	138.17%	8.34 years	19.94%	74.04
Secondary	unavailable	2007	2007	unavailable	unavailable
Female		30.44	2.6 years		
Male		57.55	4.14 years		
Tertiary	unavailable	2012	2012	unavailable	unavailable
Female		4.42%	.22 years		
Male		16.21%	.81 years		

Three grade levels operate at the lycée level; graduating from the second year of lycée, “BAC1” (Baccalaureate 1) qualifies students for certain lower level jobs and graduating from the third year of lycée, “BAC2” (Baccalaureate 2) qualifies students to apply to university. Students have the option of electing to study in the math and science track or the liberal arts track. The majority of the female students in Dabou have opted for the liberal arts track which is rumoured to be ‘simpler’. At Lycée Dabou, there are three female students studying in their final year of the math and science track.

A female student's situation is further complicated by responsibilities that burden her from a very young age. Females in Togo are expected to care for children, complete daily domestic work, haul water, and bear children, sometimes at an early age (Tuwor and Sossou 2008).

Societal pressure and tradition, lack of monitoring, and confusion regarding the age of consent (14) and the law prohibiting sexual relations between teachers and students are all factors that lead to differing educational experiences for girls and boys (Plan 2006).

Inhibiting factors such as these will be further discussed in the Discussion of Findings section followed by factors that contribute to successful education experiences.

Dabou Overview

Within Togo there are five administrative regions divided latitudinally from north to south. The second region north of the coastal, Maritime Region, is called the Plateau Region and is the site of this research. The Plateau Region is the largest by area in the country and contains thirty prefectures. The research was conducted in Lycée Dabou, a secondary school located within the largest town in Prefecture Awwa. Dabou is a short motorcycle ride from the Ghanaian border and is home to nearly 35,000 people. The main industry is cocoa and banana farming and in the town centre, the most prevalent industry is the market trading.

Box 1: First Impressions (Researcher Diary, 30 April 2014)

Upon arriving in Dabou, the most obvious feature is the lush green landscape and the jungle that encompasses the city, rich in cocoa fruit, bananas, mangos, avocados, and pineapples to name a few. The 100km road leading to Dabou which takes 9 hours to traverse does not deter vehicles as large as freight trucks from arriving with the imported goods that stock the textile market in town, and departing full of locally grown fruit. The town centre is a constant buzz. Women are seen selling food from behind wooden tables that line the dirt roads, while young men whiz by on their motorcycles toting one, two, or three passengers, forcing pedestrians off the road. School children move in droves from the early hours of the morning; it appears that they attend over-crowded and under staffed primary schools based on the student to teacher ratio I could see through the window and the amount of students seated at each desk.

Lycée Dabou is one of four lycées within the prefecture. It serves a population of nearly 45,000 people but only has a school population of only 802 students of which 118 are girls. There are 14 employed teachers, all male and nearly 60 students per classroom.

The lycée, located on the hillside, is an impressive concrete structure of two floors including an expansive school yard housing an old wheel for a school bell all enclosed by the student-built bamboo fence. Recreation time, a 15-30 minute daily break, sees male students dotting the school yard, some relieving themselves and some simply overlooking, while most students exit the fenced area to buy food and drink provided by local women. The latrines, overflowing and over grown are ignored by everyone but the goats, leaving female students with poor hygiene conditions and no legitimate option for privacy. The female students' uniforms of white blouses and khaki skirts make them easy to spot amongst the males' all khaki uniform; their numbers are small but their presence is anything but ignorable as they move around the grounds in groups.

3. Literature Review

Quality education is essential to social and economic development; the benefits, though difficult to quantify, are undoubtedly positive (King and Hill 1993). This sentiment has been echoed by international organisations such as the UN and its factions, the World Bank, UNDP, USAID and countless others who contribute funding to education around the world each year (UN 2014, USAID 2014, World Bank 2014). 189 countries committed themselves to achieving the MDGs, established by the UN in the year 2000 which focuses on poverty eradication via eight separate goals and six EFA goals (UN 2013). This commitment is a display of the agreed importance of achieving universal primary education and gender parity. Regardless of the way education, in this case for girls, is monitored and evaluated internationally, the benefits are paramount. Girls education was noted as the most important path to female empowerment by the Cairo and Beijing education conferences and has been called 'a lifeline to development' by UNICEF (1996).

In this study I use the MDGs as a contrasting point between the macro picture of girls' education and the reality for many on the micro level. I focus on goal number three entitled 'Promote gender equality and empower women' which specifically calls for gender parity in primary and secondary education. Aside from how the international stage interprets girls' education, the voices from the ground in Togo have highlighted it as an issue of importance

that has made a shift towards a more equitable system in recent years. In the literature review I use theories posed by Butler (1988, 1990, 2004) and Foucault (1976, 1979, 1995) to define gender and its discourses, performances, and regulations to illuminate how gender appears in Dabou, Togo.

International Goals

MDG 3 sets out to achieve an incredibly broad goal and at the same time intends to monitor the progress of said goal, with exceedingly narrow parameters. The goal's progress is monitored quantitatively; the ratio of female to male students in primary, secondary, and higher education is one of the three indicators for this goal and is the only education-related indicator for the goal (UNICEF 2012). While the existence of such goals are important and create an international dedication to educational improvement, the monitoring of such appears limited. The goal fails to focus on the roots of gender inequality found within local and international power structures and promotes the view that counting the number of girls in school is a sufficient way to eradicate gender disparity (Saith 2006). Measuring gender empowerment in one goal that can apply to every female in the world is quite possibly not attainable, especially if quantitative measures are used in the monitoring process. What's missing is the theoretical concept of 'becoming' gendered by assuming that gender is a quantifiable binary of male and female (Dunne 2007). Regarding the validity of the numbers being used, enrolment data, especially from countries where enrolment is historically low, can be very unreliable (Lewin, Sabates 2012).

The monitoring of the goals is further inhibited by its 'western' assumptions. Take the birth rate by age 18 for example, as compiled by UNICEF the number of births by age 18 is calculated and shown as a percentage of the total population of 18 year old females. This number is 17% for Togo, which compared to neighbouring Burkina Faso at 28%, appears quite low (UNICEF 2013a,c). However, what this data does not tell us is how old the average middle school student is, or, at what level of schooling is the average 18 year old, or what forms of contraception have been taught in school, or who the fathers are— classmates, teachers? From a western stand point, it may be assumed that if a female has a baby at age 18, she has already completed her schooling. In 2011 in the U.S., 82% of students aged 6-17

were enrolled at or above their modal grade level (Davis and Bauman 2013). However in Dabou, this is more than likely not the case due to high rates of grade repetition and drop out. Therefore, the statistic of teenage birth rate may need a complimentary statistic regarding *student* birth rate.

Quantitative data should not be ignored, as it serves a important, yet somewhat limited purpose in this context. Statistics have become essential for developing governments and non-governmental agencies when it comes to providing financial resources (Jerven 2013). However, quantification of factors that impact girls' education can lead the reader to see the situation from a very narrow point of view. For example, if it is stated that there are equal numbers of boys and girls finishing secondary school, the reader may be inclined to think there is gender equality, but the most important information is missing— what is actually happening in the classroom. As North (2010) states, getting girls into school is the emphasis of MDG 3 but it does not consider the inter-workings of the gender power relations and experiences within school and after schooling. Statistics do not tell the international community how or why gender parity, and disparity, occurs in schools; without knowing how or why it becomes difficult to address the issues. Gender is not something that is quantifiable, even though the international goals determine it to be through their discourse, monitoring, and reporting (North 2010).

Gender

The international data is limiting in that it does not allow for the exploration of femininity and how being and becoming female has implications for education. This has led me to take a closer look at gender and discourse and how both are perceived in Dabou. Gender is understood in many varying ways; it is important that I first explain how I understand gender and how it will be used throughout the dissertation. To understand gender, I call on Butler's concept of performativity; acts of gender, the gender binary, and societal norms along with the consequences of not conforming to, or following said societal norms. Gender performativity as posed by Judith Butler consists of acts, performance, and performativity. Starting out with the notion that gender is "always doing" (Butler 1990, p. 34), Butler goes on to say that it is only as real as the gendered acts that we perform and without such acts,

gender wouldn't exist at all. The acts produce an illusion of gender and since everyone performs gender, we come to believe it and accept it as real. Butler (2004) states that regulating and speaking about acts gives them leverage, or makes them real. The regulatory discourses of gender are the same discourses that make it compulsory and influence its existence.

When we perform gender, we are simply conforming to the social norms that tell us how to do so (Butler 1990). Rather than being natural or innate, gender differences are produced through behaviours that signify 'female' or 'male'. These are socially produced and often differ from one culture or place to another. The interpretation of the gender performance is guided by cultural norms which establish meaning. The perceptions are derived from different cultural interpretations resulting in a cultural translation (Salih, Butler 2004). In Togo if a female is a student, she must shave her head; in the west if a female shaved her head one may assume she is a male. In the Togolese context, where female babies have their ears pierced immediately and girls begin working in the home sometimes as early as 5 years old, it becomes apparent that a rigid gender binary has been constructed. Thinking back to the international goals we can clearly see the discussed gender binary in the labelling "girl" and "boy" and the use of numbers to represent gender as if gender is a determined, static, countable 'thing', rather than an ever changing concept, shaped by history. This is part of a gender regulation that is extremely restricting: physically and mentally.

Homosexuality in Togo remains publicly unseen and the traditional values and culture have not legitimated a discourse for it. The gender roles and the heteronormative culture are deeply engrained leaving one prescribed path of sexuality and gender for all. These historically constructed norms have been worked on and manipulated for many years and it is through the performativity that they remain relevant (Butler 1990). For example, boys should wear trousers, play in the streets, and wield machetes, whilst girls should wear dresses, work in the home, and eventually bear children. The teachers in Lycée Dabou with whom I spoke, were very definite about the future of their female students, speaking about pregnancy in the future tense rather than conditional future tense. By doing so, they are contributing to the heteronormative structures already in existence in their society. Schools become gendered

institutions, which reiterate the regulatory discourses, which become significant in teacher-student relations and identity formation (Dunne 2007). The school and family perform the gender regime in similar ways (Kessler et al 1985), creating a very powerful norm that Butler (1990) points out is not easily performed in opposition to. In saying this, I see gender as a concept that is determined by history, yet changes, not as something fixed and determined by sex.

Discourse

Gender is expressed through discourse (Foucault, 1995); discourse at its most simple can be described as a verbal performance or collection of acts which is constituted by a category of signs. In this sense gender is constructed through discourse and controlled by exclusions that prohibit, divide, or reject a 'will to truth'. An object of study, gender for example, cannot exist prior to discourse; it is built within the discourse (McNay 1994). Bear in mind that our language and speech however is always constrained by taboos and circumstances in which the speech itself is deemed appropriate or not; it is also regulated by who has the authority to speak about certain discourses. The authority to speak is related to the maintenance of a lopsided system of social relations (McNay 1994), which are also policed and influenced by sexuality. Sexuality, according to Foucault, is not something that is given at birth, or determined by nature. Rather, sexuality is a historical construct that is linked to bodies, pleasures, discourse, knowledge, control, resistance, and power (Foucault 1979). Foucault (1979) takes his readers through the history of sexuality and how and why talking about sex is now taboo, arriving at the notion that human reproduction is essential for civilisations to persist, inevitably causing homosexuality to become socially stigmatised. Rather than sexuality being innate, it is an effect on the body by discourse (McNay 1994), and as stated above discourse is constructed through history, meaning it is constantly changing. In the Togolese context, we are able to now understand why homosexuality is not spoken about or accepted and why a woman choosing to not have children is unacceptable; without a discourse to support a subject, it becomes uninterpretable.

With discourse acting as a common thread throughout, the review of the literature suggests that gender performativity, sexuality, and power are all interrelated and work in a continuum

with and through each other. Though the gendered self is an illusion that is kept up by society and everyone acting within society, the compilation of movements and discourses that we use and act through become the norm. The discourses around gender, especially the gender roles that we are all perceived to enact, have been moulded and varied over time and work to regulate us through social norms and as Foucault (1979) spells out, sexuality is also regulated in order to create power structures. For agency and the opportunity of change to exist, we must first recognise how we are bound and constrained within the norms such as the heterosexual gender binary, prescribed gender roles, sexual regulation and so on. By recognising that such constraint exists, it is then that we are able to pursue change through variation of repetition (Butler 1990). As actors performing gender and sexuality, we are unable to act outside of existing discourses. It is in this way that discourse, in my mind, is used both as an *expression* and as a *restriction*. Yet we must always remember the limits of discourse and the consequences of our performance; the act gains meaning through its interpretation by others, not through our intended meaning. Therefore, we are not acting alone when we perform gender, or construct sexuality, or exercise power; influences greater than the individual contribute to these constructions yet it works both ways, for without individual acts, the performance, construction, and repetition, would not occur.

Being Female in Togo

The female experience in Togo, the predetermined lifestyle of a woman, the ‘track’ a young girl is placed on from the time she is born, seems restricting from a western point of view. However, taking a closer look, we learn that it is an amplification of the heterosexual gender binary that exists in western cultures and the result of historically constructed sexual regulations. Piercing girls’ ears from infancy, identifying the child as a ‘girl’ with dresses, the assignment of domestic work, and encouraging few hours in the classroom all lead to the pinnacle of the young girl’s life- pregnancy. The concept of reproduction and bringing new life coupled with the expectation of familial responsibility and limitations of sexual activity is a perfect representation of Butler and Foucault’s previously explained work.

With specific reference to the school – a significant social institution, we see the regulatory power held by the teachers. The practices in the classroom are guided by gendered social

norms, despite the interviewed teachers using the beginning of a discourse of gender equality. The visible beginnings of a change amongst the teachers should not be ignored, for change becomes a reality when the actors deviate the norm that regulates their speech, sexuality, and gender performance (Butler 1990). As all of the interviewed teachers noted, a change is beginning. This is evident when looking at the demographics of the school; a few girls are remaining in school despite the strong gender norms in society and in school. The female enrolment ratio in upper secondary school has steadily risen from 7.38% in 2000 to 16.76% in 2007 (UIS 2014). This data does not provide any information regarding the gendered space and learning environment within the schools, but it does give a general overview of the number of female students persisting in education.

4. Research Design

Aims and Objectives

Having reviewed the literature my interests are in exploring the views of the girls, who are the focus of the MDGs, and their teachers. This study was conducted in order to better understand what the educational implications of being feminine are in Dabou, Togo. To this end, the scope of the research has been narrowed to three questions:

- What are the biggest threats/challenges to female students' education persistence?
- What factors have supported female secondary school students to persist/remain in school?
- What do teachers and students anticipate in their (students') future and what are the similarities and differences between the two parties' expectations?

The analysis of the interview and observation data through a case study approach will be drawn together to begin to address the overarching question about the implications of being feminine within the education system in Dabou. More specifically, the focus on the contributing and inhibiting factors coupled with expectations for the future allows the dissertation to explore more than just the number of females at Lycée Dabou.

It is known that the number of female students is astoundingly low, but the international data neglects to explain why. In this dissertation I elaborate on this by using the above-explained concept of gender, and move beyond the gender binary used in international development

data. The concepts of the constructed gender binary, gender discourse and performativity, and power and sexuality are used throughout the dissertation as a way to demonstrate to the reader how and why being feminine in Dabou can be disadvantageous when considering academic persistence and success. By addressing schools as gendered institutions with staff and students consistently repeating the regulatory discourses, coupled with the cultural traditions of gender, the dissertation is concerned with sharing the reality of femininity in secondary education.

The study takes into account the female students' views as well as their male teachers' views in order to better highlight the comparisons and the contradictions within their chosen discourses. The literature review builds a foundation for the study and analysis using theoretical concepts posed by Butler (1988, 1990, 2004) and Foucault (1976, 1979, 1995) regarding gender and discourse. A comparison and critique of the concept of gender is highlighted by addressing the stiff, categorical nature of the term 'gender' as used by international development organisations in contrast to the theoretical concept Butler provides. The study itself is guided by three research questions.

Methodology

Qualitative studies imply an open, inductive structure of analysis which are tailored to and by the researcher in order to create relevant research to the local context and people, moving beyond statistical analysis of data found in quantitative research (Dunne et al 2005).

Qualitative research allowed me to dig deeper and have a conversation with the participants, delving into the "how", and permitting the students' and teachers' voices to guide the research. As Nind (2008) states,

“Qualitative research can access the perspectives and experiences of oppressed groups lacking the power to make their voices heard through traditional academic discourse” (p. 5).

Given that female secondary students in Dabou are under-represented with little public voice, I have chosen to undertake a qualitative study predominantly through a student focus group. I also conduct teacher interviews to provide multiple perspectives on the girls educational experiences and aspirations and in their own right as key players in the education of girls.

The comparative aspect between students and teachers will be addressed during the

Discussion of Findings but its importance is worth noting here as a tool for highlighting the different perspectives and understandings of the concept of education in Dabou.

Positionality

As researchers, we understand ontology and epistemology in varying ways influenced by our own experiences. Our understanding of such has an influence on our research and how we conduct and realise it (Dunne et al 2005). Recognising that there are many different positions to arrive from, it is important to understand how I am arriving at this research and how I see myself within the research. Positivists view knowledge as objective, definite, and measurable, often times existing outside of discourse. However, anti-positivists view knowledge as subjective, in flux, and unique to the individual, only existing within a discourse (Cohen et al 2007). From the anti-positivist, or subjectivist view, research is seen as “a search for meaningful relationships and the discovery of their consequences for action” (Cohen et al 2007, p.10). This research is situated in a subjectivist position due to the fact that I did not conduct the research with the intent of locating or fixing a definitive problem with the education system of Dabou; I conducted the research in order to shed light on the reality of education for girls in Dabou and what implications being feminine has on their persistence in education and success. I am also arriving at this stage of the research with a strong feminist position. Feminist research accords knowledge as a product of life experiences which is relayed to others using face-to-face modes of communication (Hesse-Biber 2006). Feminist research must consider the overarching power issue by bearing in mind the purpose of the research— who it is for, in whose interest does it lie? It is a shift away from the androcentric, positivist research which limits women, their voices, and their power. By researching women in what has traditionally been male dominated methods, it is only furthering the production of androcentric theories (Cohen et al 2007), hence why I have chosen and interview methods in which the females can openly express as they desire.

Reflecting on the literature regarding gender and discourse, I maintain the belief that gender is not a fixed category that people are relegated to, rather, it is a performed, historically created concept which can only exist with the discourse to support it (Butler 1990). This research was not conducted solely for the purpose of a dissertation, it was conducted with the

goal of getting to know the participants and allowing their voices to be heard, acknowledging that they may be otherwise silenced. Research should not be conducted for the benefit of only the researcher, specifically feminist research should work to empower the oppressed group, give a voice to the oppressed, and benefit both parties (Cohen et al 2007), in this case young women.

Design

Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations for this study were quite complex to begin with. When I expressed interest in working with female secondary school students, I was instantly hindered by the complexity of working with participants under the age of 18, as put forth by the ethics committee of the School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex. I was informed by my translator, a local Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) that the students in upper secondary school are rarely under the age of 18 due to the high repetition rate. Additionally, owing to the established relationship with the PCV, the young women were assumed to be comfortable speaking in a group environment about topics such as education, which later proved to be far less ‘taboo’ than their regular biweekly discussion groups relating to sexual health. After learning that one of the participants is a mother, that most of the participants do not live with their parents, and some travel many miles each week to their rented homes in Dabou so their daily commute is nullified, I concluded that these young women shall not be considered vulnerable with respect to this research. The ethics committee reviewed the case, and approved the study. All participants were given an information sheet written in French and read and signed the consent forms, informing them of their rights as participants and explaining the purpose of the research. Participants were also invited to the study, rather using an opt-out strategy which ensured their desire to participate (Shenton 2004).

Sample

The sample of students was chosen based on previous participation in sexual health discussion groups with the PCV. All participants were deemed to be over the age of 18 according to school records. All participants came from varying ethnic and socio economic backgrounds, though this was coincidental and not a specification for the sample. The

sample of teachers was chosen by the principal based on scheduling factors and availability during the week of the study which coincided with exam week. There were eleven student participants, though one student remained silent throughout the activity. Each students' history of grade repetition varied; some students began primary school as early as 9 years of age and others as late as 12. The youngest middle school graduate was 13 when she completed, and the oldest was 18. The living situations for the students range from renting a room in town (for those students whose parents are farmers from rural areas and minimal income) to living with relatives or parents.

The demographics of the seven male teachers varied by ethnicity, age, education background, languages spoken, and teaching subject. Because all secondary school teachers in Dabou are government workers, they had all been assigned a post in Dabou.

Methods/ Data Collection

The research was conducted using interviews with the seven teachers (including the principal) and a small group interview with eleven female students. The interviews were conducted in English and translated to French throughout for added clarity. Interviews were the chosen method of research because interviews can work in more personal ways than questionnaires can, allowing the participants to express their views of life directly to the researcher; the research backs away from collecting data about lives and becomes part of our lives (Cohen et al 2007).

The interviews that I conducted with the teachers and students were both semi-structured using an interview schedule, though if a respondent's answer prompted further questions, I did not hesitate to let the conversation change direction (See Appendix A and B). In traditional research, Reinharz (1992) states that in structured interviews, the participants ideas, memories, and thoughts become words of the researcher rather than the participants own words. This is something I wanted to avoid as this has been a source of marginalisation of female voices. To clarify, all teachers were asked very similar basic questions which allowed me to compare answers (Cohen et al 2007). The student group falls between a focus group and a group interview as it contains some characteristics of both. There was an

interview schedule and students were allowed to move the conversation in the direction they chose, however as peers, they were hesitant to contradict each other's responses. The reasons for this still remain unclear.

During the interviews, all teachers and students were given pseudonyms so that I could easily address them without using their proper name. The teachers' pseudonyms were: Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc. and they will be referred to by their pseudonyms during the Discussion of Findings section. Rather than being referred to as "students" I used the title Girl 1, Girl 2 due to the fact that the teachers all referred to their female students in this way. The term used by teachers, and Dabou residents alike, to refer to the female students is 'jeune fille' meaning young girl, irrespective of their age.

After the interviews were concluded, the transcriptions were completed by myself and the translator together so she was able to do a more literal, word for word translation. The transcriptions do not include French. Even though the participants were working through a translator, their words are transcribed in first person, exactly as they were spoken.

Data Analysis

After the data was transcribed, it was read multiple times and coded in order to complete a discourse analysis. The three categories of coding are directly related to the three research questions: inhibiting factors to education, contributing factors to education, and expectations for post-lycée life. The data was first separated into two categories: teacher and student. Next, it was separated into the three above mentioned categories, and broken down into sub categories within the three overarching categories.

Table 2: Categories and subcategories of data coding

Limiting Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • age • academics • cultural beliefs • distance from school • domestic work • family responsibility (current or future) • job opportunities • lack of educational importance • lack of support • laziness • marriage • money • parents • pregnancy
Contributing Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • classroom organisation • comprehensive courses • failure as motivation • female teachers • gender equality • goals for the future • modernity • money • mother's education • NGOs • organisation • parental support • PCV • previous schooling • rewards • state policy • teacher support • women in the work place
Future Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • birth attendant • domestic worker • environmental protection • jobs requiring little to no extra schooling • journalism • midwifery • motherhood • nurse • physician's assistant • teacher • technical schooling • university

Gender analysis has recently expanded through the use of discourse analysis to see how gender is constructed and maintained (Coates 2012). While each environment and culture

constructs gender differently, a discourse analysis on the information collected from a small sample in Dabou allows deeper learning about being female in schools and how the implications can have an impact on education. In the upcoming Discussion of Findings section, the repetition of certain factors displays the meaning of being feminine in Dabou and what expectations are assigned to females in the society. The social constructivist approach to discourse analysis on gender holds that the language gives existence to the social reality and gender (Coates 2012). As Gee (2011) explains, no matter what people say, the words are always performing an action. These actions are represented through the data from the teacher and student interviews and the similarities in chosen discourses of the teachers and students becomes very apparent. When discourses are repeated, they reproduce and build significance within the context (Gee 2011). These repeated discourses from the interviews will be highlighted in the Discussion of Findings section where I will further discuss their implications.

The teachers and students both embody what gender means in Dabou and both parties perform the socially accepted and constructed gender roles (See Butler 1990 and Foucault 1995). There is however, a variation on the girls' part due to the fact that they have persevered in education unlike the majority of their peers. This fact, however, does not change their gender role outside of school, as all students reported experiencing high levels of domestic responsibilities. Through the students' and teachers' discourses used in the interviews, it becomes clear how definitive and restrictive the socially constructed understanding of femininity is. Bearing this in mind, the Discussion of Findings section documents the current difficulties that female students face every day due to the socially constructed female gender role. I also discover the added complexity of juggling 'female' duties and remaining a full time student.

Limitations

As a master's student, a female, and a westerner conducting research in SSA, the limitations of this research seem to be apparent. From the beginning I was aware of the language and cultural restrictions I would encounter as a foreigner and a female, however, I also saw this as an opportunity. As an outsider, I was able to ask questions that locals may not respond to

because they are seen as ‘common sense’ or even ‘taboo’. Playing the part of an ‘alien’ in the situation allowed me to inquire a bit deeper than perhaps a local researcher may have. As Dunne et al (2005) notes, how the participants view me is just as important as how I view myself as a researcher. At the beginning of each interview I introduced myself, my background, and sat at the same eye level as the participants in order to be seen as an equal and not a dominant or subordinate presence. By creating as much of an equal relationship as possible, it is more likely that the participant’s reality will be reflected, rather than my reality (Reinharz 1979). I have no way of knowing what kind of responses a male researcher would have elicited, but by explaining that their local knowledge was assisting me in understanding a different education system, I felt that the participants were at ease and willing to share their knowledge.

Additional limitations include timing, and cultural understandings. I was only in Dabou for two weeks; the first week was exam preparation week for all secondary students and the second week was exam week. This limited the amount of time I was able to spend with the participants and ruled out classroom observation as a method of research. I was also limited by the principal’s assumption of the research, as he chose nearly all language teachers for the interviews when he learned that I had previously worked as a language teacher. The principal’s choosing of the teachers for the interviews is a limitation in itself, though unavoidable as culturally, the principal needed to be seen as an acting partner in the research and offered to do this. The most difficult limitation for me to grapple with, coming from a western background, relates to the Togolese understanding of respect and societal hierarchy. I was instructed how to act during the interviews by my translator, but at times felt uncomfortable knowing that I could not probe the participants further because it was not culturally appropriate for a female to ask a male so many detailed questions. This of course is a contextually specific limitation that is unavoidable and only adds a new level of interest to the research when thinking about this limitation within the confines of teacher-student relations.

5. Discussion of Findings

Introduction

This chapter opens with the initial reactions of the students towards a BAC degree in contrast with the initial reactions of the teachers and follows with how things have changed in this field in recent years. The chapter then moves on to present and discuss the research findings by answering the research questions, making comparisons between the student and teacher responses, and highlighting where the findings depart from the literature. Beginning with inhibitors, the teachers and students discussed two significant education inhibitors, pregnancy and domestic work. Following, the contributing factors were highlighted as organisation and attitudinal social modernity. Finally, the future plans for the students from both teacher and student perspective are analysed.

As an introductory question I asked the girls why education and a lycée degree was important for females in Dabou. Their immediate responses were:

- ‘all of the doors are open’,
- ‘we are open to all types of work afterwards’,
- ‘a very important place in society [after completion]’.

In contrast to the benefits of education in opportunities for jobs and high social status in the future, the teachers responses were much more focused on the students’ ability to secure a low level job and to make money as quickly as possible in order to support the families they, inevitably, will all have. These female students are not the norm, as there are only 118 female students at a school with a population of 802. It is in this context that the discussion continued with their views on factors that inhibit education and factors that contribute to education.

The elite group of students, however, appears far removed from their peers no longer in education. One student, Girl 9 said, “for certain girls, it’s laziness...they just don’t learn”. In this statement we can see how impressions of the inability of girls to learn is taken up and employed by a peer. Throughout the transcripts, the students used words like ‘they’ and ‘certain girls’ which gave an air of distance, as if they were separating themselves from the

other girls in their community, those who could not continue with school. These female students are part of an elite group of 118 and are discursively distancing themselves from their female peers.

The number of female students currently attending Lycée Dabou has never been so large. All seven teachers used the word “before”, or a synonym, to discuss the extreme gender parity that used to exist at the secondary level, and how have things have changed since then.

“...before it was like that, that families preferred boys and they only preferred them to go to school, but it’s not like that anymore,” (Teacher 1)

“...it’s not like before, nowadays there are girls’ rights,” (Teacher 7)

“ Before parents thought that girls couldn’t attend school and go far...Now the parents have understood and they let the girls go to school,” (Teacher 2)

There were no exact dates used to describe the shift, simply an expression of what it was like before compared to the increase in number of female pupils now found at the lycée.

Research Question 1: Inhibiting Factors

What are the biggest threats/challenges to female students’ education persistence and how were they overcome?

The threats and challenges to education as voiced by the teachers and the students overlap with some but not all of the inhibiting factors listed by international aid organisations as well as with prior research conducted in Togo (UNICEF 2014, Plan 2012, Tuwor and Sossou 2008). An analysis of the interview transcripts revealed 14 factors in all and two main inhibiting factors that were discussed in depth and exemplified using personal anecdotes. The two main factors are pregnancy and domestic work. These will be the main focus for this analysis although there were other inhibiting factors less frequently referred to in the transcripts that include: laziness, marriage, parents, academics, money, family, distance, culture, other job opportunities, lack of support, lack of education importance, and age. Twelve out of the fourteen categories were discussed by the teachers; age and lack of education importance were not addressed. Twelve categories were discussed by the students; the students did not speak about distance or family.

The teachers and the students presented ostensibly similar ideas regarding inhibiting factors to education, but the two parties' responses highlighted a lack of teacher agency regarding support. Lack of support was one of the over arching inhibiting factors mentioned by the students and teachers but as they began to explain what kind of support, it was evident that the teachers were not realising their own agency and that the students overlooked it entirely. The students emphasised lack of parental support and concluded that in order to avoid missing school due to many of the other inhibiting factors, such as domestic work and pregnancy, support must be given from external sources.

“For example, orphans- they don't have any support, there is no money,” (Girl 1)

“Some [parents] think that young girls' education is nothing,” (Girl 8)

Regarding pregnancy education, “It's not sufficient what we learned in school, you also have to have parents,” (Girl 8, an orphan and a mother)

The teachers who spoke about support did not always see themselves as the givers of support and often passed the responsibility to others, including parents and NGOs. When I inquired about various inhibiting factors which could benefit from teacher support, the teachers named parents as holding responsibility. Teacher 7 made a house call to assist a parent in making a difficult decision about whether or not to allow her daughter to return to lycée after giving birth.

“I went to see her mother to ask her to make an effort that after she [the student] give birth and she return to school,” (Teacher 7)

This teacher was the only teacher to speak about contacting parents in order to assist the students with matters such as pregnancy, though he never mentioned himself as a support system. He also spoke to domestic responsibilities and informed me that if a girl arrives late to school once she will be hit and if she is late three times, she is obligated to abandon her studies. When I asked if there was a way to help girls arrive on time to class or to alter the consequences, taking into consideration their domestic responsibilities, he said,

“Yeah well, we asked Plan International if they would come and do it [bikes for students scheme] here and they refused,” (Teacher 7)

While parental support is ever important, it appears that cooperative support from the teachers would only benefit the female students in making their education journey slightly less complicated.

Many of these categories of threats to education are discussed within international organisations' reports on schooling for girls in sub-Saharan Africa and academic research. Plan International's 'Because I am a Girl' campaign's 2012 report names seven threats to girls' education in SSA: gendered attitudes in society, cost of education, transactional sex, early pregnancy, child marriage, child labour, and distance to school (Plan 2012) while the UNICEF 'All Children in School by 2015: Global initiative on out-of-school children' Regional Report for West and Central Africa (2014) lists: economic issues, child health, cultural perceptions, and lack of understanding of value of education as factors that inhibit girls' education and lead to child labour. The majority of both the Plan and UNICEF factors were mentioned by teachers and students in this study. The issue of transactional sex (teachers and students engaging in sexual acts in return for lower school fees or higher marks) was never breached during the interviews. I was informed by my translator that one of the teachers was involved in a relationship with a female student at the time of the interview, however for the safety of all involved parties I did not probe teachers or students on the topic. Tuwor and Sossou (2008) researched girls' education in conjunction with gender and socio cultural perspectives in Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. They argue that the low retention rates of girls is caused by general discrimination and unequal treatment of women due to strong patriarchal social structures. They specifically name child slavery, marriage, child trafficking, poverty, and domestic work as inhibiting factors. What is missing is lack of support; the international data and the research as conducted by Tuwor and Sossou (2008) does not mention a lack of support as an inhibiting factor.

Domestic Work

The students frequently voiced the difficulty of school for girls and that girls frequently fail more often than boys. The students hesitated to explain this but when I questioned further, we arrived at one of the significant education inhibitors— domestic work. The girls elaborated,

“The problem comes from the house, why? Because the parents aren't willing to have the boy do domestic work so maybe the girl does it all and then she's tired and the boy's studying and she is tired, she's also done the work,” (Girl 4).

The students all agreed that they have less studying time than their male peers. In a town like Dabou where families do not have toilets, plumbing, electricity or gas stoves, the cooking, cleaning, child care, animal minding, and farm work yields hours of strenuous, time-consuming work.

Young girls in Togo are often given away by their parents to relatives or fellow members of the same ethnicity to work as domestic servants in exchange for economic benefits. They are often promised school fees and a better life, but unfortunately can also be the victims of labour exploitation and abuse (Tuwor and Sossou 2008). After speaking with ten out of the 118 females at Lycée Dabou and learning their histories, it is very apparent that the domestic work comes at the expense of their school work, they feel that they have little time for studying; eight out of the ten interviewed students have repeated one or more grades. It is evident that most girls are not getting an equal chance of education and the requirement to do domestic work is a key inhibiting factor.

Using girls as domestic workers, moving them from their biological family as if they are objects rather than young girls and students, reiterates the gender theory posed in the literature review. Because the gender discourse in Dabou only allows for two genders and heterosexual behaviour, daily tasks and roles are designated “male” or “female”. The gender binary is formed through repetition of acts (Butler 1990) and many aspects of daily life contribute to this. The repetition of the performance occurs in the home, the work place, the market, the schools, and so on. Students and teachers are constantly surrounded by the performance of “appropriate” gender, which for females in Dabou, does not include the field of education.

“Certain girls prefer, instead of wasting their time here [lycée], to stop here and maybe do seamstress work or hair dressing or I don’t know what, in town,” (Teacher 1)

A teacher labelling a female’s time in school as “wasted” is a perfect example of the kind of gender role the teacher expects his female students to assume— a low level worker, rather than an academic. Female students readily take ownership for the domestic work even though they voice the fact that it inhibits their education. They are aware that it is unfairly balanced but also recognise that parents will not expect their brothers to participate in sharing the work load.

Box 2: Impressions of local gender roles (Researcher Diary, 4 May 2014)²

Amina's oldest came home last night as we were making 'paht'. She stood in the door to the kitchen and I said, "Hi", but she said nothing. She waited for Amina to turn around. My translator said that Amina asked where she'd been all day and the girl muttered something and went inside. I mentioned that she smelled nice and my translator said, "That's the problem". It may be assumed that when the girls are not in the home working, they are out getting into trouble or doing things they're not supposed to be doing- perhaps with boys/men.

The girls used the terms "have to", "my work", and "forced to do" to refer to the domestic work in their homes. Both teachers and students realise the necessity and demands of domestic work which is, coupled with parents asking only the girls to do domestic work instead of both boys and girls. It produces a very restrictive discourse and culture of house work.

"It is the girl that has to do the washing before going to school in the morning and she will arrive late," (Teacher 7)

Despite this definitive discourse of work posed by Teacher 7, 118 girls continue to arrive at school day after day and persist with their school and domestic work. The girls I interviewed voiced their strategies to overcome this inhibiting factor, which is discussed further in the following Research Question.

Every teacher at Lycée Dabou is male including the principal. The dominance of male teachers creates an interesting dichotomy between the teachers and the students. As it stands, the students are not given any allowances for being tardy due to their domestic responsibilities. As mentioned in the introduction of this section, the teachers requested bike donations from Plan International to help girls get to school faster after they complete their morning chores. However, when Plan declined to assist girls in Dabou, the teachers did not report that they made any further attempts to assist the girls in arriving to school on time or altering the consequences of being late. Also, as stated above, corporal punishment is used if students are tardy and as stated by Teacher 7, if students are tardy three times, they must

² Name changed for anonymity

abandon their studies. While this information was not able to be confirmed as policy, simply knowing that the teachers hold it to be true is very revealing of the teachers inherent power bestowed by the gender regime and the unwillingness to adapt for the girls' external responsibilities.

Pregnancy

Hidden from the international statistics are the students I spoke with who heavily attributed girls' failure at school to early or unwanted pregnancy. UNICEF claim the adolescent birth rate (18 years of age and under) in Togo is 17.3% (UNICEF 2013a). This appears low, but the reality is that all but two of the interviewed students have repeated at least one grade resulting in most female students being over the age of 18 in some, or all, years of lycée. The international statistics regarding adolescents and teenagers are not applicable to many secondary school students in Dabou. The young women I spoke with are not included in these statistics and are often over looked because they fall, by definition, somewhere between 'girl' and 'woman'; they are referred to by their community and school as 'young girls' and are too old to be included in 'adolescent' statistics. There was no possible way of obtaining data to calculate how many female students have dropped out due to pregnancy in Dabou, however due to the frequency of this factor being mentioned by teachers and students, it is deemed a significant education inhibitor.

“You see, the woman, she must bring the life, she must bear children,” (Teacher 6)

The discourse used by the teachers and the students further supports the defined gender roles of the female in Togolese society, assuming pregnancy will happen, assuming students will not return to school, and assuming that the girls absorb the entire responsibility of the pregnancy and the child. The girls informed me that students who give birth are often ashamed to return to studies or see themselves as too old to be students after they are away from school for a year or two due to child birth. Reportedly, the problem in Dabou is that,

“girls fall pregnant very early,” (Teacher 7)

This sounds as if the girls are falling ill or coming down with something unavoidable, as if they themselves became pregnant without involvement of anyone else. This teacher also states, as echoed by the students, that if a girl and a boy become pregnant, the boy will not

abandon studies but the girl will. The future tense is used by the teachers when referring to pregnancy,

“One day she will become the mother of her children and she will educate them,” (Teacher 1)

There is no future conditional tense; it is assumed that this is going to happen. The girls even reiterate the sense of imminent pregnancy by using phrases such as, ‘when girls get pregnant’.

The education for female students regarding pregnancy prevention and sexual health is seemingly scarce. According to the students, in the final year of middle school and the final year of lycée (only available in the science track) the students take a science course which includes human biology, taught by male teachers.

“Typically all science teachers are men; it’s rare that you’d find a woman that teaches life or earth science,” (Girl 2)

The majority of the students were not comfortable raising their hand to ask their teachers questions regarding contraception and Girl 11 states that the course is only comprehensive if enough questions are asked. Girl 8, a mother of one, reported that the material they learn in the last year of middle school is not sufficient on its own, and that to delay pregnancy one needs parental support. In order to receive parental support, the mother must be educated enough to relay accurate information; the mother must have completed the final year of middle school to have ever learned about human biology. This is quite the vicious circle. The mother’s ability to help her daughter is dependent upon her education and as the girls stated, the education they receive is not sufficient.

There are additional resources available to girls in Dabou regarding sexual health. Because Dabou is a commercial centre with a large population, the girls benefit from living near the largest hospital in the prefecture that has supported a PCV over the past two years. The students expressed that their work with the local PCV offered them more detailed information that prepares them to delay pregnancy more successfully than girls from surrounding villages who do not work with a PCV. Girl 1 informed me that NGOs often play the role of sexual health educators in addition to the PCV. The teachers can also act as a support system for

female students; one teacher, Teacher 7, visited a pregnant 8th grade student whose mother did not want her to return to school. Teacher 7 identifies it as a problem with society and parents who do not encourage females to return to school after child birth. The students never mentioned the teachers as a support system, other than teachers of human biology.

Research Question 2: Contributing Factors

What factors have supported female secondary school students to persist/remain in school?

As previously stated, the students with whom I spoke are the exception; as female students they are the educated minority. A key purpose of the research was to understand how they made it so far in their education and what supported them along the way. As previously discussed, there are many reasons for females to discontinue their studies, yet these females have managed to defy the odds and carry on with their education despite all of the inhibiting factors working against them.

The students attributed their success to goal setting and organisation with the help of parents. The teachers attributed the students' success to attitudinal social modernity regarding gender equality displayed first by parents. The full list of factors is as follows:

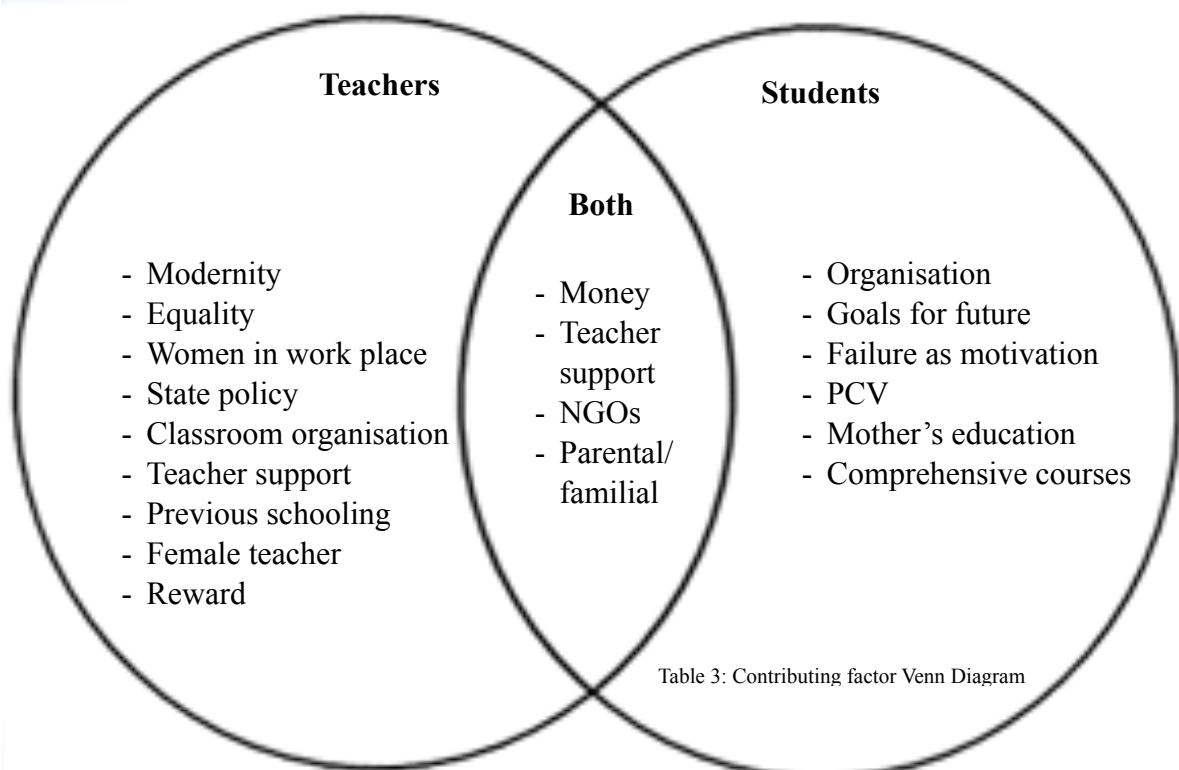


Table 3: Contributing factor Venn Diagram

Teachers and students provided different factors that they each believed to contribute to girls' education; with only four factors in common it is clear that their standpoints on this subject are more varied than on the subject of Research Question (RQ) 1. Interesting to note is the fact that teacher and parent support were shared concepts by the teachers and students, as opposed to the first RQ where only parental support was discussed. Important to bear in mind when comparing the opinions of the teachers and students is the fact that the teachers are all male, did not go through the same difficulties of education when they were in school, are older than the students, and are government employees who may have worked in cities and towns other than Dabou.

How the teachers and students spoke about the contributing factors was very interesting; the students offered direct solutions to the significant inhibiting factors whilst the teachers spoke in very general, more socially aware terms, less focused on immediate, active solutions for continuing education. The teachers noted a change in the workforce of Togo, reporting that women were now being hired to do jobs previously only held by men, secretary work for example. The teachers also noted that the number of female students attending Lycée Dabou has increased over the past years and the principal was quick to inform me that, the national and international plan of development for Togo emphasises the importance of girls education. He also noted that there are policies in place to assist girls' families in paying for secondary school; the fee for female students is nearly half of the fee for male students. The students on the other hand offered up very practical solutions such as organisation for their complicated schedules which allows for more concentration on their school work.

Many large NGOs and international aid organisations work tirelessly to promote girls' education, but when it comes to domestic work, the solution is not so straight forward. Plan International names many different strategies for assisting communities and schools to make quality education more attainable for girls, but when it comes to the issue of overburdening female students with domestic work, Plan International's 'Because I am a Girl' campaign's (2012) does not offer any solution to alleviate this issue. UNICEF's All Children in School by 2015 Regional Report (2014) does not directly offer a solution to alleviate girls of domestic responsibilities but does suggest awarding vouchers or economic incentive to assist parents.

This could translate into hiring help to complete the chores the girls are responsible for, though this is speculation. Regarding early pregnancy, both teacher and student responses matched up with the suggestions of health classes and parental support from UNICEF and Plan.

Social Modernity: the teacher voice

The teachers credited much of the females' success in education to the parents and their willingness to send them to school. It is the parents who provide the money for school fees, assist with domestic work, and make the final decisions about opportunities for their daughters and sons. But such favourable decisions were not always the case.

“Families preferred boys and they only preferred them to go to school, but it's not like that anymore, families send both of their kids to school,” (Teacher 1)

Teacher 2 says that parents now understand and allow their girls to attend school,

“what the boy can do, the girl can also do”

According to all seven teachers, the attitude of parents has changed over time. All teachers made a comparison about what educational priorities for girls used to be and to where the priorities have progressed. The consistent responses from all teachers display a potential shift towards modernity in the secondary school system in Dabou. Whilst the teachers are not attributing the increasing numbers of female students to work they are doing, the teachers are still recognising the increase in students and by realising the reality, it becomes easier to adapt and differentiate to ensure quality education for all.

These words, laden with accounts of change and social modernity coming from all of the teachers, seemed to be in line with what the principal spoke about regarding the international and national plans of development for Togo which emphasise the importance of girls education. While unable to definitively state if the principal was speaking about government funded and supported plans which are in action in Togo, it can be definitively said that Togo has signed off on the 2015 MDGs. The abolition of primary school fees occurred in Togo in 2008 (Bonnaud 2013), a step towards primary education access for all as spelled out in MDG 2. Perhaps the language used by the teachers regarding women in the work force, gender

equality in the classroom, and government initiatives to encourage girls, comes from a policy level push to achieve MDG 3.

Organisation: the student voice

The students attributed their academic success mainly to their ability to set goals for their futures and to organise their school and domestic work. Not all of the students live with their parents or have living parents, but they all mentioned the importance of parental support with regards to helping with house work and allowing them to complete the house work at different hours so they can participate in school activities. Girl 9 informed me that if she has extra meetings after school, for example with the PCV, her parents help her with her domestic work, but on normal school days she explains,

“I make my program. At noon I come [home] and I do the work and I know that at two I have to go back to school and whatever [chores] I don’t finish at that time I know in my head that I have to do afterwards,” (Girl 9)

Girl 11 also refers to having a program and organisation as the most important strategies for getting work done and proceeding with school. Girl 6 focuses on her career goal as motivation to continue with her education,

“I knew I wanted to become a physician’s assistant so I kept on going,” (Girl 6)
Though she does not explain why setting a goal or an objective was so beneficial for her education, her peer explained,

“...although maybe you fail, you realise you have to continue studying because you’ve already designated that objective for what you want to do in your life, you’re obligated,” (Girl 1)

The students spoke so definitively about their futures even though the majority were familiar with the prevalence of failure. One student even referenced failure as a motivational tool,

“Also failing is a lesson, when you fail you’re going to work harder,” (Girl 2)

The students used terms like “obligated” and “have an objective” displaying the reaches of their motivation. The teachers never mentioned goal setting; it was brought up exclusively by the students when explaining their personal reasons for persisting with education.

According to Butler (1990), agency from the discursively constructed gender norm occurs when there is a variation of gender performance repetition. For the girls in Dabou, as in many cultures, not performing their gender according to the norm would result in social punishment. Therefore in order to create agency, the repetition of performativity must occur slowly, in stages. If the students I interviewed in Dabou were to dismiss their domestic work tomorrow and insist that their brothers do it, the consequences and punishments would conceivably be drastic and perhaps violent. What the girls in Dabou told me, was to create a program or a plan of organisation to control the domestic work and build time, essentially, for their school work. The strategy they employ is not as drastic as refusing to do the chores or assigning them to siblings, which is perhaps why it appears to be successful for the small percentage of girls still in secondary school. The girls are still performing their gender as depicted by their mothers— cooking, cleaning, hauling water for the house and wood for the fire, but they are slightly altering the pattern to allow for increased academic success. This strategy of ‘getting organised’ or ‘making a plan’ cannot be deemed as the perfect policy solution to the educational restrictions caused by domestic work, however, it is reportedly working for this cohort of female students. It is impossible to state that this is the reason for the girls’ academic success, many factors play into their unique situations, but it can be said that it is a contributing factor whose importance was realised and prioritised by the students.

Research Question 3: Anticipations for the future

What do teachers and students anticipate in their (students’) future and what are the similarities and differences between the two parties’ expectations?

Unfortunately, this study does not track the reality of the girls’ futures, but it does uncover what the teachers and students both expect for the future. This is where the research comes to an interesting crossroads. As seen in RQ1 the teachers and students provide nearly identical responses to the research question. In RQ2, the responses from the teachers and students become dissimilar, with only four responses in common. Arriving at RQ3, we see an entirely different set of responses from the teachers and the students. Whilst the girls list their future career plans, nearly all requiring tertiary education, the teachers paint a much different

picture when asked about what they foresee for the female students after achieving their Baccalaureate Degree.

Teachers

The teachers' responses to the research question regarding the girls' futures, contradict what was previously reported as equality amongst male and female students. Teacher 7 reports,

“...in the class from the beginning, with the girls, to not overly fantasise the long-schooling option, rather the technical, the J2 (technical degree), the secretary”

and Teacher 6 speaks along the same lines of not setting the sights too high regarding a higher education degree that will take more than a few years,

“You see, the woman, she must bring the life, she must bear children. If she has something [paid employment] as early as possible this is to her advantage”

Teacher 2 demonstrates the different expectations for girls and boys after completing their BAC and differentiates what the boys and the girls should go on to pursue after secondary school. He then sums up his statement by reaffirming that boys and girls have equal ability,

“The boys are going to go to university. For girls, the BTS (technical degree) is good because it's only three years and it's tangible and they get a job afterwards. Boys must have the courage, the valour, to continue on to the fourth year or maybe beyond to get a masters degree. Finally, in sum, girls can do what boys can do,” (Teacher 2)

Teacher 6 points out that the government of Togo did not foresee any needed support or job placement for girls who achieved their BAC. He goes on to state that even with the BAC, many girls resort to paid domestic work because the funding from their parents has stopped and there is minimal government support when it comes to finding a career. As Kessler et al (1985) points out, the way in which the teachers construct and convey gender is very much based on how they constructed their gender throughout their lives; it can be said that their insistence on the girls becoming mothers and the need to make money straight away is due to their history of exposure to this norm.

What is astounding is the language that is being used to distinguish the boys from the girls. Boys should have ‘valour’ and ‘courage’ whilst girls should do something that will yield ‘tangible’ results that requires ‘only’ a few years, to not ‘overly fantasise’ the longer

educational options. For boys, there is no child birth, there are no time restrictions on how many years of their life they can dedicate to academia. Additionally, Teacher 1 informs me that at university,

“some of them [females] find that the first year, it’s difficult for them... they abandon” Not only are the teachers distinguishing what boys and girls should do in the name of what they believe to be best financial practices, this teacher is now discursively limiting the girls academically and using language which does not encourage female students to pursue higher education. As Gee (2011) points out, when discourses are repeated they reproduce and build significance within the context. The teachers are all using the same discourse regarding low expectations for the students future, which perhaps has built significance and in some way impacts the students success, but what it has not done is influence the students’ personal expectations, as discussed in the next section.

The post-BAC educational reality for females in towns like Dabou is stark. If you are a female in many parts of Togo, it means you have less of a chance of getting a secondary school diploma. In 2011 the lower secondary school completion rate for females was 21% and 37% for males (World Bank 2014). The most recent statistic from 2007 for school life expectancy for Togolese females is 8.53 years, with only 4.42% of female students moving on to tertiary education (UIS 2014). Being female in Togo means there is a large chance your educational endeavours will be sacrificed because you have a brother, because you get married at an early age, because you have too many duties in the home and no time for studying, or because you are experiencing an unwanted pregnancy. Time spent with the students and teachers has revealed that the teachers use a discourse that is very representative of the statistically low chance of female success in tertiary education, whilst the students speak with much higher expectations regardless of the international data.

Students

The students’ outlook on what lies ahead is quite different from the teachers’ professed expectations. Not only do the students know exactly what career they want to have upon graduating from lycée, they do not hesitate to share this information with me at the very beginning of the interview. The students are comfortable speaking about the goals they have

set for themselves and as stated previously, use these goals as motivation to continue through the education system. The students' goals for the future include becoming midwives, physician's assistants, birth attendants, journalists, environmental activists, and teachers. Girl 10's aspiration is to be a teacher and upon inquiring what grade she would teach, her peers squealed with excitement and began whispering. Girl 10, however, shook her head shyly and smiled when she said "middle school". I later found out from my translator that the students were whispering the words "university professor" with reference to the grade level Girl 10 would teach. The career goals of the students all require additional education at the university level, and only one mentioned career requires a technical degree as the suggested path of the teachers.

The students' responses demonstrate a high level of motivation to reach the goals they have set for themselves upon beginning their BAC degree, regardless of what their teachers expect of them. The students want more for themselves than a technical degree or a job in the trade sector, working as market vendors in town. It is interesting to see that all ten of the interviewed students can have such admirable goals for their futures when the teachers with whom they are in direct contact with every day set goals for them with much lower cognitive demand. The opinions of the teachers who are in full responsibility of their learning and their academic achievement have yet to influence the goals and aspirations of the students. Both parties see the same inhibiting factors, yet they see entirely different futures for the students who persist. The students attribute this to goal setting; goal setting, especially when specific goals are set can boost students' performance due to an increase in specification of the required level of effort to succeed (Schunk 1990). The students also reported using failure as motivation,

“...failing is a lesson. When you fail, you're going to work harder,” (Girl 2)

Only two of the ten students interviewed finished middle school on schedule, meaning that eight out of ten failed at least once during middle school, and possibly again during lycée. Schunk (1990) speaks about sustained motivation depending on students believing that their behaviour change is directly related to better outcomes. The students should then value those outcomes and change the old habits or behaviours to continue experiencing better outcomes. For these girls, all over the age of 18 and still pursuing their BAC despite one or more

failures, it appears that they have changed their behaviour and are experiencing positive outcomes which is motivating them to continue.

The students with whom I spoke did not replicate the teachers' discourses of future expectations, rather, they spoke of careers requiring tertiary education. The students' statements appear to be in line with Butler's (1990) outlook on changing a rhetoric through performativity—yielding something new from the ashes of the old. Change, of course, is an arduous process, however the female student population at Lycée Dabou continues to increase and both teachers and students recognise the presence of more women in the work force. Change is happening in Dabou, and it is apparent from the career goals set by the students and their ability remain unaffected by the multiple inhibiting factors and persist in school. What is not apparent is how the students have avoided the institutionalised discourse of the teachers regarding their futures. According to Butler (1990, p. 158), “Language assumes and alters its power to act upon the real through locutionary acts, which, repeated, become entrenched practices and, ultimately, institutions.” The research departs from the literature here with regards to the language and practices of the teachers and students. Following Butler's logic, the girls' future expectations should be affected by the language and discourse of the teachers, and both parties' expectations should be similar. However, the girls set career goals with more cognitive requirements than the teachers expect. Drawing on the international data and noting the low numbers of tertiary enrolment for females, in contrast with the attitudes of these ten girls, I reiterate the importance of understanding the situation from a micro level rather than simply a macro level. Learning that the girls in Dabou have very high expectations for themselves displays a desire for change which is not represented in the 4.42% female tertiary enrolment rate (UIS 2014) or any other statistic for that matter.

6. Conclusion

Summary

Through this small study involving seven teachers and ten students, I have uncovered more information regarding the implications of being female in the education system in Dabou than would have been possible through the international data alone. Simply knowing an enrolment ratio, or a school life expectancy is not sufficient information to fully comprehend

what life is like for a female pursuing her BAC degree. It is not possible to foster improvements for the female students without knowing the details of the situation on the ground. Using the inhibiting factors to girls' education, the contributing factors that assist in their education journey, and what the students and teachers expect for the future could assist in further action to begin eradicating the above mentioned inhibiting factors.

The Research Questions were answered very simply in list format, however the interview design involving teachers and students allowed for a more complex comparison which yielded wider reaching qualitative data. By comparing the two parties' responses, I was able to discern that the inhibiting factors defined by the teachers and students were nearly identical and domestic work and pregnancy were emphasised. The contributing factors given by the teachers and students did not overlap entirely, and the most important contributing factor for the students was self-initiated organisation whilst the teachers focused on attitudinal social modernity. Overarching support from parents was emphasised by the students in order for their organisational plans to take shape and by the teachers as well, who credited parents in making the first attitudinal shift towards equality. The expectations for the future, as defined by the teachers and students were entirely different. The teachers saw low cognitive level jobs as more suitable for the girls and focused on the fact that immediate employment should be the focus in order to support their families that they will inevitably have. The students named careers which require additional schooling, nearly all at the tertiary level. This vast gap in expectations is telling of the ever present lack of gender parity at Lycée Dabou, of the teachers' views of the female students, and most importantly, of the students self-perceptions. The high expectations of the students, by the students, is encouraging, as they believe that they can continue to use bespoke strategies coupled with the support of their parents to pursue a tertiary degree and achieve their career goals, despite what the teachers believe. This information cannot be gleaned using international statistical data.

MDG 3, which aims to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary schools by 2015, has one education related indicator which measures the number of girls and boys in school. It's difficult to measure something such as equality and empowerment when the indicator

being used is quantifiable and what it is measuring is hardly quantifiable (Antrobus 2006). The language of MDG 3 does not appear to account for the late nights, early mornings, and missed classes the girls experience due to their domestic responsibilities nor does it account for the difference in the girls' expectations of the future compared the enrolment data. The international goals do not account for the meaning of being feminine. As stated in the Literature Review (see Butler 1990, 2004), the implications of femininity are socially constructed and the repetition of performance is what makes the gender 'real'. The girls are faced with these inhibiting factors because their culture identifies them as 'female roles', for example, having children early, getting married young, doing domestic work, caring for siblings, and so on. The quantitative data that is used to inform international monitoring reports is useful as an overall picture of progress but without understanding why the girls are faced with such difficulty, it is difficult to spark change.

Further research

This study has lead to many more stones unturned so to speak; after meeting and talking with teachers and students, it has prompted further research. In order for changes to be made to improve the situation for female students in Dabou, additional research needs to be done regarding home life, parental expectations of females, and student teacher relations. As students and teachers both claim parental support as being essential for girls to succeed, further research is needed to uncover more about parental attitudes and why more parents are willing to enrol and assist their daughters in education and why many parents remain unwilling. Involving the community would require a wider reaching study which was not possible for me at the time. Budget and time limitations prohibited this and I was not aware at the time of commencement that the topic of parents would be such a strong focus for students and teachers. Additionally, the lack of importance placed on teacher support and the disconnect between the teachers and the students determined by low frequency of students speaking about teachers, unveils an interesting relationship. Further research on this relationship would require classroom observations which, referring back to the Limitations section, was not possible during this study due to scheduling conflicts.

Reflections

At the start of the research, my interests fell with RQ1 whilst RQ2 and RQ3 were simply a follow-up question and a way to end the interview, respectively. I was nervous about RQ1, as I knew of its negative nature, and I did not want to stir up too many memories of failure for the interviewees. But the teachers and students seemed familiar with the question, they did not hesitate to tell me why girls fail or discontinue school, yet the interesting turn came when I asked about what helps them to succeed. This was less rehearsed, as if not many had treaded these waters before. It morphed into the question that allowed for students to share most personal information. RQ1 remained important, as it is difficult to know how to help a student succeed if you do not know why they are not succeeding. RQ3's meaning shifted as well once I realised the degree of difference between the teacher and the student responses. It was no longer just a good note to end an interview on. Instead, RQ3 became the question that most positively affected me when I learned about the high expectations that the students had for themselves.

At times, being female in Dabou, as explained in the Limitations section, was incredibly frustrating. I was told I could not continue to ask questions and that my questions were too detailed—that I required too much information. These feelings of oppression of knowledge were common throughout my trip and one can only speculate what this would look like for the female students inside the classroom. Further research regarding the teacher and student relationship inside the classroom, with respect to knowledge oppression would be very useful for further development.

Reinharz (1997) suggests that we arrive in the field with one set of selves and leave with an entirely different set. Each self has its own distinct voice that becomes part of the research. Upon reading about Togo and learning of the grim situation for female students, I instantly became pessimistic about the teachers, the men, the parents, the government, the culturally and historically created gendered structures that keep girls from succeeding. My first draft of research questions can attest to that, as well as the first draft of the interview schedule which sounded a bit more like an interrogation of the male teachers than an interview. My

expectation was quite low of the teachers at Lycée Dabou, perhaps influenced by the data that told me how many teachers sexually, physically, and mentally abuse their students, or the data that told me about the failures of the female students. I constructed an idea of what I assumed the lycée environment to be, based on this. When I arrived in Dabou, I quickly realised that I needed to let my preconceived notions go, and allow the subjects to voice their emotions, opinions, and histories so that their voice could lead the research, not mine. “It is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself” (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, p. 124). I became the learner and I created a new self through the research process. I focused on the teachers and the students sitting in front of me, shaking my hand, and recounting their experiences, rather than the teachers and students depicted in the statistical data. I wiped the slate clean of what I thought I knew, and focused on what the interviewees were telling me, their truths. Yes, there were statements made which made me uncomfortable, or frustrated, or angry even, but there were also statements which gave me hope for the changing future of female education in Togo; this was not something I expected.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Teacher Interview Schedule:

1. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
2. Did you have a favourite teacher in lycée and why were they your favourite?
3. Were you trained as a teacher? If so, where, when?
4. Do you think it's important for girls to attend lycée? Why or why not?
5. What factors lead to successful female students at lycée?
6. What do you envision for your female students after graduating?
7. Why are there so few girls at Lycée Dabou?
8. Do you find it different teaching boys and girls? How so?
9. What advice would you give to a new teacher about girls' education here in Dabou?

Appendix B

Student Interview Schedule:

1. Why is the BAC so important for you to achieve?
2. What do the women you know with a BAC degree do now?
3. What do you want to do after finishing your BAC?
4. Why are you in lycée but so many other girls your age are not?
5. Why didn't you choose to become an apprentice?
6. Have you avoided the inhibiting factors?
7. What makes a teacher good or bad?
8. Did you have a helpful or favourite teacher in elementary or middle or high school?
9. Your sibling says she wants to go to lycée in the future, what would you tell her to do?